CLASSIFIERS IN MAL (THIN)

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1. Types of classifiers.
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The purpose of this paper is to present data on classifiers in the Ban Sakat Klang dialect of Mal.¹

Classifiers, i.e. 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. Some nouns in Mal are countable, some are uncountable. All countable nouns are obligatorily associated with a classifier if a number is used in counting them — for example,

?en ?ui ?coi phże? le?
I have pot three CL
I have three pots.

¹Mal, also known as Thin or Lua', is a Mon-Khmer language of northern Thailand and Laos. A member of the Khmuic subgroup, it is closely related to Khmu', Palaung and Lawa. In Thailand Mal-speakers inhabit Pua, Chiang Klang and Thung Chang districts of Nan province, while in Laos they are found in Sayaboury province (see Filbeck 1976). For the data used in this paper I am indebted to Toi Rokphrai of Ban Sakat Klang in Pua District. To David Thomas I wish to express my appreciation for his suggestions and other help in the preparation of my paper.
I have four children.

Uncountable nouns include such lexical items as saa 'rice', phuai 'water', and kék 'curry'. When used with numbers these can take only the receptacle classifiers (see 1.3).

1. Types of classifiers.

There are three types of classifiers in Māl: regular classifiers, self-classifiers, and receptacle classifiers.

1.1. Regular classifiers.

Regular classifiers constitute a set of morphemes whose only function is to classify nouns. They include simple unit classifiers, group classifiers, and action classifiers.

simple unit classifiers

phah 'sheet', with: koi 'trousers', but 'blouse', toŋ 'loincloth', bēi 'mat', taʔ 'khooi 'mattress', kua 'cloth', ʔuu 'sarong', cuu cĕh 'rag'.

phia 'side', with: mat 'eye', sap 'arm', thi 'hand', thu mōoi 'ear', thōŋ thii 'wrist', cēg 'foot', bōom 'cheek', thāŋ 'earring', panai seem 'wing'.

taa 'place', with: sēc 'farm', saʔ 'forest', sop khwaŋ 'market', duup sōo 'spirit house'.

moʔ 'item', with: gup 'spoon', pa 'knife', phịy 'bow', tiaŋ 'bone', thaak 'tongue', th'oon 'bracelet', qi'ah 'comb', ğıt 'upper shelf', gaa 'lower shelf'.

naŋ 'body', with animals and spirits: siŋ 'pig', wai 'tiger', suaʔ 'dog', seem 'bird', leen 'crab', mai 'snake', phōm 'land leech', khun 'earthworm', kam coʔ 'dragonfly', lōh 'tadpole', looŋ 'toad', khaa 'fish', sōo 'ghost', phiib huŋ
'rainbow'.


lah, with: laŋ 'ai 'flower', thiŋ 'mushroom', thiŋ thui 'kind of edible mushroom'.

laŋ, with: thu 'uaŋ 'leaf', thu 'betel'.

log 'person', with terms for human beings: pham 'man (in general)', pham pœi 'corpse', gîi 'friend', khwan thiat 'child', hum 'young man', moon 'young woman'.

søn, with long objects: thai 'rope', sook kî 'hair', sook seem 'feather', lam 'uaŋ 'tree', gaŋ 'post', gαι kîŋ 'needle', pît 'pencil', lœŋ 'road', pîn 'dart', ñan 'grass', siag 'tooth', lam kao 'small bamboo', lam nœʔ 'rice stalk', ñuam 'strip of bamboo'.

ñot 'drop', with: mia 'raindrop'.

group classifiers

yœn 'disordered pile', with: phaʔ ?oih 'firewood'.

gœk 'ordered pile', with: phaʔ ?oih 'firewood'.

kœng 'bundle', with: phaʔ ?oih 'firewood'.

gœi 'lump (round object)', with: ñuũ leʔ 'stone', bot 'cloud'

ñũm 'clump', with: gœe 'lemongrass'.

bœk 'sheaf, bundle', with: nœʔ 'rice stalk'
phaaŋ 'hand, cluster', only with: phə? khwai 'banana'.

huaŋ 'bunch, stalk', with: phə? khwai 'banana', ɳəo? 'rice, grain'.

dcci 'handful', only with: hiaŋ 'tea leaf'.

thoop 'parcel', with: hiaŋ 'tea leaf'.

baa 'package', with: kua 'cloth'.

phuan 'group', with: pham 'man', buo? 'cattle'.

thum 'bunch', with: khaa 'fish', laŋ ?ai 'flowers'.

phuŋ 'group of small insects', with: mot 'ant'.

action classifiers

doŋ 'time', with: yem 'to sweep', khai 'to sneeze', le? thi 'to breathe', hlo? 'to bark', phok 'to strike (of lightning)', le? 'to fall (of rain)'.

kaih 'time', with: thoi 'to forge', poök 'to cut', tık 'to pound', phoŋ 'to shoot', yəiŋ 'to shake', caŋ 'to call', khiah 'to laugh'.

