A Comparison of the Numeral Classification of Humans in Mon–Khmer[1]

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1. Introduction

A reviewing human classification systems in the numeral phrase in Mon–Khmer languages reveals a diversity of styles and forms. Humans can be grouped in a single separate category or, in a more elaborate system, in several separate categories which grade people according to social and religious considerations.[2] They may also be classified together with other animates, or they may be grouped with non-living objects. The alternative of leaving humans uncategorized in the numeral classifier system does not appear to be an option in any of the data analyzed here.[3]

Of the above three styles, the first, grouping humans in a separate category, emerges as the dominant pattern. Only Angku in the Palaungic branch does not have such a category. Also several of the languages from the eight branches of Mon–Khmer described here—Khasi, Palaungic, Monic, Khmer, Khmuic, Katuic, Bahnaric and Viet–Mường—have elaborated categories for humans. Many of the numeral classifier morphemes for these human categories are native, and some of the classifier morphemes are formed by infixing, a process unique to Mon–Khmer

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[2] When the classification of humans is related to the social and religious considerations of a community, changes in the community's social structure can be expected to have consequences for the related lexicon. Some of the work reported on here draws from data collected close to 100 years ago. For example, some of the research on Palaungic languages and Mon was published in the early 1900's. Other work on Khmu, Vietnamese and Palaungic was published in the 1950's. Most of the work comes from data published in the 60's and 70's and often collected prior to and during the Americans' involvement in Vietnam. The continuing social and political upheavals in the Southeast Asian area from the time of the Vietnam War can be expected to have some effect on classification systems for humans in general and even on the very status, use and existence of the languages in question.

[3] A possible example of humans being uncategorized is found in Tai Loi: Samtau–Waic [Palaungic]. Scott (1900) reports only the number and noun slot being filled in the example 'three men'. However, this is not proof that humans are unclassified. It is always possible that the classifier for 'men' is a repeater and that it was omitted in this context. In other Palaungic languages there are several classifier morphemes for humans that can classify themselves as nouns.

in the Southeast Asian area. However, even though there is widespread classification of humans in the Mon–Khmer subfamily, only a few of the classifier words, native or not, are shared across or even within the branches of Mon–Khmer.

(See the appendix for a list of the Mon–Khmer languages analyzed here.)[4]

2. General Human Classifiers

In Khasi, data from Standard Khasi and from the Wār (Amwi) dialect show that the two varieties of Khasi use different morphemes for the same human category: Standard Khasi *ngut* and *Wār bɛ~rbɛ*. The meanings of these two forms remain unknown from the available data, and they do not function as classifiers in other Mon–Khmer languages. The exact range of their usage varies by speaker, some willing to include spirits, angels, devils and ghosts in this category with humans and some not.

In the Palaungic branch, the numeral classifier morphemes for counting humans are found throughout the Waic subbranch and in other Austroasiatic languages and are all probably native forms with the exception of the classifier in Angku to be described below. While the Palaungic languages and dialects employ native Austroasiatic lexical items, the sixteen languages and dialects employ five different forms. The Angku languages Amok and U, located in the east of the Palaungic area, both use the same classifier morpheme *i*, meaning 'man, human being'. It occurs throughout the northern group of Mon–Khmer languages meaning 'human' or 'woman', and it occurs in Khmer and Katu as a grammatical marker and in the Aslian subfamily as a definite article. In Monglwe, another Angku language, the classifier morpheme, *kwīn*, means 'father' throughout Waic and is also attested in Nicobarese meaning 'husband/male animal'.[5]

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[4] Much of the data reported on here comes from a broader study described in Adams (1989) for the Mon–Khmer, Aslian and Nicobarese subfamilies of Austroasiatic. Of the 59 languages and dialects looked at there, only three Mon–Khmer languages did not have some recorded classifiers. These languages are Pear [Pearic], the only representative of the Pearic branch for which I had data, Riang and Davies' Puman [Palaungic]. The records for these three languages are meager and classifiers may have been missed. Their not being recorded in these cases may also be accounted for by the fact that classifiers are optional in some Mon–Khmer languages in some styles of speaking. For example, Shorto (1979, p.c.) reports that his fieldwork on Riang showed that it did have classifiers and that a specific set of numbers went with them. Until better data are obtained these few examples without classifiers in the number phrase mean little.

This study differs from the 1989 one in several ways. First, new sources for Khmer, Vietnamese and Mường are included. The new Mường data, drawn from a study published in 1987 by Russian linguists, demonstrate a rich system for classifying humans. The new work on Khmer (Marston, 1988) gives us some idea of the changes that took place after the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia. The discussion of the classification systems has been also been reinterpreted and refined here.

[5] To claim that all these forms classify ordinary people may be inaccurate. In several of the languages, Davies' Wa, La, En, and Wa Kengtung, the only example was with the word 'man' and especially in the case of Monglwe where the classifier means 'father', it may be that the classifiers are restricted to usage with human males. However, in the other languages besides Monglwe the classifiers have a general meaning, so I have made the assumption that they apply more widely to all sorts of people.

A third form, **ki?* (Proto–Waic) meaning 'man, body', is found in the all the northern Palaungic languages except La. These northern languages include Gold Palaung, En, Son, Wa–Kengtung, Drage's Wa, Davies' Wa, Antisdel's Wa and Kawa.[6] In La, one finds a fourth form, *p'i*, reconstructed in Diffloth (1977) as Proto–Waic **bi?* and glossed as 'person'.

The southern Lawa group of the Palaungic branch, consisting of the Bo Luang, Umphai and Mae Sariang dialects share a fifth classifier, *pui*. This form is reconstructed in Diffloth (1977) as Proto–Waic **bɤy* meaning 'person'.

Of the five classifier morphemes found in the Palaungic languages only one of them, **ki?*, functions as a classifier somewhere else in a Mon–Khmer branch. Mon also employs it as a classifier for humans in general, and in spoken Mon it is a polite term of address between people of equal status (Shorto 1962: 17).

