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[This paper presents material showing the scope and variety of the numeral classifiers used in Thai. It also provides illustration of the various situations in which the classifiers are employed and sets forth the rules of word-order which apply in each situation. It thus covers one of the most important phases of the syntax of the Thai noun.[1]]

1. The numeral classifiers[2] of Thai constitute an important syntactic word-class of the language and are employed with all nouns denoting objects which may be counted (e.g. 'man', 'house', 'word'). In most cases it is impossible to devise rules which will serve as an infallible guide in choosing the proper classifier to be employed with any given noun. For this reason it is desirable to memorize the classifier to be used with a noun at the same time that one learns the noun, just as in French or German one must memorize the gender of each noun.

There are some eighty or ninety special classifiers to be found in the language[3] and some of these words have no other meaning or function. In addition there are many nouns which are repeated to serve as their own classifiers, and this increases considerably the total number of words which are employed in this manner.

2. There are five classifiers commonly used with nouns referring to human beings; the choice of classifier to be used depends largely upon the rank or station in life of the individual or individuals referred to. The highest of these is ʔoŋ,[4]

[2] Numeral classifiers or numeratives are often referred to by a number of other names, such as 'Numeralwörter' (F. J. Wershoven, Lehr- und Lesebuch der Siamesischen Sprache 65–8 [Wien, Pest, Leipzig, 1892]), 'Zählwörter' (Walther Trittel, Einführung in das Siamesische 72 [Berlin and Leipzig, 1930], 'numeral designations' (D. J. B. Pallegoix, Dictionnaire Siamois Français Anglais, revu par J. L. Vey 32 [Bangkok, 1896]), and 'descriptive words' (O. Frankfurter, Elements of Siamese Grammar 49–55 [Bangkok, 1900]).

In this paper they are introduced as numeral classifiers and thereafter referred to simply as classifiers. This latter term is to be preferred to most of the others, since it is better to avoid emphasis on the use of these words with numerals. While it is true that they are required when numerals are used, they also have many other uses, as shown in this paper.

[3] One of the most complete lists of classifiers to be found in published works is that given by Frankfurter, loc. cit. It is of little use to the general reader, however, since the terms and illustrations are written in the Thai alphabet.

[4] A brief explanation of the Thai phonemic symbols used in this paper may be given here. The consonants are as follows: three voiced stops, b, d, and -g (-g occurring only in

used for the king and queen, for princes and princesses, and for dukes and duchesses. The term *rû·b* is generally used in referring to talapoins, but some people employ *ʔoŋ* in place of *rû·b*. The term *thân*ʔ is employed for nobles below the rank of duke and sometimes also for high-ranking officials in the army and navy. The term next in order is *na·j*, which may be used in referring to individuals slightly above the common people in rank or position in life. The term most generally used in referring to human beings is *khon*, which is also the ordinary word for 'person'. Thus one says *khon sɔ̌·ŋ-khon* 'two people',[5] *phû·jǐŋ sǎ·m-khon* 'three women', *khru· lǎ·j-khon* 'many teachers'.

Sacred or awesome beings are also arranged in a series of ranks which is reflected in the choice of classifier. For gods or angels *ʔoŋ* is commonly used, while giants and certain large-bodied ghosts of folklore are classified by means of the word *ton*, which is not used elsewhere in the language. Various kinds of smaller ghosts are classed with animals and therefore take the classifier *tua*. Interestingly enough, the word *sòb* 'corpse' (which usually serves as its own classifier, e.g. *sòb sì· sòb* 'four corpses') is also occasionally classified by means of *tua*.

