CLASSIFIERS AND STANDARDISATION:
SOME SOUTH AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN COMPARISONS

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INTRODUCTION

Areal and typological treatments of Asian classifier systems have led to proposals about syntactic development of classifier constructions within specific languages and about how they may spread among languages or language families. Proposals to date have mainly focused on syntactic issues, such as word order relative to head nouns. We suggest that for a more detailed understanding of classifier evolution and spread, sociolinguistic and stylistic issues need to be considered. Among classifier systems across southern Asia stylistic norms and attitudinal factors exert pressures both for and against classifier use on given speech levels. There is a general areal pattern: toward the west classifiers are normatively devalued, traditionally occur only in vernacular speech and even there are little proliferated; toward the east they are normatively valued, occur in standard languages as well as in spoken vernaculars and are typically prolif- erated.[1]

Among Asian languages, areal patterning of numeral classifier systems has been recognised for some time. Emeneau (1956) placed importance on classifier distribution in his initial treatment of India as a 'linguistic area' and later (1965) he went on to document classifier constructions in a host of Asian lan- guages to the east. Heston (1980) has recently extended them westward into Iranian languages. Jones (1970) has described South-East Asian classifiers in particular detail, tracing not only their constructions with numerals but their interactions with deictics and other modifiers.

Classifier constructions have been linked to other linguistic features, particularly to obligatory singular-plural marking. Sanchez (1973), Greenberg (1972, 1975) and others have established this (inverse) relationship and noticed the similarity between classifiers and units of measure as used with mass nouns in languages which otherwise have obligatory plural marking. Similarities between classifiers and generic nouns can also be drawn along syntactic lines (Krupa 1978).

Although syntactic approaches to understanding areal classifier phenomena are warranted, we suggest below that semantic and sociolinguistic analysis may contribute more explanatory detail as well, particularly when we turn to inves- tigate diachronic issues and how they relate to language standardisation.

Below we document the use of classifiers in languages of the Hindi group in some detail. We find that Standard Hindi makes no use of classifiers at all (excluding measuring terms), however as one moves eastwards classifier use not only increases, but social attitudes toward classifiers shift as well. In Standard Bengali several classifiers are now normatively acceptable, but in an

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archaic Sanskritised style of Bengali they do not occur. Assamese uses upwards of a dozen classifiers with no stylistic devaluation. This general areal shift in social attitude continues into South-East Asia where, e.g. in Thai and Lao, stylistic norms actually *favour* classifiers and their proliferation, the opposite of the situation within the Hindi group. We propose then that a gradient areal shift occurs across southern Asia with respect to normative attitudes taken towards classifiers, and that such attitudes are significant in tracing syntactic change.

CLASSIFIER USE IN HINDI VARIETIES

Rather than falling into a single cluster of closely-knit forms of speech, as do for example Bengali and Gujarati dialects, the so-called Hindi dialects constitute a linguistic continuum or language group consisting of five definite subgroups. Although the genetic interrelationship of these subgroups, which are known under the geographical designations of Rajasthani, Western Hindi, Eastern Hindi, Bihari, and Pahari, cannot be denied, the lack of a single clear-cut line of linguistic descent has led to a state of fluidity that makes the drawing of language and dialect borders difficult. It is this situation which has caused a blurring along the western edge of the Hindi group where its Rajasthani subgroup merges with Gujarati and on the eastern side where some of its Bihari languages and their dialects tend to slip toward the Bengali linguistic orbit. Such conditions have meant that culture and politics have played as great a role as have purely linguistic factors in determining the limits of the Hindi group of languages.

The most important of these non-linguistic influences has been the political and cultural hegemony over the entire Hindi-speaking area for the past 800 years at least of the western section of Uttar Pradesh in general and of Delhi in particular. It was around the city of Mathura just to the south of Delhi from which Brajbhāṣā spread all over northern India as the premier vehicle for written vernacular poetry on Hindu religious themes from the 15th century or earlier to the end of the 19th. The same period saw a parallel diffusion of Urdu, which is based on the dialect of Delhi itself, as the dominant language of Islamic and secular literature and polite urban culture and interregional commerce. These trends have culminated in the present century with the rise of Urdu and its sister Standard Hindi to the status of world languages. Since Brajbhasa, Urdu, and Standard Hindi are all three Western Hindi languages and share the same or very similar grammatical features, the prestige of that subgroup has become so great that linguistic forms which are characteristic of it have come to be the criteria for polished, sophisticated speech against which all other members of the Hindi language group are measured. By the same token, those grammatical traits which are not present in Western Hindi but are found in one or more of the other subgroups of the Hindi family tend to seem inelegant and rustic - even to those who use them in their mother tongue.

One such grammatical element is the numeral classifier, which occurs in the Eastern Hindi, Bihari, and Pahari subgroups, but not in Western Hindi or Rajasthani. Of all the Hindi family subgroups it is in the Bihari that the numeral classifier reaches the height of its vigour and shows its greatest variety of forms. As we see below, this confirms the basic areal pattern of eastward classifier acceptance, with neighbouring Bengali admitting classifiers in both its literary and colloquial forms. Three languages, Maithilī, Magahī,

and Bhojpurī, have long been accepted as independent members of the Bihari sub-group. In addition to these, on the basis of linguistic, cultural and even political grounds, Nāgpurī (also called Sadānī and Sadrī) has recently begun to be seen as an independent language rather than as a variety of Bhojpurī (Tivārī 1970:88-118). The following brief survey of the present condition of these lan-guages will begin with Maithilī in the north-eastern quarter of Bihar and move through the other three on a course to the south and then to the west. Popula-tion figures for members of the Hindi group are notoriously difficult to estimate (Sinha 1973:123-124). Statistics below, based on 1971 population of the districts in the heartland of each language area (unless otherwise noted, M.I.B. 1978:409, 421, 438-439), should be taken as approximate.

Maithilī

Maithilī as the only member of the Bihari subgroup to have developed a literary tradition enjoys considerable prestige both in its own region and among scholars of Indian literature. Its position is considerably enhanced by the fact that the famous 15th century poet Vidyāpati chose it for the composition of some of his poetry (Mishra 1976:93-95). Like some of the other members of the Hindi group it has been revived as a vehicle for minor literary use in the present century. Nevertheless, it has no political status and remains primarily a village language. Maithilī is spoken mainly in the districts of Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Vaishali, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, and Saharsa in the Indian state of Bihar and in the neighbouring areas of southern Nepal. The number of Maithilī speakers at the present day could be reasonably put at about 20 million. On the north Maithilī is bordered by Nepali, on the east and south by Bengali, and on the south and west by Magahī and Bhojpurī. While as many as 12 different numeral classifiers have been listed for Maithilī (Jha 1958:353-354), the most common in written use today seems to be goṭ which is suffixed to numerical adjectives as with ek (*one*) in the following sentence (Deshmukh 1976:16):

Nāmdev ekgoṭ   sāmāsik shabd, jakar   arth   bhel nāmhi   dev achi.
*Nāmdev one-*CLF *compound word, which-of meaning is   name-*INTENSIVE *god is*
Nāmdev is a compound word the meaning of which is 'the name itself is god'.

Contrary to modern usage, old texts like the poems of Vidyāpati do not con-tain the classifier and, even as late as the last decades of the 19th century, many learned Maithilī writers preferred to suppress its use. For example, between 1883 and 1887 George Grierson produced a set of grammatical sketches of Maithilī, Magahī - which he termed 'Magadhī' - and Bhojpurī. In order to obtain illustra-tive and comparative material he asked an educated speaker of one or more dialects of each language to translate the same set of fables into his particular form of speech. The results are informative. Not a single classifier is employed by the translators of the northern Maithilī (Grierson 1883:30-38), mixed southern Maithilī-Bengali (Grierson 1887:82-89), and mixed southern Maithilī-Magadhī (Grierson 1886:88-94) versions while classifiers are used normally in the mixed Maithilī-Bengali (Grierson 1887:80-86), southern Maithilī (Grierson 1885:94-101), and mixed Maithilī-Bhojpurī (Grierson 1884:92-98) translations. Since it is unlikely that classifiers were not used at that time in speech uniformly all over the Maithilī area, the explanation seems to be that some translators were writing in a traditional literary style in which classifiers were omitted.

Magahī

Despite its being the speech of the area at the political centre of the state of Bihar - the districts of Patna, Gaya, Nalanda, Aurangabad, Nawadah, Monghyr, Hazaribagh, Girdih, and Dhandad - and the home language of some 16 million people, Magahī is the least developed of the four Bihari languages. It has a fine tradition of folklore, but possesses neither an old nor a modern written literature.

