

Classifiers

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Where do we find classifiers?

- ▶ often in East Asian languages:
Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Malay etc.
- ▶ sometimes in Native American languages:
Mayan languages, Tlingit, Mi'gmaq etc.
- ▶ extremely rare in IE languages:
English 'five **head** of cattle'

What is a classifier?

- ▶ CLs indicate the semantic class of a noun wrt its referent
- ▶ semantic classes

- (1) a. sān **wèi** lǎoshī (Mandarin)
3 CL teacher
'three teachers'
- b. sān **zhī** māo (Mandarin)
3 CL cat
'three cats'
- c. sān **tóu** niú (Mandarin)
3 CL cattle
'three head of cattle'

What is a classifier?

- (2) a. sān **méi** yìngbì (Mandarin)
3 CL coin
'three coins'
- b. sān **kē** zhēnzhū (Mandarin)
3 CL pearl
'three pearls'
- c. sān **běn** shū (Mandarin)
3 CL book
'three books'

What is a classifier?

- (3) a. yon-**mai**-no pan (Japanese)
4-CL-GEN bread
'four slices of bread'
- b. yon-**ko**-no pan (Japanese)
4-CL-GEN bread
'four buns'
- c. yon-**hon**-no pan (Japanese)
4-CL-GEN bread
'four baguettes'

What is a classifier?

- ▶ CLs allow for counting in classifier languages
- ▶ necessary in numeral phrases

- (4)
- a. sān **běn** shū (Mandarin)
3 CL book
'three books'
 - b. *sān shū (Mandarin)
3 book

Types of classifiers

- ▶ objects, groups, kinds

- (5) a. sān **zhī** xióng (Mandarin)
3 CL bear
'three bears'
- b. sān **qún** xióng (Mandarin)
3 CL bear
'three herds of bears'
- c. sān **zhǒng** xióng (Mandarin)
3 CL bear
'three species of bears'

Types of classifiers

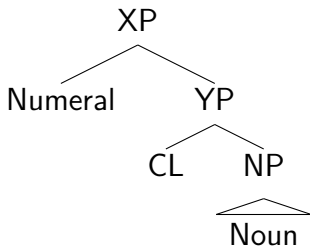
- (6) a. go-**nin**-no gakusei-ga (Japanese)
5-CL-GEN student-NOM
'five students'
- b. go-**tsui**-no gakusei-ga (Japanese)
5-CL-GEN student-NOM
'five pairs of students'
- c. go-**kumi**-no gakusei-ga (Japanese)
5-CL-GEN student-NOM
'five groups of students'

Classifiers vs. massifiers

Classifier phrase

- ▶ classifiers = individuating classifiers, count-classifiers

- (7) a. sān **tóu** niú (Mandarin)
3 CL cattle
'three head of cattle'
- b. three **head** of cattle (English)



Classifiers vs. massifiers

Measure phrase

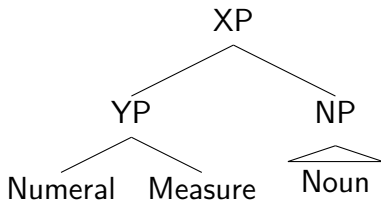
- ▶ massifiers = measure classifiers, measure words

(8) a. sān **bēi** shuǐ (Mandarin)

3 CL water

'three glasses of water'

b. three **glasses** of water (English)



Partly classifier languages

- ▶ classifiers can be optional
- ▶ Korean, Minangkabau (Malayan)

- (9) a. tu(-**myeong**-ui) namja (Korean)
2(-CL-GEN) man
'two men'
- b. duo (ikue) anjiang (Minangkabau)
2 (CL) dog
'two dogs'

Partly classifier languages

- ▶ classifiers can be required only with some numerals
- ▶ Mi'gmaq (Eastern Algonquian), Chol (Mayan)

- (10) a. na'n-ijig ji'nm-ug (Mi'gmaq)
5-AGR man-PL
'five men'
- b. *na'n **te's**-ijig ji'nm-ug (Mi'gmaq)
5 CL-AGR man-PL
- c. *asugom-ijig ji'nm-ug (Mi'gmaq)
6-AGR man-PL
- d. asugom **te's**-ijig ji'nm-ug (Mi'gmaq)
6 CL-AGR man-PL
'six men'

Classifiers and number marking

Typological puzzle (Chierchia 1998)

- ▶ classifier languages: CL \Rightarrow *SG/PL

- (11) a. sān **běn** shū (Mandarin)
3 CL book
'three books'
- b. *sān shū (Mandarin)
3 book

- ▶ non-classifier languages: SG/PL \Rightarrow *CL

- (12) a. three books
b. *three book

Classifiers and number marking

Languages with both SG/PL and CL

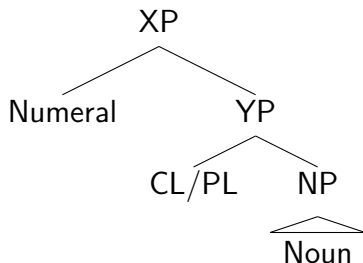
- ▶ never within one phrase

- (13) a. yergu **had** shenk (Western Armenian)
2 CL building
'two buildings'
- b. yergu shenk-**er** (Western Armenian)
2 building-PL
'two buildings'
- c. *yergu **had** shenk-**er** (Western Armenian)
2 CL building-PL

Classifiers and number marking

Syntactic explanation (Borer 2005)

- ▶ CL and PL compete for the same position



Classifiers and number marking

Semantic explanation (Chierchia 1998)

- ▶ number individuates and allows for counting
- ▶ all nouns in CL languages are mass

- (14) a. *shū-**PL** (Mandarin)
book-PL
- b. *sān shū (Mandarin)
3 book
- c. *sān **běn** shū (Mandarin)
3 CL book
'three books'

- (15) a. *muds (English)
- b. *three muds (English)
- c. three **buckets** of mud

Classifiers and number marking

Semantic explanation (Chierchia 1998)

- ▶ number-neutral nouns require CLs

Not so quickly!

This picture is too simplistic

- ▶ CL languages display the mass/count distinction

(16) a. *sān **gè** shuǐ (Mandarin)

3 CL water

b. sān **bēi** shuǐ (Mandarin)

3 CL water

'three glasses of water'

Not so quickly!

This picture is too simplistic

- ▶ some counting modifiers in Japanese require countable denotations (Sudo 2017)

- (17) a. suuhyaku-no kaban (Japanese)
hundreds-GEN bag
'hundreds of bags'
- b. *suuhyaku-no ase (Japanese)
hundreds-GEN sweat

Not so quickly!

This picture is too simplistic

- ▶ Mandarin measure marker *de* is incompatible with individuated readings (Li 2011)

- (18) a. wǒ de jiǔliàng shì sān píng **de** jiǔ (Mandarin)
my drinking be 3 CL DE wine
'My drinking ability is three bottles of wine.'
- b. *tā kāi le sān píng **de** jiǔ (Mandarin)
he open PFV 3 CL DE wine
'He opened three bottles of wine.'

Not so quickly!

This picture is too simplistic

- ▶ in some languages bare nouns do not need CLs (Wilhelm 2008)

- (19) a. solághe k'ásba (Dëne Sų́łíné)
5 chicken
'five chickens'
- b. solághe ɫı (Dëne Sų́łíné)
5 dog
'five dogs'