Contrary to what is true of other words referring to animals, the word for elephant has its own special classifier, namely *chŷag*, a word which otherwise has the meaning 'rope'. This is explained by the fact that the elephant is a sacred animal. All other animals and all birds, fish, reptiles, and insects take the classifier *tua*, which is also one of the words meaning 'body'. Thus one says, *chá·ŋ*ʔ *sɔ̌·ŋ-chŷag* 'two elephants', but *mǎ· sìb-tua* 'ten dogs', *kàj sǎ·m-tua* 'three chickens', *ŋu· sì·-tua* 'four snakes'. In a similar manner a herd of elephants is classified by means of the special word *khlɔ̌·ŋ*, while herds or flocks of other animals and of birds are classified with the word *fǔ·ŋ*, e.g. *chá·ŋ*ʔ *nỳŋ-khlɔ̌·ŋ* 'one herd of elephants', *nóg nỳŋ-fǔ·ŋ* 'one flock of birds'.

So far we have been dealing with the classifiers used with nouns referring to animates. When we turn to nouns referring to inanimates we find a host of different classifiers. In some instances the size, shape, or function of the object referred to serves as a partial guide in determining which classifier should be used. Thus the word *lêm*ʔ is employed with the word for book and with words

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syllabic final position); glottal stop, ʔ; four voiceless unaspirated stops, *p*, *t*, *c* [č], and *k*; four corresponding voiceless aspirated stops, *ph*, *th*, *ch*, and *kh*; three voiceless spirants, *f*, *s*, and *h*; seven voiced sonorants, *w*, *j*, *m*, *n*, *ŋ*, *l*, and *r*. There are nine vowels: *i*, *e*, *ε* [æ], *y* [ï], *ə* [ë], *a*, *u*, *o*, and *ɔ*. These may occur both short and long, thus: *i* and *i·*, *e* and *e·*, etc. The long vowels, however, are probably to be considered double vowels on the phonemic level, since they configurate in all respects with the heterophonous vowel clusters *ia*, *ya* [ïa], and *ua*. The vowel *a* is always nasalized when it follows ʔ or *h*, and all vowels are nasalized when preceded or followed by nasal consonants. There are five tones: even or middle (left unmarked), low (`), falling (ˆ), high (´), and rising (ˇ). In the case of vowel clusters the tonal markers are placed, for orthographic convenience, over the first vowel, e.g. *hǔa* 'head'. The falling and the high tones induce a final glottal stop if the syllable ends in a vowel or a sonorant (e.g. *nâ·*ʔ 'face'; *chá·*ʔ 'slowly'; *wîŋ*ʔ 'to run'; *nán*ʔ 'that') but not if it ends in another stop consonant (e.g. *mî·d* 'knife'). All final glottal stops, however, may be dropped under certain conditions of sandhi.

[5] The hyphen in this example and others to follow indicates internal open juncture.

referring to edged or pointed objects, such as knives, sickles, needles. Boats and certain other objects which float on the water take the classifier *lam*, while houses and buildings take the classifier *lăŋ*. The word *baj*, which means 'leaf' when used as a noun, is employed as the classifier not only for all kinds of leaves but also for various types of containers, such as cups, bottles, boxes, buckets, baskets, and the like. In a number of other instances, however, the choice of classifier is entirely arbitrary. Thus the word *tua*, ordinarily used with animals, is also employed with the words for table, chair, pen-point. Among the words which are repeated as their own classifiers may be mentioned *kham* 'word' (e.g. *kham sì·-kham* 'four words'), *myaŋ* 'city', *hɔ̆·ŋ̍* 'room'.

Sometimes certain special notions are included in the context by means of the classifier employed. When this happens, the classifiers have a function similar to that of the so-called 'counters' of English, such as the words 'grain', 'pile', 'heap', 'strand', or 'coil' when these are employed with numerals. And, as in English, it often happens that different classifiers may be used with the same noun with a corresponding difference in meaning, e.g. *sa·j nʊ̀ŋ-méd* 'one grain of sand' vs. *sa·j nʊ̀ŋ-kɔ·ŋ* 'one pile of sand'; *krɑ̀dɑ̀·d nʊ̀ŋ-phɛ̀n* 'one sheet of paper' vs. *krɑ̀dɑ̀·d nʊ̀ŋ-tɑ̂ŋ̍* 'one pile of paper' or *krɑ̀dɑ̀·d nʊ̀ŋ-kɔ·ŋ* 'one (disorderly) heap of paper'; *lûad nʊ̀ŋ-sên̍* 'one strand of wire' vs. *lûad nʊ̀ŋ-khòd* 'one coil of wire'; *phɔ̆m nʊ̀ŋ-sên̍* 'one strand of hair' vs. *phɔ̆m nʊ̀ŋ-pɔ·j* 'one lock of hair' or *phɔ̆m nʊ̀ŋ-lɔ·n* 'one wave of hair'.

