CLASSIFIERS IN KOKBOROK

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ABSTRACT

Classifiers are defined as morphemes which occur 'in surface structures under specific conditions'; denote 'some salient perceived or imputed characteristics of the entity to which an associated noun refers' (Allan 1977: 285). The classifiers are primarily divided into sortal and mensural subtypes. Sortal classifiers typically individuate referents in terms of the kind of entity it is, particularly with respect to inherent properties such as shape and animacy while the mensural one distinguishes the referents in terms of quantum or amount (Lyons 1977: 463). Thepresent paper is a humble attempt to describe morphosemantic aspects of Kokborok classifiers in the light of synchronic approaches. The study is confined to the West Tripura district of Tripura State.

KEYWORDS: Kokborok, Classifier, Numeral Classifiers, Sortal and Mensural Classifiers

INTRODUCTION

The word 'kokborok' is a compound word. '**kok**' means '*language*' and '**borok**' means '*people*'. According to 2001 Census of India, the total population of Kokborok speakers in the State of Tripura was 761964. Robert Shafer (1966-74) has made totally different classification of Sino-Tibetan languages than from other authors. He divides Tibeto-Burman into four main groups: Bodic, Baric, Burmic and Karenic. According to Shafer, Kokborok belongs to the Western Units of the Barish Section within the Baric Subdivision of Sino-Tibetan. The closest linguistics relatives of Kokborok are: Bodo (Boro), Mets, DimasaHodzai, Lalung (Tiwa), and Moran. Kokborok has nine dialects namely Debbarma, Reang, Jamatia, Koloi, Rupini, Noatia, Tripura, Uchoi and Murasing. Among the nine dialects, Debbarma dialect is considered to be the most standard dialect spoken in the state of Tripura. Kokborok language is also spoken in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh (Hill Tract of Chittagong).Kokborok was recognised as an official language of Tripura state in 1979.Kokborok speakers are the major group among the 19 (nineteen) Tribes in Tripura. Kokborok language is also influenced by the dominant Bengali language, as itis mostly spoken in the state of Tripura for the purpose of official, business and so on. The Kokboroks do not have their own script as a result they use both the Roman and Bengaliscripts for academic, official communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kokborok has a limited number of published works in the field of linguistics. Sir G.A Grierson, 1903*Linguistics Survey of India*, Vol-lll, Part-ll described a bit of grammatical structure of Kokborok language. Pai's Kokborok Grammar (1976) is a brief description of Kokborok with an emphasis on its phonology, morphology and syntax. The grammar consists of four chapters Introduction, Morphophonemics, Morphology and Syntax followed by 14 samples of texts. However, a detailed study is not undertaken particularly regarding the Classifiers system of Kokborok language. Hence the study has been proposed to analysis the existing classifier system of Kokborok language.

METHODOLOGY

The primary data was collected in the form of conversation, questionnaire with as many informants of the language as possible and the data have been crosschecked with other speakers of the same variety of West Tripura District of Tripura State. Finally, the data have been recorded with the help of the tape recorder and transcribed for a closer study. The secondary data, which includes the available written materials in the form of books, journals, articles etc., have been collected through library works. The persons of different age groups, professions, and sexes have been used as informants.

Classifiers in Kokborok Language

Classifiers are generally rich in Tibeto-Barman languages. Kokborok being a language of this group make use of classifiers and quantifiers for denoting the semantic classification of the referent on the basis of the quantities of the noun that is its physical, shape and state etc. They occur with numerals and precede the numerals. Classifiers in Kokborok language are predominantly monosyllabic.

Numeral Classifiers

Classifiers in Kokborok always occur with the numeral, which makes a close bound syntactic unit in the following order: classifier + numeral. This syntactic unit may occur after or before the noun. However, the preferred order is N CLF-NUM as in (1-4). It is worth mentioning that the noun is never known to intrude between classifier and numeral.

(1)   *ri*   *kan-sa*

        cloth   CLF-one

        'One cloth'

(2)   *bijab*   *ka*n-*nwi*

        book   CLF-two

        'Two books'

(3)   *tók*   *ma-sa*

        bird   CLF-one

        'One bird'

(4)   *kʰum*   *bar-sa*

        flower   CLF-One

        'One flower'

        The reverse order can also be possible. The possible order is CLF-NUM N as in the following examples (5)-(7)

(5)   *ri*   *kan-sa*

        cloth   CLF-one

        'One cloth'

(6)   *bijab*   *kan-nwi*

      book   CLF-two

      'Two books'

(7)   *tok*   *ma-sa*

      bird   CLF-one

      'One bird'

Properties of Numeral Classifiers

All the classifiers in Kokborokare bound and are used only in classifier constructions. Similarly, a numeral in Kokborok is also a bound morpheme and cannot occur without a classifier. However, Allan (1977) stated that this does not mean that all nouns are classified in all their occurrences in speech. Any noun can be used without a classifier unless in the context of counting. This is true in the case of Kokborok too as evidence in the following examples.

