CHAPTER - III

DESCRIPTION OF THAI CLASSIFIERS

3.0. Introduction

Classifiers as already defined (see section 1.1.), constitute a grammatical phenomenon used for identification and segregation of various concepts as they appear to human perception. Being an important structural phenomenon of the Southeast Asian languages, classifiers play a vital role in the system of communication and therefore demand a vivid description from the point of view of its formal and functional aspects. This chapter attempts to describe and classify the Thai classifiers from the formal and functional points of view.

3.1. Description and Categorization of Thai classifiers by different scholars

Classifiers have been described and categorized in various ways by different scholars with some variations and with some similarities in their analyses.

Uppakitsillapasarn Phraya (1968:72-76) while discussing the meaning of classifiers states that, a classifier is a noun word which indicates the common noun, for example, /rù:b/ used as a classifier for ‘Buddhist monk’, /tual/ used as a classifier for ‘animal’, /lam/ used as a classifier for ‘boat’ etc. In Thai, classifiers constitute an integral part of the sentence structure. For example, */phrá sãːŋ/ ‘two Buddhist monks’, */máː sãː:m/ ‘three horses’ and */rika diaw/ ‘one boat’ are ungrammatical
structures without the use of the classifiers. The grammatical forms are /phrá sɔ́ːŋ rùː b/ 'two Buddhist monks', /máː sáː m tøːː/ 'three horses' and /ria lám diaw/. 'one boat'.

According to him classifiers in Thai can be categorized into the following six types:

(i) Classifiers— used for the types of nouns, such as, /riː n/— a classifier for 'watch'

(ii) Classifiers— used for the groups of nouns, such as, /khanː?/— a classifier for 'group of human beings, departments, group of dramas etc.'

(iii) Classifiers— used for the shape of nouns, such as, /kɔːː nl/— a classifier for 'stone, soap, bread, clod etc.'

(iv) Classifiers— used for nouns measured according to the metric system, such as, /khùː/— a classifier for 'pair of shoe, sock, spoon etc.'

(v) Classifiers— used to indicate the arrangement of nouns, such as, /muan/— a classifier for 'cigarette' etc.

(vi) Classifiers— used as a repeated head noun, such as, /prathēː d}/— a classifier for 'country', for example, /prathēː d sáː m prathēː d/ 'three countries.'

Naksakul (1978:30-38) argued that a classifier is a modified noun phrase in the Thai language. Her categorization of Thai classifiers resembles with that of Uppakitsillapasarn Phraya (1968:72-76).
According to both of them Thai classifiers are of six types as presented below:

(i) Noun classifiers—used for classifying types of nouns. For example, /khanāːn/—a classifier for ‘medicine’, /ton/—a classifier for ‘ghost, hermit, giant, demon etc.’

(ii) Group classifiers—used for classifying groups of animates and inanimates. For example, /kɔːn/—a classifier for ‘army troop, group of workers, heap of things’, /fūːn/—a classifier for ‘herd of animals, group of fishes, birds, squadrons etc.’

(iii) Shape classifiers—used for classifying shape of things, such as, /krāːbːkː/—a classifier for some thing which is long inflexible and hollow such as, ‘a body of bamboo, rifle, gun etc.’

(iv) Metric classifiers—used for classifying nouns based on measurement, such as, /khûː/—a classifier for ‘pair of shoes, socks, couples etc.’

(v) Arrangement classifiers—used for indicating the arrangement of nouns such as, /khôːd/—a classifier for ‘rope, wire, electric wire etc.’

(vi) Repeated classifiers—used as the head noun or as an element of a compounded form and also as the classifier. For example, /krasuan/—a classifier for ‘department ministry’ in the construction /krasuan sāːm krasuan/ ‘three ministry departments’, /tambon/—a classifier for ‘sub-division etc.’ in the construction /tambon sāːm tambon/ ‘three sub-divisions’, in these two constructions the head nouns have been used as repeated classifiers. One element of a compounded form can
also be used as a classifier as is evident from the following example: /roːryan sāːm roːy/ ‘three schools.’ Here /roːy/, a part of the compound /roːryan/ ‘school’ is used as a classifier. It can be used for ‘store, school, police station etc.’

Panuphong (1979: 67-96) argues that a classifier in Thai is a noun functioning as a classifier. She states, classifiers in Thai are used with numerals. She identifies six positions in the sentence structure, as shown in the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Determiner</th>
<th>Intransitive</th>
<th>Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bāːn</td>
<td>lāŋ</td>
<td>kāw</td>
<td>nīː</td>
<td>sīːm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

house CL old this repair past

‘This old house was repaired.’

(The gap indicates the position for the classifier.)

Her other observations are as follows:

(i) There are single and repetitive occurrences of classifiers in Thai noun phrases. In case of the repetitive occurrences the head noun is repeated as the classifier. For example,

(a) khon sīːŋ khon

human-being two CL

‘two persons’
In the example (a) the head noun /khon/ has been repeated as the classifier /khon/, but in the example (b) the classifier /lëm/ is presented instead of the head noun /nãysǐ/.

(ii) There are some nouns different in form but are used within the same classifier category and are different in meaning. For example,

(a)  
\[
\text{khăw mi: bâ:n sõ:ŋ bâ:n}
\]
he have house two CL

'He has two families.'

(b)  
\[
\text{khăw mi: bâ:n sõ:ŋ làŋ}
\]
he have house two CL

'He has two houses.'

The word /bâ:n/ when used with the classifier /bâ:n/ in the sentence (a) means 'house, house wife, and also children' i.e., family but the same word when used with the classifier /làŋ/ as in the sentence (b) means 'house', an object only.
(iii) Deletion of the head noun where the noun is repeated as a classifier is optionally possible. But the meaning of the sentence remains unchanged. For example,

(a) \textit{khāw phūːd kāb khon thūːk khon}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
he & speak & with & human-being all CL \\
\end{tabular}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
thīː & paj & naj & ŋaːn \\
\end{tabular}

at go in party

'He talks to every one in party.'