As in Bhojpurī, with which it shares a long linguistic border on the west, the usual numeral classifiers in Magahī seem to be ṭho and go placed between the numerical adjective and the noun it modifies. Again as in Bhojpurī a composite form, ego, results when go is used with ek. The following examples are taken from folk tales (Aryānī 1965, pt.1:2,13):

ek ṭho rājā halā.
one CLF *king was*
There was a king.

ego   jangal   mẽ ego   bāgh raha   halai.
one-CLF *wilderness in one*-CLF *tiger used to live*
A tiger used to live in a wilderness.

Since Magahī has never been a literary language it is not strange that Grierson's texts show no evidence of a suppression of the classifier, as for example (Grierson 1883:84):

ego   cīlh apanā   ṭhor me ēk ghõghā lēlē halai.
one-CLF *kite his-own mouth in one cockle had taken*
A kite had taken a cockle in his mouth.

Nāgpurī

To the south of Magahī and Bhojpurī, to the east of the Chattīsgarhī language of the Eastern Hindi subgroup, and to the north of the Oriya-speaking area, lies the region of the third Bihari language, Nāgpurī. Unlike most other members of the Hindi group Nāgpurī does not have a large population of native speakers. This is due to the fact that Nāgpurī functions as a lingua franca or bazaar language for intercommunication among speakers of the various non-Indo-Aryan languages of southern Bihar, among which Mundari and Kurukh (Oraon) are the most important, and between those people and immigrants from other parts of Bihar. Thus, though Nāgpurī is spoken as a second language by a great many people over the districts of Palamau (Palāmū), Ranchi, and Singhbhum, in the 1961 census only 459,143 people listed Nāgpurī as their mother tongue (Jordan-Horstmann 1969: 8-11). While Nāgpurī until the present century was never thought worthy of literary development, in the past couple of decades a small but dedicated group of writers has begun to use it for short stories, plays, poetry, and - especially among Christians - religious literature. Nāgpurī has several numeral classifiers. Go, goṭ, goṙ and ṭho are all used freely while mũṙ is restricted to use in counting cattle and khãṙ for pieces of cloth (Nowrangi 1956:32-33). This sentence illustrates the use of the numeral classifier in Nāgpurī (Navrangī 1965:51):

mor dui go beṭāman ahai.
my two CLF *sons   are*
I have two sons.

It is of interest to note that the Kurukh language, a member of the Dravidian family, which is the first language of a large portion of Nāgpurī speakers employs numeral classifiers borrowed at some time in the past from Nāgpurī or some other Indo-Aryan form of speech. The most commonly used of these borrowed classifiers are jhana, for people, and goṭang, for things. The second of these is illustrated by the following example (Grignard 1931:30-31):

en ningāge pãcegoṭang paddan   ci'idan.
I to thee five-CLF   *villages give*
I give thee five villages.

Similar borrowed classifiers are found in Malto, also a Dravidian tongue but spoken a considerable distance from Kurukh to the north-east (Das 1973:54).

Bhojpurī

The fourth Bihari language, Bhojpurī, probably has a larger number of speakers, estimated at around 32 million by 1971 figures, and certainly has a much larger geographical extent than any other member of the Hindi family except Standard Hindi and Urdu. Nevertheless, until modern times it was almost completely ignored as a literary vehicle. Today there is literary activity in Bhojpurī but it is confined to a local audience with output divided between inexpensive collections of songs meant mostly for rural people and novels, plays, poetry, and stories meant for more serious literary consideration (Upādhyāy 1972:200-376). Since Standard Hindi, in addition to being the official language of India, is the state language of both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, it does not seem very likely that there will be much variation in the status and use of Bhojpurī in the future. It will no doubt, however, continue to be the home language of most people living in the districts of Basti, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Deoriya (Devariyā), Balia, Gazipur, Varanasi, Mirzapur, and Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh and in Bhojpur, Gohtas, Siwan, Saran, Champaran, and Gopalganj in Bihar. Bhojpurī is also spoken in the strip of southern Nepal continguous with the Indian Bhojpurī-speaking districts (Lee n.d.).

During the last century and into the first two decades of the 20th century hundreds of thousands of Indian labourers settled under indenture schemes in countries outside of India. Since the largest single group of these workers, particularly in the mid 19th century when recruitment began, came from the Bhojpurī area, it is natural that a lingua franca based on Bhojpurī came to be the speech of the Indian communities in four overseas lands: Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, and Surinam. At the present time the form of Bhojpurī spoken in Trinidad is moribund and the situation of Bhojpurī in Guyana is not promising but the Bhojpurī of Mauritius and that of Surinam are not only still healthy as spoken languages but have even seen the first stirrings of literary development, in spite of the disdain which many of their own speakers feel for them.

The following sentence from a formal speech serves as an excellent example of the use of the numeral classifier in modern educated Indian Bhojpurī usage (Upādhyāy 1978:12):

Āj   se   kuch sāl   pahil Mārisas   avarū Briṭish Gāinā i   duī go
today from some years before Mauritius and   British Guyana these two CLF

desan   ke pradhān mantrī   ke mahān pad ke Bhojpurī   bhāī   log
countries of prime   minister of great office of Bhojpuri brother people

susobhit karat rahe.
were adorning.
Several years ago the high position of prime minister was filled by
(our) fellow Bhojpurī people in both Mauritius and British Guyana.

Grierson's 19th century examples of Bhojpurī show the classifier as would be expected (Grierson 1884:100-108) but it does not appear in any of the Bhojpurī folksongs which he quotes (1884:109ff).

The numeral classifier is used in colloquial Mauritian Bhojpurī as in the quotation given below from a recipe. The orthography is an informal one that is based on French which is used when Mauritian Bhojpurī is written in Roman script. The quotation also gives an idea of the degree to which Mauritian Bhojpurī has borrowed vocabulary from the Creole of Mauritius (Usha Devi 1974).

doogo   baré baré chouchou léké   oobal   ya bouille kar dihaja.
*two-*CLF *big big chouchou having- boil   or boil   do*
                                  taken (Bhojpurī (Creole
                                          word)   word)
Take two good-sized chouchou[2] and bring them to a boil.

The Bhojpurī of Surjnam, which is printed in a writing system based on Dutch spelling, also has the numeral classifier (Dihal 1976:2):

hattie   howehe djaise ekgo   ghar ke dewal.
*elephant is   like   one-*CLF *house of wall*
An elephant is like the wall of a house.

Chattīsgaṛhī

Bhojpurī and Sadānī are the two westernmost Bihari languages. Beyond them lies the territory of the Eastern Hindi subgroup. Since there is a gradual transition rather than an abrupt break between Bhojpurī and the two Eastern Hindi languages that adjoin it, Avadhī and Baghelī, and between Nāgpurī and Chattīsgaṛhī, the Eastern Hindi language to the west, many grammatical features besides the classifier are found in all five of these forms of speech. The farthest south of the Eastern Hindi dialects, Chattīsgaṛhī, is spoken by some 11 million people in the districts of Raipur, Bilaspur, Raigarh, Rajnandgaon, Durg, and Surguja in Madhya Pradesh. It is bordered on the north by Baghelī and on the west and south by Marathi and on the east, in addition to Nāgpurī, by Oriya. Chattīsgaṛhī has never been used for literary composition. As in the Bihari languages the Chattīsgaṛhī numeral classifier comes between a number and the word it modifies (Sheṣ 1973:266):

ek ṭho gobarrā kirvā rahis.
one CLF *dung   bug   was*
There was a dung beetle.

