Numeral Classifiers in Sgaw Karen

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The purpose of this paper is to present data on numeral classifiers in the Mae Chaem dialect (Chiengmai) of Sgaw Karen. It was found that there are three types of classifiers in Sgaw Karen: unit classifiers, noun-derived classifiers, and verb-derived classifiers. Noun-derived classifiers can be further divided into simple unit classifiers, group classifiers, action classifiers and measurement classifiers. These classifiers are discussed together with exhaustive examples. The classifier constructions which belong to the "Southeast Asian" type (see Jones 1970) are given. A short discussion concludes the article.[1]

The fact that Southeast Asia abounds with numeral classifiers is well known. Robert B. Jones in his "Classifier Constructions in Southeast Asia", an essay honoring Mary R. Haas in 1970, suggested that the Tai group of languages is a possible source of influence in the spread of the use of classifiers in Southeast Asia and China. Numeral classifiers in languages of different families in Southeast Asia have been described at length since Haas 1942 (see Burling 1965; Hla Pe 1967; Benton 1968; Omar 1972; Nguyẽ phú Phong 1975; Adams, Becker, and Conklin 1975; Wajanarat 1980, and others). However Karen happened to be overlooked, alluded to by a few examples in Jones 1970. It is the purpose of this paper to present data on classifiers in the Mae Chaem dialect of Sgaw Karen. The writer of this article is also the compiler of a dictionary of this dialect of Sgaw Karen, viz. the *Thai-Sgaw*

Karen Dictionary, 2 volumes, 1,277 pages, 1986. Data in this paper are taken exclusively from this dictionary.

Numeral classifiers (see Jones 1970, T'sou 1976, Allen 1977) are those morphemes which identify units, usually by reference to the shape of the object or objects concerned, when a number is present. All countable nouns are obligatorily associated with a classifier if a number is used in counting them. For example,

cə^1 thi^1 pɔʔ^1 təʔ^1 phləʔ
I   see   tent   one   CL
'I see one tent.'

cə^1 luʔ^1 ne^1 she^{2}ka^2 səʔ^3 beʔ^1
I   choose   obtain   shirt   three   CL
'I chose three shirts.'

Uncountable nouns include such lexical items as thi^2 'water', so^2 'oil', and me^2 'cooked rice'. When used with numbers these nouns must take the measures classifiers.

I.   Types of classifiers

There are three types of numeral classifiers in Sgaw Karen: unit classifiers, noun-derived classifiers, and verb-derived classifiers.

I.1   Unit classifiers

Unit classifiers constitute a set of morphemes whose only function is to classify nouns. They cannot be used as a common noun. If they appear as a common noun (ex. 'thu^2' as a noun means 'mountain' and is used also as a classifier for cloth, cigarettes and bananas), then it is the case of homonym. Unit classifiers in Sgaw Karen are simple unit classifiers. Twenty unit classifiers have been found:

1.   pɔ^2 'section of bamboo', used as a classifier with:
                   wa^1 'bamboo', me^{2}te^{2}blɔ^2 'preparation of

glutinous rice cooked in a bamboo joint', me^{1}ʔu^2 'fireworks'.

2. puʔ^3 'volume of books, used with: li^{1}ʔ 'book', li^{1}ʔ^{1}cɔ^{1}ɲa^1 'newspaper', khɔ^{2}peʔ^1 'exercise book'.

3. phu^2 'item, bunch of bananas', used with: lɔ^{1}da^2 'mattress', sə^{2}kwiʔ^3 'banana', tha^1 'loom'.

4. phuʔ^3 'bunch of flowers, cluster of flowers', used with: phɔ^{2}ta^{1}shɣɨ^1 'roses'.

5. tɔ^2 'place', used with: ma^{2}ta^1 'work', phiʔ^3 'place'.

6. thu^2 'roll, curl, furl', used with: mɔʔ^{1}thu^2 'cigarette', sə^{1}kwiʔ^3 la^1 'banana leaf', ta^{1}kiʔ^{3}ɲaʔ^1 'cloth'.

7. cu^1 'set', used with: she^{2}ka^2 'shirt', phlɔʔ^{1}khi^2 'trousers'.

