

# The syntax of the free choice marker *suibian* in Mandarin

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The 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics (IACL 32)

June 12–14, 2026

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

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# Introduction

- This study discusses the distribution of *suibian* 隨便 in Mandarin.
- In most dictionaries and reference grammar, it means “casual, random”.
- **Predicative/Attributive**

- (1) a. 清·魏子安《花月痕》：  
你們倒會打算，三個合擺一席，還是隨便的席，羞人不羞人呢？
- b. 《紅樓夢》第五八回：  
「是隨便，有新茶，便供一鍾茶，有新水，就供一盞水。」

- **Adverbial (manner)**

- (2) a. 北魏·賈思勰《齊民要術·園籬》：  
若值巧人是隨便採用，則無事不成。
- b. 《老殘遊記》第一七回：  
這是制強盜的刑具，你就隨便施於良民，天理何存？良心安在？

# Introduction

- ***Suibian* as a subordinator, similar to *wulun* ‘no matter’**

- (3) a. 清·李寶嘉《官場現形記》第七回  
倘若問起來，[ 隨便 英國也好，法國也好 ]，  
還他個糊裡糊塗橫豎沒有查考的。
- b. 清《二十年目睹之怪現狀》  
我勸你們安靜點罷！要照這個樣子，[ 隨便 到誰家去 ]，都是不能擔待的。
- c. 呂叔湘《現代漢語八百詞》(1980)  
[ 隨便 你說什麼 ]，我一概不信。
- The various usages are resulted from grammaticalization that starts as early as Qin dynasty (Wang 2010).

# Introduction

- Adnominal usage is somewhat less common, but is still attested:

## (4) Taiwan Mandarin: *Sinica Corpus*

- 隨便 一點芝麻綠豆，蚊子蒼蠅，都會和我們的愛情扯上關係。
- 隨便 一人，已足以橫行江湖。
- 隨便 一個報紙、一個電視新聞或者廣播都要比網路宣傳效果好。

## (5) Mainland Mandarin: *CCL Corpus*

- 随便 一个节目放春晚上都比昨晚的好看啊。
- 随便 一个白色不识字的流氓就可以把他杀死。
- 路上 随便 一块小圆石就含有大量的能。

- with a **free choice** meaning, like *renhe* 任何 ‘any’ (Wang and Hsieh 1996).

# Introduction

- Synchronically, *suibian* is not as common as 任何, but is not uncommon (with regional differences).



維 漢語共時語料庫

LiVaC Pan-Chinese Synchronous Language Corpus



一般詞語  人名(n)  地名(g)  專名(x,y)  綽號(h)  外文(i)  數詞(#)

隨便	BJ 京		HK 港		TP 台	
	1995-99	2015-19	1995-99	2015-19	1995-99	2015-19
分佈 Distr %	20	11.13	54.76	53.17	25.24	35.7
排序 Rank	9952	13002	4977	7087	7609	6954



一般詞語  人名(n)  地名(g)  專名(x,y)  綽號(h)  外文(i)  數詞(#)

任何	BJ 京		HK 港		TP 台	
	1995-99	2015-19	1995-99	2015-19	1995-99	2015-19
分佈 Distr %	25.71	18.25	36.24	51.18	38.05	30.57
排序 Rank	460	812	248	362	231	374

# Introduction

- In this talk, I differentiate three closely related usages of *suibian*, in addition to the predicate/subordinator usage.

## (6) Three usages of *suibian*

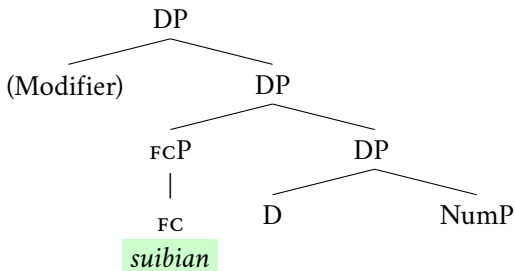
- |    |                   |                        |
|----|-------------------|------------------------|
| a. | 他 隨便 拿了《紅樓夢》（就走）。 | adverbial, manner      |
| b. | 他拿了 隨便 一本書（就走）。   | adnominal, free choice |
| c. | 他 隨便 精讀了 一本書。     | adverbial, free choice |

- I argue that
  - suibian* is ambiguous between a manner adverb and a free choice marker;
  - adverbial and adnominal free choice *suibian* (1b-c) is derivationally related.

# Introduction

- To overview the proposal, I propose adnominal *suibian* is a phrasal modifier.