In the Khmuic branch, the northern and southern dialects of Khmu employ a different classifier morpheme for humans from the one found in Mal. The Khmu dialects, as with many of its classifiers (see Adams 1989, 1991), have borrowed the form *gon* for classifying people from Lao or other Tai languages. Mal, on the other hand, has the form *lɔng* that has no identifiable cognates in the available data.

The general classifier for humans in pre-revolutionary Khmer is different again from the forms in the four other branches described above. This form, *nɛək*, is of indeterminate origin, although it is frequently attributed to a Chamic borrowing of a wider-spread Austronesian cognate. In Rhade, for example, *anak* is a noun meaning among other things 'offspring, child'. The morpheme does not function as a classifier in Austronesian though it is employed in Austronesian to make compounds or for purposes of nominalization. The Austronesian origin is disputed by Gedney (1986, p.c.) who believes that "some day epigraphic evidence within early Khmer, or else comparative evidence" will prove the word native Mon–Khmer.

The Khmer classifier resembles, but is probably not related to, the classifier for humans which occurs within both the Katuic and Bahnaric branches. The form *na?* occurs in Kơho Sre [S. Bahnaric], and in Kui, Brou, Pacoh, and Katu [Katuic]. Its origin can probably be attributed to the infixation and initial syllable reduction of the native cognate *chak*. The clue to this identification comes from the form of the human classifier in Kantu, another Katuic dialect. The classifier morpheme in Kantu is *chanak*, the infixed version of **cak* which means 'body' (Proto–East Katuic [D.M. Thomas 1967: 73]). In Katu proper this form is *chak* or *achak* (Costello 1971: 28), and it is infixed by the *-an-* infix found throughout Mon–Khmer. The morpheme *chak* is found only in Bahnaric and Katuic, according to Diffloth (1982, p.c.).[7]

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[6] Davies (1909) gives *shi* as a classifier for humans in Gold Palaung. It is unlike all the other forms found in the Rumai and Waic subbranches. Since I know the reliability of Milne's data (1921), I am including only her forms.

[7] Another interesting feature of the *chanak* form is that the non–infixed root, *chak*, is also a classifier in Kui [Katuic], but it is used for tubers, not humans. It is not unusual in Mon–Khmer for the same lexical item to classify quite different phenomena in different languages. This is true for example for the *măt* cognate which is an honorific classifier for humans in Bahnar, but used with portions of medicine in Mon.

While Kơho Sre [S. Bahnaric] employs the same morpheme for classifying humans as the Katuic languages do, the rest of the Bahnaric languages employ a variety of other forms. (See Table 1.) The North, East, Central and West subbranches of Bahnaric have basically one classifier per subbranch. The Southern subbranch, including Kơho Sre described above, has several different forms.

The North Bahnaric languages, except for Jeh, all share a cognate which is reconstructed by Diffloth (1982, p.c.) as **ngaay*. Diffloth gives its meaning as 'pupil of the eye', but in the Sedang data it is glossed as 'person'. The classifier in Jeh, *ʔnau*, is not related to the other North Bahnaric form, which according to Thomas and Smith (1967) has the cognate *mangay* in Jeh. (The meaning of this cognate in Jeh is 'the one having eyes' [Diffloth, 1982, p.c.]) It is also possible that the **ngaay* cognate is related to the Vietnamese and Mường human classifier *người*, which also means 'person' and can function as a pronoun as the form does in Sedang.

In Cua, an East Bahnaric language, we find a different form functioning as the human classifier. The form *drơ* in Cua is also used in some of the dialects of Bahnar proper [Central Bahnaric] not as a classifier, but as a noun meaning 'person, individual'.

Bahnar proper, of the Central Bahnaric group, also has a unique classifier meaning 'person', *nu*. It is not possible to establish any cognates for it from the available data. The Rơngao dialect of Central Bahnar uses the same form as most of the North Bahnaric languages described above, *ngai*. This different form is explained by the fact that the speakers of this dialect have a northern origin.

The classifier **raaʔ* which occurs in the West Bahnaric languages Brao, Ôi, and Loven is from a noun meaning 'big, adult human', which has cognates in other Austroasiatic languages but does not function as a classifier in any of them.

	person		ghost/spirit
	one	two or more	
North Bahnaric			
Rơngao (Neo and Gregerson 1974)	ngai ---------->		
Sedang (Smith 1967, 1975)	ngê ---------->		
Halang (Cooper 1971)	ngai ---------->		
Jeh (Cohen 1976)	?nau ---------->		
Hrê (Trebilco, Trebilco and Nghìa 1974)	ngai ---------->		
East Bahnaric			
Cua (Đô, Môc and Maier 1974)	drơ ---------->		
Central Bahnaric			
Bahnar proper (Guilleminet and Alberty 1959, 1963)			
East dialects	nu ---------->		
West dialects except Rơngao	nu ---------->		
Rơngao	ngai ---------->		
West Bahnaric			
Loven (Bondet de la Bernardie 1949)	rà ---------->		
Brao (Keller 1976)	raa ---------->		
Ôi	ra ---------->		
South Bahnaric			
Stieng (V. Miller 1976)	mbu	du	
Central Mnong			
Mnong Preh (Phillips and Kpor 1974)	nuyh ---------->		
Eastern Mnong			
Mnong Rơlơm (Voegelin and Voegelin 1966)	naw ---------->		
Mnong Gar (Condominas 1977)	nɛh ---------->		
Kơho Sre (Manley 1972 and Drouin n.d.)*	na? ---------->		
Chrau (Thomas and Luc 1966, Thomas 1971)	mvu	ndu	

* Form as cited in Manley.

Table 1. Bahnaric classifiers for humans

The languages in the South Bahnaric subbranch, as mentioned above, do not share a classifier for humans but have several different ones. Stieng and Chrau inflect the classifiers for number. The two forms for classifying a single person, *mbu* in Stieng and *mvu* in Chrau, appear to have an *m-* prefix which very likely has as its meaning 'one'. Most of the words for 'one' in Mon–Khmer start with *m-* and in Katu and Khmer an *m-* prefix form of 'one' is attested. The classifier for more than one person is *ndu* in Chrau and *du* in Stieng.