(b) \textit{khāw phūːd kāb thuːk khon}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
he & speak & with & all CL \\
\end{tabular}

\begin{tabular}{llll}
thīː & paj & naj & ŋaːn \\
\end{tabular}

at go in party

'He talks to every one in party.'

In the sentence (b) the head noun /khon/ 'human-being' has been deleted. But the meaning of the sentence remains unchanged.

Wattanaprasert (1983:54-56) makes a comparison of the usages of the classifiers used in the Chiang Mai dialect with those of the classifiers used in the Bangkok dialect in order to bring out both similarities and differences. According to the study the classifier usages in both the dialects are found to be the same. She defines a classifier as a modifier which modifies both the noun phrase and the verb phrase in the sentence.
She shows the position of the classifiers in the noun phrase and in the verb phrase as is presented in the following:

**Noun Phrase:**

1. Structure 1: Noun + Numeral + Classifier
2. Structure 2: Noun + Classifier + Cardinal Number
3. Structure 3: Noun + Classifier + Ordinal Number
4. Structure 4: Noun + Classifier + Demonstrative
5. Structure 5: Noun + Classifier + Adjective

**Verb Phrase:**

1. Structure 1: Verb + Numeral + Classifier
2. Structure 2: Verb + Classifier + Cardinal Number
3. Structure 3: Verb + Classifier + Ordinal Number
4. Structure 4: Verb + Classifier + Demonstrative
5. Structure 5: Verb + Classifier + Adjective

The comparative study of the use of Thai classifiers in Chiang Mai and Bangkok reveals that the function of classifiers is to classify things with similarities and differences depending upon the perspectives and perception of the speakers.

Bandhumedha, Navavan (1984:23-29) identifies a classifier in Thai as a noun and states that Thai classifiers classify words when counting or isolating things is required. She analyses Thai classifiers into the following types:

(i) Classifiers used to indicate all kinds of human beings, for example, /khon/ is used for all common human beings. There are some classifiers used to indicate human beings belonging to different social
ranks, such as /phráʔon/ 'body part' used as the classifier for 'King', 'Queen' etc.; /ʔon/ 'body part' is also used as the classifier for 'Buddha image', 'Royalty' etc.; /rûːb/ 'picture' used as the classifier for 'Buddhist monk'.

(ii) Classifiers used for animals, for example, /tua/ is used for /sàːd/ 'animal'. It can be used as a generic classifier for all kinds of animals. But for the elephant the classifier /chãk/ 'rope' is used as it is an auspicious animal.

(iii) Classifiers generally used for inanimate objects of many kinds depending on their shape.

(iv) Classifiers used for human-supernatural elements, for example, the classifier /ton/ is used for /phźː/ 'ghost', /jãːk/ 'giant', etc.

(v) Classifiers used for indicating some actions like 'blessing, speaking, planning etc.', such as /pràːkaːn/ which is used with the noun /phɔːn/ 'blessing'.

She has divided the classifiers for inanimate things into two big groups as presented below:

I. Classifiers for Single things

The sub-groups are as follows:

(i) Shape Classifiers

Examples are given below:
/duan/ used for the round objects, such as, /duancan/ 'moon
/duanʔa:thǎl/ 'sun' etc.
/sa:j/ used for some small and long things like 'road, river, wire'

/tual/ used for an object with leg and arm shapes, such as 'chair,
bed' etc.¹

(ii) Kind Classifiers

Bandhumedha (1984:26) mentions /jàːŋ/, /chaníːl/, /prəphəː:d/,
/khɔːː/ as 'kind classifiers' used with general things and /ηæːŋ/ for 'ginger', /pəːn/ for 'saw' i.e. classifiers for individual things.

(iii) Measure Classifiers

According to Bandhumedha, Navavan (1984) /naːthiː/ 'minute',
/chuaːməŋ/ 'hour', /wan/ 'day', /dian/ 'month' are used as classifiers for 'units of time' and /mèːd/ 'meter', /fud/ 'foot' for 'the units of metric'.

II. Classifiers for Groups

(i) Classifiers for grouping things, such as /phuaŋ/ 'cluster',
/khríaːl/ 'banana', /chɔːː/ 'bouquet' etc.

(ii) Classifiers for container and metrics, for example:

(a) náːm sáːm kəːː

water three CL

'three glasses of water'
(iii) **Kind classifiers**

These are used to indicate groups of elements consisting of distinct individuals, such as

/lklõ:ŋ/ — a classifier for ‘herd of wild elephants’

/lkrS:k/ — a classifier for ‘group of animals’

Further, she has mentioned other kinds of Thai classifiers, which can be dedicated to verbs. For example,

(a) Classifiers— used with verbs indicating ways of actions, such as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nid</th>
<th>phú:ŋ</th>
<th>jà:ŋ</th>
<th>di:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nid</td>
<td>speak</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Nid has spoken nicely.’

(b) Classifiers— used with verbs indicating actions taking place for a short time, such as,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>khâ:w</th>
<th>lâb</th>
<th>nź:ŋ</th>
<th>tź:n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘He has taken a nap.’
(c) Classifiers—used with verbs indicating the number of times of actions, such as

\[
\text{mā: ti: lū:k sū:k thi:} \\
\text{mother hit child two CL}
\]

'The mother hit the child twice.'

(d) Classifiers—used with verbs indicating size, weight, measurement etc., such as,

\[
\text{bɔ: lə:k sī:sīb fūd} \\
\text{pond deep forty CL}
\]

'The pond was deep by forty feet.'

Wongpukdie (1985:19-309) studies classifiers in Thai to compare and contrast the usage of classifiers in three periods namely, the Sukhothai period, the Ayutthaya period, and the present time. It has been observed that some classifiers occurred in all the three periods, some classifiers occurred in some periods according to social status. The classifiers used in these three periods have been derived in the same way. They came from nouns and verbs. Some classifiers that came from the nouns have the same forms as nouns but some do not have.

According to her studies, classifiers occurring in the Sukhothai period, in the Ayutthaya period and in the present time can be distributed into the following three types:

(i) Classifiers occurring with particular nouns or particular verbs.
(ii) Classifiers occurring with numerous nouns or numerous verbs.
(iii) The numeral classifiers could occur with nouns or with verbs.

