LINGUISTICS OF THE TIBETO-BURMAN AREA
VOLUME 12:2 — FALL 1989

On the Origin and Development of Classifiers in Jingpo*

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0. Compared to that of other Tibeto-Burman languages, the classifier system of Jingpo is not very developed, especially in terms of count-noun classifiers. When most nouns are counted, no classifier (CL) is necessary; the noun can be directly modified by a numeral. For example, 'four chickens' is expressed as u^{31} mă^{31} li^{33} 'chicken' + 'four'; 'two shirts' is expressed as pă^{33} loŋ^{33} lă^{55} khoŋ^{51} 'shirt' + 'two'. I described the basic synchronic characteristics of Jingpo noun classifiers in Xu 1987. The aim of this paper is to discuss the origin and development of Jingpo CLs through an analysis of the internal situation vis à vis CLs and a comparison with CLs in related languages.

1. The CLs of Jingpo developed gradually, in general along the following two paths:

1.1. Creating CLs from native lexical material.

1.1.1. Most of the CLs in Jingpo developed from native material, mainly through one of the following three methods: (1) using a noun to act as a CL; (2) combining two lexical items to create a compound CL; (3) using container nouns as ad hoc CLs. When a noun is used as a CL, the meaning of the CL is related to the attributes and shape of the referent named by the noun. CLs created in this way (there are about twenty common ones) are mainly count-noun CLs, such as khum^{31}, which as a noun means 'body', but as a CL can be used with common animal names, melons, and fruits, and certain other objects:

wa?^{31}	khum^{31}	mji^{33}		n^{33}	kjin^{33}	khum^{31}	mji^{33}
pig	CL	one		cucumber	CL	one	
'one pig'				'one cucumber'			

As a noun, ʃaŋ^{33} khoŋ^{33} means 'circle, ring'; as a CL, it can be used to modify circular objects:

nam^{31}	pan^{33}	ʃaŋ^{33} khoŋ^{33}	mji^{33}
flower		CL	one
'one wreath of flowers'			

* The Chinese version of this paper is to appear in the Journal of the Central Institute of Nationalities, 1990.2.

As a noun, tʃe̲n^{33} has the meaning 'fragment'; as a CL it is similar to English 'slice', 'strip', 'half', or 'part':

kă^{55} wa^{55} tʃe̲n^{33} mji^{33}
bamboo CL one
'one strip of bamboo'

ji?^{55} tʃe̲n^{33} mji^{33}
dry land CL one
'one section of dry field'

ŋa^{33} tʃe̲n^{33} mji^{33}
cow CL one
'one side of beef (i.e. half of a cow)'

1.1.2. Native lexical items are also used in combination to create specialized CLs. Of these, some consist of two lexical items, usually a noun plus a noun, verb, CL, adjective, or stative verb. Others are comprised of a root plus a prefix. These bimorphemic CLs include count-noun CLs, quantity/weight measures, and group CLs. There are about thirty of them. Ex.:

Noun + Noun > Classifier
ʃan^{31} 'meat' + po^{33} 'head' > CL for hunted animals
num^{31} 'woman' + po^{33} 'head' > CL for wives

Noun + Verb > Classifier
si^{31} 'cotton' + ka?^{31} 'to separate' > 'boll (of cotton)'
thiŋ^{31} 'house' + nep^{55} 'to pad'> 'plank (of floorboard)'

Noun + Classifier > Classifier
kai^{31} 'bead' + to̲ŋ^{33} 'tube' > CL for cylindrical beads
wa?^{31} 'bamboo' + phaŋ^{33} CL for trees > 'grove (of bamboo)'

Noun + Stative Verb > Classifier
la?^{31} 'hand' + kʒa?^{31} 'shape of hand grabbing smth.' > 'handful'
si^{31} 'cotton' + lan^{31} 'pile-shaped' > 'pile (of cotton)'

Prefix + Verb > Classifier
mă^{31} (prefix) + kun^{33} 'carry on back' > 'backload (of firewood)'
ʃin^{31} (prefix) + kʒam^{31} 'build' > 'floorboard (2nd floor and up)'

Prefix + Stative Verb > Classifier
sum^{31} (prefix) + pjau^{31} 'string-shaped' > 'string (of meat, fish, fruit, etc.)'