The other South Bahnaric languages have a variety of forms for human classification. The Kơho Sre form is *na?*, cognate to the form found in the Katuic languages which are further north in Vietnam. The Mnong Preh [Central Mnong] form *nuyh* appears to be a borrowed form reconstructed as **mnus* from Sanskrit *manusa* meaning 'man, person'. The Mnong Rolom and Mnong Gar [Eastern

Mnong] languages have forms unrelated to each other and probably unrelated to any of the forms found elsewhere *(naw* and *nɛh* respectively). Of the six languages in South Bahnaric described here only two share the same classifier morpheme for counting humans.

In the furthest east branch of Mon–Khmer, Viet–Mường, the two languages for which data were available, Vietnamese and Mường, use the same classifier for counting people in general. This classifier *người* means 'person' and originally 'eye' and has cognates in Proto–Palaungic as **ʔngaay* meaning 'eye'. Both these forms may be related to the classifier mentioned earlier in North Bahnaric.

A description of the Angku [Palaungic] language has been left for last since it represents the one language in a Mon–Khmer branch without a separate category for humans. In Angku both humans and animals are classified by the form *to*. This form most likely is also a borrowing, and it resembles the forms found in Gold Palaung and in other Palaungic languages for animals which are borrowed from Tai languages. However, this form could have another source besides Tai, possibly Chinese or Miao-Yao. David Strecker (1980, p.c.) reports the following problems in identifying the origin of this form.

> Manomaivibool (1976: 180) suggests that the *tua* classifier for animals [in Thai] is a word that 'might have been borrowed from Chinese in Hàn times.' The putative Chinese etymon is **dəu* (with the p'íng tone).
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> This is similar to forms given as 'animal (classifier)' [in Miao-Yao] in Purnell (1970: Appendix: 7). Purnell lists two cognate sets which he glosses "animal (clf.)" The first set is: Cheng Feng *-teu*^{4} and Hua Yuan *-te*^{3}. These are both Miao dialects in Kueichau and Húnán ... Purnell reconstructs the form in Proto–Miao as **đ-*, with tone B, vowel uncertain.
>
> Purnell's other cognate set consists of forms from three Iu Mien dialects and one Kin Mun dialect, that is from the two languages which constitute Yao ... Purnell's Proto–Yao is *tau*^{2}. Apparently the tone of the Proto–Yao form does not correspond to the tone of the Proto–Miao form so Purnell has to set up two separate cognate sets.
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> Moreover, it would appear that the Hmong [a Miao language] classifier *tus* (pronounced [tu:] with low level tone) 'classifier for cylindrical objects including people and other animals' is not cognate with either Cheng Feng *teu*^{4} etc., or with Proto–Yao **tau*^{2}. For one thing the tones do not match up.

As Strecker notes, it is difficult to know if any relationship among the Chinese, Tai and Miao–Yao forms exists. A Mon–Khmer classifier for animals of the following phonological shapes, *to, tu, tau, tua*, could have come from any one of a number of sources. In Angku, while the classifier form resembles the other *to* forms in Palaungic, the items the Angku classifier classifies are similar to those in Hmong or Chinese which count both humans and animals.

While all languages in Mon–Khmer except Angku [Palaungic] have a separate classifier for humans, this does not represent a system peculiar to Mon–Khmer or more generally to Austroasiatic. The Aslian and Nicobarese languages also have separate categories for humans (Adams 1989). This style of classification is extremely common and has been described for other Asian languages in Adams and Conklin (1973).

3. Elaborated Human Classifiers

In the data available for this study, the number of languages reported to have elaborated systems were considerably fewer than those with general classifiers for humans. Essentially all the languages with numeral classifier systems had examples of the latter, while only eight had elaborated systems. These include Drage's Wa, Gold Palaung and Lawa [Palaungic], Khmer, Mon, Bahnar proper [Central Bahnaric] and Vietnamese and Mường [Viet–Mường]. In some cases, this lack of proliferation of human classifiers seems surprising. For example, it seems surprising among the northern and southern varieties of Khmu who have so freely borrowed from Lao and other Tai languages for much of their classifier system. In some other cases, for example in Palaungic and Bahnaric, the small size of the classifier samples may mean that the data collector missed additional forms that may exist. But in general this type of expansion of the classifier set is not common in Mon–Khmer, and when it occurs it is sometimes the result of social influence from outside the native culture. As with the general human classifiers, the elaborated systems for humans show little resemblance to each other, except for those languages that belong to the same branch. There is no sharing of forms across branches.

In Palaungic, the elaborated systems in Gold Palaung and Drage's Wa and Lawa are all based on religious notions. The Lawa form is from Tai languages. The overarching organizing semantic principle in the Gold Palaung and Drage's Wa systems appears to be the dimension that Becker (1975) proposed for Burmese: 'distance from Buddha'. These two systems were most likely borrowed from Burmese via Shan. (See Table 2.)

The existence of these elaborated classifiers is a linguistic manifestation of a changing cultural situation. As described in LeBar, Hickey, and Musgrave (1964: 125-6), the Gold Palaung have adopted Buddhism, as well as other customs, from the Shan and Burmese. Buddhism has replaced, or perhaps co-exists to some degree, with an animistic religion which other Mon–Khmer cultures have retained.[8]

The Gold Palaung and Drage's Wa classifiers come from the same source, Shan and/or Burmese. Information on culture contact in LeBar, Hickey, and Musgrave (1964: 125-6) indicates that if they were borrowed from Burmese, it would have happened sometime after 1780. However, if they were borrowed from Shan which borrowed them from Burmese, it could have been two or three centuries earlier. The Shan source seems a likely candidate, but it may be that Burmese has been a secondary source, which might explain the existence of both *sū* and *chū* in Gold Palaung. These forms are phonologically similar and also overlap in the set of nouns they classify. LeBar, Hickey, and Musgrave report that at the time of their writing monks of the central area (where Gold Palaung is spoken) went to Mandalay and Rangoon for training. They were bound to be influenced by Burmese language and culture and may have been a source for the introduction of new forms.

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[8] It is conceivable that the strategy of borrowing classifiers for these non–native religious divisions while maintaining a native one for humans in general allowed some maintenance of the animistic native world view. Other categories of human, animal and religious divisions in the lexicon might better demonstrate this.