Tanongsaksakul (1990:21-239) studies classifiers that were in use in the Ratanakosin period (the period of Rama I-VIII in Thailand). She found that there were 494 classifiers used during the period from Rama I to Rama VIII. She defines classifiers and categorizes them into two types namely, general classifiers and classifiers of measurement or estimation. These two types can co-occur with nouns and verbs. She also mentioned that the number and use of classifiers varied in different periods. Some classifiers were not found in some period because of some societal changes.

Warotamasikkhadit (1996:28-42) describes a classifier in Thai as a component of the noun phrase and the verb phrase in a sentence. For example, /baj/ is used as a classifier for ‘fruit, plate, leaf, egg etc.’ as in /bajmæ:j sää:m baj/ ‘three leaves’; /kâ:w/ is used as a classifier for ‘walk’ as in /khaw də:n paj khâːnːəː sää:m kâːw/ ‘He walks three steps ahead.’ It has also been observed that the use of classifiers is a feature of nouns in the head position. He classifies classifiers in Thai into four types as follows.

(i) Group classifiers— indicative of grouping, such as /kɔː:/— a classifier for ‘clump of bamboo, clump of lotus etc.’ These are common nouns.

(ii) Generic classifiers— he gives /kʰon/ as an example of a classifier for ‘human being’, /hāŋːəː/— a classifier for ‘location, place etc.’
(iii) Specific classifiers— he gives the following examples: /kal/ used as a classifier for 'time, period', /khanāːnl — a classifier for 'medicine'  

(iv) Repeated classifiers— /khāː/ — a classifier for 'leg' as in /khāː sōːŋ kmāː/ ‘two legs’ as mentioned by him.

Hongsawan (1997:90-449) compares the classifiers of Thai with those of Vietnamese. The study focuses on ‘true classifiers’ in both the written and spoken forms of a language and emphasizes on their use in general and special contexts. She used the term ‘true classifiers’ in the sense of standard classifiers i.e. classifiers which are generally used in the language. 

According to her studies, the true classifiers in Thai are categorized into three groups, namely, classifiers of body parts, classifiers of perception and classifiers of feelings. In Thai classifiers, she observes 73 items with 52 semantic features. In Vietnamese, she identifies true classifiers, categorized into five groups, that is, classifiers of body parts, classifiers of perceptions, classifiers of feelings, classifiers based on personification, and classifiers based on metaphor. In Vietnamese, she finds 74 items with 70 semantic features.

The study employs the componential analysis with an approach towards comparing the worldviews of the speakers of both the languages that are reflected through their selections of classifiers. In both Thai and Vietnamese there are similarities in semantic features that are considered to be standard for classification in both the languages. There are inherent features, perceptual features, features of function and those of
extraordinary characteristics. The distinctive features of classifiers in both Thai and Vietnamese follow the rules and cultural conditions of each language.

Pankhuenkhat (1997:191-192) argued that classifiers are indicative of nouns which precede the numerals and define nouns that indicate shape, kind, etc. The classifiers can occur with countable nouns and uncountable nouns.

He classifies the noun classifiers into five types:

(i) Auto classifiers— are classifiers used as same the head noun, such as, /nǐw sib nǐw/ ‘ten fingers’, /hũa lā:j hũa/ ‘many heads’ etc.

(ii) Special classifiers— are classifiers used for individual items, such as, /kluet nǐy law/ ‘one flute’ etc.

(iii) Categorized classifiers— are classifiers used to indicate kind of things, such as, /chanīd/ ‘kind, type’, /jà:y/ ‘kind, sort, variety, manner’ etc.

(iv) Group classifiers— are classifiers used for grouping, such as, /chā:y sɔ:y khlō:y/ ‘two herds of elephants’, /kə:ʔ sɔ:y fū:y/ ‘two herds of sheep’ etc.

(v) There are classifiers that are used to quantify or measure, such as, /njə:n sib pɔ:n/ ‘ten pound (money)’, /ná:mta:n nǚy chɔ:n/ ‘one spoonful of sugar’ etc.

Sunkaburanuruk (1999:68-94) studies the usages of classifiers in modern standard Thai among different age-groups of speakers. The speakers are of age between 25 and 40 years. She finds that the use of
classifiers is a co-occurrence of classifiers and nouns as well as patterns of noun phrases in modern standard Thai. She observes from her data that the speakers use a lot of generic classifiers and repeater classifiers, and not the specific classifiers. She states that classifiers in Thai often occur with numerals—cardinal and ordinal and also with adjectives in noun phrases.

She finds that the speakers who are less than 25 years in age use specific classifiers more than the speakers aged 40 years. In addition, she observes that both the age groups use various patterns of noun phrases containing classifiers almost at the same rate of frequency.

Bandhumedha, Banchob (2002:160-167) states that a classifier plays an important role in the Thai language. Use of adjectives with a numeral (ordinal) and without the classifier causes the sentence to be incomplete.

A classifier is a word that is used after ordinal numbers in order to enumerate the preceding noun to indicate the shape or type of the noun. According to him the classifiers in Thai help:

(i) To enumerate the numeral words or adjectives.
(ii) To indicate whether the nouns are animate or inanimate and also to indicate the shape of those nouns.
(iii) To specify the phrase, especially with the demonstrative words.
(iv) To represent nouns.

However, as he (2002:161) states there are only three classifiers in the King Ramkhamhaeng Inscription. They are /khon/, /tual/, and /?an/. 
The classifier /khon/ — is used with humans, /tual/ — is used with animals and /ran/ — is used with the objects both big and small. Further, he comments that when new words are coined or created, new classifiers come up to be used for them.

According to him, nowadays, especially in informal speech, remembering the appropriate classifier for nouns is difficult, therefore, the classifier /ran/ — is used in general. A tendency to use /ran/ for all inanimate objects can also be observed.

Suktay (2004:51-336) studies the use of classifiers in Thai which are indicative of action. She investigates the classifiers used with verbs in Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods. She says that verbs which take classifiers are of three types, namely, intransitive verbs, transitive verbs and descriptive verbs. She observes that the number of classifiers if compared across the periods will be found to have increased gradually.

