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6.0. Introduction

The present work has been done with a view to carry out a comprehensive research on the classifiers of the Thai language. The study is based on the data of classifiers in Thai. This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the findings of each of the chapters of the work along with some observations on the relevance for the study of such a classificatory schema and the relevance for it in language pedagogy as well.

6.1. The Findings

The first chapter deals with the geographical location of Thailand where the Thai language is spoken. Then classifiers have been defined and an account of the study of Thai classifiers as realised in the retrospective literature has been given. The scope, objective and the methodology of the research program have been taken into consideration.

Ostapirat (2005) and Ratanakul (2007) opine that Thai is a member of the Tai sub-family belonging to the Tai-kadai or Kadai or Kam-Tai language family.

Classifiers have been defined and described by different scholars from different points of view. Taking cues from the earlier scholars like Lanyon-Orgill (1955), Emeneau (1964), Noss (1964), Burling (1970), Bhattacharya (1976), Allan (1977), Lehman (1979), Crystal (1985), Ahmed (1986), Placzek (1992), Pacioni (1996), Matthews (1997), Aikhenvald (2000), Grinevald (2002) and from Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (1996), a classifier can be defined as a word or morpheme which is used with numerals, nouns and verbs, denoting some perceived or imputed characteristics of the entity to which it is associated. Classifiers can be both generic and specific.

The present work aims at describing the Thai classifiers exhaustively from the point of view of its nature as a morphological structure, semantic structure and its position in the syntactic structure. The usage of the Thai classifiers will also be studied in different contexts with an aim to contribute to the language acquisition aspect.

The study is based on the data collected from the speech of the native speakers of Thai. The study has been carried out in the descriptive model.

In a broad sense, the present study of classifiers includes three important areas i.e., Morphology, Syntax and Semantics. This work is a qualitative research. The research methodology is divided into the following four stages:
i. Data collection.

ii. Constructing the overall outline of the work.

iii. Analyzing the raw data as well as systematizing the collected data.

iv. Formulating conclusion, identifying significant results, and areas for further research.

In the second chapter a study has been attempted to go through the concept of classifiers as realized in different languages of the world. There are languages which have been identified as classifier languages by the earlier scholars like Allan (1977) and Aikhenvald (2000). As stated by the scholars classifier systems are heterogenous non-hierarchical non-taxonomic organizations which vary idiosyncratically from one language to another and are culture governed phenomena. According to Allan (1977), there are remarkable similarities among classifiers for nouns in many unrelated and geographically non-contiguous languages from Africa, America, Asia and Oceania. Therefore, the chapter reviews the theoretical concepts as well as the developmental studies of the classifier languages in order to have a glimpse at the nature and types of classifiers, the types of classifier languages of the world, so far studied.

Depending upon the morpho-phonological properties of the classifiers of different languages, following Allan (1977) and Aikhenvald (2000) classifiers can be of the following types:

i. Numeral Classifiers

ii. Noun Classifiers

iii. Concordial Classifiers

iv. Possessive Classifiers
As mentioned in the earlier studies, the European languages by and large are not 'Classifier languages.' The morpho-syntactic status, the variety of forms and the pragmatic use of the classifiers are evident in the languages like Japanese, Ponapean (Oceanic language), Bantu (African), Spanish, Sesotho (South African), Chinese, Kanjobal (a Mayan language, in Guatemala, Central America), Yidiny (Australian), Jakaltek (Australian), Diegueño (North American), Cayuga (Iroquoian, an indigenous language of North America), Mundurukú (Tupi, Brazil), Ngandi (Australian), Thai, Burmese, Tzotzil (Mayan language, Mexico) and so on.

