

THIS OR THAT?

Multi-Attributions in the Thesaurus, Their Benefits and Challenges

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An Example to Start With...

郤至曰：

「不可。

至聞之，

武人不亂，

智人不詐，

仁人不黨。

Xì Zhì said,

“It can’t be done.

I have heard

that a fighting man does not rebel,

that a wise man is not duplicitous,

and that a virtuous man does not form factions. [...]”

(translation by Eric Henry [2020])

source: *Guóyǔ* 國語

https://hxwd.org/textview.html?location=KR2e0001_tls_004-216a.51&query=%E4%BB%81%E4%BA%BA%E4%B8%8D%E9%BB%A8#

仁人不黨。

and that a virtuous man does not form factions.

●	黨 (dǎng)	FACTION	vi act	form gang, conspire at lower social levels	✕👍?
●	黨 (dǎng)	FACTION	vi	be conspiratorial, be prone to form gangs	✕👍?
●	仁人 (rén rén)	BENEVOLENCE	NP nonreferential	a man of human-heartedness	👍? ✕
●	仁人 (rén rén)	BENEVOLENCE	NP indefinite	a human-hearted person; any kind-hearted person	✕👍?

- ◇ non-referential? indefinite? (difference in *semantic feature*)
- ◇ man of benevolence? benevolent man? (difference in *hermeneutic interpretation*)
- ◇ attribution(s) of the phrase are not independent of the context (we would have to attribute *wǔrén* 武人 and *zhìrén* 智人 accordingly, or vice-versa; this could mean that they, too, would have to be attributed multiple times!)
- ◇ question of hermeneutic understanding of the overall text; what seems like but a mere change in nuance actually makes a philosophical difference
- ◇ Is one interpretation more likely than the other or do they both hold up equally well under scrutiny?

Categories of Multi-Attributions

- four categories with potential sub-categories found as of now:
 1. “morphological” cases (multi-character words whose constituents are also individually attributed; the most prominent examples for this are, of course, binoms)
 - The term “morphological” is obviously a bit misleading as this is purely about word formation and the consideration of whether or not it makes sense (at the relevant stage of the language) to presume a binom (or larger unit) instead of two(+) syntactically related characters.
 2. syntactic cases (different possible syntactic functions for one unit of analysis, i.e. nt vs. vt for the same word with similar semantics or, at the very least, attribution to the same concept)
 3. semantic cases (different possible semantic/hermeneutic interpretations that retain the same syntactic function [for the most part], e.g. NPab but assignment to very different concepts depending on the overall interpretation of the context)
 4. fourth category (potentially hermeneutic? – would need a proper label) where there is disagreement on both the syntactic and the semantic/hermeneutic level, leading to completely different attributions of the same unit

“Morphological” cases

西方有木焉，名曰射干，...

In the West there was a tree and its name was Archery Trunk: [...]

1. 西方 (xī fāng) DIRECTION NPadS: in the West (LZ)
方 (fāng) TERRITORY n: region; territorial area; local areas (CH)
2. 名曰 (míng yuē) NAME VPtoN middle voice: be called (LZ)
→ one might consider additionally attributing both of these characters separately as *míng yuē* is merely a commonly re-occurring combination of words

source: 荀子 (https://hxwd.org/textview.html?location=KR3a0002_tls_001-3a.18)

Syntactic cases

學行之，上也；言之，次也；教人，又其次也；咸無焉，為眾人。

As for study, it is practice (of what one has learnt) that is the most important. Speaking up on it comes second; teaching it to others comes third. Having none of these one counts as an ordinary fellow.

次 (cì) BAD n subject: that which is the next best (CH)

次 (cì) BAD vi: be inferior; be the next best (CH)

source: 法言 (<https://hxwd.org/textview.html?location=KR3a0009>)

Semantic cases

小人不知天命而不畏也， ...

The petty man does not understand the mandates of Heaven and thus does not stand in fear and awe of them, [...]

天命 (tiān mìng) FATE NPab{N1adN2} system: the system of what is ordained by Heaven as the natural course of events (CH)

天命 (tiān mìng) FATE NPab{N1adN2}
metaphysical: commands of Heaven; fate (CH)

source: 論語 (https://hxwd.org/textview.html?location=KR1h0004_tls_016-12a.10&prec=2&foll=28)

One Special Case...

將戕賊杞柳而後以為栴捲也？

Or must you mutilate the willow before you can make it into cups and bowls?

將 (jiāng) INTEND vt+V[0]: want to V; be prepared to; will V; is willing to V; have the intention to (CH)

將 (jiāng) OR vadS1.post-S2: or else (CH)

將 (jiāng) OR vadS1.post-S2: in questions: or alternatively; or perhaps rather (將S2邪, 將S1邪) (CH)

source: 孟子 (<https://hxwd.org/textview.html?location=KR1h0001#>)

Potential Issues

- The “morphological” (word-formation) category would have to be very carefully examined in terms of validity; at what point in time does it really make sense to start attributing something as a binom? Did each attributor pay attention to the time period in order not to be potentially anachronistic in their analysis?
- The syntactic category is plagued by a dependency on the attention to detail (or lack thereof) by the contributors. Is something worth being called a multi-attribution if the difference is merely in the degree of “pixelage”, i.e. if contributors likely mean the same thing but one was more precise in their expression than the other? (e.g. nadN vs. nadN[post-N])
- The semantic category could potentially display issues for cases where two different concepts have a very similar word added to both of them, i.e. concepts that are prone to overlapping interpretations could lead to the creation of (unnecessary) multi-attributions.
- The unnamed fourth category should, in theory, mostly be limited to texts where the entirety of two interpretations/translations differs; is something like that truly possible on a grand scale (that warrants the existence of the category itself)?
- Generally speaking, one has to ask for each case if all given interpretations possess validity and, if yes, if they are also *equally plausible*. (Ideally, multi-attributions should be reserved for these cases.)
- etc.

Conclusions (so far)

- All multi-attributions are not created equal! (validity of each one needs to be examined)
- explicatory precision from the contributor can be both useful or challenging for the user
 - for the “experts”, this level of detail is necessary to capture the existing nuances; for beginner users, this might be quite confusing and perhaps intimidating
- We currently do not have a way to link an attribution to a specific translation (which might make the suggested attributions more comprehensible to the casual user)
- The question of how much of a perceived ambiguity warrants a multi-attribution would have to be examined.
- Identical multi-attributions (which I have excluded from this presentation) would have to be systematically deleted.
- If, in the future, more people were to contribute attributions to the system, we would need a “standard” of how precise we generally want to be with attributions.

Tentative Structure of the Paper

- Introduction
 - short explanation of how the attribution system works (reference to *Clavis Syntactica* paper?)
 - significance of attributions in general
 - definition of a multi-attribution
- Main Body
 - categorisation of multi-attributions in three (four) categories:
 - “morphological” (single- vs. multi-character words)
 - syntactic (different possible syntactic functions for one unit of analysis with similar semantics/identical concepts)
 - semantic (different possible semantic/hermeneutic interpretation for [mostly] identical syntactic functions)
 - other (completely different interpretations) | **needs label**
 - pros and cons of multi-attributions (contributor vs. user perspectives)
- Conclusion & Desiderata