Lawa	Drage's Wa	Gold Palaung	Shan	Burmese
	hsu pagoda	sū Buddha's image, pagoda chū Buddha's image, pagoda, halo, riverbank	shu^{2} deities, pagoda	hsu Buddha, relics, images, law, nets, gardens, stairs
tɔn monk			ton^{1} deities	
	pa priest	p'ā king, king's image	paa^{4} clergymen, rulers, religious precepts	pa: deities, saints, monks, royalty
				u: people of status, teachers, scholars
			phu^{3} human male	
pui human	kaü people	kū human, doll	kɔ^{5} person	yauk ordinary people

Table 2. Sources of human classifiers in Palaungic

The tripartite division of the world that Milne's Gold Palaung speaker presented is very orderly. The native Mon–Khmer form *ki?* for ordinary people works very well with the borrowed *sū, chū* and *p'ā.* Each of the classifiers serves to distinguish one type of being and the images and artifacts associated with this type. In accord with the 'image' concept, *sū/chū* classifies Buddha and associated images, *p'ā* classifies kings and their images, and *kū (*ki?)* classifies people and their images, dolls. An animate meaning is central to all of these categories even though inanimate items are contained in them. In addition, in Gold Palaung, *tō* classifies animals and related images, just as in Shan, and is the furthest point from Buddha.

In the *sū/chū* class, the inclusion of 'pagoda' in a class with images of Buddha appears due to the use of these buildings for religious purposes. *Chū* in addition classifies halos and river banks. Halos are associated with deities in Asian cultures just as they are in Western religions. However, the motivation for the inclusion of river banks is not obvious and has no parallels in Shan or Burmese. The existence of another classifier for river banks in Gold Palaung, *klōng,* also Burmese in origin, makes counting river banks by *chū* even more puzzling.

The form found in Lawa for monks is also borrowed from some Tai language and is another example of a style of elaboration that singles out religious people for special consideration.

The pre-revolutionary Khmer elaborated system has also been influenced by Buddhist culture, but the classifier morphemes are quite different, as are the items counted by the classifiers in the Khmer system. For example, the concept of 'image' and the consequential inclusion of inanimate items is not found in pre-revo-

lutionary Khmer. Basically the Khmer system distinguishes people with royal and religious status from all others.

I.	image of Buddha	clergy/monk	royalty	person
Jacob 1965, 1968		ʔɔng (k̂)	prɛəh-ʔɔng(k̂)	nɛək
Huffman 1970		qang	preəh-qang	neəq
Headley 1977		ʔang		neak
Ehrman 1972		ɔng		né?
G. Maspero 1915		an		nak
Gorgoniev 1966			prɛəh Ang	nɛək

II.	high persons	dignitaries	superior honor	inferior honor
G. Maspero 1915	louṇk		hupan~pan	hupăk
Jacob 1965, 1968			hupan	

III. rù:p	person	picture/ painting	statue/image	shape/form	monk
Jacob 1965, 1968	x				
Gorgoniev 1966	x				
G. Maspero 1915	(writer)		x		
Ehrman 1972		x	x	x	
Headley 1977	x	x	x		x

IV. tu:ə	person	letter of alphabet	character in play	upright object
Jacob 1965, 1968	x	x	x	x
Headley 1977		x	x	

Table 3. Pre–revolutionary Khmer classifiers for deities, humans and related inanimates.

As can be seen from Table 3, the different sources for pre-revolutionary Khmer report the system slightly differently. All sources agree on the classifier for people in general. It is over the use of two classifiers for royalty and clergy that there is disagreement. These latter two classifiers are related to each other; one is the single morpheme *ʔɔng(k̂)*, the other is the same form compounded with *prɛəh* meaning 'sacred'. Three sources, Headley et al. (1977), Maspero (1915) and Ehrman (1972), report only the classifier *ʔɔng(k̂)*, while Gorgoniev (1966) reports only the *prɛəh-ʔɔng(k̂)* form. In these sources, regardless of which classifier they report, royalty, monks, and sometimes images of Buddha are all counted by the one form. Jacob (1965) and Huffman (1970) report both forms. In these two systems, the two forms distinguish royalty from clergy, with the royalty being called 'sacred'. Finally Jenner and Pou (1980-81: 284-5) give *prɛəh* as a 'generic headword for beings and objects conceived as divine or royal'; however, they do not give this morpheme or *ʔɔng(k̂)* as a numeral classifier.

As with the Palaungic language, dimensions of relative sanctity would be the most appropriate for describing the relationship among the classifiers in Section I of Table 3. Interestingly enough it is possible for certain nonholy people to be off this scale in some speakers' classification systems. For example, Maspero (1915)

reports that thieves are not classified by *nɛ̀ək* and hence not by the other forms either. However, Headley et al. (1977) do report examples of this particular usage.

Except for the images of Buddha, the pre-revolutionary Khmer system listed in Section I does not include any of the kinds of inanimate items that are found in the Gold Palaung categories, although the concept of person plus related images does appear in the categories created by *rùːp* and *tuːə* described in Sections III & IV of Table 3. These two classifiers count people according to the notion of image as opposed to reality and include a number of inanimate items in their classes. The *rùːp* form here is meant not for classifying real people, but for items which are somehow an abstraction or perhaps even a caricature. As with the *ʔɔng(k)* classifier, different sources report *rùːp* and *tuːə* as classifying different items. Jacob (1965) gives the most restricted list for *rùːp* and cites it for counting 'people from a philosophical view and characters in books'. Ehrman (1972) and Headley et al. (1977) on the other hand have it as classifying 'pictures, images, shapes and statues' as well. *Rùːp* is a borrowing from Sanskrit/Pali meaning 'image' and has in Khmer been retained as a noun with this meaning.

Headley et al. (1977) is the only source that gives *rùːp* as referring to monks. The classification of monks here is unclear unless in some sense monks are thought of as "images of god". Unfortunately, Headley et al. do not give data clarifying when one might employ *ʔɔng(k)* for monks as opposed to using *rùːp*.

