

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 u³¹ mǎ³¹ li³³ 'chicken' + 'four'; 'two shirts' is expressed as pǎ³³ loŋ³³ lǎ⁵⁵ khoŋ⁵¹ '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 khum³¹, which as a noun means 'body', but as a CL can be used with common animal names, melons, and fruits, and certain other objects:

wa³¹ khum³¹ mji³³
pig CL one
'one pig'

n³³ kjin³³ khum³¹ mji³³
cucumber CL one
'one cucumber'

As a noun, faŋ³³ khoŋ³³ means 'circle, ring'; as a CL, it can be used to modify circular objects:

nam³¹ paŋ³³ faŋ³³ khoŋ³³ mji³³
flower CL one
'one wreath of flowers'

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

*kə*⁵⁵ *wa*⁵⁵ *tʃen*³³ *mji*³³
bamboo CL one
'one strip of bamboo'

*ji*⁷⁵⁵ *tʃen*³³ *mji*³³
dry land CL one
'one section of dry field'

*ŋa*³³ *tʃen*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' + *pə*³³ 'head' > CL for hunted animals
*num*³¹ 'woman' + *pə*³³ 'head' > CL for wives

Noun + Verb > Classifier

*si*³¹ 'cotton' + *ka*⁷³¹ 'to separate' > 'boll (of cotton)'
*thiŋ*³¹ 'house' + *nep*⁵⁵ 'to pad' > 'plank (of floorboard)'

Noun + Classifier > Classifier

*kai*³¹ 'bead' + *təŋ*³³ 'tube' > CL for cylindrical beads
*wa*⁷³¹ 'bamboo' + *phaŋ*³³ CL for trees > 'grove (of bamboo)'

Noun + Stative Verb > Classifier

*la*⁷³¹ 'hand' + *kʒa*⁷³¹ 'shape of hand grabbing smth.' > 'handful'
*si*³¹ 'cotton' + *lan*³¹ 'pile-shaped' > 'pile (of cotton)'

Prefix + Verb > Classifier

*mə*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) + *pjaʊ*³¹ 'string-shaped' > 'string (of meat, fish, fruit, etc.)'

1.1.3. Ad hoc use of container nouns as CLs:

*pha*⁷³¹ *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'

tʃum³¹ tʃok⁵⁵ mji³³
 salt pinch one
 'a pinch of salt'

n³³ ku³³ lǎ³¹ ku³¹ mji³³
 rice handful one
 '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 mu⁵⁵ (← mù) '1/6 acre', ʃiŋ³¹ (← shēng) 'litre', tu³¹ (← dòu) 'bushel', to³³ (← dùo) 'mule-load', thau³³ (← táo) 'set', and kjin³³ (← jīn) '1/2 kilo'. From Dai, examples include tʃoi³³ '1 1/2 kilos', tʃo⁵⁵ 'ten basketsful', khan⁵⁵ 'ten ounces (1/3 of a tʃoi³³)', luŋ⁵⁵ 'a strip (of paddy field)', and khop⁵⁵ 'level (piles of grain)'. From Burmese, borrowings include teŋ³³ 'kilometer', up³¹ 'roll (of cloth)', taŋ³¹ 'basketful', pje³³ '1/8 basketful', mju⁵⁵ 'kind, class', thup³¹ 'stick, roll', poŋ³³ 'pound', mǎ⁵⁵ nit⁵⁵ '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.:

pun⁵⁵ ʒam⁵¹ toŋ³³ mji³³
 cloth foot one
 'a foot of cloth'

nam³¹ si³¹ kjin³³ mji³³
 fruit 1/2 kilo one
 '1/2 kilo of fruit'

n³³ ku³³ taŋ³¹ mji³³
 rice basketful one
 'a basketful of rice'

kum³¹ phʒo³¹ lap³¹ mji³³
 money yuan one
 'one yuan (unit of money)'

mǎ³¹ ʃa³¹ wǎ³³ noŋ³³ mji³³
 person group one
 'a group of people'

lǎ⁵⁵ khoŋ⁵¹ laŋ³¹ ʒa³³
 two CL go
 '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:

waʔ³¹ khum³¹ mji³³ fa⁵⁵ kau⁵⁵ mǎ³³-sa¹³³
 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, laŋ³¹. There is also an allomorph of this CL, kǎ³¹ laŋ³¹, which includes the meaning 'one', as in 'one time'. This form can only combine with mji³³ '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:

phun⁵⁵ mǎ³¹ sum³³
 tree three
 'three trees'

sǎ³¹ poi⁵⁵ lǎ⁵⁵ khoŋ⁵¹
 table two
 'two tables'

sa³³ pja³³ mǎ³¹ li³¹
 soap four
 'four (cakes of) soap'

pau³¹ lǎ⁵⁵ khoŋ⁵¹
 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:

mǎ³³ ko³³ si³¹ khum³¹ mǎ³¹ li³¹ 'four pears'
 pear CL four

mǎ³³ ko³³ si³¹ fi³³ lǎ⁵⁵ khoŋ⁵¹ 'twelve pears'
 pear twelve

n⁵⁵ ta⁵¹ thiŋ³¹ ko³³ mji³³ 'one family'
 family CL one

n⁵⁵ ta⁵¹ mǎ³¹ ŋa³³ fi³³ 'fifty families'
 family fifty

This is not to say that it is impossible to use a CL here. It would not be ungrammatical to use one, but customarily one would not be used.