1.2. Self-classifiers.²

Self-classifiers constitute a set of nouns capable of classifying themselves. These have also been called auto-classifiers or repeaters. Examples:

?əən ?ui ciaŋ ba ciaŋ
I have house one CL (house)
I have one house.

?əən ?ui dəŋ phoon dəŋ
I have bowl four CL (bowl)
I have four bowls.

²See Adams, Becker and Conklin 1975.
This set includes: ciap 'house', duup 'hut', cóq 'hole', bōh 'mountain', khwai 'stream', gēt 'shadow', khyai 'nail', ūua 'finger', tah 'forehead', gāp 'mouth', Ḇok 'neck', phoi 'nest', ñwai 'village', dhō 'bowl', ŋe 'day', thua? 'month', waq 'year'.

Compound nouns use their first element as classifier. For example, doi cóq 'heal': doi cóq ba doi 'one heel'; kəŋ khaak 'horns': kəŋ khaak pyəi kəŋ 'two horns'; thuu loi 'tail': thuu loi ba thuu 'one tail'; mà phẹ? lak 'pumpkin-pine': mà phẹ? lak ba mà 'one pumpkin-pine'.

There are many compounds which designate parts of trees; these are likewise classified by their first element. For example, thuu ñuaq 'leaf': thuu ñuaq se? thuu 'many leaves'. In the same way are classified wa ñuaq 'branch'; kiak ñuaq 'root'; ēi ñuaq 'stump'; gai ñuaq 'stalk', and guh ñuaq 'tree-top'.

1.3. Receptacle classifiers.

Receptacle classifiers are a set of nouns used as needed as units of measurement for other nouns. The members of this set designate any kind of container, but have no specific size. They are usually used with mass nouns. Examples:

phuai ba lui
water one CL (gourd)
one gourd of water.

phuai ba ka laq
water one CL (cup)
one cup of water.

saa phoon dōh
rice four CL (bowl)
four bowls of rice
kak ba ʔoːi
curry one CL (pot)
one pot of curry.

Although I have attempted to identify standard measures, I have thus far been unable to elicit any. My informant has hitherto given me only forms borrowed from Thai, such as ba sɔɔk 'one sɔɔk (50 cm.)' and ba kʰɪp 'one kʰɪp (25 cm.).'

2. Classifier constructions.

Mal classifier constructions are of the "Southeast Asian" type,³ that is to say, they follow the order noun + numeral + classifier. This noun-phrase pattern can be extended by the addition of demonstratives and adjectivals, so that the full noun phrase order is: (N) Noun + (Adj) Adjectival + (Nu) Numeral + (Cl) Classifier + (Dem) Demonstrative. Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Adj</th>
<th>Nu</th>
<th>Cl</th>
<th>Dem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>khaa</td>
<td>thiit</td>
<td>phoon</td>
<td>naŋ</td>
<td>nee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these four small fish.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pham</td>
<td>coʔ</td>
<td>ba</td>
<td>loiŋ</td>
<td>?een</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>sick</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that sick man.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³Jones 1970 divides the languages of Southeast Asia and South China into two large groups distinguished by the structure of noun phrases involving classifiers. The difference is based on the position in the phrase of the head noun. One group employs the pattern numeral + classifier + noun (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese); he terms this the "Chinese" type. The other group employs the pattern noun + numeral + classifier (e.g., Thai, Burmese); this he calls the "Southeast Asian" type.
3. **Comparisons.**

The Mal classifier system resembles that of the closely related Khmu? (Smalley 1956), Lawa la-oop,⁴ and Palaung (Janzen 1976) in the following two ways.

All are of the "Southeast Asian" type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Nu</th>
<th>Cl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>khaa</td>
<td>phoon</td>
<td>naŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmu?</td>
<td>khee?</td>
<td>mooy</td>
<td>too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rat</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaung</td>
<td>kaa</td>
<td>uu</td>
<td>too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawa</td>
<td>kho?</td>
<td>ti?</td>
<td>ggoŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La-oop</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And the full noun phrases in which classifiers occur are also alike:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Adj</th>
<th>Nu</th>
<th>Cl</th>
<th>Dem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>khaa</td>
<td>thiiit</td>
<td>phoon</td>
<td>naŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmu?</td>
<td>koon</td>
<td>cmro?</td>
<td>cet</td>
<td>gon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>child</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>seven</td>
<td>CL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaung</td>
<td>lɛ</td>
<td>uu</td>
<td>too</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pig</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaung</td>
<td>pлеɛ</td>
<td>braaq</td>
<td></td>
<td>taai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fruit</td>
<td>sour</td>
<td></td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴My examples were kindly provided by Donald Schlatter in May 1978.
Data are unfortunately not yet available on other Khmuic and Palaungic languages, but these four languages agree in their patterning of classifiers.

REFERENCES


Haas, Mary, 1942. The Use of Numeral Classifiers in Thai, in Lg., 17: 201-5.