In addition, she also observes that, there are 112 classifier structures that can be used with verb phrases. She states twelve types of positional occurrence of the classifiers in verb phrases, such as,

(i) After quantifying words
(ii) After countable words
(iii) After approximate words
(iv) After quantity and countable words
(v) After quantity and approximate words
(vi) Before countable words such as ‘1’
(vii) Before order words
She compares the classifier-structures used with verbs and the structures used with nouns. It has been commented that some of those structures are used interchangeably and some are used specially with nouns.

Nagamatsu (2007:24-157) studies the comparative semantic features of Thai and Japanese classifiers in order to find the similarities and differences reflected in the classifier-usage of both the languages. He focuses on specific classifiers, excluding repeater classifiers, in both written and spoken languages. He finds that there are clearly differentiated usages of noun classifiers in Thai and Japanese. He observes Thai classifiers as indicative of social status which is not the case with Japanese. He studies one hundred and thirty-two Thai noun classifiers and forty-eight semantic features in comparison to sixty-seven classifiers and forty-one distinct semantic features in Japanese. Classifiers of animates, classifiers of plants, classifiers of objects, classifiers of abstract nouns, classifiers used in literary works, classifiers used with place names and classifiers indicating kind have been taken into consideration in the study.

He finds similarities in classifier-usage of Thai and Japanese. He observes that both the languages have generic classifiers. For example, /fan/ in Thai and /tsu/ in Japanese are used fairly as classifiers to
categorize different words when they can not remember the specific classifier for the particular word.

In addition, he acknowledges the distinct semantic features of each type of noun classifiers that depend on the cultural rules and regulation of the languages.

3.2. Types of Thai classifiers

Taking cues from the existing works on the description of the Thai classifiers, an analysis has been attempted to view the particular grammatical phenomenon on the basis of their formal structure as well as functional and semantic interpretation.

3.2.0. Formal Structure

Classifiers in Thai can be viewed from the point of view of their phonological shape and morphosyntactic formation.

3.2.1. Phonological Shape

Classifiers in Thai are basically of consonant-vowel-consonant structure (CVC). For example, /pàːk/ for ‘mouth, witness, fish-net’, /dàːm/ for ‘pen’, /dum/ for ‘hub of a wheel’ etc.

There are also other phonological structures found in Thai classifiers. The phonological shape of the classifiers can be presented in the following way:

(i) CV (e.g., /khûː/ for ‘pair’)

(ii) CVC (e.g., /kham/ for ‘word, mouthful etc.’)
(iii) CV.CVC (e.g., /chabâb/ for ‘letter, newspaper etc.’)
(iv) CVC.CVC (e.g., /wannâʔ/ for ‘class of human beings’)
(v) CCV (e.g., /traː/ for ‘trademark, seal’)
(vi) CCVC (e.g., /khloːŋ/ for ‘herd of wild elephants’)
(vii) CCV.CVC (e.g., /kracâw/ for ‘flower basket, fruit basket’)
(viii) CV.CCVC (e.g., /khâːkhwaːm/ for ‘message’ as in /khâːkhwaːm sâːm khâːkhwaːm/ ‘three messages’)
(ix) CVC.CV (e.g., /tamraː/ for ‘textbook, reference book’)
(x) CVC.CV.CV (e.g., /chaːnchalaː/ for ‘platform of train’)

3.3. Morphosyntactic Structures

So far as the morphosyntactic structure of the Thai classifiers is concerned the following characteristics have been observed:

3.3.0. A Particular Nominal element used as a Classifier

In Thai a particular nominal element can be used as a noun and as a classifier both simultaneously in the same sentence or only as a classifier alone in different sentences. Hiranburana (1979:39) rightly observes the situation as “It is a word which occurs with a noun when a number and/or a demonstrative is also present ... However, in the context where the noun is understood, the noun may be omitted, leaving its classifier to act as the head of a classifier phrase.” Therefore, it can be said that a particular classifier has the potentiality to be used only as a classifier and
as both a nominal element and a classifier simultaneously in the same syntactic construction. For example,

(1) /khon/ as a classifier for ‘all kinds of human-beings’, e.g.,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mi:} & \quad \text{khon} & \quad \text{jù:} & \quad \text{sā:m} & \quad \text{khon} \\
\text{have} & \quad \text{human-being} & \quad \text{be} & \quad \text{three} & \text{CL} \\
\text{‘There are three persons.’}
\end{align*}
\]

\text{cf.}

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mi:} & \quad \text{nákrian} & \quad \text{jù:} & \quad \text{sā:m} & \quad \text{khon} \\
\text{have} & \quad \text{student} & \quad \text{be} & \quad \text{three} & \text{CL} \\
\text{‘There are three students.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(2) /pà:k/ as a classifier for ‘mouth, witness, fish net etc.’, e.g.,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{khadi:} & \quad \text{nì:} & \quad \text{mi:} & \quad \text{phaja:n} & \quad \text{jù:} & \quad \text{sā:m} & \quad \text{pà:k} \\
\text{case} & \quad \text{this} & \quad \text{have} & \quad \text{witness} & \quad \text{be} & \quad \text{three} & \text{CL} \\
\text{‘This case has three witnesses.’}
\end{align*}
\]

\text{cf.}

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{khon} & \quad \text{raw} & \quad \text{mi:} & \quad \text{pà:k} & \quad \text{jù:} & \quad \text{nìŋ} & \quad \text{pà:k} \\
\text{human-being} & \quad \text{we} & \quad \text{have} & \quad \text{mouth} & \quad \text{be} & \quad \text{one} & \text{CL} \\
\text{‘We people have a mouth.’}
\end{align*}
\]
(3) /nâ:/ as a classifier for ‘face, page (for writing)’, e.g.,

khon raw mi: nâ: jù: nêj nâ:
human-being we have face be one CL

‘We people have a face.’

cf.
khâw khian ra:jïa:n ma: sã:m nâ:
he write report come three CL

‘He wrote three pages of report.’