2.1.3. There are also some count-nouns with which the use of a CL is optional. Although these nouns all have CLs, the CL will customarily be used only when needed for clarifying the unit of measurement. For example, 'one chopstick' is usually *khoi³³ tse³¹ lã⁵⁵ ɲai⁵¹ mji³³* ('chopstick' + 'one' + 'one'), without a CL, but to emphasize the unit of measurement, to show that it is not 'a pair', 'a bunch', etc., it is possible to add the CL *khat⁵⁵*, so 'one chopstick' would become *khoi³³ tse³¹ khat⁵⁵ mji³³*. Other examples:

<i>sum³¹ wum³³ si³¹ mǎ³¹ ɲa³³</i>	=	<i>sum³¹ wum³³ si³¹ khum³¹ mǎ³¹ ɲa³³</i>
peach five		peach CL five
<i>u³¹ ti³¹ kɜu⁷⁵⁵</i>	=	<i>u³¹ ti³¹ khum³¹ kɜu⁷⁵⁵</i>
egg six		egg CL six

Of the three situations discussed above, the first two are the most frequent, and the third is relatively rare. The fact that CLs are optional in Jingpo suggests that Jingpo CLs are in a transitional stage of development where their use has not yet stabilized. This phenomenon is a function of the need for increased complexity and accuracy, and is in accordance with the development of CLs from few to many.

2.2. The grammaticalization of CLs is uneven. In Jingpo, those CLs that are native and have completely grammaticalized are few. Most still retain a certain amount of their original (nominal) lexical meaning. According to the degree of grammaticalization, they can be divided into four types:

2.2.1. Those that have completely grammaticalized; we cannot determine what lexical items they developed from. There are about twenty of this type, not counting borrowed CLs. Aside from their function as CLs, they have no other use, and can only be ascribed to the class of CLs. Examples are *man³³* 'pair', *kum³¹ tun³³* 'handspan (index finger to outstretched middle finger)', and *tik⁵⁵* 'rectangular piece of land (for growing vegetables)'.

2.2.2. Those that are fairly grammaticalized, but we can still determine which nouns they developed from. When these are used as CLs, their lexical meaning is completely lost. There are only five or six of this type; two examples would be (a) *lap³³*, which means 'leaf' as a noun, but 'sheet, slice' as a CL. It is used in counting pieces of paper, tree leaves, and other flat thin objects:

** In Jingpo there are two ways to express the meaning 'one': *lã⁵⁵ ɲai⁵¹* and *mji³³*. Both are used when a noun is being modified, but only *mji³³* can be used to modify a CL.

mai³¹ sau³¹ lap³¹ mji³³
 paper CL one
 'one piece of paper'

phun⁵⁵ lap³¹ lap³¹ mji³³
 leaf CL one
 'one (tree) leaf'

(b) tum³³ means '(fruit) pit, seed' as a noun, but is used as a CL for small round objects:

sum³³ wum³³ si³¹ tum³³ tum³³ mji³³
 peach-pit CL one
 'one peach pit'

n³³ ku³³ tum³³ mji³³
 rice CL one
 'one grain of rice'

2.2.3. Those that are not very grammaticalized; to varying degrees they retain their original lexical meaning. There are six or seven of these. Ex.:

(a) si³¹ khap⁵⁵ 'bale [50 kg.] (of cotton)' is a compound CL comprised of the root si³¹ 'cotton' and the noun khap⁵⁵ 'bale'. It retains the lexical meaning of its morphemes, and can only be used for bales of cotton, as in

pā³¹ si³³ si³¹ khap⁵⁵ mji³³
 cotton bale one
 'a bale of cotton'

(b) fiŋ³¹ kjaŋ⁵⁵ has the lexical meaning of 'ear (of grain)'. When used as a CL, it has the meaning of 'spike (of grain), stem, branch', etc., and is used in counting ears of wheat or other grains, flowers, etc. Ex.:

khau³¹ lan³¹ mam³³ siŋ³¹ kjaŋ⁵⁵ mji³³
 wheat CL one
 'an ear of wheat'

2.2.4. Those least grammaticalized. There are about ten of this type. They retain their lexical meaning to such an extent that they preclude the cooccurrence of a noun either before or after the CL. One can only say

kok ³¹	mji ³³	or	kap ³¹	mji ³³
CL (room)	one		CL (dynasty)	one
'one room'			'one dynasty'	

but not

*kok ³¹	kok ³¹	mji ³³	or	*kap ³¹	kap ³¹	mji ³³
room	CL (room)	one		dynasty	CL (dynasty)	one

