

A study on the semantics and compounding of Southern Min *chêng*

Ying Cheng, Yawen Chen

National Hsinchu Teaching College, National Taiwan Normal University

ycheng@nhcue.edu.tw, jc2266.candy@msa.hinet.net

Abstract

According to Southern Min dictionary edited by Dong (2001), the meanings and the examples of *chêng* are listed in the following table:

meaning	Examples
ago	<i>chìn-chêng, chá-chêng, chêng-chit-mî</i>
Face, front	<i>thâu-chêng, heng-chêng, chhù- chêng</i>
Ahead, beforehand	<i>sū- chêng</i>
former	<i>chêng-pái</i>
Ex-(wife)	<i>chêng-lâng-kiáⁿ, chêng-bó, chêng-ang</i>
future	<i>chiân-tô</i>
fore	<i>chêng -nî</i>
senior	<i>chiân-pòe</i>
near	<i>bok-chêng, gán-chiân, bîn-chêng, bîn-thâu-chêng</i>

Based on the Southern Min dialect spoken in Taiwan (the corpus adopted from *Ún-giân ê tai-gi-bun* homepage <http://203.64.42.tur21/iug/Ungian/ungian.asp>), we'll explore the frequency of each semene of *chêng*, the relation between the semantics and the different structures of compounds composed by *chêng*, and the competition of synonyms. There are three issues discussed in the paper: (1) based on nominal element collocated with *chêng*, the semantic development of *chêng* follows the path proposed by Heine et al 1991; (2) the meaning of qian varies with different position in a compound, e.g. *chêng-saⁿ- kang* 'the previous three days' and *saⁿ- kang-chêng* 'three days ago' share the same morphemes, but have different order, and therefore have different meanings; (3) According to the layering principle proposed by Hopper (1991:22): "new layers continually emerging. As this happens, the older layers are not necessarily discarded, but may remain to coexist with and interact with the newer layer". The interaction and competition of different layers appear in the two sets of (near-)synonyms, i.e. *bok-chêng, gán-chiân* and *bak-chiu-chêng* 'now' and *thâu-chêng, bîn-chêng* and *bîn-thâu-chêng* 'front'.