3.3.1. The First element of a Compounded form used as a Classifier

In the Thai language the first element of a compounded form is found to be used as a classifier (though this first element may not be used as a lexical item separately, it is used separately as a classifier). For example,

(4) /sɔŋ/ as a classifier for ‘envelop, cigarette packet’, e.g.,
sɔŋcõdmâ:j sã:m sɔŋ
envelop three CL
‘three envelops’

(5) /kham/ as a classifier for ‘words (oral speech), mouthful, bite’, e.g.,
khamphû:d sã:m kham
word (of speak) three CL
‘three words of speaking’
(6) /kɔy/ as a classifier for ‘heap (of sand, stone etc.) troop, force, brigade of people, department etc.’, e.g.,

\[
\text{chan kɔ: kɔyfaj waj sə:m kɔy}
\]

'I make bonfire keep three CL

'I make three bonfires.'

(7) /khon/ as a classifier for ‘all kinds of human-beings’, e.g.,

\[
\text{mi: khonkrua ma: maj nįh khon}
\]

have cook come new one CL

'A new cook has come.'

(8) /hɔ-opening line obscured by image-

\[
\text{naj bə:n làŋ nī: mi: hɔnɔ:n jù: hà: hɔ}
\]

in house CL this have bed-room be five CL

'There are five bed-rooms in this house'

3.3.2. Nominal forms having Reflexive Nature used as Classifiers

Nominal forms are found to be used as classifiers widely in the same sentence structure. Formally, the nouns are repeated in the sentence. Therefore, these can be said to be reflexive in nature. These classifiers can be called repeated or repetitive or reduplicative classifiers. For example,
(9) /wannáʔ/ as a classifier for 'caste, class of human-beings', e.g.,

\[ \text{India bora:n mi: wannáʔ jù: si: wannáʔ} \]

India ancient have caste be four CL

'Ancient India has four castes.'

(10) /kumon/ as a classifier for 'cave', e.g.,

\[ \text{khā:yná: mi: kumon jù: sǎ:m kumon} \]

ahead have cave be three CL

'There are three caves ahead.'

(11) /miː/ as a classifier for 'hand', e.g.,

\[ \text{chan mi: mi: jù: sỹŋ mi:} \]

I have hand be two CL

'I have two hands.'

(12) /pà:k/ as a classifier for 'mouth, witness, fish-net etc.', e.g.,

\[ \text{manúd mi: pà:k jù: nĩŋ pà:k} \]

human-being have mouth be one CL

'The human being has a mouth.'

(13) /khaː/ as a classifier for 'leg, microphone pole, four legs of furniture etc.', e.g.,
chá:ŋ tua nɛŋ mi: khā: jù: sì: khā:
elephant CL one have leg be four CL

'An elephant has four legs.'

3.3.3. Classifiers occurring with Numerals

Classifiers in Thai can occur with numerals. There are sentences which attest the use of classifiers without the use of numerals, but in actuality, an inherent sense of number (especially singular) remains involved in the structure. For example,

(14) /khloːŋ/ as a classifier for 'herd of wild elephants', e.g.,

mi: chá:ŋpàː jù: khlōːŋ jáj
have wild elephant be CL big

'There is a herd of wild elephants.'

(In the above sentence there is no numeral, yet the use of the classifier /khloːŋ/ indicates 'a herd')

cf.

mi: chá:ŋpàː jù: sǐŋ khlōːŋ
have wild elephant be two CL

'There are two groups of wild elephant.'

(In the above sentence the classifier has been used with the numeral /sǐŋ/ 'two'.)
Compare the following sentences:

(15) /kâ:w/ as a classifier for 'step of walking', e.g.,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>khâw</th>
<th>da:n</th>
<th>paj</th>
<th>kâ:w</th>
<th>diaw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'He walks a step.'

cf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>khâw</th>
<th>da:n</th>
<th>paj</th>
<th>sâ:y</th>
<th>kâ:w</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'He walks two steps.'

(16) /kham/ as a classifier for 'words (oral speech), mouthful, bite', e.g.,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>khâw</th>
<th>kin</th>
<th>khâ:w</th>
<th>khâ:</th>
<th>kham</th>
<th>diaw</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>rice</td>
<td>only</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'He eats a mouthful of rice only.'

cf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>khâw</th>
<th>kin</th>
<th>khâ:w</th>
<th>sâ:m</th>
<th>kham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>rice</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'He eats three mouthfuls of rice.'

3.3.4. Classifiers occurring with Determiners

Classifiers in Thai can occur with the determiners. For example,
(17) /khu:/ as a classifier for ‘pair, couples (e.g., lover, sock, shoe etc.)’
e.g.,

(a) *rɔyθa:w khu: ni:*  
shoe CL this  
‘this pair of shoes’

(b) *rɔyθa:w khu: nan*  
shoe CL that  
‘that pair of shoes’

(c) *nɔk khu: ni: sũaj*  
bird CL this beauty  
‘This pair of birds is beautiful.’

(d) *pla: khu: nan chan jà:k dâj*  
fish CL that I want get  
‘That pair of fishes I want.’

(18) /tua/ as a classifier for ‘all kinds of animals, four legs of furniture, alphabet letter, shirt, trouser, etc.’ e.g.,

(a) *mä: tua nan chan ch3:b*  
dog CL that I like  
‘I like that dog.’
(b)  
\[ \text{tö:ʔ tua ní: khāṃrā:η di:} \]  
\( \text{table CL this strong good} \)  
'This table is strong.'

(19) /k新格局/ as a classifier for 'soap, stone, coal, cloud, etc.', e.g.,

\[ \text{māː sī: sabū: k新格局 ní: maː mī:waːn} \]  
\( \text{mother buy soap CL this come yesterday} \)  
'Mother bought this soap yesterday.'

3.3.5. Classifiers occurring with Interrogative Adverbs

Classifiers in Thai can occur with interrogative adverbs. For example,

(20) /khon/ as a classifier for 'all kinds of human-beings', e.g.,

\[ \text{miː khon jūː kīː khon naj bāːn} \]  
\( \text{have human-being be how many CL in house} \)  
'How many people are there in the house?'