The few examples given in the preceding paragraphs will serve to show that we cannot make rules covering the choice of classifier to be used in every given instance. The use of classifiers is a matter that must be treated not only as a part of the grammar of the language but also as a part of its lexicography. For this reason the most useful type of dictionary for the language would be one which provided each noun entry with a parenthetical indication of the classifier required to be used with it.

3. The classifiers of Thai are used in a great many types of noun-phrases, and under certain circumstances are also employed as noun substitutes. When one has acquired a mastery of their various uses one has conquered the most difficult phase of the syntax of the noun. The most important of these uses are described in the following paragraphs.

Classifiers are employed when nouns are accompanied by quantifiers, indicators, or adjectives. The term QUANTIFIER is used for all numerals (except *sŭ·n* 'zero', used only in arithmetical or mathematical calculations) and for such words as *lă·j* 'many', *kì·* 'how many', and *ba·ŋ* 'some' (used only with countables, never with continuals such as water). The term INDICATOR is used for demonstrative and interrogative adjectives and a special function of the word *nʊ̀ŋ* 'one', while all other types of adjectives are referred to simply as ADJECTIVES.

The use of a classifier is obligatory when a noun is accompanied by a quantifier and the word-order employed is NOUN + QUANTIFIER + CLASSIFIER, e.g. *mă· sɔ̆·ŋ-tua* 'two dogs' (lit. 'dog two-body'), *mă· lă·j-tua* 'many dogs', *mă· kì·-tua* 'how many dogs'.

In precise speech a classifier is also used when a noun is accompanied by an indicator or an adjective; in this case the word-order is NOUN + CLASSIFIER

+ INDICATOR OR ADJECTIVE, e.g. *mǎ· tua-nǐ·ʔ* 'this dog' (lit. 'dog body-this'), *mǎ· tua-nǎj* 'which dog', *mǎ· tua-lég* 'the little dog'. In less precise speech, on the other hand, it is sometimes permissible to omit the classifier, e.g. *mǎ·-nǐ·ʔ* 'this dog', *mǎ·-lég* 'the little dog'. It also seems to be true that the use of a classifier in these circumstances, e.g. *mǎ· tua-nǐ·ʔ*, denotes a higher degree of particularization, such as might be rendered in English by the expression 'this very dog'. When numeral adjectives are employed, the classifier may never be omitted, e.g. *mǎ· tua-thî·sɔ̌·ŋ* 'the second dog'.

It will be noted that the position of a classifier in relation to a quantifier differs from its position in relation to an indicator or an adjective. An interesting fact to be observed in this connection is that the numeral *nỳŋ* 'one' may occur in either position with a resultant difference in meaning. In the one case it tells us how many objects there are and is therefore employed as a quantifier, e.g. *mǎ· nỳŋ-tua* 'one dog'. In the other case it gives us a construction comparable to the English use of an indefinite article and is therefore employed as an indicator, e.g. *mǎ· tua-nỳŋ* 'a dog'.

A number of more complex constructions may be made in which quantifiers, indicators, and adjectives are combined in various ways. The rules of word-order which obtain in such constructions are as follows:

Noun + classifier + adjective + classifier + indicator, e.g. *mǎ· tua-lég tua-nán?* 'that little dog' (lit. 'dog body-little body-that'); *mǎ· tua-lég tua-nỳŋ* 'a little dog'.

