CHAPTER II

NATURE AND TYPES OF CLASSIFIERS
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2.0. Introduction

In this chapter we will go through the concept of classifiers as realized in different languages of the world. Classifiers constitute a grammatical category denoting some saliently perceived or imputed characteristics of the entity to which an associated noun refers. They occur as morphemes in the surface structure under specific conditions. As already mentioned earlier (see section 1.1) classifiers are used for identification and segregation of a variety of concepts as they appear to human perception. There are languages which have been identified as classifier languages by the previous scholars. As stated by scholars classifier systems are heterogonous non-hierarchical non-taxonomic organizations which vary idiosyncratically from one language to another and are culture governed phenomena. According to Allan (1977:285) there are remarkable similarities among classifiers for nouns in many unrelated and geographically non-contiguous languages from Africa, America, Asia and Oceania. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to review the theoretical concepts as well as the developmental studies of the classifier languages in order to have a glimpse of the nature of the classifiers as studied in different languages. The chapter also discusses the types of classifier languages and types of classifiers as realized in different languages.
of the world, so far studied along with a brief reference to the Thai classifiers.

2.1. Nature of Classifiers

The study of the nature of classifiers of different languages brings into light various thought processes existing in human cognition. The inherent tendency of perception that enables human beings to identify various world views which they come across in a particular geographical and cultural setting help the human beings to segregate those views in terms of some general or common features and also in terms of some specific features. It is the use of the classifiers that marks a surface structure representation in the linguistic system, of such a complex semantic system of human cognition. The study of classifier systems though attempts to realize some semantic universals across various systems of language communication, aberrations have also been noticed by the scholars which fail to identify them under a specific or particular semantic system, therefore stand as exceptions to any system.

The classifiers are essentially derived from the nominal forms (and verbs also) that basically cover the major semantic domains like Concept /Idea, Material Object, Quanta, Arrangement, Space, Body Parts, Animacy, Inanimacy, Impression (Visual/Auditory) and Action.

In this connection it will be pertinent to refer to Asher and Simpson (1994:567): “…noun classifiers draw on the semantics of material and social interaction, while numeral classifiers predominantly categorize by shape,
and genitive classifiers by functional interaction. Verbal classifiers align themselves on the noun classifiers if they are of the incorporated subtype, classifying by material principally, while the order and phonologically more eroded subtype of verbal classifiers align themselves on the semantics of numeral classifiers, categorizing by shape.”

As mentioned by the previous scholars the classifier systems in most of the languages consist of generic classifiers, specific classifiers and unique classifiers that cover various semantic categorizations. The various classifiers that have been studied and identified across the languages of the world are given below:

a. Classifiers of human interaction (marking sex, kinship and status)
b. Classifiers for inanimate classifying objects as plant, rock, dirt, etc.
c. Classifiers for shape
d. Classifiers for functions
e. Classifiers for time expressions

It is the noun classifiers that classify the inanimate and also the concrete objects whereas, the numeral classifiers have been observed to classify a wide variety of noun forms in the languages.

In course of development, as the use of classifiers extends from specific nouns to nouns in general the meaning of classifiers transforms from concrete material to abstract functionality and also extends to the metaphorical domain. This has been appropriated by Asher and Simpson (1994:568) as, “the semantics of classifier systems are therefore a matter of
the age of the system, combined with its vitality and adaptability and its stage of evolution on a scale of grammaticalization.” It is the marginal grammaticalization and the concurrent extreme fluidity and creativity that characterize the notion of classifiers. It is this evolution or extension of the use of classifiers from one kind of substance to another that helps in understanding the thought process of human cognition with relative transparency.

2.2. Types of Classifiers

As already mentioned (see section 1.1.) according to Allan (1977:285), “…classifiers are defined on two criteria: (a) they occur as morphemes in surface structures under specifiable conditions; (b) they have meaning, in the sense that a classifier denotes some salient perceived or imputed characteristic of the entity to which an associated noun refers (or may refer).”

In this section the occurrence of the classifiers as morphemes in surface structures under specific conditions as has been studied by the scholars across the languages of the world, will be discussed with examples.

Depending upon the morphophonological properties of the classifiers of different languages, classifiers can be of seven major types, viz.,

I. Numeral Classifiers
II. Noun Classifiers
III. Concordial Classifiers
I. Numeral Classifiers

Numeral classifiers are the most widely used and recognized type of the classifier system. In a numeral noun phrase and in expressions of quantity these classifiers are used in contiguity to numerals.

As stated by Aikhenvald (2000:98), the numeral classifiers have following contingent characteristics.

(i) Semantics predominates the choice of numeral classifiers.
(ii) Numeral classifiers being an open lexical class, the usage varies from speaker to speaker depending upon their social status and competence.
(iii) Depending upon the property of the noun under consideration, the choice of numeral classifiers varies. The association of the numeral classifiers with all the nouns is not obligatory in the languages. An example from Mandarin Chinese is cited below.