Halbī

In the Bastar and Raipur districts of Madhya Pradesh immediately to the south of the Chattīsgaṛhī area is found the interesting Halbī dialect which, though it contains some elements strongly reminiscent of Oriya and others of Chattīsgaṛhī, is usually considered to be a form of Marathi (Mukherji 1965:550-553). The Halbī use of the numeral classifier could be the result of influences

from both Chattīsgarhī and Oriya. This example is from Bastar district
(Grierson 1968, vol.7:351):

> kohīco   dui-ṭhan beṭā ralā.
> *someone-of two-CLF sons were*
> *A man had two sons.*

The Halbī usage may be particularly informative in that faint evidence for
a classifier construction involving the use of jan, *person*, when human beings are
enumerated has been noted for Marathi (Emeneau 1956:11). Thus it seems from
examples like the following sentence from Raipur district that Halbī provides
traces of a link between the classifier construction in the Indo-Aryan languages
of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and eastern India and its otherwise isolated
appearance in Marathi (Grierson 1968, 7:374):

> kāco mānuske dū-jhan putār rahlio.
> *some man-of two-CLF sons were*
> *A certain man had two sons.*

In addition to the above examples of orthodox usage of the numeral classifier
Halbī has a form for the number one which seems to consist of the classifier goṭ
prefixed to a distortion of ek (Wood 1980:150):

> goṭok bhorun rājā co des   bhorun des   āse mane.
> *one   Bhorun king of country Bhorun country is* NARRATIVE-PARTICLE
> *A king Bhorun's country is in the land of Bhorun.*

Baghelī

To the north of Chattīsgarhī is Baghelī, spoken in Madhya Pradesh in the
districts of Balaghat, Rewa, Jabalpur, Damoh, Mandla, Panna, Satna, and Shahdol
by some seven million people. Baghelī is so closely allied with Avadhī that it
cannot be said to have any literary tradition distinct from that of literary
Avadhī. The following example of the classifier is taken from a Baghelī folk
tale (Varmā 1957:45):

> o   kar tīn   ṭhun mīt   rahai.
> *him of three* CLF *friends were*
> *He had three friends.*

Avadhī

The last of the three Eastern Hindi languages to be dealt with here is
Avadhī, the written form of which was the vehicle for one of the foremost literary
streams of medieval northern India. Of the many works composed in Avadhī from
the 16th to 19th centuries without doubt the greatest, in terms of prestige,
cultural influence, and poetic perfection, are the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās and
the *Padmāvat* of Malik Muhammad Jāysī. In spite of this wonderful literary past
modern Avadhī is poor in written literature and serves as the medium of expres-
sion for only a small number of plays and poems. It is at present spoken by
around 22 million people in Uttar Pradesh. Like its sister dialect Baghelī,
Avadhī provides a linguistic bridge between the Western Hindi subgroup on its
western flank and the Bihari on the east. Consequently, many of the grammatical
forms similar to those of the Bihari languages which are still present in the

Avadhī spoken in the districts of Gonda, Faizabad, Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, and Allahabad begin to be replaced in the central districts of Lucknow, Bara Banki, Rae Bareli and Bahraich and have vanished entirely in the westerly districts of Kheri, Sitapur, Unnao, and Fatehpur. Furthermore, it is probably because of the prestige of Standard Hindi, Urdu and other varieties of Western Hindi, that both modern and pre-modern literary Avadhī and the Avadhī spoken in cities like Lucknow tend to resemble the Western Hindi languages more than those of Bihari. Although examples of the numeral classifier can be cited neither from medieval works like the *Rāmcaritmānas* nor from contemporary Avadhī verse (Trivedī 1967, 1977), instances of its use are found in a modern drama (Trivedī 1976:16, 72) and are plentiful in spoken Avadhī. According to Saksena (1937:155) the Avadhī numeral classifiers are ṭhaī, ṭhaur, and ṭhi. To these may be added ṭho as used in this example from Lucknow district:

> cārī ṭho munīm   rakkhin rahe.
> *four* CLF *accountants placed are*
> *(We) employ four accountants.*

Fiji Hindi

Indian indentured labourers began migrating to Fiji in the last quarter of the 19th century. According to immigration records the majority of these workers came from the eastern and central districts of Uttar Pradesh. While these same districts had already been supplying labourers to the sugar planta- tions of Mauritius and the West Indies for two or three decades, the Indian immigrants to those two areas in those earlier years were mainly from Bihar (Lal 1980:55-57). As a result of this shift in geographical region of origin the Indians settling in Fiji developed a variety of Hindi as their common language that is based on that form of speech characteristic of many eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh which, though it is in many ways transitional between Avadhī and Bhojpurī (Singh 1972:259-279), is generally considered to fall within the Avadhī sphere. In accordance with its Avadhī roots Fiji Hindi, which is purely a spoken language, had the numeral classifier as illustrated by the following question and its reply remembered by a speaker of Fiji Hindi from a conversation of some years ago:

> kitnā   gannā kaṭāiyā rakhā hai?
> *how many cane cutters placed are*
> *How many cane-cutters do you employ?*
>
> cār ṭhū.
> *four* CLF
> *(I employ) four.*

During this century Fiji Hindi has come increasingly under the influence of Standard Hindi. Perhaps for this reason the numeral classifier, as evidenced by R. Moag's (1977:207-285) excellent description of Fiji Hindi, has vanished from the modern usage of that language.

Nepali

It still remains to look briefly at the Pahari subgroup, the third member of the Hindi continuum in which the numeral classifier is found. Many linguists and grammarians have commented on the presence of classifiers in Nepali (Southworth

1967:3-4) and there is no doubt that they have an essential place in both written and spoken forms of that language. Among the several numeral classifiers used in Nepali are vaṭā and janā (Turner 1931:58). These two classifiers are used as in the following passages taken from two different Nepali versions of the *New Testament*:

    ... ti sātvaṭā   roṭī   ra   mācchāharu liyo ...   (BSIC 1962a:37)
        he seven-CLF bread and fishes   took
    ... *he took seven loaves of bread and the fish* ...

    ekjanā   māniskā dui chorāharū thie.   (BSIC 1961:49)
    one-CLF man-of   two sons   were
    A man had two sons.

On the other hand, the numeral classifier does not seem to be used in such western Pahari languages as the Gaṙhvālī of northern Uttar Pradesh. For example, numeral classifiers are lacking in the passages of the Gaṙhvālī translation of the *New Testament* (BSIC 1962b:51,70) that correspond to those just quoted for Nepali.

At the present time it is not possible to say whether or not the presence of the classifier in Nepali and its absence in Gaṙhvālī is in any way due to the use of the numeral classifier in Tibeto-Burman languages like Newari (Hale and Shresthacharya 1974) that have long been in intimate contact with Nepali but not with Gaṙhvālī.

Other members of the Hindi group

To the best of our knowledge the languages which have just been discussed are the only members of the Hindi group which make use of the numeral classifier. That this list is not final and that a still wider geographical extent for the use of the classifier in Hindi may be revealed by future research is indicated by two tantalising bits of further evidence. First is the use, as seen in the following sentence, of the classifier ṭho in a Hindi form of speech surviving in the Khulna district of Bangladesh (Mitra 1965:374):

    ek-ṭhō pīthā aggū-k bhittī pari gayā.
    one-CLF cake   fire-of inside fell
    A cake fell into the fire.

Of course, it is not very peculiar to find the numeral classifier in an isolated form of Hindi surrounded by Bengali speakers for several generations, but this usage would prove to be much more intriguing if, as seems to be the case, this language stems from a source in the Western Hindi subgroup (Mitra 1965:372-373) which possesses the ṭho classifier found in Avadhī and Bhojpurī.

The second bit of information comes from the Andaman Islands. There an elderly Great Andamanese resident of Strait Island used the same numeral classifier in the following Hindi sentence:

    ghar   mẽ bahot murgī, koī koī sabjī   naī ai ek   ṭho ek   ṭho kāṭṭa ai.
    house in many   hens   any any vegetable not is one CLF one CLF cut
    There are lots of chickens in the house. If there are no vegetables,
    then (we) kill (them) one by one.

The Strait Island people now use Standard Hindi in daily life in place of their native languages. The appearance of the classifier in the Hindi which they speak may be an influence from the speech of a Bihari man from Ranchi who

has lived among the two dozen or so Strait Islanders as a member of their community for many years.   In any event, its presence in the Andaman Islands bears witness to the vitality of this grammatical feature in some spoken forms of Hindi.