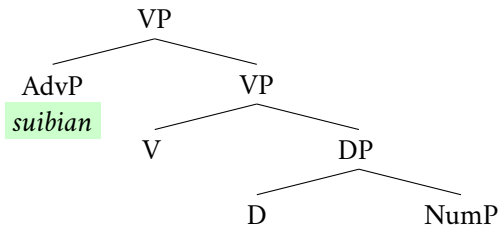
(7) Adnominal, free choice *suibian*: a modifier of DP



# Introduction

- Adverbial *suibian* can be used as a manner adverb.

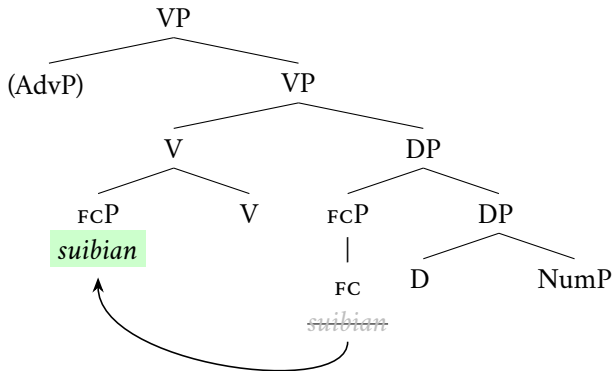
(8) Adverbial, manner *suibian*: a modifier of VP (= an adverb)



# Introduction

- The adverbial, free choice reading, however, is derived via incorporation.

(9) Adverbial, free choice *suibian*: an incorporated phrase onto the verb



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## Suibian as an adnominal marker

- **Suibian is an adnominal marker.**

(10) It can be part of an object.

- 她居然竞聘不过 [ 随便 一个有稍微一丁点关系的人 ] 。
- 张侍郎来到，坐着 [ 随便 一辆车 ] ，带着一个小童儿 。

(11) It can be displaced together with a displaced argument.

- 他... [ 把 随便 一件事情 ] 说成一个让人笑出眼泪的动人故事 。
- 其间 [ 被 随便 什么东西 ] 打一下就没了 。

## Suibian as an adnominal marker

- *Suibian*-NP shares the same distribution of a canonical NP.

### (12) Prepositional phrases

- 有的就 [ 在公路旁边 **随便** 一块草地上 ] 架起这种简单的帐篷。
- 假定观察的结果 [ 跟 **随便** 一个什么人 ] 所信以为真的规律发生了矛盾...

### (13) Coordination with NPs

- 忍者只要三样东西：8紫水龙斧，  
如月沙罗戒 [ 和 **随便** 一个比较好的+闪首饰 ]。
- 那几本高中需要反复诵读的历史课本上的知识，  
[ 和 **随便** 几本大学历史系必读书 ] 比起来如何？

### (14) Contrast with NPs

这个斗争并不是 [ **随便** 一伙人 ] 的斗争，而是 [ 一个阶级 ] 的斗争。

## Suibian as an adnominal marker

- **Suibian is external to DP.**

(15) Baseline: 典狱长直接叫人给自己搬了椅子，拿了 随便 一本书。 (Novel)

(16) *suibian*-NP<sub>object</sub>: 他拿了 随便  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} *那 \\ *这 \\ *每 \\ 某 \end{array} \right\}$  一本书。

(17) 随手拈起一本杂志，从 [ 随便 某 一页 ] 开始翻。 CCL

- Indeed, *suibian*-NP in subject position can co-occur with *mei* 'every'.

- (18) a. 遇见爱情之后的张梓琳，结婚，怀孕，帅气的丈夫，  
随便 每 一张都是美的！
- b. 唾液虽然有很好的补益效果，但不是  
随便 每 口唾液都可以达到这样的效果。

## Suibian as an adnominal marker

- In addition to numeral phrases, *suibian* can be followed by *wh*-expressions,

### (19) *suibian* > *wh* (Chen 2021)

- 这是他所认识的随便哪一个人 都及不上的。
- 将就着嫁了一个随便什么人，依赖他的经济供给。

- ... and the free choice marker *renhe* 'any'.

### (20) *suibian* > *renhe*

- 更愿意去外滩、去锣鼓巷、去西湖、去随便任何一个地方走一走。
- 一个个曾经的愤青都成为一种平庸生活的享受者，像随便任何一个中年人一样。

## Suibian as an adnominal marker

- **Adnominal *suibian* imposes selectional requirements on its NP.**

(21) *Suibian* + NumP/ *mou*/ *wh*/ *renhe*/ (*mei*)

a. 他拿了隨便一本書（就走）。

b. \*他拿了隨便《紅樓夢》（就走）。

\*Proper nouns

c. \*他拿了隨便小說（就走）。

\*Bare nouns

d. \*他拿了隨便這本小說（就走）。

\*Demonstrative phrases

## Suibian as an adnominal marker

- Adnominal *suibian* reuiques overt Num, unlike other D elements.