(1) san ge rén
three CL.GENERIC person
'three people'
Another example from Bengali,

(2) ək-\(t\)a boi

one - CL:NON.HUMAN book

'one book'

II. Noun Classifiers

Aikhenvald (2000:81) describes noun classifiers as the classifiers that characterize the noun and co-occur with the noun in a noun phrase. The specifications of a noun classifier are discussed in the following:

(i) A semantic notion governs the choice of a noun classifier. All nouns do not take noun classifiers.

(ii) More than one noun classifier can co-occur in a noun phrase.

(iii) Different classifiers can be used with a particular noun with a change at the semantic level.

(iv) Since the number of noun classifiers can vary from a small closed set to a large open set, noun classifiers are found to be grammaticalized to varying extents.

(v) Anaphoric function is a predominant feature of the noun classifiers.

An instance of a noun classifier from Jacaltec as observed in Aikhenvald (2000:82) is presented below.
Another example from Yidiny (Australian language),

(4)  \textit{buri} \quad \textit{birmar}

\begin{tabular}{c}
\text{CL:FI}RE \\
charcoal
\end{tabular}

\begin{quote}
(\textit{hot}) charcoal'
\end{quote}

III. Concordial Classifiers

Allan (1977:286) defines concordial classifiers as classifiers "...in which classifying formatives are affixed (usually prefixed) to nouns, plus their modifiers, predicates, and pro-forms." An example from the Bantu language (African) is given below:

(5)  \textit{ba - sika} \quad \textit{ba - ntu} \quad \textit{ba - bile}

\begin{quote}
'\textit{ba + have + arrived} \quad \textit{ba + man} \quad \textit{ba + two}'
\end{quote}

'Two men have arrived.'

IV. Possessive Classifiers

Aikhenvald (2000:125-147) identifies three kinds of classifiers in possessive constructions. He has called them 'possessed' classifiers, 'relational' classifiers and 'possessor' classifiers. In the present study all these three types are discussed within the 'possessive' classifiers because of the restricted occurrence of all the types in the languages of the world.
Further, most typologists (Lichtenberk, 1983) consider the three types as just one kind of noun categorization.

Possessed classifiers characterize the possessed noun in terms of their animacy, shape, size and structure. Thus, their choice is dependent on meaning. This type is comparatively common in the languages of the world. The size of the inventory may be large. The possessed classifiers do not describe the type of relationship between the possessor and the possessed. Morphologically they can be independent words or affixes to the possessed noun. One example of inalienable possession\(^2\) from Tariana (an endangered language in Amazonas, Brazil) is given below:

\[(6) \quad \text{nu-pana} \]
\[
1\text{SG-home}
\]
\[
\text{‘my home’}
\]

Relational classifiers categorize the semantic nature of a relation between the possessee and the possessor. It is important to note that their use is determined by the semantic relation between these two linguistic elements. They are usually independent words. But they may also be affixed to the possessed noun or possession marker. Relation classifiers are generally restricted to the constructions of alienable possession. The frequency of this type of classifiers is medium in the languages of the world. The size of the inventory may be small. One example from Kilivila (belonging to the Oceanic group) is as follows:
In this example *doba*, ‘grass skirt’ is understood as a piece of cloth and obviously is alienably possessed.

Possessor classifiers categorize the possessor. The possessor appears to have the properties of animacy and humanness. This type is extremely rare in the languages of the world. The size of the inventory may be small. In the following we present an example from Dâw (belonging to the group of the Makú languages of Northwest Amazonia):

\[(8) \quad yud \quad dâw \quad tôg-êj\]

*clothing*  *human*  *daughter-CL:ANIMATE.POSSESSOR*

‘The clothing is girl’s; the girl’s clothing’

V. Verbal Classifiers or Predicate Classifiers

Verbal classifiers are always found to refer to predicate arguments with which they co-occur. The verbal classifiers occur with the verb, categorizing the referent of its argument in terms of its shape, consistency, size, structure, position and animacy. The choice of verbal classifiers is based on the lexical selection and not on the grammatical agreement.
In some languages verbal classifiers are determined by the discourse function of the extra-predicate noun. Verbal classifiers are used to refer to the noun in a narrative. Participants can be reintroduced by the use of verbal classifiers (as in Papuan languages). They are also used anaphorically in many South American Indian languages (Aikhenvald 2000:149).

An instance of a verbal classifier from Imonda belonging to Papuan, Waris language family (Aikhenvald 2000:152) is being cited below:

(9) sa ka-m
    coconut 1SG-GOAL

    pōt-ai-h-u
    CL:FRUIT-give-RECIPIENT-IMPERATIVE

    'Give me the coconut.'