(21) /chabāb/ as a classifier for 'news paper, letter, telegraph, document etc.', e.g.,

\[ \text{miː còdṃāːj maː kīː chabāb} \]  
\( \text{have letter come how many CL} \)  
'How many letters have come?'
(22) /fǔ:n/ as a classifier for ‘group of animals, group of air planes, squadrons etc.’, e.g.,

\[\text{thīːnān miː nōk jūː kīː fǔːn} \]

there have bird be how many CL

‘How many groups of birds are there?’

(23) /cānjwāːd/ as a classifier for ‘province’, e.g.,

\[\text{prāthēdthaj miː cānjwād jūː kīː cānjwād} \]

Thailand have province be how many CL

‘How many provinces are there in Thailand?’

(24) /nɔːː/ as a classifier for ‘offshoot, sprout, banana shoot, bamboo shoot etc.’, e.g.,

\[\text{khun miː nɔːːklūaj jūː kīː nɔː} \]

you have shoot-banana be how many CL

‘How many banana shoots do you have?’

(25) /lēːm/ as a classifier for ‘knife, axe, pin, needle, sword, candle, book, bull cart, note book’, e.g.,

\[\text{khun miː nāŋšī jūː kīː lēm} \]

you have book be how many CL

‘How many books do you have?’
(26) /sên/ as a classifier for ‘road, wire, belt, robe etc.’, e.g.,

\[
\text{mi: thanôn ki: sên thî: paj sanã:mbin dâj}
\]

has road how many CL that go airport able

‘How many roads are there to airport?’

(27) /dâ:ml/ as a classifier for ‘pen’, e.g.,

\[
pà:kkâ: ki: dâ:ml thî: châj di:
\]

pen how many CL that use good

‘How many pens are good (for use)?’

3.3.6. Classifiers occurring with Relative Pronouns

Classifiers can occur with relative pronouns in a Thai sentence. For example,

(28) /lêm/ as a classifier for ‘knife, axe, pin, needle, sword, candle, book, bull cart etc.’, e.g.,

\[
nânsî: lêm thî: khun hâj chăn ma:
\]

book CL that you give me come

\[
wa:n jù: bon tô?:
\]

put be on table

‘The book that you gave me is on the table.’
(29) /cha:m/ as a classifier for ‘full bowl’, e.g.,

\[ \text{kua} \text{jee} \text{aw cha:m} \text{ thii:} \text{ chan} \text{ kin} \text{ ?ar} \text{j} \text{ ma:k} \]

noodle CL that I eat tasty very

‘The noodle that I have eaten (is) very tasty.’

(30) /ru:b/ as a classifier for ‘Buddhist monk, picture’, e.g.,

\[ \text{phra} \text{ ru:b} \text{ thii:} \text{ the:d} \text{ kenh} \text{ kenh} \text{ ru:b} \text{ nan} \]

monk CL that teach expert expert CL that

‘That monk who is very expert for teaching…’

(31) /sa:j/ as a classifier for ‘river, road, chain, wire, cable, belt etc.’, e.g.,

\[ \text{mae} \text{na:m sa:j thii:} \text{ khun} \text{ hen} \text{ pen} \text{ mae} \text{na:m caw phra} \text{jaa:} \]

river CL that you see be river Chaophraya

‘The river that you see is Chaophraya.’

(32) /khon/ as a classifier for ‘all kinds of human beings’, e.g.,

\[ \text{dekkphoo} \text{cha:j khon thii:} \text{ ma: wannii: pen phikan phom} \]

boy CL that come today be friend me

‘The boy who has come today is my friend.’

3.3.7. Classifiers occurring with Adjectives

Classifiers in Thai can occur with adjectives in a sentence. For example,
(33) /tua/ as a classifier for ‘all kinds of animals, four legs of furniture, alphabet letter, shirt, trouser, doll etc.’, e.g.,

\[ \text{I want buy cow CL white} \]

‘I want to buy a white cow.’

(34) /khú:/ as a classifier for ‘pair, couples (e.g., lover, sock, shoe etc.)’ e.g.,

\[ \text{She wear shoe CL pink} \]

‘She wears the pink shoes.’

(35) /khâːn/ as a classifier for ‘side (of body and material objects)’, e.g.,

\[ \text{I pain leg CL left of me} \]

‘My left leg pains.’

3.3.8. Classifiers occurring without the Head Noun

Classifiers in Thai can be used in a sentence optionally without the head noun but they actually qualify the head noun. The meaning in such a case is found to be conveyed from the context in which the sentence is used. For example,
(36) /phě:n/ is a classifier for ‘cloth, mat, towel, sheet, curtain, rug, blanket, hanger ship, land (paddy) etc.’, as in the following sentence:

(pha:) phě:n năj sǔaj
(cloth) CL which beauty

‘Which cloth is beautiful?’

In the above sentence the classifier /phě:n/ may be used without the head noun /pha:/ ‘cloth’. The specific head noun to which the classifier is used, is being conveyed from the context.

3.4. Function of Thai Classifiers

Classifiers in Thai are basically found to be nouns. Nouns change their classes to become classifiers. Verbs in Thai are not found to be another major source of classifiers as are found in some other languages (e.g., Iaai, an Austronesian language) in the world. As classifiers are basically used for the purpose of segregation as well as identification and classification they become attributive in nature from the functional point of view.

Classifiers in Thai have the following functions:

3.4.0. Classifiers used to classify Nouns

Classifiers are used to classify nouns. For example,
(37) /chǐak/ as a classifier for 'pet elephant', e.g.,

\[ \text{luːŋ miː chāːŋ jùː sāːm chǐak} \]

unčle have elephanť (pet) be three CL

'Uncle has three pet elephants.'

(38) /lùːk/ as a classifier for 'fruit, football, balloon etc.', e.g.,

\[ \text{chān miː fūdɔ:n jùː sāːm lùːk} \]

I have football be three CL

'I have three footballs.'

(39) /dɔːk/: as a classifier for 'all kinds of flower, key, firecracker, mushroom, fungus etc.', e.g.,

\[ \text{chān sìː dɔːkkulːb maː sib dɔːk} \]

I buy rose come ten CL

'I bought three roses.'

