CLASSIFIERS IN MAL (THIN)

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1. Types of classifiers.
1.1. Regular classifiers.
1.2. Self-classifiers.
1.3. Receptacle classifiers.
2. Classifier constructions.
3. Comparisons.

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,

?ên ?ui ?coi phê? lê?
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 Khmuʔ, 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.
?әәn үui қhwan thiat phoon ләә
I have child four CL
I have four children.

Uncountable nouns include such lexical items as saә 'rice', phuәi 'water', and қәә '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 Mal: 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

phәә 'sheet', with: kәәi 'trousers', but 'blouse', тәәә 'loincloth', бәәi 'mat', тәәәә kerooi 'mattress', kәә 'cloth', ?uu 'sarong', cuu cәә 'rag'.

phиа 'side', with: mat 'eye', sap 'arm', thi 'hand', thu әәәә 'ear', thәә thиа 'wrist', cәә 'foot', бәәә 'cheek', тәәә 'earring', пәәәи seem 'wing'.

tәә 'place', with: сәәә 'farm', saә 'forest', sop қhваә 'market', duup sәәi 'spirit house'.

мәә 'item', with: gup 'spoon', па 'knife', phиа 'bow', әәә 'bone', thaak 'tongue', thәәәә 'bracelet', ҹәәи 'comb', гиә 'upper shelf', гаә 'lower shelf'.

нәә 'body', with animals and spirits: sinә 'pig', wai 'tiger', suaә 'dog', seem 'bird', ләәәә 'crab', мәә 'snake', бәәә 'land leech', khun 'earthworm', kam соә 'dragonfly', ләә 'tadpole', ләә 'toad', kхаә 'fish', sәәi 'spirit', phиа Һuә

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'rainbow'.


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

laŋ, with: thuʔ 'leaf', thu 'betel'.

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

sən, with long objects: thai 'rope', sook kʲiʔ 'hair', sook seem 'feather', lamʔ 'tree', ʔaŋ 'post', ʔai kʲiŋ 'needle', pət 'pencil', lɔŋ 'road', pən 'dart', nän 'grass', sian 'tooth', lam kəo 'small bamboo', lam ʔaoʔ 'rice stalk', ʔuam 'strip of bamboo'.

ʔət 'drop', with: mia 'raindrop'.

**Group classifiers**

jən 'disordered pile', with: phaʔʔ 'firewood'.

gək 'ordered pile', with: phaʔʔ 'firewood'.

kɔŋ 'bundle', with: phaʔʔ 'firewood'.

ŋui 'lump (round object)', with: ʔuu leʔ 'stone', bot 'cloud'

ʔum 'clump', with: gəe 'lemongrass'.

bək 'sheaf, bundle', with: ʔaoʔ 'rice stalk'
phaaŋ 'hand, cluster', only with: phɛʔ khwai 'banana'.

huaŋ 'bunch, stalk', with: phɛʔ khwai 'banana', ʔaoʔ 'rice, grain'.

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

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

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

phuaŋ 'group', with: pham 'man', buoʔ 'cattle'.

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

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

.action classifiers

doh 'time', with: yem 'to sweep', khai 'to sneeze', lɛʔ thɔɿi 'to breathe', hloʔ 'to bark', phok 'to strike (of lighting)', leʔ 'to fall (of rain)'.

kaih 'time', with: thɔi 'to forge', pɔoŋ 'to cut', tʰik 'to pound', phoen 'to shoot', yɛih 'to shake', cah 'to call', khiaŋ '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:

ʔen ʔui ɗiaŋ ba ɗiaŋ
I have house one CL (house)

I have one house.

ʔen ʔui dɛh phoon dɛh
I have bowl four CL (bowl)

I have four bowls.

²See Adams, Becker and Conklin 1975.
This set includes: ciaŋ 'house', duup 'hut', gɔŋ 'hole', bɔh 'mountain', khwai 'stream', gət 'shadow', khyai 'nail', ńua 'finger', tah 'forehead', gap 'mouth', ńok 'neck', phoi 'nest', ńwai 'village', ḏəh 'bowl', ńe 'day', thua? 'month', waاة 'year'.

Compound nouns use their first element as classifier. For example, ḏɔi cæŋ 'heel': ḏɔi cæŋ ba ḏɔi 'one heel'; kəŋ khaak 'horn': kəŋ khaak pəei kəŋ 'two horns'; thuu ḏɔi 'tail': thuu ḏɔi ba thuu 'one tail'; mə phə? lak 'pumpkin-pine': mə phə? lak ba mə 'one pumpkin-pine'.

There are many compounds which designate parts of trees; these are likewise classified by their first element. For example, thuu ?uanŋ 'leaf': thuu ?uanŋ əẹ thuu 'many leaves'. In the same way are classified wa ?uanŋ 'branch', kiak ?uanŋ 'root', ńai ?uanŋ 'stump', gai ?uanŋ 'stalk', and guh ?uanŋ '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 lək
water one CL (cup)
one cup of water.

saa phoon ḏəh
rice four CL (bowl)
four bowls of rice
kæk bæ ?coi
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 bæ sçɔk 'one sɔɔk (50 cm.)' and bæ khïp 'one khïp (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>thiiit</td>
<td>phoon</td>
<td>naŋ</td>
<td>nee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>four</td>
<td></td>
<td>this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

these four small fish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coʔ</th>
<th>bæ</th>
<th>lɔŋ</th>
<th>?een</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pham</td>
<td>sick</td>
<td>one</td>
<td></td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that sick man.

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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.

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3. **Comparisons.**

The Mal classifier system resembles that of the closely related Khmu? (Smalley 1956), Lawa la-oop, 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>fish</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawa</td>
<td>kho?</td>
<td>ti?</td>
<td>ηgonη</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></th>
<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>
<td>nee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td></td>
<td>this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khmu?</td>
<td>koon</td>
<td>cmro?</td>
<td>cet</td>
<td>gon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>child</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>seven</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaung</td>
<td>lɛ</td>
<td>uu</td>
<td>too</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pig</td>
<td></td>
<td>one</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaung</td>
<td>plɛɛ</td>
<td>braaŋ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>taai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fruit</td>
<td>sour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*My examples were kindly provided by Donald Schlatter in May 1978.*
Lawa kho? ra? ti? ṣgoŋ se
La-ooŋ wood big one CL that

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.