Then the types of classifier languages have been mentioned as in the following:

i. Numeral classifier languages
ii. Noun classifier languages
iii. Concordial classifier languages
iv. Possessive classifier languages
v. Verbal classifier languages
vi. Locative classifier languages
vii. Deictic classifier languages

I. Numeral classifier languages— The numeral classifiers are available in the languages of East, South-East Asia and Oceania, in the Tibeto-Burman languages, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Ainu and in most
of the Austroasiatic languages. It is also found in the Indic and Iranian languages, Turkic and Hungarian languages and in some languages of North America. A number of Mexican and Central American languages, the Mayan languages, the South American languages have large sets of numeral classifiers. Papuan languages and the Oceanic and the Western Austronesian languages have also numeral classifiers. The Afroasiatic family does not attest such a system of numeral classifiers (Aikhenvald 2000:121-124).

II. Noun classifier languages— some Australian, some South American, some western Austronesian, some Oceanic, and Tai languages belong to this category.

III. Concordial classifier languages— According to Allan (1977:286) many African (Bantu and Semi-Bantu) and Australian languages belong to this type.

IV. Possessive classifier languages— this type is available in a number of North American Indian and South American Indian languages, in some languages of Northern China and Indo-China and in some Papuan languages.

V. Verbal classifier languages— Verbal classifiers are found in some North American languages, in Californian languages, in some languages of north Australia and so on.

VI. Locative classifier languages— Aikhenvald (2000:172) admits that locative classifiers are rarely found in the languages of the world. However, according to him South American Indian languages (e.g.,
Palikur, Carib languages, Daw etc.) are found to attest the locative classifiers.

VII. Deictic classifier languages— As Aikhenvald (2000:177) mentions deictic classifiers are found in the North American languages (e.g., Yuchi and the Siouan family), some languages of South America and Eskimo are found to have deictic classifiers.

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. The third chapter describes and classifies the Thai classifiers from the formal and functional points of view.

Classifiers have been described and categorized in various ways by different scholars with some variations and with some similarities in their analyses. In this regard the works on Thai classifiers worth mentioning are Uppakitsillapasarn Phraya (1968), Naksakul (1978), Panuphong (1979), Wattanaprasert (1983), Bandhumedha, Navavan (1984), Wongpukdie (1984), Tanongsaksakul (1990), Warotamasikkhadit (1996), Hongsawan (1997), Pankhuenkhat (1999), Sunkaburanuruk (1999), Bandhumedha, Banchob (2002), Suktay (2004) and Nagamatsu (2007).

Taking cues from the existing works on the descriptions of the Thai classifiers, an analysis has been attempted to view the particular grammatical phenomenon on the basis of its formal structure as well as functional and semantic interpretation.
Formal Structure. Classifiers in Thai can be viewed from the point of view of their phonological shape and morphosyntactic formation.

Phonological Shape. Classifiers in Thai are basically of consonant-vowel-consonant structure (CVC). For example, /pà:k/ for ‘mouth, witness, fish-net’, /dâ:m/ 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., /khû:/ 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., /wannáʔ/ for ‘class of human beings’)
(v) CCV (e.g., /tra:/ 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., /khɔːkhwaːm/ for ‘message’ as in /khɔːkhwaːm sâːm khɔːkhwaːm/ ‘three messages’)
(ix) CVC.CV (e.g., /tamraː/ for ‘textbook, reference book’)
(x) CVC.CV.CV (e.g., /chaːnchalaː/ for ‘platform of train’)

So far as the morphosyntactic structure of the Thai classifiers are concerned the following characteristics have been observed.
I. 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. 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.

II. In the Thai language the first elements of compounded nouns are found to be used as classifiers (though these first elements may not be used as lexical items separately, these are used separately as classifiers).

III. Nominal forms are found to be used as classifiers widely in the same sentence structures. Therefore, these can be said to be reflexive in nature.

IV. 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.

V. Classifiers in Thai can occur with the determiners.

VI. Classifiers in Thai can occur with the interrogative adverbs.

VII. Classifiers in Thai can occur with the relative pronouns.

VIII. Classifiers in Thai can also occur with the adjectives.

IX. 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.
Classifiers in Thai are basically found to be nouns. Nouns change their classes to become classifiers and become attributive in nature from the functional point of view. Classifiers are used for the purpose of segregation and identification.