(10) Weesa gà-kàà-nèè’a
    cat 3SG.A+3SG.O-CL:LIVING-give:PRES

    'She is giving him a cat.'

VI. Locative Classifiers

As pointed out by Allan (1977:287) the locative classifiers or Intra-locative classifiers, “...are those in which noun classifiers are embedded in
some of the locative expression which obligatorily accompany nouns in most environments." Locative classifiers have been observed to be ‘fused’ with an adposition which may be a preposition or a postposition. It is the semantic character of the concerned nominal form that determines the choice of the locative classifier. The use of locative classifiers depends on the shape, boundedness, dimensionality of the head noun. It does not involve animacy distinctions. Two examples of locative classifiers from Palikur (North Arawak), a South American Indian language (Aikhenvald 2000:173,174) are presented below:

(11)  
\[ \begin{array}{llll} 
\text{pis} & \text{keh} & \text{paha-t} \\
2SG & \text{make} & \text{one-NUM.CL:VERT} \\
\text{arab} & \text{pi-wan} & \text{min} \\
\text{shield} & 2SG-\text{arm} & \text{on.\text{VERT}} \\
\end{array} \]

‘You make a shield on your arm.’

(12)  
\[ \begin{array}{ll} 
\text{xoo-ked} \\
\text{canoe-\text{IN:HOLLOW}} \\
\end{array} \]

‘in a canoe’

VII. Deictic Classifiers

The deictic elements such as articles and demonstratives obligatorily take the deictic classifiers. The occurrence of deictic classifiers is based on the semantic notions. According to (Aikhenvald 2000:176) “...they categorize the nouns in terms of its shape, animacy, and position in space.”
Examples from Mandan, an American Indian language have been cited below:

(13)  \textit{ds- māk}  
\textbf{this-DEICTIC CL.LYING}  
\textit{‘this one (lying)’}  

(14)  \textit{ds- hāk}  
\textbf{this-DEICTIC CL.STANDING}  
\textit{‘this one (standing)’}

2.3. Types of Classifier languages

As mentioned in earlier studies on classifier languages, the European languages by and large are not ‘Classifier languages.’ The large semantic domain as covered by the classifiers found in the languages of Asia, Oceania, Australia, Africa and the Americas, are not available in the European languages. The morphosyntactic 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.

Aikhenvald (2000) identifies the world languages in terms of the availability of the types of classifiers in those languages. The languages of
the world attesting different types of classifier system have been discussed below:

I. Numeral Classifier languages

The languages of East, South-East Asia and Oceania have the numeral classifier system. The numeral classifiers are also found in the Tibeto-Burman languages, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Ainu and in most of the Austroasiatic languages. The Afroasiatic family does not attest such a system of numeral classifiers (Aikhenvald 2000:121-124).

The Indic and Iranian languages such as the Magadhan languages (e.g., Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Maithili), Marathi, Hindi, Nepali, Persian, some of the languages of the Dravidian family (e.g., Kolami, Parji, Kurukh, Malto, Kui-Kuwi) and some of the Munda languages (e.g., Korowa, Santali, Mundari) exhibit such a classifier system which makes it an areal feature of South Asia according to Emeneau (1964:647-648).

As Aikhenvald mentions (2000:121) Many Turkic and Hungarian languages are also found to have a good deal of numeral classifiers. The numeral classifiers are present in some languages of North America—in Eastern subarctic linguistic region and Northwest Coast linguistic region.

The numeral classifier system is claimed to be an areal feature of the languages spoken in the Northwestern region of California. Numeral classifiers are also available in the Northeast linguistic region (in Menomini and Potawatomi languages).
A number of Mexican and Central American languages like Aztec (Uto-Aztecan), Huave (isolate), Totanac (isolate), Sierra Popoluca (Zoquean), Zapotec (Otomanguean), and Nahuatl attest numeral classifiers. This feature is found also with the Mayan languages, which has been claimed to be a result of diffusion according to the scholars.

The South American languages like the language families of Arawak, Tucano, Guahibo, Peba-Yagua, Chapahuan, Harakmbet, Bora-Witoto, Nambiquara, Tsafiki, Waorani, Sáliba (those spoken in the Lowland of Amazonia), some Tupi languages and Chimila among the Chibchan languages of Colombia, have large sets of numeral classifiers.

Papuan languages are found to attest numeral classifiers. The languages that have this type of classifiers are Iwam, Abau, Chambri, Wogamusin and Chenapian. Some Angan languages of the gulf province and Folopa (Podopa) of the Teberan family have numeral classifiers. Numeral classifiers are also available in the languages of the Merobe province.

The Oceanic and the Western Austronesian languages have numeral classifiers (excepting those Austronesian languages spoken in Taiwan). The Oceanic languages spoken in Bougainville do not attest numeral classifiers.