- (22) a. \*他拿了隨便本書（就走）。
- b. 他拿了這本書（就走）。
- c. 他拿了那本書（就走）。
- d. 他拿了某本書（就走）。

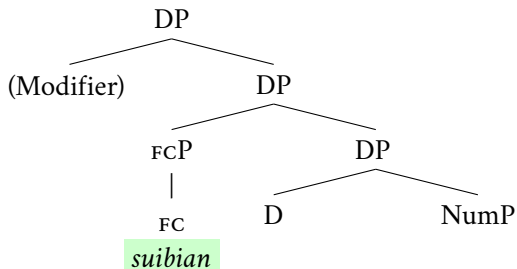
- **The ban on one-omission follows if *suibian* is a phrasal category.**

- (23) a. 他拿了（一）本書。 verb licensing
- b. 他拿了這（一）本書（就走）。 demonstrative licensing
- c. \*他拿了隨便本書 \**suibian* licensing
- d. cf. adverbial *suibian*: 他隨便拿了本書 verb licensing

# Proposal

- These above observations justify the following structure:

(24) Adnominal, free choice *suibian*: a modifier of DP



## Further evidence

- ***Suibian* gives rise to an individual-denoting, indefinite reading**

- (25) a. 在茫茫宇宙，你把[随便一件物体]<sub>i</sub>推出去，你说它<sub>i</sub>最后是怎样的？  
 b. 只要瞄上了[随便哪一个地方]<sub>i</sub>，那儿<sub>i</sub>的人立刻就会伸出双手迎接。

- ***Suibian* can be followed by *de*.**

- (26) a. 来到这里的游客一定要亲口尝一下这里的茶叶，  
 可以到随便的一个小茶馆中享受一下，可以保证这里的茶叶都是地地道道的。  
 b. 打开随便的一个表格，点选菜单里的工具。  
 c. 我一般都把自己做的木马夹在随便的一部视频。

- Note the the causal meaning of *suibian* is unlikely in these contexts.

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## Suibian as a manner adverb

- While the manner adverbial status of *suibian* is uncontroversial, I would like to set up a diagnostic test to make sure when *suibian* must be *manner* adverbial.
- More generally, this section and the next explore whether we have a free choice adverbial *suibian*, by setting up a way to differentiate the manner and free choice reading.

## Suibian as a manner adverb

- Evidence for a manner adverb:

(27) Incompatible with verbs that entail a non-causal manner:

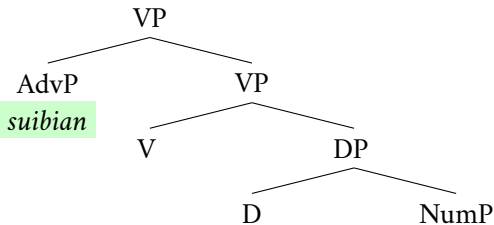
- #他隨便精讀了《紅樓夢》。
- #他隨便詳述了《紅樓夢》的內容。
- #他隨便細味了《紅樓夢》的故事。
- #他隨便鑽研了《紅樓夢》的深意。

- This is in line with what is described in the literature.

# Proposal

- These above observations justify the following structure:

(28) Adverbial, manner *suibian*: a modifier of VP (= an adverb)



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## Suibian as a pre-verbal, FC marker

- Now we have established two usages of *suibain*, among other usages.
- They have different distributions:
  - Manner adverbial *suibian*
    - **cannot follow verbs like** 精讀／詳述／細味／鑽研
  - Free choice adnominal *suibian*
    - **cannot be followed by proper nouns/ bare nouns/ demonstrative phrases**
- Is there a gap?

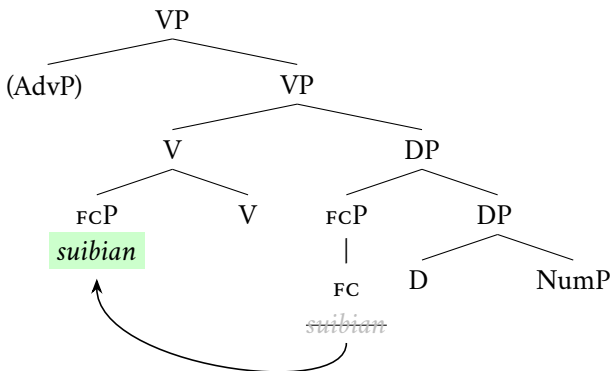
<i>Suibian</i>	Manner	Free Choice
Adnominal	N/A	✓
Adverbial	✓	?