Only Jacob (1965) and Headley et al. (1977) report the classification of people or images of people by *tuːə*. As a noun it means 'body', 'figures', 'character or part in a play'. Headley et al. (1977) report it as counting only characters in plays and letters of the alphabet. Jacob (1965) reports it as also employed for upright objects and persons. There are obvious relationships among the concepts 'body', 'upright', 'figure', 'symbol', 'written' and 'plays'. Ehrman (1972) also cites this classifier but as a way of counting cars. The expression 'a car body' has parallels even with English; however, this particular usage does not seem to fit well with the other functions of *tuːə*.

Maspero's list of classifiers contains additional forms for dignitaries and other 'high' persons not found elsewhere. One of them is *loṵk* for dignitaries. Another form, *hupan*, is for high honors and degree of rank, and the third form *hupǎk* is for inferior honors. Jacob (1968: 88) also lists *hupan* as a classifier.

Not a single form in the elaborated set of classifiers for humans in pre-revolutionary Khmer is a native Mon–Khmer form. The *ʔɔng(k), prɛ̀əh-ʔɔng(k), rùːp* and *loṵk* forms are all originally Sanskrit/Pali in origin. *ʔɔng(k)* is from *aṅga* meaning 'body, limb, member or part'; *rùːp* is from *rūpa* meaning, image, appearance, form'. These words are not classifiers in the languages of their origin since neither Sanskrit nor Pali are classifier languages. However, *prɛ̀əh-ʔɔng(k), ʔɔng(k)* and *rùːp* are also used as classifiers in Siamese for approximately the same set of objects and concepts, e.g. *rùːp* is used for priests, drawings and photographs in Siamese. According to Gedney (1980, p.c.) it is not possible to determine whether Khmer borrowed these forms from Siamese or vice versa. Therefore, it is also impossible to know who innovated their use as classifiers.

The other classifiers are Siamese in origin. Tuːə and the Thai classifier *tua* are both glossed as 'body';[9] however, the kinds of items they count are different. In Thai, the form is mainly for animals and additional things with limbs, like tables and shirts, but letters of the alphabet may also be classified by this form. The use with characters in plays occurs in Khmer only, and the Khmer classifier is much more limited in its scope ignoring the major usage in Thai for animals. The use of classifiers most frequently in Khmer literary language may explain some of these differences. Another Siamese form, *hupan*, is from a Siamese phrase *huâ phăn* which means 'who commands 1000 men' and the inferior honors classifier, *hupåk* is related to *paak* an old Tai word meaning '100'.

During the period of Khmer Rouge control in Cambodia several changes were made in the lexicon of Khmer. Many of these changes related to those items that marked the status of people within the older royal culture and Buddhist society. While Marston (1988) limits his discussion to the effect of the Khmer Rouge philosophical changes and social reorganization on the structure of the pronoun system and the terms of address lexicon, the inferences for the classifier system are clear. First of all during this period there was limited use of writing which probably affected the overall frequency of the use of classifiers. According to Marston,

> The use of writing was severely curtailed. Courtly language had already begun to fall into disuse when the monarchy ended in 1970. In the course of the DK period, temples were closed and traditions of Buddhism dispensed with, and with them elaborate styles of diction associated with the monkhood ... There was some variation from place to place as to whether in these villages monks would be addressed with traditional forms or with the forms used with the general population. (1988: 16)

Several of the forms mentioned above can then be expected to have fallen into disuse both because of the restrictions on writing and on the changes in the social structure. One of these would be the *prɛəh* form which was associated with the Buddhist ideal of sanctity and debt of loyalty directed to anyone with whom this term was used including parents. Since the Khmer Rouge wanted to sever all loyalty except that directed towards their movement this term fell into disuse. Another form that can be expected to have been eliminated was *loṵk*, which if really functioning as a classifier as Maspero claimed, would have fallen into disuse because it also became a prohibited honorific title at this time. As Marston notes (1988: 18) it was important for the Khmer Rouge not to be treated as if they were in the same category as those people who would have been addressed by this label, and they reprimanded people who used this term with Khmer Rouge soldiers.

It is possible that some of the classifiers remain in use, but might no longer be applied to certain social groups. For example monks might no longer be counted by *rùːp*.

Marston's data do not allow us to know if other words were added to the system, only that some classifiers, and perhaps their use in general, were eliminated or at least restricted. What has happened since the entry of the Vietnamese into the complex social situation is also yet to be characterized.

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[9] This interpretation may be wrong as Headley et al. (1977) do not give this as the source of this classifier.

The Mon system of elaboration is much more restricted than the other two described above. In two of the three sources that cite classifiers, (see Table 4), the general human classifier is also used for monks and deities. One source, Halliday (1922), cited a separate classifier for kings and kingdoms, *kadäng petain.* Two of the sources, Halliday (1922) and Haswell (1901), also cited a class including men, governors, owners and masters. Shorto (1971) cites this latter form, *tɔela?/ [tɪ̈la],* as a learned form meaning 'master, owner, lord' and does not give it as a classifier in his modern spoken Mon dictionary. These two possible elaborated forms found in Mon, *kadäng petain* and *tɔela?,* are not related to any of those in the other Mon–Khmer languages. In addition, these classifiers do not seem to divide the social structure according to the idea of distance from Buddha as in Palaungic and pre-revolutionary Khmer, but more in terms of social power based on partly economic considerations, i.e. ownership.

	deity	monk	king /kingdom	man /person	governer	master/ owner
Shorto 1962	<----------			həkao?		
Halliday 1922			kadäng petain			
				cékau		
				tala---------->		
Haswell 1901	<---------			ǰaku		
				tala---------->		
Low 1837				ø		

Table 4. Mon categories for deities and humans

A very different and interesting style of elaboration is found in Bahnar proper and the Rơngao dialect in this area [Central Bahnaric]. Rather than the Palaungic, Khmer and Mon style of separate classifiers categorizing humans on dimensions of religiosity and political power, in Bahnar, one finds humans classified with inanimate objects and also with non-human animates on the basis of such notions as value and size. (See Table 5.)