Classifiers in Thai have the following functions:

(a) Classifiers are used to classify nouns.

(b) Classifiers are used to classify verb forms (denoting action).

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, which has been presented in the following:

i. Concept/Idea
ii. Material Object
iii. Quanta
iv. Arrangement
v. Space
vi. Body Parts
vii. Animacy
viii. Inanimacy
ix. Impression (Visual/Auditory)
x. Action

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 subcategorized 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 classifier depending upon the structural shape or dimension of an object as it appears to human cognition. They 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 these above-mentioned semantic categories and subcategories has been discussed in chapter IV dealing exhaustively with the syntactic and semantic aspects of Thai classifiers.

In the fourth chapter the role of classifiers in the Thai language has been dealt with depending upon the position of classifiers in the syntactic structure and its realization at the semantic level.

Position in the sentence:

(a) Classifiers in Thai occur as a nominal element and as a classifier both simultaneously in the same sentence structure (because a
noun when used as a classifier becomes attributive in nature)—therefore, reflexive in nature.

(b) Classifiers can occur only once in a sentence individually.

c) Classifiers follow the noun in a sentence. When a noun word follows the head noun it becomes the attribution of the head noun and is considered as classifier of the noun in the sentence.

(d) Classifiers in Thai usually follow the cardinal numbers (only exception is the singular number which can both precede or follow the classifier. When the classifier precedes the number, it is necessarily singular and an inherent sense of emphasis remains involved in the construction).

(e) Classifiers in Thai precede the ordinal numbers.

(f) Classifiers precede the determiners in a sentence. The determiners ‘this’ ‘that’ are mostly found to occur with classifiers.

(g) Classifiers follow the interrogative adverbs in Thai.

(h) Classifiers precede the relative pronoun in a sentence.

(i) Classifiers can precede the adjective in a Thai sentence.

(j) A classifier can occur more than once in a sentence.

As already initiated in chapter III, the Thai classifiers are found to cover a broad spectrum of the semantic interpretations. The semantic features that are conveyed by the different types of Thai classifiers are discussed in the following:
I. Concept /Idea refers to a principle relating to something abstract or a notion combining elements into the idea of one object.

II. Material Object is something which is concrete and is realized through the physical sense organs.

The semantic category of 'material object' has been subcategorised. The subcategories are as follows.

i. Long Cylindrical category refers to those objects which are long and look like a cylinder.

ii. Round category refers to any round object or oval shaped top with three dimensions.

iii. Thin Long category refers to those objects which are long and thin in appearance.

iv. Flat Flexible category refers to any object having flexibility and/or flat in shape.

v. Hollow Bulky category refers to something which is empty inside and bulky in shape and size.

vi. Long Curved / Flexible category indicates something which is long but curved and flexible in shape and size.

vii. Flat Inflexible category indicates those material objects that are flat in shape and not flexible.

viii. Square Hollow category refers to something which is square in shape and hollow inside.

ix. Square category refers to objects with square shape.

x. Thin Flat category refers to those objects which are thin and flat.

xi. Bulky Inflexible category refers to something which is round and heavy.
III. Quanta refers to discrete particles, the values of which are expressed as the frequency, the measurement, the unit of energy or action as well.

IV. Arrangement deals with something laid out in a particular order or in a specific fashion.

V. Space refers to the place or area.

VI. Body Parts— The nominal elements indicative of body parts are used as classifiers in Thai.

VII. Animacy refers to those classifiers which are actually noun words indicating life having experience of locomotion, i.e., feel or move.

VIII. Inanimacy refers to those forms which indicate life devoid of locomotion.

IX. Impression (Visual/Auditory)— The words denoting some sensory impressions which may be visual, auditory or even tangible are found to be used as classifiers in Thai.