## Suibian as a pre-verbal, FC marker

- I suggest that an adverbial *suibian* can indeed be a free choice marker.
- Different from the manner adverb, it is derived via **incorporation** from its adnominal counterpart.

(31) Adverbial, free choice *suibian*: an incorporated phrase onto the verb



## Suibian as a pre-verbal, FC marker

### Two pieces of evidence for movement:

- ① Since incorporation is local, and requires structural adjacency, we expect to see **intervention effects if movement is involved**.
- E.g., nominal modifiers block adverbial, free choice *suibian*.

- (32) a. 他精讀了 [用法語寫的] 隨便 一本書。 free choice  
 b. #他 隨便 精讀了 [用法語寫的] 隨便 一本書。 manner only
- (33) a. 麻煩你 点击 [奇迹世界广告中的] 隨便 一个广告 free choice  
 b. 麻煩你 隨便 点击 [奇迹世界广告中的] 隨便 一个广告 manner only

## Suibian as a pre-verbal, FC marker

### ② *Do-so* replacement fails to target the clause adjacent to FC *suibian*.

- I assume 這樣做 replaces a VP (Wei and Li 2016).

(34) a. Baseline: manner *suibian* can be stranded.

張三平常會 隨便 [VP 寫寫日記]，李四也會 隨便 [VP 這樣做]。

b. Target: FC *suibian* cannot be stranded.

\*張三打算 [VP 隨便 精讀] 一本書]，李四也打算 隨便 [VP 這樣做]。

c. Cf. FC *suibian* must be replaced altogether.

張三打算 [VP 隨便 精讀] 一本書]，李四也打算 [VP 這樣做]。

- That FC *suibian* cannot be stranded indicates that it is not an adverb.
- This follows from the incorporation account:  
**if *suibian* is incorporated onto V, it cannot be seperated from V.**

## Some suggestive evidence

- Analytically, incorporation of a phrasal category onto verbs is attested in Mandarin, defended in Wei and Li (2016).
  - They propose that *zheme* 這麼 originates from the object of a VP, and is then incorporated onto the verb.

### (35) NP incorporation onto verbs

- 張三打了自己的兒子。瑪莉也這麼做了。(p.187)
  - 張三認為瑪莉很聰明，李四也這麼認為。(p.193)
- Despite being pre-verbal, *zheme* conveys no adverbial meaning.
  - Rather, it replaces a VP/CP argument.

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## Concluding remarks

Among many other usages, I have argued that

- ① *suibian* is an **adnominal, free choice marker that modifies a DP**.

(36) 他拿了隨便一本書（就走）。 adnominal, free choice

- ② *suibian* also has an adverbial usage, which is ambiguous between

- a **manner adverb** (as reported in many literature);

(37) 他隨便拿了《紅樓夢》（就走）。 adverbial, manner

- a **free choice marker, which incorporates onto the verb**.

(38) 他隨便精讀了一本書。 adverbial, free choice

## Remarks on speakers' variations

- Grammaticalization path of *suibian* (Wang 2010)

- (39)
- |    |                                      |            |
|----|--------------------------------------|------------|
| a. | VO phrases                           | 隨他便        |
| b. | VO compound as a predicate/adjective | (1)        |
| c. | Manner adverb                        | (2)        |
| d. | Subordinator                         | (3)        |
| e. | Adnominal free choice marker         | 他拿了隨便一本書。  |
| f. | % Adverbial free choice marker       | 他隨便精讀了一本書。 |
- (e) gradually becomes stabilized, with some degree of speakers' variations.
  - (f) is relatively newer, and it also involves a movement mechanism, showing greater variations.

## Further issues

- Discussions on free choice marker focus mostly on 任何, but it is not the only free choice marker in Chinese.
- For example, Cantonese makes use of 是但, 求其, and 隨便 to convey similar meaning.

(40) a. 阿明 隨便 睇咗一本書。

b. 阿明 是但 睇咗一本書。

c. 阿明 求其 睇咗一本書。

- Different types of free choice meaning: 是但 vs. 任何

(41) a. 是但 一枝水有毒。

b. \*任何一枝水有毒。

(42) a. 我睇咗 是但 一本漫畫。

b. \*我睇咗任何一本漫畫。

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