Yet these CLs are not the same as those count-nouns that can be directly modified by a numeral. There are two main differences: this type can only take the form mji³³ to express the meaning 'one', whereas nouns can take both mji³³ and lā⁵⁵ ŋai⁵¹;

when used as CLs, their meanings are not exactly those of the original nouns. Compare the following:

sǎ³¹ poi⁵⁵ as a CL:

jan⁵⁵ the³³ sǎ³¹ poi⁵⁵ mji³³ to⁵⁵ tfo⁷³¹ ma⁷³¹ ai³³.
 3pl table(banquet) one entertain give aux.part.
 'They invited a tableful (of people) to a banquet.'

sǎ³¹ poi⁵⁵ as a noun:

ŋai³³ sǎ³¹ poi⁵⁵ lǎ⁵⁵ ŋai⁵¹ mji³³ lu³¹ n³¹-ŋai³³.
 1sg table one one have aux. part.
 'I have a table.'

This suggests that these CLs are the precursors of true noun CLs. Because their lexical meaning has not bleached away, and they are still concrete semantically, they haven't actually become true CLs; they have just begun the process of grammaticalization from noun to CL.

Among all those CLs that developed from nouns in the four types mentioned above, the level of grammaticalization (bleaching) is closely related to the flexibility of the use of the CLs. Generally, the more advanced the stage of grammaticalization, the more flexible the use will be. For example, niŋ³¹ the⁷³¹ 'drop' is made up of the noun niŋ³¹ 'rain' and the verb the⁷³¹ 'drip'. Because the meaning of 'rain' has been completely lost in this compound, niŋ³¹ the⁷³¹ can be used not only for counting drops of rain, but also drops of oil, water, etc. On the other hand, kai³¹ lep³¹ 'slice (of ginger)' can only be used in counting slices of ginger, as the noun kai³¹ 'ginger' retains its lexical meaning.

The unevenness in the grammaticalization of Jingpo CLs shows that Jingpo CLs developed little by little because of the needs of production and daily life, and are going through a gradual process of bleaching and grammaticalization. This process is an important step in the development of Jingpo CLs.

2.3. There are many ways that CLs can combine with numerals and nouns. The scope of use of each type of combination is different.

2.3.1. Noun + Numeral. Used in counting count-nouns:

n ³¹ pa ⁵⁵ lǎ ⁵⁵ khoŋ ⁵¹	po ³¹ luŋ ⁵⁵ mǎ ³¹ suŋ ³³
quilt two	ball three
'two quilts'	'three balls'

2.3.2. Noun + CL + Numeral. Used in counting units of weight, volume, money, group nouns and some count-nouns:

n³¹ tsin³³ kom³³ mji³³
 water cup one
 'one cup of water'

kjep³¹ tin³³ man³³ mji³³
 shoes pair one
 'one pair of shoes'

kum³¹ phzo³¹ kjo³¹ mji³³
 money dime one
 'one dime'

u³¹ khum³¹ mji³³
 chicken CL one
 'one chicken'

2.3.3. CL + Numeral. Used only for the type of CL discussed in section 2.2.4, those where there has been little bleaching of lexical meaning, so no noun can appear with them:

lam³³ mji³³
 CL (affair) one
 'one thing/affair'

kok³¹ mji³³
 CL (fireplace) one
 'one fireplace'

2.3.4. Numeral + CL or CL + Numeral. Used with very few words:

la⁵⁵ khon⁵¹ thiŋ³¹ kza³³
 two CL (floorboard)
 'two floorboards'

=

thiŋ³¹ kza³³ la⁵⁵ khon⁵¹
 CL (floorboard) two
 'two floorboards'

la⁵⁵ khon⁵¹ niŋ⁵⁵ kam⁵¹
 two CL (steps)
 'two (stair) steps'

=

niŋ⁵⁵ kam⁵¹ la⁵⁵ khon⁵¹
 CL (steps) two
 'two (stair) steps'

The four constructions above have the highest frequency of use. Of these, the first and second are used most often. The common characteristic of these two is that the numeral and the CL both appear after the head noun. The third type is of the same nature as the first, in that semantically the CL functions the same way as a noun. The fourth type, where the numeral can either precede or follow the CL, only holds for a few CLs.

According to the analysis presented above, the main order of numeral, CL, and noun is for the numeral and CL to follow the head noun. This is the same order we find in pre-Qin Old Chinese. It wasn't until the North-South Dynasties period that CLs in Chinese moved to the position in front of the noun (Liu 1959). If we say that the post-nominal position for CLs is a relatively old feature of Sino-Tibetan, then we can determine that the genesis and development of CLs in Jingpo is still in a relatively early stage.

The diachronic development of a language is very often reflected in its synchronic characteristics. From an analysis of the complex features of the modern language we can find clues to the history and evolution of those features. The CLs of modern Jingpo provide evidence of this.

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