In Bahnar proper and the Rơngao dialect, a classifier meaning 'head', *kơl,* is used in a denigrating manner for humans. The central use of this form as cited by Guilleminet and Alberty (1959, 1963) is for 'living beings and people and bonded souls'. Slavery and indenturing have been historically common in this area. The classifier is also used for inanimate things such as boats and valuables, and this usage appears to be derived from the concept of bonded souls as having a value and being worth a rate of exchange that can be applied to other objects.

Two of the forms found in the elaborated Bahnar system are honorifics but bear no resemblance to any of the other forms with this function in Mon–Khmer languages. *Măt,* one of the honorifics, also functions as a noun and has a variety of meanings including 'eye, eyesight, hole in the ground for seeds, tear, lamina' and in compounds 'pupil of the eye'. This form is found throughout Southeast Asian languages, including Mon where it also means 'precious stone'. This last meaning may help to explain its usage as an honorific i.e. as something of value. The second honorific, *tòng,* also treats a person's social value as related to a kind of economic value. In this case, people are classified as equivalent to valuable items

including jars, rifles and axes. *Tòng* is a form found throughout Bahnaric to classify things with handles.

The last two forms to be described here for Bahnar proper are classifiers whose uses are primarily for objects but are extended to include humans but unlike the extension of inanimate classifiers to humans in other languages these are not deprecating in the typical fashion. The form *găr/gĕr*, meaning 'seed', 'grain', is used for adults in a speech genre whose forms are referred to as *pơma pơjơruh*. *Pơma pơjơruh* is a deprecating genre used when one does not want spirits to understand the topic under discussion. For example, one would use it when discussing the preparation of a sacrifice. The purpose of these forms is to protect the speakers in case they must cancel the sacrifice. If the normal language (which spirits understand) were used and the promised ritual were cancelled, the spirits would know this, be offended and punish the person making the promise (Guilleminet and Alberty 1959). Thus the classifier makes humans diminutive and less than human and not recognizable to the spirits.

	honorific for person	non-honor for person	children	bonded souls	non-human animates	things
Bahnar proper (all dialects) (Guilleminet and Alberty 1959, 1963)	măt					
				kơl*--->	(valuable animals)-->	----------> (valuables)
	<---------					tòng (valuables)
		<--------- (belittling)	<----- (poetic)		<--------- (fish)	găr** (small spherical objects)
			<-----		<----- (fish, young dogs and cats	kơnāng (flat things)

Table 5. Elaborated classification of humans in Bahnar proper

The *găr/gĕr* form and *kơnāng* are both also used for children in Bahnar proper. The former is employed as a poetic form for children and is not belittling as with adults. The latter, *kơnāng*, is an extension to human children of a form used for flat inanimate objects and the immature of the dog and cat species. The form is cognate with *kāng* found in Mnong Gar meaning 'board'. The description of immature beings as lacking a dimension, i.e. being flat rather than round, is also poetically pleasing. This form and the others described above are usages not seen so far in other Mon–Khmer languages. The Bahnar and Rơngao system is one clearly associated with the Bahnar culture and not a borrowed one as we have seen with the other elaborated systems.

Vietnamese and Mường also have elaborated classes which are different from any of those encountered in the other Mon–Khmer systems. While there are categories which are similar to some of those described for Mon, Khmer and Palaungic which will be described below, both of these two languages have an extensive set of categories which are derived from their kinship systems. Their usage in the numeral classifier system is related to their usage in the pronominal system where kin

terms are employed with non-kin. The family in Vietnamese, Mường and other Mon–Khmer cultures is the major social unit whose structure is also used to order other kinds of social relationships. The set of classifiers based on kinship terms is smaller than the set of extended pronouns, which is smaller than the set of kin terms themselves.

Vietnamese		Mường	
Lineal consanguine			
cố/cụ	great grandparent		
ông	grandfather	ông^2	grandfather
bà	grandmother		
anh	older brother	eñ^2	older brother
chị	older sister		
em	younger sibling	un^3	younger sibling
collateral consanguine			
bác	father's older brother		
chú	father's younger brother		
cậu	mother's brother		
cô	father's sister	kô^2	aunt
affinal			
bác (dâu) father's older brother's wife thím (dâu) father's younger brother's wife			

Table 6. Vietnamese and Mường kin classifiers

Table 6 cites the kin classifiers as reported by Nguyễn Đình Hoà (1957), Thompson (1965) and Shafer (1975, p.c.) for Vietnamese and Sokolovskaija and Nguyễn (1987) for Mường.

The use of these forms in Vietnamese has been described in detail in the above cited sources and Adams (1989). For example, *ông* indicates great respect and is used with men over 30 or 40, as well as with royalty, deities, and such professions as doctors, priests, scholars, mayors, midwives and sorcerers. In Vietnamese and Mường, it is not just occupation or wealth that determines the use of these forms, but also sex, age, married state and other kinds of behavior that do or do not deserve respect. The Mường use of kin classifiers follows similar patterns to the related Vietnamese categories. For example, *ông*^{2} occurs with the noun 'older man', *eñ*^{2} with 'teacher', *un*^{3} with 'pupil' and *kô*^{2} with 'nurse'.

The set of items that makes up the kinship system in Vietnamese is drawn from Mon–Khmer, Chinese and Thai sources. Of the elements discussed here that are part of the classifier lexicon, *cố, ông, bà* and *chị* in the lineal consanguine set are Chinese according to Benedict (1941). However, Diffloth (1982, p.c.) says that there are cognates for *ông* throughout Bahnaric and that it might better be seen as a native form. *Anh* and *em* are neither Chinese nor Thai according to Benedict. *Con*, another lineal term meaning 'child', is definitely Mon–Khmer. Of the collateral consanguine set *bàc, cậu* and *cô* are Chinese; only *chú* is Mon–Khmer according to Benedict (1941). *Thím*, the one other affinal term in the system is also Chinese.

The borrowed forms from Chinese are not classifiers in Chinese, so their use in Vietnamese and Mường represent an innovation. The only other language in the

area with a classification system of the same style is Nung, a Tai language spoken in Vietnam, (see Saul 1965). However, the forms in question are not borrowings from Nung. The similarities are probably due to parallel developments by cultures sharing the same concerns.