8. koʔ^1 'heap, pile, stack', used with: lɔ^{1}bo^2 'straw', sə^{1}mɨ^1 'firewood'.

9. kha^2 'item, thing, affair, matter', used with: nɔ^{1}bləʔ^1 'ladle', ta^{1}pɔʔ^3 'strainer', ta^1 'matter', ta^{1}ma^2 'work', ta^{1}ɣe^1 'affair', li^{1}ʔ 'book, knowledge, subject', nɔ^{2}mə^1 'tea (boiled)', ɲa^{1}pho^{2}ʔɨʔ^1 'pickled fish', ta^{1}ʔɔʔ^1 'food', thi^2 'water', lɔ^{1}da^2 'mattress', pə^{1}thɔʔ^3 khli^2 'grains of bean (for planting)', pɣa^{1}pu^2 'forest', ta^{1}ka^{1}lɨ^1 'voice', khaʔ^3 'table', ta^{1}ʔu^2 'prayer', ta^{1}sha^2 'disease'.

10. klɔʔ^1 'piece, fragment, pipe, tube', used with: khri^2 'wild yam (a head of)', se^1 'wood (a long section of cut timber)', sə^{1}mɨ^1 'firewood', siʔ^{3}naʔ^3 'pistol, firearm'.

11. khu$?^3$ 'piece', used with: se^1 'wood (a cylindrical section of cut timber used as a chair)'.

12. d$\frac{1}{1}^2$ 'body', used with all four-footed animals (including the flying lemurs) and ordained persons and supernatural beings: pə$?^1$na^1 'buffalo', pɔ^{2}dɔ$?^3$ 'porcupine', phli$?^1$ 'flying lemur', phli^2 'tapir', ta^{1}ho^2 'barking deer', ta^{2}pha$?^3$ 'wild goat, antelope (*Capricanus sumatrensis*)', ta^{1}pho^{2}ɲɔ^2 'civet', thɔ$?^3$ 'pig', thɔ$?^3$shɔ^2 'wild cat', cɔ$?^3?$e^2 'short-tusked bull elephant', kə^{1}se^1 'horse', kə$?^1$shɔ^2 'elephant', khɔ^2 'bamboo rat', klɔ$?^1$ 'ox', nwa^2 'ass', sə^{1}xi$?^1$khɔ^1 'rhinoceros', shwi^1 'dog', z$\frac{1}{1}^1$khe^{2}plɔ^2 'mongoose', zo^{2}hɔ^1 'pangolin', cɔ^{2}sɔ^2 'novice', ta^{1}γɔ^2 'statue', ta^{2}m$\frac{1}{1}^1$xa^1 'ghost', dɔ$?^3$sə^{1}ka$?^3$ 'giant, ogre', sɔ^{2}kha^2 'Buddhist monk'.

13. mɔ^2 'mouthful', used with: me^2 'cooked rice', sə^{1}be$?^1$ 'a concoction to be chewed having betel nuts as the main ingredients'.

14. shə^2 'item', used with: ta^{1}dɔ$?^3$cɛ$?^3$ 'examination questions', kə^{1}na^2 'arithmetic problems'.

15. sho^2 'pair, item (especially with engine, machine, motor, things having movement, music instruments)', used with: cγɔ^1 'cymbals', khɔ^{1}phi$?^3$ 'shoes', na^{1}di$?^3$ 'earrings', tha^1 'loom', cɛ$?^3$sha$?^3$ta^1 'sewing machine', kə^{1}ha^1 'water wheel', kə^{1}ha^{1}ri$?^3$ 'bicycle', kwɛ$?^3$le^{1}lo^2 'telephone', mɔ^{1}tɔ^{1}ka$?^3$ le^1 so^2 'bus', na^{1}ri^1 'clock, wrist-watch', le^1 'ox-cart', le^1 d$\frac{1}{1}?^3$ta^1 'tank', le^1 me$^1?$u^2 'train', le^{1}zɔ^1 'bicycle', sh$\frac{1}{1}?^1$ 'cradle, hammock', swɛ^{1}cu^1 'balance, a pair of scales', te^{2}na^1 'lute', thɔ^{1}lɔ$?^1$ 'fiddle', sɔ^{1}xe^2 'harmonica'.