(40) /khon/ as a classifier for 'all kinds of human-beings', e.g.,

\[ \text{miː khon jùː nai hŏŋ sib khon} \]

have human-beinĝ be in room ten CL

'There are ten persons in the room.'
(41) /sǎ:j/ as a classifier for ‘river, road, chain, wire, cable, belt etc.’, e.g.,

\[ mi: \text{ mâ:nâ:m sǎ:m sǎ:j } \]

have river three CL

‘There are three rivers.’

(42) /lam/ as a classifier for ‘airplane, boat, sugarcane, bamboo’, e.g.,

(a) \[ khāw \ sǐ: \ rīa \ ma: \ sā:m \ lam \]

he buy boat come three CL

‘He bought three boats.’

(b) \[ khāw \ mi: \ má:jphasis \ jù: \ lá:j \ lam \]

he have bamboo be many CL

‘He has many bamboos.’

3.4.1. Classifiers used to classify Verb forms

Classifiers are used to classify verb forms (denoting action). For example,

(43) /tǐ:n/ as a classifier for ‘sleep’, e.g.,

\[ khā:w \ lǎpj \ pāj \ nǐ:ŋ \ tǐ:n \]

he sleep go one CL

‘He has slept a time.’
(44) /hôn/ as a classifier for 'time, instance, event, incident (with verbs only)', e.g.,

\[
\text{khăw} \quad \text{paj} \quad \text{hôn} \quad \text{diaw}
\]

he go CL single

'He went once only.'

(45) /thi:/ as a classifier for 'time, occasion, event (with verbs only)', e.g.,

\[
\text{khăw} \quad \text{thu:k} \quad \text{ti:} \quad \text{să:m} \quad \text{thi:}
\]

he be hit three CL

'He was hit for three times.'

(46) /?a:thid/ as a classifier for 'verbs indicating period of action', e.g.,

\[
\text{chăn} \quad \text{câ?} \quad \text{paj} \quad \text{să:m} \quad \text{?a:thid}
\]

I will go three CL

'I will go for three weeks.'

(47) /r3:b/ as a classifier for 'round, cycle, time (with verbs only)', e.g.,

\[
\text{phôm} \quad \text{wîŋ} \quad \text{să:m} \quad \text{r3:b} \quad \text{læ:w}
\]

I run three CL already

'I ran three rounds.'
(48) /khray/ as a classifier for ‘time, period, event (with verbs only), e.g.,

(a)  chan  hēn  khāw  khray  diaw
     I    see    he   CL    single

     ‘I saw him once only.’

(b)  chēn  hēn  khāw  sā:m  khray
     I    see    he    three   CL

     ‘I saw him three times.’

3.5. Semantic Categorization

Depending upon the semantic load carried by the different types of classifiers as observed in the Thai language, a broad classification of the semantic interpretation has been attempted. Classifiers have been found to be used basically to separate as well as identify and classify different nominal formations depending upon the perception or the world view of the members of the speech community. Noun words denoting different meanings are found to be used as classifiers in Thai. Therefore, a set of semantic features has been set up for this purpose. These have been presented in the following:

(i) Concept /Idea
(ii) Material Object
(iii) Quanta
(iv) Arrangement
(v) Space
Each of the above-mentioned features has been explained in the following along with suitable classifiers as examples.

3.5.0. Concept /Idea

It refers to a principle relating to something abstract or a notion combining elements into the idea of one object. The following classifier indicates this feature:

(49) /phaːn/ as a classifier for ‘plan, policy’, e.g.,

\[\text{chan mi: phaːn thamaː n jù: sā:m phaːn}\]

'I have plan work be three CL'

3.5.1. Material Object

It refers to something which is concrete and is realized through the physical sense organs. A classifier indicating the feature is as follows:

(50) /lam/ as a classifier for ‘airplane, boat, sugarcane, bamboo’, e.g.,

\[\text{khaw sī: khāṃbin ma: sā:m lam}\]

'He bought three airplanes.'
Taking cues from Allan (1977:285-309), Hundius and Kölver (1983:165-214) and Singhapreecha (2001:259-270) the semantic category of ‘Material Object’ has been categorized on the basis of shape of the object to which the classifier is being used. Such a categorization essentially focuses on the use of the classifiers depending upon the structural shape or dimension of an object as it appears to human cognition. The subcategories are mentioned in the following:

(i) Long Cylindrical category
(ii) Round category
(iii) Thin Long category
(iv) Flat Flexible category
(v) Hollow Bulky category
(vi) Long Curved / Flexible category
(vii) Flat Inflexible category
(viii) Square Hollow category
(ix) Square category
(x) Thin Flat category
(xi) Bulky Inflexible category

Each of the above-mentioned subcategories of material object will be discussed exhaustively in chapter IV dealing with syntactic and semantic aspects of the Thai classifiers.

I. Long Cylindrical category

It refers to those objects which are long and look like a cylinder. The following classifier denotes such a feature:
(51) /tôn/ as a classifier for 'tree, plant, stalk, post, pillar etc.', e.g.,

\[ bâm \, khê\, n \, süghên \, mi\, tônmây jû\, : \, sib \, tô\]

house of Singkhon have tree be ten CL

'There are ten trees in Singkhon’s house.'

II. Round category

It refers to any round object or oval shaped top with three dimensions. A classifier marking this feature is given below:

(52) /lu:k/ as a classifier for 'fruit, mountain, football, balloon etc.', e.g.,

\[ khâw \, mi\, : \, mamûn jù\, : \, sâ:m \, lu:k\]

he have mango be three CL

'He has three mangoes.'

III. Thin Long category

It refers to those objects which are long and thin in appearance. The following classifier indicates this category:

(53) /sên/ as a classifier for 'road, hair, wire, belt, thread, beam light etc.', e.g.,

\[ sêmphôm \, sâ:m \, sê\]

hair three CL

'three hairs'
IV. Flat Flexible category

It refers to any object having flexibility and/or flat in shape. In the following example a classifier of such category is presented:

(54) /pi:k/ as a classifier for ‘wings of animals, flank, side, wings of airplane etc.’, e.g.,

\[ \text{nōk mī: pi:k jù: se:ν yi: pi:k} \]

bird have wing be two CL

‘The bird has two wings.’