Beyond the divisions based on kin metaphors, numerous other categories for humans are found in Mường and especially in Vietnamese. The different categories for humans in these two languages represent the most elaborated systems to be found in Mon–Khmer and in Austroasiatic as a whole. For example, Vietnamese and Mường have a separate classifier for children, *dươ*^{3} in Mường. It counts words like 'daughter' and 'children' and by extension, 'servant'. They both also have a form meaning 'fellow, chap, boy', *sang*^{1} in Mường and *thăng* in Vietnamese, which occurs with words for 'children' and 'boy' and often has a slightly derogatory meaning like 'urchin'.

Other classifiers for humans in Vietnamese also distinguish between respected occupations and people who are not highly valued. For example, *chàng* and *nàng* are archaic forms for respectable men and women respectively. *Tay* meaning 'hand, arm' classifies artisans. The word 'house', *nhà,* is used with monks, writers, poets and other occupations and carries with it the concept of those who live in groups or who are organized in some fashion. Some of the derogatory classifiers include ones for women of low repute who can also be counted with the animal classifier *con*. Nguyễn Đình Hoà (1957) also cites several classifiers for crooks.

A few of the classes in Vietnamese resemble those in Khmer, Mon, and Palaungic and mark religious people, royal people and other people of rank. According to Nguyễn Đình Hoà (1957), many of these forms occur in Sino-Vietnamese and, therefore, probably have their origin in Chinese. For office holders, heroes and kings, objects related to the king, and Buddhas and saints there are the following forms:

trang	for heroes
vị	for officeholders and outstanding characters
viên	for officeholders
bực/bậc	for heroes and monarchs
đúng/đấng	for heroes and monarchs
đức	for Buddhas and saints
ngự	for royal personalities and objects

Some of these forms i.e. *bực/bậc* and *vị* actually mean 'rank'. *Đức* means 'virtue' and also functions as an honorific title. *Ngự* means 'royal, imperial'.[10]

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10 *Đức* and *ngự* are given as classifiers by Cao Thi Liễu (1980), but not by Nguyễn Đình Hoà (1966).

These similar groupings among these four languages in different branches are undoubtedly independent developments as the lexical items for these classes are not related to each other. As with Khmer, we can also expect that changes in the social structure during and following the Vietnam War will have affected the structure of the Vietnamese system as it relates to social categories.

A further similarity of Vietnamese to the Khmer system is the treatment of images separate from the animates associated with them. However, the forms in Vietnamese are not especially for images as in Khmer. In Vietnamese both *con*, the classifier for animals, and *cái*, the general classifier for inanimate objects, are the forms applied to images representing animates. For example, *con* is used for kites which can represent animates and for effigies and dolls. On the other hand, *cái* is also found with the sculptures of deities.

Before concluding this section, it is important to comment upon another aspect of the elaboration of human classification which occurs in several different Austro–asiatic languages. As mentioned above for Vietnamese, Mường and Bahnar proper children may be counted separately from adults. In Viet–Mường children are in a separate class, and in Bahnar they are counted in with flat inanimates. In addition to these examples, in Pacoh and Brou [Katuic], the general human classifier *nak* is not used to count children. S. Watson (1976) notes that in Pacoh, one generally uses *lam*, the general inanimate classifier, with one's own children. On the other hand, to use *lam* with adult humans is insulting. Miller (1976, p.c.) also reports that in Brou "*lam* is characteristically used with the word *con* 'child', with *nak* being used for adult humans." In Nicobarese one also finds *manik* as a separate classifier for children. The questions of how further widespread this distinction between adults and children is and of the exact nature of the social basis for this distinction need additional data for a complete answer.

Even though concepts of rank, status and age are important in the numeral classifier phrases of several Mon–Khmer languages, the above discussion demonstrates that the elaborated systems from Palaungic, Mon, Khmer, Bahnaric and Viet–Mường differ from each other in significant ways. While these languages make distinctions along the lines of social value, the grounds for determining this value and the specific morphemes for these categories are quite different from each other. The distinct social categories represented in these systems are clearly a feature of the historical and cultural context of the various groups in the different branches of Mon–Khmer.

4. Conclusion

Becker (1975) and T'sou (1976) have both suggested that meanings of the particular classifier forms, if known, can be useful in identifying semantic dimensions *that are specific to a language family. However, the diversity of forms for human* classifiers in Mon–Khmer make patterns like those described for Burmese by Becker (1975) difficult to ascertain. Of the general human classifiers, only three are shared between branches: **kiʔ* in Palaungic and Mon, *nak* in Katuic and Kơho Sre [S. Bahnaric] and *người* in Vietnamese and Mường and North Bahnaric. The explanation for the variety of different morphemes in the Mon–Khmer subfamily

may partly be processes of lexical replacement because of taboos on the use of words resembling names of the dead and names referring to other taboo topics. When this kind of replacement occurs another native word or one from a non-Austroasiatic language may be substituted. These types of replacement have a random effect on lexical fields. Some of the variation can also be accounted for by the borrowing of classifiers specifically to function in this grammatical slot. The inventory of classifiers borrowed from Tai languages in northern and southern Khmu dialects is a notable example of this type of borrowing. The Khmu case represents a general strategy of bilingual speakers borrowing from a language with a more developed lexicon and/or with more prestige. These types of changes in the lexicon are more systematic.

While the diversity of the classifier lexicon for humans does not lead us to expect a single semantic pattern distinctive of the Mon–Khmer subfamily, interesting patterns do emerge when comparing the meanings of classifiers. Most of the classifiers for counting humans in general whose meanings can be identified refer to the species itself and are glossed as 'person', 'man', 'human being', or 'adult human'. A few of these forms are additionally glossed as 'body', 'self', or 'individual', which all give the sense of an individual unit of person. The Monglwe [Palaungic] morpheme means 'father, husband and male animal'; thus, it includes both humans and other species. The widespread *chak/chanak/nak* form in Katuic and Kơho Sre [S. Bahnaric] means 'body' and is not species specific but parallels the secondary meanings of the forms mentioned above. The only other identifiable morpheme is the one for 'person' that additionally means 'eye' in Viet–Mường and possibly in North Bahnaric.