The origin and use of the classifier in Bhojpurī

Although there is as yet no single guide for the use of the classifier in those Hindi languages, as a group, in which it occurs, it is possible to indicate some general characteristics of the place of the classifier in one of them, Bhojpurī.   In etymology the Maithilī numeral classifier goṭ is probably cognate with the classifier goṭā in Oriya, Assamese, and Bengali and related, as R.L. Turner (1963, fasc.3:229) holds, to the Standard Hindi noun goṭ *a chess (or gaming) piece*, the Marathi noun goṭā *a roundish stone*, and the Oriya adjective goṭā *whole, undivided*.   The root meaning has to do with roundness.   It seems reasonable to connect the Bhojurī go with goṭ, though this derivation has been denied by U.N. Tiwari (1960:120).   Ṭho presents a greater problem and no acceptable origin has been suggested, though it is attractive to look for some connection with the common Bengali classifier ṭā.   It is even possible that a search through the ancestry of ṭā might lead back toward goṭ and goṭā.   All such inquiries are limited by the fact that numeral classifiers do not exist in Sanskrit or the Prakrits and cannot be traced further back in Indo-Aryan speech than the earliest written remains of Bengali and its sister languages.   Moreover, while in Bengali and Assamese and to a lesser extent in Maithilī and Nāgpurī (Gosvāmī 1976:57) specific classifiers may be assigned to objects of a particular form or nature, in Bhojurī go or ṭho can be used with a person or an object of any size or shape.   Whatever reference to roundness may once have been implied has been lost.   In meaning there is no difference between go and ṭho and the two classifiers are used by some speakers interchangeably.   Other speakers, however, feel that one or the other of the two is favoured in particular localities and go definitely predominates in the Bhojurī of Trinidad (Mohan 1978:70), Surinam (Huiskamp 1978:191), and Mauritius (Domingue 1971:60,62).

A comprehensive attempt to set out guidelines governing the use of the Bhojurī classifier has been made by P.R. Mohan (Mohan 1978:70-75) whose findings, which while intended for the Bhojurī of Trinidad are equally applicable to all forms of Bhojurī, can be summarised with examples of usage from India as well as Mauritius and Trinidad as follows:

(1) Attributive numerical adjectives are usually, but not always, followed by the classifier.

(2) The classifier occurs with a numerical adjective if the noun modified is understood but not expressed, as in this sentence given by a speaker from Saran district, Bihar:

> chauṭho ke   apanā   sāthe lete jā.
> *six*-CLF OBJECT MARKER *oneself with   take go*
> *Take six (of them) away with you.*

(3) A number acting as an attributive within numeral compounds like tīn sau and ēk hajār, *three hundred* and *one thousand* respectively, does not take the classifier (Mohan 1978:71).   To this rule can be added the corollary that the classifier is not used after the numbers above 100, perhaps because they are all compounds.   The other numbers up to and including 100 - as long as 100 is expressed by the single word sai and not the compound ek sai - may take the classifier as in these examples from Saran district:

rājā sai go hāthī   pos le bāran.
king 100 CLF *elephants has care for*
The king keeps 100 elephants.

rājā caurāsī go bāhman ke   khiavalan.
king 84   CLF *brahmans* OBJECT MARKER *fed*
The king fed 84 brahmans.

(4) The classifier is not employed with a number used as mathematical symbol (Mohan 1978:71):

das ā pãc hai panarā, nā?
ten and five are 15   no
Ten and five make 15, don't they?

(5) Numbers modifying days, weeks, hours, and other measurements of time do not take the classifier, as is illustrated by this sentence from a Mauritian story in which the classifier is used after the number modifying an ordinary noun but not after the number modifying a time expression (Naubatsingh 1979:18):

ūhī   gãvvā mẽ ek din ego   pandit āil.
*that-INTENSIVE SUFFIX village in one day one-*CLF *pundit came*
One day a pundit came into that village.

(6) A number designating a quantity of money does not take the classifier unless the intention is to refer to the individual coins or notes (Mohan 1978:72):

burhwā ke   das kāpā dehlī.
old man OBJECT MARKER *ten cents gave*
(I) gave the old man ten cents.

burhwā ke   das gō kāpā   dehlī.
old man OBJECT MARKER *ten* CLF *cent-coins gave*
(I) gave the old man ten one-cent coins.

(7) As with money, numbers used with units of weight and measurement do not take the classifier, unless of course those units are being treated as entities in themselves (Yādav 1973:1):

ehī   ek mīl caurāī ā das mīl lambāī mẽ Jagdevã ke
that-INTENSIVE SUFFIX one mile width and ten mile length in Jagdevã of

jamīn pare le.
land fell
In that space one mile wide by ten miles long, lay Jagdevã's field.

(8) In order to give a distributive sense Bhojpurī, like all forms of Hindi, reduplicates numbers. Such reduplicated numbers do not take classifiers (Yādav 1973:62):

mahanth   jī   ke ek-ek bāt unkā kān mẽ hamesā gũjat   rahe.
chief priest HONORIFIC *of one-one word their ears in always resound kept on*
Every single one of the words of the chief priest kept on ringing in their ears.

The sentence quoted above from the Andamans, ek tho ek tho kātta ai (*we kill them one by one*), is not an exception to this rule but rather the proof of it since the use of the classifier gives the meaning that the chickens will be killed one by one, separately. The absence of the classifier would have given the sense that every single chicken would be killed.

(9) Mohan's rule that two numbers used together to indicate an indefinite quantity do not take the classifier is generally but not always true in Indian Bhojpurī. Her example shows the usage without the classifier (Mohan 1978:62):

> āth   das lakr̄ī kāphī hoī.
> *eight ten sticks enough may be*
> *Eight or ten sticks of wood should be enough.*

On the other hand, an Indian Bhojpurī novel shows this usage with a classifier (Yādav 1973:64):

> chav sāt   go nokar   daural āke   sab   sāmān   hāth se le lihalē.
> *six seven CLF servants ran   having come all   luggage hand by took*
> *Six or seven servants ran up and took up the luggage in their hands.*

(10) The numeral classifier is not used with fraction forms other than der̄h *one and a half*, and ḍhāı̃ *two and a half*.

(11) The numeral classifier, as is shown by the following two Indian Bhojurī sentences, is not used with ordinal and aggregative numbers:

> pahilā bāt   ta   ī   bā je   eh   Mahābhārat mē Kr̥ṣṇajī ...
> *first   matter well this is that this Mahābhārat in Kr̥ṣṇa-HONORIFIC*
> *Well, in the first place in this Mahābhārat Krishna ...*
>   (Yādav 1973:66)

> hot   bihān dosarā dine   cāro   bhāī   āpan-āpan   jarūrī
> *being morning second day-on all-four brothers one's own one's own necessary*

> samān   le   ke   ghar se   calale lāge.
> *luggage having taken house from went   began*
> *Just at morning on the second day all four brothers gathered up the*
> *things they needed and set out.*   (Vimal n.d.:64)

(12) Finally, when an attributive number occurs before other adjectives modifying the same noun, the number followed by the classifier comes first in the series (Ojhā 1971:35):

> ego   āur   cīj   le   calı̃ jā.
> *one-CLF other thing take move go*
> *Take away one other thing.*

To Mohan's rules as listed above may be added a number of other observations that can be made about the use of the classifier in Bhojurī. As will have been noted from the various examples already given the classifier may occur with a number modifying any noun, regardless of whether that noun is masculine or feminine or represents a person or a thing. The classifier is also used in phrases with abstract nouns, but not with numbers in fixed compounds like ek sāth *together* (Dhurandhar 1979:4):

> dugo   dukh   ek sāth.
> *two-CLF sorrows one together*
> *Two sorrows (came) together.*

Due to the constraints of metre, rhyme, and rhythm, the numeral classifier seems to occur less often in Bhojurī verse than in prose and speech. In some instances, as in the following line taken from a Bhojurī wedding song from Surinam, it is difficult to find any explanation except poetic licence for the absence of the expected classifier after the numbers (Arya 1968:24-25):

> pāca pāna   nau narivaral jai sarage   bāṭyau dẽutā pittara ...
> *five betel-leaves nine coconuts who heaven-in are   gods fathers*
> *Five betel leaves and nine coconuts, you who are in heaven, gods and*
> *ancestors ...*

Inverted word order may be responsible for the lack of classifiers in this line of a satirical poem (Bhakt n.d.:8):

> Hind mẽ gul   nayā ek khilal,   pārṭī cār ek mẽ milal.
> *India in flower new one blossomed party four one in met*
> *In India a new flower has blossomed, four parties have melded into one.*

Even so, the classifier often appears in poetry exactly as it does in normal prose usage (Bhakt n.d.:37):

> naihar   mẽ das go bhaiyvā bāṛe.
> *mother's-house in ten* CLF *brothers are*
> *There are ten brothers in my mother's house.*

When asked about the function of the classifier most Bhojpurī speakers respond that it gives a feeling of definiteness or emphasis to the number with which it is used, a view which harmonises especially well with the two rules given by Mohan which we have labelled (6) and (7) above. Further corroboration for this interpretation might be seen in the Nāgpurī practice of placing the particle go, goṭ, goṛ, or ṭho (the same particles that are used as classifiers) after a noun to give a nuance of definiteness, emphasis, or disrespect, e.g. chauvā ṭho *the child (in question)*, and janī go *the woman (disrespectful)* (Nowrangi 1956:32). Nevertheless, examples can be given in which the presence or absence of a numeral classifier appears to have little to do with definiteness and the function of the classifier cannot be so simply explained.