1.1.3. Ad hoc use of container nouns as CLs:

pha?^{31} wan^{33} mji^{31}
rice gruel bowl one
'a bowl of rice gruel'

ʃat^{31} n^{31} kup^{31} mji^{31}
rice mouth one
'a mouthful of rice'

tʃum^{31}	tʃo̲k^{55}	mji^{33}		n^{33} ku̲^{33}	lă^{31}	ku̲^{31}	mji^{33}
salt	pinch	one		rice		handful	one
'a pinch of salt'				'a handful of rice'			

1.2. Borrowed CLs. There are about forty CLs of this type, mostly indicating weight or quantity. These CLs gradually worked their way into the language because of the needs of daily life and contact with surrounding Chinese, Dai, and Burmese people. Examples from Chinese include mu^{55} (← mù) '1/6 acre', siŋ^{31} (← shēng) 'litre', tu^{31} (← dǒu) 'bushel', to^{33} (← dùo) 'mule-load', thau^{33} (← tào) 'set', and kji̲n^{33} (← jīn) '1/2 kilo'. From Dai, examples include tʃoi^{33} '1 1/2 kilos', tʃo̲^{55} 'ten basketsful', khan^{55} 'ten ounces (1/3 of a tʃoi^{33}), luŋ^{55} 'a strip (of paddy field)', and khop^{55} 'level (piles of grain)'. From Burmese, borrowings include teŋ^{33} 'kilometer', up^{31} 'roll (of cloth)', taŋ^{31} 'basketful', pje^{33} '1/8 basketful', mju^{55} 'kind, class', thup^{31} 'stick, roll', poŋ^{33} 'pound', mă^{55} nit^{55} 'minute' (ult. < English).

1.3. Ancient CLs. Aside from the above, there are about twenty specialized native CLs, of which more than ten are weight/measure or group CLs. There are two verb classifiers and nine count-noun classifiers. We can find no etymological relationship between these classifiers and items in other word classes, so it is possible that these developed very early in the history of Jingpo. Comparing these with CLs in related languages, we find no more than a few cognate sets. This suggests that these CLs developed in Jingpo after Jingpo had already become an independent language. (See appendix).

2. Jingpo CLs went through a process of development from nonexistence to existence, and from few to many. From the present situation vis-à-vis CLs in Jingpo, it is possible to find clues that reflect their development.

2.1. There are three situations with respect to the use or non-use of CLs:

2.1.1. A classifier must be used. When counting weights, measures, units of money, or groups, or when counting verbal actions, a CL must be used. Ex.:

pu̲n^{55}	ʒam^{51}	toŋ^{33}	mji^{33}	nam^{31}	si^{31}	kji̲n^{33}	mji^{33}
cloth	foot		one	fruit	1/2 kilo		one
'a foot of cloth'				'1/2 kilo of fruit'			
n^{33} ku̲^{33}	taŋ^{31}		mji^{33}	kum^{31}	phʒo^{31}	lap^{31}	mji^{33}
rice	basketful		one	money		yuan	one
'a basketful of rice'				'one yuan (unit of money)'			
mă^{31}	ʃa^{31}	wă^{33}	noŋ^{33} mji^{33}	lă^{55}	khoŋ^{51}	la̲ŋ^{31}	sa^{33}
person	group		one	two		CL	go
'a group of people'				'go two times'			

Aside from this, when counting animals that have been eaten or are going to be eaten, it is customary to use a CL:

wa?^{31} khum^{31} mji^{33} ʃa^{55} kạu^{55} mă^{33}-ɜai^{33}
pig CL one eat aspect sent. particle
'(They) ate a (whole) pig.'

From the semantics of the CLs it is not difficult to see that most classifiers of this type were late developments historically. The former reflect the increased complexity of weights and measures; the latter reflect the need to clarify the measurement of individual referents.

Although a verbal CL must be used when counting actions, the system of verbal CLs is quite simple: there is only one specialized verbal CL, lạŋ^{31}. There is also an allomorph of this CL, kă^{31} lạŋ^{31}, which includes the meaning 'one', as in 'one time'. This form can only combine with mji^{33} 'one', and not with any other numerals. Borrowed verbal CLs are also very restricted in scope; generally only nouns which express a unit of time are borrowed as verbal CLs.

2.1.2. Situations where CLs are not used are basically of two types: (1) under normal circumstances, most count-nouns do not require the use of a CL (some nouns have CLs that could be used, some don't have CLs at all). The NP can be directly modified by the numeral:

phun^{55} mă^{31} sum^{33}
tree three
'three trees'

să^{31} poi^{55} lă^{55} khoŋ^{51}
table two
'two tables'

sa^{33} pja^{33} mă^{31} li^{31}
soap four
'four (cakes of) soap'

pau^{31} lă^{55} khoŋ^{51}
gong two
'two gongs'

(2) even though a noun may have a corresponding CL, the CL is not used when the number modifying the noun is a compound (i.e. higher than ten). Compare the following examples:

mă^{33} ko^{33} si^{31} khum^{31} mă^{31} li^{31} 'four pears'
pear CL four

mă^{33} ko^{33} si^{31} ʃi^{33} lă^{55} khoŋ^{51} 'twelve pears'
pear twelve

n^{55} tạ^{51} thiŋ^{31} ko^{33} mji^{33} 'one family'
family CL one

n^{55} tạ^{51} mă^{31} ŋa^{33} ʃi^{33} 'fifty families'
family fifty