Noun + classifier + adjective + quantifier + classifier, e.g. *mǎ· tua-lég sɔ̌·ŋ-tua* 'two little dogs' (lit. 'dog body-little two-body'); *mǎ· tua-lég kì·-tua* 'how many little dogs'.

Noun + classifier + adjective + quantifier + classifier + indicator, e.g. *mǎ· tua-lég sɔ̌·ŋ-tua-nán?* 'those two little dogs' (lit. 'dog body-little two-body-that').

In each of these constructions the first classifier may sometimes be omitted with the reservations made above.

4. The classifiers of Thai are also freely used as noun substitutes and in this event they may often be translated by means of the English pronoun 'one'. This is best illustrated by the following series of sentences:

chǎn mi· mǎ· sɔ̌·ŋ-tua. 'I have two dogs.'

tua-nǐ·ʔ jàj. 'This one is big.' *tua-nán? lég.* 'That one is little.'

Q. *khun tɔ̂ŋka·n tua-nǎj.* 'Which one do you want?'

A. *tua-lég.* 'The little one.'

khǎw mi· mǎ· lǎ·j-tua. 'He has many dogs.'

Q. *khun tɔ̂ŋka·n kì·-tua.* 'How many do you want?'

A. *sì·-tua.* 'Four.'

Note that in the last sentence a classifier must accompany the quantifier whereas in English we may use a numeral alone.

5. There are a number of words in Thai which may be called 'independent' classifiers, since they are used with quantifiers, indicators, and adjectives, but never accompany nouns. Their English equivalents are classed as nouns, but the Thai words are identified as classifiers by the rules of word-order.

One set of independent classifiers consists of words denoting periods of time, such as *wan* 'day', *khy·n* 'night', *dyaŋ* 'month', *pi·* 'year'. When these words are quantified the quantifier precedes them, e.g. *să·m-wan* 'three days, for three days'; *nỳŋ-pi·* 'one year, for one year'. (If these words were nouns the quantifier would have to follow them and be followed in its turn by a classifier.) In a manner comparable to its behavior with nouns accompanied by classifiers, the word *nỳŋ* 'one' may follow as well as precede the independent classifier, but in this event the meaning conveyed is one of temporal location rather than of temporal duration. Hence *wan-nỳŋ khăw klàb ma·* means 'one day he came back' while *khăw jù· thî·nî·ʔ nỳŋ-wan* means 'he stayed here for one day'. When the independent classifiers are accompanied by indicators or adjectives, such words always follow the classifier, e.g. *pi·-thî·sŏ·ŋ* 'the second year'.

Another set of independent classifiers consists of words indicating how many times an event takes place. The most common of such words are *khráŋʔ* and *hŏn*, which may be used more or less interchangeably, e.g. *khăw wîŋʔ sŏ·ŋ-khráŋʔ* or *khăw wîŋʔ sŏ·ŋ-hŏn* 'he ran twice'. Note that here again the quantifier precedes the independent classifier. Moreover, there is once more a difference between such an expression as *nỳŋ-khráŋʔ* 'one time, once' (in which the word *nỳŋ* precedes the classifier) and *khráŋ-nỳŋ* 'once upon a time' (in which it follows the classifier). Other independent classifiers of this type impart an aspectival meaning to the context. Thus *thi·* includes the notion of instantaneousness or momentaneousness, as in *khăw tèʔ nỳŋ-thi·*, which may be best rendered into English as 'he gave a kick'. It is also possible to say *khăw tèʔ nỳŋ-khráŋʔ* or *khăw tèʔ nỳŋ-hŏn* 'he kicked once', but when either of these words is employed there is no indication that the action is momentaneous. Another word with an overtone of aspect is *khra·w*, which conveys the notion of prolonged or durativized action, as in *lom phád nỳŋ-khra·w* 'the wind blew once'.