CLASSIFIER USE IN EASTERN MODERN INDO-ARYAN

In the easternmost Indo-Aryan languages stylistic constraints on classifiers differ considerably from the Hindi situation discussed above. In both written and spoken forms of Modern Bengali, Oriya and Assamese classifiers are not only acceptable but virtually obligatory. Furthermore, their use is not confined to numerical expressions. Discourse and contextual features such as definiteness and indefiniteness are typically indicated by classifier expressions, and related interactions with deictic forms are also common.

Bengali

In modern standard Bengali indefinite reference is regularly indicated through the formula aek (*one*) + classifier + noun; definite reference, by noun + classifier:

> aek-khana boi   *a book*
> boi-khana   *the book*

where khana classifies boi *book* (hyphens are used to suggest the unstressed post-clitic character of classifiers in these constructions).

The assignment of specific classifiers to nouns in these languages is quite flexible and is best seen as a communicative resource available to speakers to convey certain stylistic nuances, thus:

> boi-khana   *the book* (thinking of the slab-like physical object)
> boi-ṭi   *the book* (the nice little one)
> boi-ṭa   *the book* (the big boring volume I must read)

Similarly, jon, ṭi, or ṭa may classify people, depending somewhat on attitude, although the first is normatively preferred for the written language.

The Bengali classifiers ṭi and ṭa seem to reflect wider Indo-Aryan phenomena where what were previously morphological endings to show a grammatical masculine-feminine distinction have become reanalysed as a rather vague semantic opposition between small-nice-likeable and large-coarse-devalued (cf. Oriya ghadi-ṭi *the watch*; ghadi-ṭa *the clock*; Tripathi 1959).

The classifier khana raises special questions. Many speakers of Calcutta Bengali accept it for portable, hand-sized items, such as books, bottles, plates, pictures, lamps, etc. but may feel it 'dialectal' for other larger items. The taxa acceptable for this classifier appear to increase through Bangladesh Bengali varieties and in Assamese the classifier (now pronounced khɔn) is normal not only for small items but also for boats and for local expanses such as shops and markets. More problematic is the fact that in Calcutta Bengali a 'double classifier' construction is occasionally heard:

> boi-khana-ṭi *the book* (the actual volume referred to)

The order is specified as above, and this leads one to speculate that a realignment of the classifier form class may be occurring.

The evolution of these forms from nominals in earlier Bengali has been discussed by Chatterji (1926), and it is an interesting confirmation of the Sanchez-Greenberg observation that the use of classifiers appears to have been stronger as obligatory plural-marking became weaker.

In archaic Sanskritised varieties of Bengali classifiers are not used even though they may well have been common in ordinary speech. Vivid confirmation of this occurs in Kṛṣṇadās Gosvāmī's *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, a 16th century work at the apogee of the Sanskritised style of Bengali. A careful perusal of the verses of this biography of the Hindu saint Caitanya has failed to turn up even one classifier either in the poet's descriptive verses or in the conversations of Caitanya with his followers. On the other hand, classifiers appear in the quoted speech of people expected to use a non-Sanskritic, purely colloquial type of language. For example, a Muslim Pathan soldier says to Caitanya (Bhaktivedanta 1975, vol.7:220-221):

> "ei   ṭhak   cāri-jana"
> *these rogues four*-CLF
> *"(Here are) these four rogues."*

Caitanya's reply has no classifier:

> "ei   cāri dayā kari   karena pālana"
> *these four mercy having done do   maintenance*
> *"These four (men) by their mercy maintain (me)."*

Kṛṣṇadās Gosvāmī's attitude toward the classifier harmonises very well with the inclination to suppress the classifier already noted for literary forms of Maithilī, up to and including the 19th century, and Avadhī, at all periods. In any event, in modern literary Bengali, as well as in colloquial forms, the classifiers ṭi and ṭa (or khana, jon, gachha, goṭa, than, etc.) are not only acceptable but syntactically obligatory, and certainly to be considered part of the modern standard language.

Although origins are not always clear for these forms, they appear to be derived from Indo-Aryan nominals. The forms ṭi and ṭa, for example, perhaps come from guṭi *small round object* (Chatterji 1926:779).

Assamese

In Assamese, Kakati (1941) and Goswami (1968) suggest that classifiers occur to a limited extent in the first 14th century Assamese documents, and both increase in syntactic functions and proliferate lexically over a period of some six centuries. The following examples suggest the scope of classifiers in present-day Assamese:

(a)	tini bati pani	*three cups of water*
(b)	tini gɔsi huta	*three pieces of thread*
(c)	tini gɔs zɔri	*three pieces of string*
(d)	tini dal rosi	*three pieces of rope*
(e)	tini dal pensil	*three pencils*
(f)	tini khɔn kapor	*three pieces of cloth*
(g)	tini khɔn nao	*three boats*
(h)	tini khɔn bɔzar	*three markets*
(i)	tini khɔni gamosa	*three towels*
(j)	tini zopa am	*three mango trees*
(k)	tini ti am	*three mangoes*
(l)	tini ti lora	*three (nice) boys*
(m)	tini ta lora	*three (not-so-nice) boys*
(n)	tini ti kɔlɔh	*three (small) jars*
(o)	tini ta kɔlɔh	*three (larger) jars*
(p)	tini ta goru	*three cows*
(q)	tini ta bhikhari	*three beggars*
(r)	tini zɔni sowali	*three girls*
(s)	tini zɔn xɔkhi	*three (respected) friends*
(t)	tini gɔraki mɔhila	*three (respected) women*
(u)	tini zɔna rɔza	*three (very respected) kings*

Example (a) shows the parallel between measures and proper classifiers (b-u). An interesting feature of Assamese classifiers, particularly in more literary varieties, is the assignment of the quasi-feminine ending -i as a dimunitive formative (cp. (b,c); (h,i); (r,s)). The set zɔn, zɔni, zɔna is somewhat skewed: the first term refers respectfully to human males of normal rank; the second, to female animals or disrespectfully to human females; the third, deferentially to high-status humans of either sex. Another classifier gɔraki can be applied with respect to humans of either sex. Finally, either ti or ta may occur with non-respected humans, with ti indicating a measure of endearment, e.g. of a small child; cf. Bengali above.

In some cases numbers themselves behave syntactically as classifiers. Thus in Assamese:

du   zɔn manuh
two CLF *person*   *two men*

but: du xɔ   manuh
     two hundred person   *two hundred men*

One presumes this is similar to expressions like 'two pairs' or 'three score'. (Note also that in Burmese certain changes in normal order are required when this

collective use of numerals occurs (Haas 1951:195). It may be noted here also
that Thai and Chinese have a special classifier for one of items usually coming
in pairs.) Assamese is similar to Bengali in that for the modern language, both
in its standardised literary form and in its colloquial varieties, classifiers
are not only tolerated but are in many cases syntactically obligatory. The lan-
guages also agree in having somewhat tenuous systems of plural marking, in many
situations optional. Thus classifiers, in addition to their use in enumerative
expressions, have the function of marking specific singulars, as we see below.

The presence of classifiers in considerable numbers in Assamese and in more
modest or marginal terms in Indo-Aryan languages to the west raises the possibil-
ity that somehow classifiers have entered Indo-Aryan from the east, and their use
is spreading westwards. Emeneau (1956, 1965) cites versions of this argument
suggested by Sir George Grierson, and the 1934 speculation of Bloch which went
so far as to implicate 'substratum influence' from Tai (Emeneau (1956:11).
Bloch's suggestion is couched in rather vague terms, but it deserves careful
attention in view of the social history of Assam.

According to local historical accounts, the Ahom and Assamese buranjis
(Barua 1930), the Tais entered the Brahmaputra valley in the mid 13th century
and gradually established control over some of what is now Assam. In spite of
lack of critical scholarship, the main lines of Tai-Ahom history in the buranjis
appear to be in general accord with what is known about Tai migrations and social
organisation elsewhere. From the earliest recorded evidence and from comparative
reconstruction, Tais have arranged themselves in a social hierarchy with a king/
chief overseeing a local aristocracy with titles like khŭn and thân. The
buranjis indicate another common situation, that of Tai overlords with people
of other ethnic groups, in various subservient feudal relationships. In the 16th
century the Tai-Ahoms came into conflict with Muslim Bengalis and at the same
time began to assimilate with Hindu Assamese, who had had a kingdom in Kamarupa
in Western Assam. Gradually the dominant Tai-Ahoms took over Assamese for daily-
life purposes, leaving the Tai-Ahom language for ceremonial and literary purposes.
This situation continued until the British annexed the Tai-Ahom kingdom in 1826
(Phukan 1964).