While a discussion of non-human animate classification is outside the scope of this paper, Becker also suggests that semantic dimensions are most meaningfully identified when looked at in relation to each other. For example, in Burmese 'head' is used with relatively high status people and a form meaning 'body' is used for animals and derogatorily for humans. This latter usage is also found in Tai languages. Therefore, a comparison of the human classifiers with those for animals in Mon–Khmer might reveal some native patterns.

The Vietnamese and Mường elaborated systems for humans suggest that metaphoric extensions of kinship relationships are a semantic field that occurs in the numeral classification systems in Mon–Khmer. The Vietnamese and Mường systems have additional examples besides grandparent, aunt, uncle, and sibling mentioned above. Worthy of note is the fact that *con* meaning 'child' is the classifier for animals in these two languages. As mentioned earlier, it also is used derogatorily with women in some kinds of occupations like prostitution. (Cao [1980] claims it can be used with young males without being derogatory.) In Vietnamese some special animals such as tigers, elephants, and whales are also counted by family labels especially in proverbs and folktales. Vietnamese also has the form *nhà* which is used for groups of people and has as its origin the concept of house and also is employed in compounds for 'family'.

Other languages in Mon–Khmer show smaller, but similar patterns. In Monglwe [Palaungic], the concept of human and animal were merged in the classifier meaning 'father, husband, and male animal'. Unfortunately, only one example of how the form was employed occurred. It counted 'man'. In Lamet [Palaungic] the morpheme *kɷn* meaning 'elder, honorable person' can be found

counting buffalo, animals associated with sacrifices to ancestors. Gold Palaung [Palaungic] also uses a form meaning 'mother-seed',*kạ-mā*, to count female cows. In Central Bahnaric the classifier *bơn* is a plural counter for animals and means 'we-all' and occurs as a prefix meaning 'person and friends' in Semai [Aslian]. These examples show not only the use of kin terms in the classifier lexicon, but also the extension of the concept of humans to animals.

In a related vein, the general classifier for humans in W. Bahnaric, 'big, human adult', gives the idea of humans as adults suggesting that the metaphoric concept of child fits elsewhere, perhaps with animals as in Vietnamese. The meaning of this term also suggests that the languages in this group consider children to be outside the category of 'human'. and this may be another example of the separate treatment of children described above in Section 3. However, no specific data were available for West Bahnaric languages to prove this.

Becker's work gave a body–part metaphor as an important unifying semantic dimension for Burmese. Body–part terms also appear in branches of Mon–Khmer, but the pattern they present is different from that in Burmese. As noted above, 'body' is a secondary meaning of some of the general human classifiers and a primary meaning in the Katuic branch, thus reversing the Burmese relationship. 'Pupil of the eye' and 'eye' also occur as the meaning of an honorific for humans in Bahnar proper and as the secondary meaning, (perhaps primary), of the general human classifier in Viet–Mường and maybe North Bahnaric. While eyes are located in the head, the use of this term probably has nothing to do with the head/body: upper/lower relationship suggested for Burmese by Becker.

In Mon–Khmer languages the concept of 'head' occurs with animals rather than with humans as in Burmese. In these cases, if a speaker counts a human with the 'head' classifier, it is derogatory. In Khmer one finds *kbaːl* 'head' (borrowed from Sanskrit) used for books and other things, but also for certain kinds of animals like buffalo. In Bahnaric, one gets two different forms for 'head' used with animals. In the Central Bahnaric languages and dialects a form meaning 'head' or 'summit' is applied to bonded humans and also to animals of similar value, (see Table 6). In addition, in Chrau, Mnong Rơlơm and Mnong Gar [South Bahnaric] one finds the form *vôq*, 'head' or 'the front part of something', used for animals. It also counts slaves and is a measure for beer in Mnong Gar. Outside of the Mon–Khmer branch, some Munda languages also use 'head' to classify animals.

Other examples of numeral classifiers whose meanings supply semantic dimensions that might distinguish Mon–Khmer categories from those in other neighboring languages are not widespread. For example, the Bahnar proper classifier referring to 'handle' which counts valuable items like rifles and humans together is such an example. In Bahnar, the grouping of humans with a few other animates and inanimates of a specific marked value is of interest, but does not have appear to have exact parallels elsewhere. Many of the categories described above are borrowed and, while in cases such as Gold Palaung and Khmer there have been reinterpretations of the borrowed categories, such examples will not be as useful in demonstrating semantic dimensions that are likely to distinguish Mon–Khmer from surrounding languages. In order to do this, much fuller descriptions of the sets of items that are counted by the classifiers are needed as well as further work on sets of cognates in the family. Also comparisons to other areas of the lexicon that categorize humans might prove useful.

Appendix Mon–Khmer language sample

Khasi
- Standard Khasi
- Wār (Amwi)

Palaungic
- Lamet
- Angku
  - Angku
  - Amok
  - Monglwe
  - U
  - *Davies P'uman**
- Riang*
- Rumai
  - Gold Palaung
- Waic
  - Samtau
    - Tai loi
  - Wa–Lawa–La
    - La
    - En
    - Son
    - Wa–Kengtung
    - Wa–Lawa
    - Drage's Wa
    - Wa proper: Davies Wa, Antisdel's Wa, BibleWa, Kawa
    - Lawa: Bo Luang, Umphai, Mae Sariang

Monic
- Mon

Khmer

Pearic*
- Pear

Khmuic
- Khmu (T'eng, Yuan)
- Mal (T'in)

Bahnaric
- North Bahnaric
  - Rơngao
  - Sedang
  - Halăng
  - Jeh
  - Hrê
- East Bahnaric
  - Cua

Central Bahnaric
Bahnar proper
East dialects: Alakong, Bơnơm, Gơlar, Tolo
West dialects: Kontum, Rơngao, Jơlong
West Bahnaric
Loven
Brao
Ôi
South Bahnaric
Stieng
Central Mnong: Preh
Eastern Mnong: Rơlơm, Gar
Kơho Sre
Chrau

Katuic
Katu
Kantu (High Katu)
Brou
Pacoh
Kui

Viet–Mường
Viet
Vietnamese
Mường

*No examples of classifiers included in the data

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