V. Hollow Bulky category

It refers to something which is empty inside and bulky in shape and size. The following classifier indicates this category:

(55) /kracâw/ as a classifier for ‘flower basket, fruit basket’, e.g.,

\[ \text{chān si: dɔ:kmaj ma: sa:m kracâw} \]

I buy flower come three CL

‘I bought three flower baskets.’

VI. Long Curved / Flexible category

It indicates something which is long but curved and flexible in shape and size. A classifier marking this feature is given below:
(56) /khan/ as a classifier for 'spoon, car, hook, umbrella etc.', e.g.,

\[
\text{chan mi: röm jù: šːŋ khan}
\]

I have umbrella be two CL

'I have two umbrellas.'

VII. Flat Inflexible category

It indicates those material objects that are flat in shape and not flexible. The following classifier denotes such a feature:

(57) /lêm/ as a classifier for 'knife, axe, pin, needle, sword, candle, book, bull cart etc.', e.g.,

\[
\text{mi: mːd sǎ:m lêm jù: naj khrua}
\]

have knife three CL be in kitchen

'There are three knives in the kitchen.'

VIII. Square Hollow category

It refers to something which is square in shape and hollow inside. A classifier marking this feature is given below:

(58) /lăn/ as a classifier for 'house, building, tent, mosquito-net, palanquin', e.g.,

\[
\text{chan mi: mûŋ jù: sǎ:m lăn}
\]

I have mosquito-net be three CL

'I have three mosquito-nets.'
IX. Square category

It refers to objects with square shape. The following classifier indicates this category:

(59) /khrān/ as a classifier for ‘television, computer, wireless, radio, motor car, mobile, mechanical factory etc.’, e.g.,

\[
\text{chan mi: khrān ju: sā:m khrān}
\]
I have computer be three CL

‘I have three computers.’

X. Thin Flat category

It refers to those objects which are thin and flat. The following classifier denotes such a feature:

(60) /phā:n/ as a classifier for ‘paper, breath, C.D., board, sticker etc.’, e.g.,

\[
\text{chan mi: phā:n ju: sā:m phā:n}
\]
I have paper be three CL

‘I have three pieces of paper.’

XI. Bulky Inflexible category

It refers to something which is round and heavy. A classifier marking this feature is given below:
(61) /kঢ়ন/ as a classifier for ‘soap, stone, lump, butter, brick, cake etc.’, e.g.,

\[ \text{ফি: হা: কঢ়ন} \]
brick five CL

‘five pieces of brick’

3.5.2. Quanta

It refers to discrete particles, the values of which are expressed as the frequency, the measurement, the unit of energy or action as well. The following classifier expresses this feature:

(62) /kং/ as a classifier for ‘year of age’, e.g.,

\[ \text{দেক কোন তা:ঃ সাম কং} \]
child CL this age three CL

‘This child is three years old.’

3.5.3. Arrangement

It deals with something laid out in a particular order or in a specific fashion. A classifier expressing this feature is as follows:

(63) /wঁ:/ as a classifier for ‘comb of banana’, e.g.,

\[ \text{মা: সঁ: কলুং: মা: সাম বঁ:} \]
mother buy banana come three CL

‘Mother bought three bunches of banana.’
3.5.4. Space

It refers to the place or area. An example of classifiers marking this feature is given below:

(64) /hɔŋ/ as a classifier for ‘room’, e.g.,

\[
\begin{align*}
    mi: & \quad hɔŋ\text{-}n \quad jù: \quad sà:m \quad hɔŋ \\
\end{align*}
\]

have bed-room be three CL

‘There are three bed rooms.’

3.5.5. Body Parts

This feature refers to body parts and the nominal elements indicative of body parts are used as classifiers in Thai. Such a classifier is as follows:

(65) /hũː/ as a classifier for ‘ear’, e.g.,

\[
\begin{align*}
    khon \quad raw \quad mi: \quad hũː \quad jù: \quad sɔːŋ \quad hũː \\
\end{align*}
\]

human-being we have ear be two CL

‘We people have two ears.’

3.5.6. Animacy

It refers to those forms which are actually noun words indicating life having experience of locomotion, i.e., feel or move. An example of classifiers indicating this feature is presented below:
(66) /khon/ as a classifier for 'all kinds of human beings', e.g.,

\[
\text{mi nákrian jù: sã:m khon}
\]

have student be three CL

'There are three students.'

3.5.7. Inanimacy

It refers to those forms which indicate life devoid of locomotion. The following is an example of classifiers denoting this feature:

(67) /tua/ as a classifier for 'all kinds of animals, four legs of furniture, alphabet letter, shirt, trouser, etc.', e.g.,

\[
\text{naj hŋ nán mi: t3? jù: sã:m tua}
\]

in room that have table be three CL

'There are three tables in that room.'

3.5.8. Impression (Visual / Auditory)

It refers to words denoting some sensory impressions which may be visual, auditory or even tangible. The same words are found to be used as classifiers in Thai. A classifier expressing this feature is as follows:

(68) /tra:/ as a classifier for 'trademark, seal', e.g.,

\[
\text{naj ëkkasa:n ní: mi tra;pràtháb jù: sã:m tra:}
\]

in document this have seal be three CL

'There are three seals in this document.'
3.5.9. Action

It refers to the forms that indicate activity, a process of doing something by using energy or influence. The following classifier indicates this feature:

\[(69) \text{/f\d:}/ \text{as a classifier for 'to kiss (with verbs only)'}, \text{e.g.,} \]

\[kh\d:w \quad h\d:m \quad \text{th\v{e}:} \quad \text{paj} \quad s\d:y \quad f\d:d \]

he  kiss  she  go  two  CL

'He kissed her twice.'

Notes

1. It is noteworthy that the classifier /\text{tual}/ is a generic one. It is used not only with the inanimate objects, but also with animals (see Bandhumedha, Navavan. 1984, ii)

2. Incidentally, it can be mentioned that in such cases classifiers are used either with numerals or determiners along with the verbs.
References