Earlier stages of Assamese and Tai-Ahom perhaps exerted influences on each
other through partially bilingual populations. A socially dominant group 'mis-
pronouncing' or otherwise modifying another language can set norms for a favoured
speech style, which is then imitated by lower-strata native speakers, spreading
the innovations throughout the speech community. In the case of modern Assamese
phonology, such a model could account for the merger of dental and retroflex
consonants in a compelling way, since this is exactly the type of merger one
would predict for Tais attempting to speak early Assamese.

One would be tempted, on the basis of observations like those above, to
follow Bloch in attributing Assamese classifiers to a borrowing process. The
problem is that on careful examination three difficulties arise from the lin-
guistic facts.

(1) Of the common contemporary Assamese classifiers (zɔn, zɔni, zɔna, to, ta,
ti, khɔn, khɔni, sola, soli, dal, dali, zopa, zupi, gɔs, gɔsi, gɔraki, pat, khila,
sita, and sɔta) none has a direct Tai cognate; rather several have Indo-Aryan
cognates. On the other hand, there are a good number of Tai-Ahom loans into
Assamese (Barua and Phukan 1964:203-205), and one would expect that if numeral
classifier constructions were being borrowed, at least a few actual forms would
be borrowed as well. For example, the Dravidian languages Malto and Kurukh as
mentioned above have borrowed nearly all of their classifier forms from

neighbouring Indo-Aryan nouns (Emeneau 1956:13). Note also widespread borrowing of forms in South-East Asia (below).

(2) The Assamese word order normal for counting is the reverse of Tai-Ahom order (Phukan 1971).

(3) A cognate of the Assamese classifier for humans (zɔn, etc.) occurs in Nepali as a classifier and was also borrowed from Nāgpurī into Kurukh as we have seen above; there is a similar use in Marathi. Also, above we have shown that cognates of ti, ta, to occur far to the west of the Magadhan area. An Assamese origin for these forms cannot be entirely ruled out, but in view of the wide areal spread and the comparatively short period of time involved, it seems improbable.

Another indirect but perhaps more conclusive objection involves general morphological complexity in Assamese. Although like other modern Indo-Aryan languages it has greatly simplified earlier inflexional patterns, it has retained a half dozen case endings (the actual forms are not necessarily conservations) and a fairly extensive verbal morphology. A language contact situation conducive to wholesale importation of classifiers would be expected to lead to morphological simplification in the same way. If Tai-Ahom speakers were doing a poor job of keeping their Assamese free of Tai-Ahom influences, one would perhaps look to morphological simplification even before such 'peripheral' changes as initiating the use of classifiers for counting.

A better approach might lie in seeing how language contact conditions could amplify and elaborate structural tendencies already present before contact. Above we have reverted to discussing classifiers in terms of their counting function only. At this point we recall that in Assamese they also serve to indicate distinctions such as definiteness/indefiniteness. (Some examples below are suggested by G. Goswami (1968) where further illustrations may be found.)

(a)	manuh ahise	*(person/come) A person has come.*
(b)	mɔi kitap pariso	*(I/book/read) I am reading a book.*
(c)	manuh-zɔn ahise	*(person/CLF/come) The man has come.*
(d)	mɔi kitap-khɔn pariso	*(I/book/CLF/read) I am reading the book.*
(e)	bhal-zɔn	*(good/CLF) The good one (of a man).*
(f)	tini khɔn kitap pɔrhilo	*I have read three books.*
(g)	kitap tini khɔn pɔrhilo	*I have read the three books (mentioned).*

A 14th century A.D. text in an Indo-Aryan variety close to the Magadhi Apabhramsa taken to be the ancestor of Assamese, Bengali and Oriya has been described by U. Goswami (1966). Among the features illustrated are ancestors of the modern Assamese forms khɔn and apparently ti used as postposed particles to indicate definiteness (p.204). A resource of this sort was perhaps felt necessary since Assamese was undergoing a good deal of readjustment in nominal morphology. Old cases merged, the original means of marking singular and plural fell out of use, and new post-positions began to take on the functions of the distinctions being lost. In particular, the ending -e was problematic. Former instrumental, locative and nominative singulars, and also nominative-accusative plurals all underwent phonological leveling and fell together in -e (Chatterji 1926:739-751). In Bengali the plural function as an obligatory category was lost, however the -e, now becoming obsolete, retained a generic-indefinite flavour. A different situation occurred in Assamese, where a strong tendency toward ergativity (associated with instrumental-case actor with past participles, later extended) took the -e in a different semantic direction. It is quite tempting to speculate that it was this ergative development of the -e ending that required a compensatory

means of definite/indefinite marking. It is perhaps this use of 'classifiers' that we first see in the old texts, although more research in this area is needed. If this was indeed the case, then Assamese was 'prone' for internal reasons to develop classifiers for definite-marking, and in fact several were in use before contact with Tai-Ahom. It happens that the definite-marking structure had the same constituent order as Tai-Ahom classifiers used for the same purpose. It was therefore rather natural for Tais learning to speak Assamese to proliferate somewhat the items typically occurring in classifier position. Later the present system of optional plural markings, all innovations, was added, and perhaps as a back-formation an old Indo-Aryan masculine/feminine distinction in -a/-ī (or consonant/-ī) was applied to the classifiers to cross-categorise taxa along a 'large-small' dimension as well as whatever semantic core originally characterised the particular classifier. Perhaps the human classifier zɔn (zɔna), zɔni, which can be traced back to Prakrit or Sanskrit jan, jani, served as the impetus. Finally, in the definite postpositional construction the classifiers have become more and more 'grammaticalised' and now phonologically they are essentially post-clitics. In fact certain case endings now can occur suffixed to the noun + classifier unit.

Although details of classifier development in Assamese and the evolution of classifiers in Eastern Indo-Aryan in general remain problematic, in terms of synchronic conditions these languages clearly occupy a pivotal position. As one moves to the west, classifiers decrease in number and in normative acceptability, until one reaches standard Hindi and its associated western dialects where they do not occur at all (apart from in measuring expressions, which are undoubtedly universal). In the following sections we move to the east, where classifiers increase in number, in syntactic function and in normative and stylistic evaluation.

South-East Asia

All of the standardised national languages of mainland South-East Asia admit classifiers into normatively sanctioned registers, including literary styles. In addition, most of the other indigenous but non-standard languages spoken in the area are described as having classifiers, but rarely more than a dozen. Classifier usage is probably most developed and most sensitive to language norms in modern standard (Bangkok) Thai, followed closely by Vietnamese. Standard forms of Lao and Burmese would follow along, and finally standard Malay and Khmer, in which classifiers in common use are rather limited in number, where classifier use is optional and is not apparently of very great significance in normative issues.

Chinese and other East Asian languages will be mentioned below along with South-East Asian ones for relevant comparisons.

For Thai, questions of normative classifier usage have been dealt with elsewhere (see Diller, this volume). Thai by Haas's count (1942) has some 80 or 90 classifiers which are 'proper' (i.e. not general measures), and in most cases the standard normative language specifies a maximal system (as opposed to a simplified one in colloquial speech).

It is convenient to differentiate lexico-semantic and syntactic issues in classifier usage. Below we look at each of these with some attention to diachronic development, since this helps to make clear the scope of normative importance.

LEXICO-SEMANTIC ISSUES

For a given 'classifier language', it is valid to pose the following three questions: how cohesive and well-defined are the semantic fields associated with classifiers; to what extent do these semantic fields arrange themselves into some higher-order configuration, hierarchical or otherwise; how firm is the assignment of any particular noun to a single classifier category? Some consideration of the types and degrees of pliability in classifier systems is necessary if diachronic or comparative questions are to be dealt with effectively.