The numeral classifiers are claimed to be absent from Australian languages and rare in Africa only. A few Kegboid languages, Ejagham and a few grassfields languages from Cameroon are claimed to attest the numeral classifier system.
II. Noun Classifier languages

According to Aikhenvald (2000:97) the most languages of the Daly area in Australia (e.g., Murrinhpatha, Emmi and Pattjamalh) have been considered as having the noun classifier system. The languages spoken along the east coast of the Cape York peninsula of Australia, exhibit the noun classifier system, of which the best described system of noun classifiers is available in Yidiny. Some Mesoamerican languages, e.g., Mayan languages and Chibchan languages exhibit the noun classifier system. The noun classifiers are also found to the attested in Makú and Jè languages of South America. A number of Western Austronesian languages and some Oceanic languages are also found to have such grammatical system. Apart from this, a number of Austroasiatic languages, Tai languages and the Tibetan language are found to attest the noun classifier system.

III. Concordial Classifier languages

According to Allan (1977:286, see section 1.1.) many African (Bantu and Semi-Bantu) and Australian languages belong to this type.¹

IV. Possessive Classifier languages

The possessive classifiers comprising possessed classifiers, relational classifiers and possessor classifiers are available in some North American Indian, South American Indian and in some Oceanic and Micronesian languages, and in some languages of Amazonia.
Possessed classifiers are found in some American Indian languages and in some languages of the Niger-Congo family. This system is also found in some languages (e.g., Hmong and other Miao-Yao languages) spoken in Northern China and Indo-China. The Papuan languages of Central and Southern Bougainville also attest this type of languages.

Relational classifiers are available in the Oceanic languages, in Micronesian languages and in some South American languages. The Austronesian languages spoken in Papua New Guinea have also been observed to have reduced sets of relational classifiers.

Possessor classifiers are found only in some Makú languages (e.g., Dâw and possibly Hupda) of Northwest Amazonia. These are comparatively rare in the languages of the world.

V. Verbal Classifier languages

Verbal classifiers are found in the languages spoken in North America like in all Eyak-Athabaskan and Haida languages. Verbal classifiers are attested in the languages of Great Basin area (Nevome, Uto-Aztecan) and in Californian languages. The presence of classificatory verbs in some Mesoamerican languages is also being claimed.

Verbal classifiers are found in Mayali (Gunwinjgu), Nuanggubuyu, Ngandi, Tiwi, and Anindilyakwa languages of north Australia.
The Papuan languages of Southern and Central Bougainville, the Warish language family and the Reef-Senta Cruzan languages exhibit verbal classifier systems. The verbal classifier system is a widespread feature of Papua New Guinea languages like Engan, Waris, Asmat, Kiwaian families and in Chimbu, Melpa and in Huon and some Ok languages. Some Lowland Amazonia languages like North Arawak, Yagua, Harakmbet, Tupi, Waorani have verbal classifiers.

As per Aikhenvald (2000:171) Africa or Eurasia and the Austronesian language families are said to be devoid of such classificatory system.

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, Dâw etc.) are found to attest the locative classifiers.

VII. Deictic Classifier languages

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

The existing studies of different types of classifier system as realized in different world languages help to understand the nature and types of the classificatory system in Thai. Taking cue from the above-mentioned studies of classifiers in the languages of the world, the Thai classifier system has been studied. The research attempts to take the morpho-phonological, syntactic and semantic viewpoints into consideration. The research is expected to throw light on the ideas regarding the acquisition of these morpho-syntactic elements as realized in the Thai language.

The retrospective literatures in the study of the classifiers and the different classifier languages reveal the fact that different types of classifiers may co-exist in a particular language. Aikhenvald (2000:184) observes that "the cooccurrence of different classifier systems in different morphosyntactic environments constitutes a strong argument in favour of the proposed typology of classifiers based on the morphosyntactic locus of coding of noun categorization devices." Apart from this, the same set of morphemes are also found to be used in more than one classifier environment, the morphemes having different grammatical properties. Such as system has been termed as 'multiple classifier' systems. The particular set of classifiers that is used in six different morpho-syntactic environments in Kilivila, an Austronesian language spoken in Trobriand Islands has been observed Aikhenvald (2000:204).
Notes

1. As Allan (1977:287) mentions there is much controversy over the status of the Bantu languages as classifier languages. Further, the inclusion of the concordial classifier languages as true classifier languages is questionable. In Aikhenvald (2000) there is no mention of this type of classifier languages.

2. Some languages distinguish between alienably (indirectly) and inalienably (directly) possessed nouns. Kinship terms, body parts, and a few other items, e.g., home, are inalienably possessed. Other nouns (e.g., dog, book) are alienably possessed.

References


CHAPTER-III

DESCRIPTION OF THAI CLASSIFIERS