X. Action refers to the forms that indicate activity, a process of doing something by using energy or influence.

The fifth chapter attempts to deal with the usage of classifiers among the native speakers of Thai belonging to different age groups. The data has been collected from the Thai speakers belonging to both the sexes and from different educational backgrounds.
Both the linguistic and extra-linguistic features that are involved in such a grammatical construction have been taken into consideration for the purpose. A field investigation has been conducted to have a glimpse of the usage pattern of the Thai classifiers among the native speakers of the language belonging to different age groups and sex. Four popular stories ("The shepherd boy", "The hare and the tortoise", "The farmer and the snake" and "The blind man and the elephant") have been taken into account for the purpose of data collection. Sampling of data has been done from the informants, the number of informants being sixteen, who belong to four different age groups. The informants belonging to four different age groups are, 1-20, 21-40, 41-60 and 61-80.

From the investigation it has been revealed that the use of classifiers is consistently and relatively high with higher age groups and relatively low with lower age groups along with some marginal exception. There is a tendency to use generic classifiers more than the specific classifiers. Such a tendency shows consistency in respect of all the age-groups. Further, there is a tendency to use classifiers more among the people with formal education (in Thai, the mother tongue) than those without formal education.

6.2. Relevance for the Study of such a Classificatory Schema

As classifiers form an important aspect of the Southeast Asian languages including the Thai language, description and classification of this structural phenomenon will enrich the grammatical studies of language in particular as well as in general. In addition, this study throws some light on the classified representation of the outside world by the
Thai speakers as reflected in the use of classifiers. A classifier is not significant in a language only because of its individual existence. It is significant as it occupies a particular categorical position in the totality of a classificatory scheme. It is a well known fact that each culture has its own way of viewing the real world. The classificatory system attempts to simplify the huge mass of information and to make it easily understandable. It helps to segregate the similar things from the dissimilar and thus clearly exhibits the distinguishing features. As Mahapatra (1973:110) says, “It reveals that the classificatory system is not merely an arbitrary or ad hoc collection of phenomena, but the result of a sustained intellectual preoccupation with the environment towards formulating a conception of reality.” A Thai speaker distinguishes between flat flexible and inflexible categories of nouns in terms of classifiers whereas a Malto (a Dravidian language) speaker identifies general flat category only. Similarly, the Thai classifier /ch3:/ is used for both fruits and flowers whereas speakers of Dimasa-Kachari (a Bodo speech) place fruits and flowers in separate groups and therefore, they use the classifier /thai/ for fruits and the classifier /bar/ for flowers. Thus, the structure and the semantic function of classifiers in Thai as defined and illustrated throughout the study, to some extent, helps in revealing an aspect of the world view of the Thai speech community.

6.3. Pedagogical Implication of the Study

While discussing about the theory and procedures for teaching a language Edward Anthony in 1963, as mentioned in Richards and Rodgers (2001:19) explained ‘method’ as “an overall plan for the orderly
presentation of language material ... .” It is obvious that for “the orderly presentation of language material” a systematic description of the material is required. So, when the Thai classifier system is considered to be a teaching point for non-Thai learners, a comprehensive study of its structure and semantic function is a prerequisite for preparing the teaching materials. Some of the important points as to how the present study is helpful to develop the insights of the teacher while preparing the teaching materials with respect to this particular grammatical phenomenon are presented below:

i. The description and classification of the Thai classifiers from the formal and functional points of view as discussed in chapter III provide insights for the phonological shape and the morphosyntactic behaviors of the classifiers.

ii. At the level of selection and gradation the importance of the generic classifiers is noteworthy.

iii. The semantic categories and subcategories of classifiers as presented in chapter IV is helpful for the selection, gradation and presentation of the classifiers according to the objectives of teaching.

iv. The description of the syntactic aspect of the classifiers in relation to their position in a sentence as discussed in chapter IV offers insights for the preparation of teaching materials on sentence construction.
v. The lists of classifiers as presented in the appendices (e.g., list of specific classifiers, list of repeated classifiers etc.) provide insights for organizing lessons on classifiers linked to contexts.

Thus, the definition, description and exemplification of Thai classifiers as presented throughout the study is hoped to contribute to designing the language teaching materials by the language teacher for the second language learner of the Thai language.

References