Most South-East Asian classifiers appear to have a semantic core which to a greater or lesser extent controls the field of application. Thus Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Burmese all have classifiers centring on long, strip-like items, rigid stick- or bar-like items, and flat sheet-like items, although in some cases these fields are further subdivided (Hla Pe 1965; Nguyen 1957). In general, the more an object conforms to the focal criteria of the classifier, the more probable is its assignment to the class. Similarly, in the case of Assamese, Burmese, Thai and Vietnamese human classification, people are sorted into categories on the basis of respect, supernatural power or similar attributes firmly grounded in specific cultural attitudes; the more an individual is a 'good example' of the focal core of a given classifier, the more likely that classifier will be used in categorisation. For Buddhist monks and similar cases there may be rather definite formal criteria which delimit a class strictly; but in other cases, such as Assamese human classifier decisions based on respect due, there may be more of a continuum involved with the possibility of selectional quandary and conflict (Becker 1975; Haas 1951). The issue to be emphasised is that variation occurs in the 'strength' of focal criteria, both among classifiers within a given language, and among classifiers (perhaps with similar criteria) as they become involved in cross-language comparisons.

Also, there is frequent break-down in semantic cohesion, at least as such appears perhaps naively from the outside. Two of the most frequently-used classifiers in Vietnamese are cái, for inanimate objects, and con, for non-human animals. However Nguyen (1957:127,144) points out that for purposes of classifier choice ants, bees, lice and most small insects are 'inanimate', whereas more-or-less useful human constructions like roads, dams, boats and knives are 'animals', as are certain types of humans such as gamblers. The Thai 'animal' classifier tua takes in inanimate objects with arm-like, leg-like or tail-like appendages, but also optionally cigarettes, nails, playing cards, numerals and alphabetic letters (it must be noted that the latter in Thai have heads and occasionally tails). The Thai classifier bay, also a noun meaning *leaf*, categorises leaf-like name cards and tickets but also round items like fruits, hats and pillows, and virtually all portable containers such as bottles, jars, wallets, purses, suitcases and even moveable storage cabinets and wardrobes. The taxa of the Thai classifier lêm are even more varied: knives, combs, books, candles and oxcarts, yet lêm is by no means a 'general classifier'.

A 'general classifier' is used in some languages when a specific one is deemed inapplicable. Chinese gè is used for a great collection of items from human to inanimate objects, and the situation is similar in upland South-East Asian languages. Malay buah is nearly as broad, but excludes humans. Burmese khú applies to inanimate objects not otherwise classified as well as to abstract entitles. Thai 'an refers to otherwise uncategorised physical inanimates, usually small. Other marginal examples of classifier languages, such as Khmer, lack a general classifier and instead simply count residue nouns directly with no classifier at all.

It is not impossible to locate conflict in classifier assignment. In Malay, houses appear to vary in classifier from buah, the more general term to tangga and pìntu. Coconuts also show variation. In Burmese, knives can either go with pens and spoons as long-handled implements (chàun) or they can go into a less well-defined class with weapons, musical instruments and actors and actresses (lɛ'; note that the latter are also exceptional in Thai). In Classical Chinese conflicts are reported for peaches and snakes, with the former being classified now as a fruit, now as a round object, and the latter now as an animal, now as a string-like object (Schafer 1948:410). Function may intrude into selection. In Zhuang, the Tai language of Guangxi, the noun *stone* (rin$_1$) is classified with kon$_2$, dak$_3$ or kay$_5$ depending on whether it is potentially useful (e.g. for making a wall), useless or neutral. The classifier for *wood* (máay) would vary in Thai in a similar way.

Thus it is misguided to represent South-East Asian classifier assignment as an automatic syntactic process similar to gender agreement rules in European languages. The tendency to reduce classifier selection to a neat one-classifier-per-noun mapping makes the systems appear too 'grammatical' and ignores important semantic and sociolinguistic determinants. Lehman (1979:165) has criticised Burling's (1965) overly rigid taxonomy for Burmese classifiers, and similar argu-ments could be brought against Hiranburana's (1979) scheme for Thai classifiers, which forces data into tree diagrams on the basis of problematic distinctive features. T'sou (1976) and Lehman (1979) have gone far in elucidating the more comprehensive quantificational background from which classifiers, narrowly defined, stand out as one semantic strategy among other related ones. But even taking proper classifiers as a limited subset apart, it is hardly likely that classifi-cation based on rigid separation of categories could succeed for South-East Asian languages. A better approach lies in the 'well-defined centre and vague bound-ary' analysis of Japanese classifiers by Denny (1979), which can explain why certain nouns do in fact have nearly invariant classifiers while others do not. Dixon's (1982:226ff) survey of classifier semantics is especially revealing in this regard. See also Conklin 1981.

It is important to emphasise semantic pliability and a degree of flux in classifier assignment in Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, etc. since this is one point at which speech-level and other sociolinguistic issues impinging on standard-isation and norm become important. Thus in Thai while there is a single common noun *egg* (khày), there are three classifiers (lûuk, bay, fɔɔng) available to distinguish speech-level. Both speech-level and accorded deference enter into human classifier assignment in Burmese, Thai and Khmer (see below). For Burmese, Becker (1975) has gone on to propose that a wide range of socio-cultural factors and values are mirrored in classifier assignment. Clearly changing social con-ditions are responsible for shifts in classifier lexico-semantics, particularly where speech-level factors are introduced.

For Chinese, Khmer, Burmese and Thai it is safe to say that in terms of actual forms used and semantic dimensionality of particular items the changes over a thousand year period or so have been sweeping.

Chinese, which during the Tang period had a rather proliferated system, has drastically compressed many former separate categories into a single general term gè. Few of the Tang forms survive as modern classifiers, although most survive as nouns. Thus rén was formerly a classifier for humans (e.g. nú èr rén *slave/two*/CLF, *two slaves*) but rén in the modern language is a noun in turn requiring the general classifier to count in (yī gè rén *one*/CLF/*person, one person*). The Tang classifier méi, originally a noun meaning *stalk* or *trunk*,

used to classify rings, beads, fruits, containers, mats, statues, rats, crabs and elephants. Although méi is still available as a classifier in modern Chinese, it has surrendered most of its taxa to gè (Schafer 1948:409-410).

The Tang proliferation stands in contrast both to an earlier system where classifiers were rarely used at all, and to the modern normative language, where usage is widespread but confined to fewer more generalised items. Probably the richer Tang system is partly an artefact of the texts used to represent it. Poets may have seized on classifier variation as a resource to create imagery or even to cope with the intricate constraints of Tang regulated metrics. The everyday language of common people may have made do with a simpler system.

A similar situation can be seen in Burmese. David Bradley (personal communication) has observed that early inscriptions used a semantically simple classifier system, with khú, a general classifier, occurring for a wide variety of taxa. Hla Pe (1965) has suggested that under the influence of Buddhist translations from Pali into Burmese, new classifiers were introduced and the system proliferated. This is somewhat odd, since Pali does not have classifiers per se, and Hla Pe does not suggest the exact classifier-creating mechanism. (Perhaps it involved the need to render into Burmese the ubiquitous Pali definite pronominal eso, esa, etam *he, this, the*, etc.) If Hla Pe is correct, then Burmese classifier proliferation was mainly a literary activity of monastery and court, and we can suppose that common uneducated people continued to use the basic simpler system in their daily speech.

Bradley also notes that there is a tendency in the more colloquial language to use a single classifier for all humans (jau'), one for all animals (kaun), and, as in the early inscriptions, to use a general inanimate classifier (khú) for a wide variety of taxa, which might be separately classified in normatively 'correct' or literary styles. Thus we see clearly for Burmese that impetus for lexico-semantic growth in classifiers comes from 'above' as a literary superimposition. The problem for modern normative standardisation is how much influence to accord to this literary vehicle and how much to follow popular usage and colloquial speech.

A clearer case of borrowed classifiers associated with elevated language levels involves Thai and Khmer, although it is not always completely certain who borrowed from whom and when. Official contacts, court documents and general patterns of cultural borrowing indicate Khmer-to-Thai loans from about the 13th or 14th centuries, and the reverse afterwards, but comprehensive research has yet to be done. The following classifiers are shared by the languages, with close to the same semantic taxa.

khûu	pairs
phanàek	divisions of an organisation
chabàp	letters, documents
chàak	dramas
chút	sets of dishes, board games, etc.
dâam	long implements
talàp	small jars (as a measure)
phàen	sheets
pháp	bolts of cloth
wong	rings
sǎay	ropes, roads, rivers
fǔung	flocks

(Forms are cited in Thai; Khmer ones are similar, without tone, and occasionally with predictable diphthongisation.)

Items relating to official policy such as phanàek and chabàp clearly show Khmer infixal morphology and also occur in Old Khmer inscriptions predating the Tai invasions. They have clearly been loaned into early Thai, along with the cultural concepts they refer to, in the post-Angkorian era of major Khmer-to-Thai cultural borrowing. In other cases, the occurrence of particular tones in Thai, together with the presence of cognates in Tai languages in China or Assam which did not undergo Khmer cultural borrowing, indicates items of Thai provenance, e.g. khûu, dàam. These were loaned into Khmer when the cultural tables were turned later on, and there was much Thai-into-Khmer influence. During this period many documents were translated rather literally out of Thai into Khmer, and the 'translational Khmer' appears to have become somewhat of a literary norm. This explains the incorporation of classifiers into formal Khmer and may even account for the minor syntactic shift from pre-Angkorian noun + classifier + number to the Thai pattern noun + number + classifier.

Social history can play an important role in semantic shift. Haas (1942), writing just ten years after the end of absolute monarchy in Thailand, explained classifiers for humans in Thai as follows (p.201; transcription slightly altered):

> There are five classifiers commonly used with nouns referring
> to human beings; the choice of classifier to be used depends
> largely on the rank or station in life of the individual or
> individuals referred to. The highest of these is 'oŋ, used
> for the king and queen, for princes and princesses, and for
> dukes and duchesses. The term rûup is generally used in
> referring to talapoins, but some people employ 'oŋ in place
> of rûup. The term thân is employed for nobles below the
> rank of duke and sometimes also for high-ranking officials
> in the army and navy. The term next in order is naay, which
> may be used in referring to individuals slightly above the
> common people in rank or position in life. The term most
> generally used in referring to human beings is khon ...

Although Haas did not mention it, the classifier system as she presented it was mirrored by a similar hierarchy in pronouns, and both linguistic sets were extensions of the Thai sadkina system, a special feudalistic means of social organisation in which all of the Thai king's subjects were assigned numerical ranks from 5 to 100,000. The classifiers as Haas described them would relate to segments of the scale, with monks needing slightly special treatment. Although the sakdina system had been formally discontinued when Haas was studying Thai classifiers, it was apparently being preserved linguistically. In the years since 1942 three of the five classifiers have gradually drifted into another semantic area: instead of classifying humans on a social scale, they now indicate degrees of formality in the speech act, although 'oŋ and rûup retain the earlier function. Thus khon is the usual colloquial form, naay a rather bureaucratic form, and thân used in rather polite formal situations; the taxa could be the same.

SYNTACTIC ISSUES

The syntactic patterns in which classifiers typically occur may also code sociolinguistic features relating to style and norm. This is particularly clear in classifier counting expressions.

Vietnamese and Bahasa Malaysia Indonesia show a stylistic variation in basic classifier order. Normal colloquial speech follows the pattern number + classifier + noun, while in literary or emphatic constructions the order noun + number + classifier is acceptable (Nguyen 1957:126). If we consider larger language families such variation also becomes apparent:

family	number + classifier + noun	noun + number + classifier
Sino-Tibetan	Chinese	Burmese, Lolo, Lahu, Lisu
Austronesian	Malay, Cham	Javanese
Austro-Asiatic	Brou, Katu, Sedang	Mon, Khmer, Khmu'
Tai	Zhuang, Nung, Black and White Tai	Standard Thai, Lao, Shan, Tai-Ahom

(Data partially adapted from Jones 1970.)

The variation in Vietnamese together with the split family patterns above suggests that classifier syntax may be rather susceptible to diachronic shifting and/or to diffusion across strictly genetic boundaries. Note that with the exception of Bahasa Malaysia Indonesia there is a general areal tendency, with languages to the east preferring the number + classifier to precede the noun; those to the west, to follow it (Indo-Aryan is mixed).

Basic shifts in word order can be documented for Chinese and Khmer. Archaic Chinese appeared to make little use of classifiers, although this may be partly a function of the type of text transmitted. The clear pattern in Ancient Chinese (i.e. of the Tang Dynasty) is either no classifier, generally the case with small, monosyllabic numbers, or the order noun + number + classifier, the reverse of the present-day structure mentioned above. In Khmer during the pre-Angkorian period the order was noun + classifier + number or, for time expressions like 'days', 'years', simply number + noun. Later the order shifted to noun + number + classifier (Schafer 1948: Jacob 1965).

Languages in the area under review differ both in the syntactic devices and in the overall importance of classifiers as they interact in the grammatical properties mentioned above. For Malay, especially in its Indonesian variety, classifiers are scarcely involved in non-numerical concerns, and even in counting they often seem to be optional. In Burmese (and also in Japanese) postposed number plus classifier may be involved in indicating indefiniteness, but are not normally used for anaphoric definite reference. Nor in Burmese are classifiers directly involved in deictic expressions, as they are in Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai. Khmer classifiers are more frequent in careful, literary speech than in colloquial varieties. Even in the former they are infrequently used with deictic demonstratives. The Khmer classifier for humans, nea', may interact somewhat more widely than others in deictic and anaphoric expressions.

Classifiers are also deeply involved in nominal compounding in several languages. In Vietnamese the order number + classifier + noun merges syntactically with number + (nominal compounding head) + (qualifier), and many of the 'classifiers' for humans listed by Nguyen (1957:133-142) appear to be more in the latter category. In Thai and Burmese, where the syntactic order precludes this type of merger, 'echo' constructions occur instead. In the following Burmese examples, nouns are serving as their own classifiers as they enter into indefinite expressions:

ein tă ein	*a house* (lit. *house/one/house*)
myó tă myó	*a city*
ei' tă ei'	*a bag*
khoun tă khoun	*a stool*
bù tă bù	*a bottle*

However Jones (1970:66) observed, for Thai complex adjectival-deictic-enumerative classifier expressions, repetition of classifiers while syntactically allowed is characteristic of "the most precise and formal speech-style". One expects this observation would apply widely through various languages and constructions where classifier repetition is permitted. Once again, we see the converse of the western Indo-Aryan situation in terms of stylistic evaluazion: for South-East Asian languages, classifier 'density' may elevate rather than depress stylistic level.

Syntactic and lexico-semantic processes may interact in configurations of diachronic change which are sensitive to speech level and norm. Thai provides a particularly clear example (for specific detail, see Diller, this volume).

The earliest Thai inscriptions show only a handful of classifiers of rather broad scope: khon, for humans; tua, for animals; and 'an, for inanimate objects, and a few other shape-related forms. Comparative Tai evidence bears out postulating a reduced set for earlier stages of Tai. During the Ayudhya and Early Bangkok Eras (c.1450–1850) several hundred classifiers came into use, at least in literate court and urban circles. This was paralleled by increases in pronominal forms and perhaps also in pre-verbal auxiliary elements. In a sense, the process is continuing today, with journalistic Thai admitting so many common nouns into what were formerly classifier positions that, at least for counting expressions, the existence of classifiers as a syntactic class is being severely eroded. On the other hand, for anaphoric purposes, for making definite/indefinite distinctions, etc. a small set including the original items cited above is in common use and not under threat of extinction. If these changes were to carry through, they would mean for Thai a syntactic shift in counting expressions, somewhat like what happened in Chinese, and the evolution of a new class of 'pronominal classifiers' of importance in anaphora, deixis and to indicate definiteness. It should be noted that these latter functions are found to some extent on the inscriptions as well as numeral classifier constructions.

In terms of normative and evaluative attitudes toward Thai classifiers, by the mid 19th century a proliferated system associated with court speech was overtly taught in pedagogical manuals. (Classifiers as a grammatical class were specified as kham phûut plaay bàat sǎngkhayǎa words spoken at the end of a number phrase.) King Rama IV took enough interest in classifiers to issue royal edicts on their proper usage. Given such a historical background, it is scarcely surprising that in today's standard language 'correct' (but sometimes 'unnatural') classifier usage is taught by parents and teachers to young Thai speakers.

It would be interesting and revealing to survey how primary school teachers in an areal continuum from, say, New Delhi to Hanoi might deal with their students' 'mistakes' with regard to classifier usage in normative standard varieties. One can imagine a Hindi class in the eastern Hindi area where the teacher's red marks were directed at offending classifiers which had slipped into the written medium from the oral colloquial familiar to students. Contrast this with the Thai teacher, whose corrective markings might be encouraging students to proliferate their 'natural' oral systems with special learned forms for elephants, flutes and royal personages, etc., not to mention correcting any substandard journalistic tendencies to count nouns directly, dispensing with special classifiers altogether. It would be all the more interesting to conduct this putative survey again at future intervals.

NOTES

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2. We are indebted to Philip Baker who is compiling a dictionary of Mauritian Creole for the identification of the chouchou as the fruit of the *Sechium edulis*.

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