(8)   *aŋ*   *kai-ma* *bup^{h}aŋ*   *t^{h}ui-k^{h}a*

      I   plant-NOMZ   tree   die-PST

      'The tree I planted has died'

(9)   *i*   *t^{h}ailik* *kumun*

      DEM   banana   ripe

      'This banana is ripe'

(10)   *tok-rok*   *bir*   *man-o*

      bird-PL   fly   can-PRES

      'Birds can fly'

It is clear that in the above sentences (8-10), there are no classifiers along with any of the nouns, however, a classifier is obligatorily used with a numeral if it is enumerated as shown in (11-12)

(11)   *a-ni*   *amiŋ*   *mak-t^{h}am*   *toŋg-o*

      1PM-GEN   cat   CLF-three   have-PRES

      'I have three cats'

(12)   *tok*   *ma-sa*   *bir-k^{h}a*

      bird   CLF-one   flew-PST

      'One bird flew'

Overview of Kokborok Classifier Subtypes

Kokobork classifiers are primarily divided into (i) sortal and (ii)mensural subtypes. While the functional basis for the distinction is ultimately semantic.

CLASSIFIER

SORTAL   MENSURAL

The sortal classifiers are generally rich in Tibeto-Barman languages. Kokborok being a language of this group make use of classifiers for denoting the semantic classification of the referent on the basis of the quantities of the noun that is its physical properties like dimension (flat, thick, thin or wide or broad), shape (long/linear, round), size (large or small), consistency (flexible/rigid) and constitution/state (liquid, solid or semi-solid). The principle classifiers in Kokborok are as follows:

k^horok-

The classifier k^horok- occurs with noun denoting human being only. Consider the following examples:

(13)   *borok   k^horok- sa*

human   CLF-one

'One man'

(14)   *c^hwla   k^horok- nwi*

boy   CLF-two

'Two boys'

ma/mak-

This classifier occurs with noun denoting animals or birds. The classifier *ma-* occurs with the singular form and *mak-* occurs with the plural form. Consider the following examples:

(15)   *musuk   ma-sa*

cow   CLF-one

'One cow'

(16)   *tak^hum   mak-nwi*

duck   CLF-two

'Two ducks'

bar-

The classifier *bar-* occurs with nouns denoting flowers of a plant or tree. Consider the following examples:

(17)   *k^hum   bar-sa*

flower   CLF-One

'One flower'

(18)   *sotromongol   bar-sa*

marigold   CLF-One

'One marigold flower'

kan-

The classifier *kan-* occurs with noun denoting flat things like books, papers, cloths, feathers. As illustrated in the following examples:

(19)   *ri   kan-sa*

         cloth   CLF-one

         'One cloth'

(20)   *bijab   kan-nwi*

         book   CLF-two

         'Two books'

kol-

The classifier *kol-*occurs with noun denoting small round or roundish objects like rice, seeds, corn etc. Consider the following examples:

(21)   *mokol   kol-sa*

         eye   CLF-one

         'One eye'

(22)   *bwcʰwli   kol-sa*

         seed   CLF-one

         'One seed'

kʰok-

The classifier *kʰok-* occurs with noun denoting money. Consider the following examples:

(23)   *raŋ   kʰok-sa*

         money   CLF-one

         'One rupee'

(24)   *raŋ   kʰok-nwi*

         money   CLF-two

         'Two rupee'

twN-

This classifier occurs with noun denoting long or short but flexible like hair, tail of a animal, thread, rope etc. Consider the following examples:

(25)   *kʰwnai   twŋ-sa*

hair   CLF-one

'One hair'

(26)   *dwkʰwi   twŋ-sa*

rope   CLF-one

'One rope'

Table 1: Classifiers with Animate and Inanimate Referents

Sl	Animate CLF	Semantic Parameters	Examples of Referents
1	*kʰorok-*	human	'man', 'boy' etc
2	*ma/mak*	non-human	'duck', 'cow' etc
Inanimate CLF			
3	*bar-*	solid	'flower'
4	*kan-*	flat thing	'book', 'paper' cloths' etc
5	*kol-*	round small	'eyes' 'seed' etc'
6	*kʰok-*	solid object	'money'
7	twŋ	long/short	'tail' 'rope' 'hair' etc

Mensural Classifier

The mensural classifier in Rongmei combines both the properties of a classifier and quantifying expression. Choudhury (2012) has mentioned that the mensural category in the language is classifiable into three subcategories- (a) collective, (b) divisive and (c) quantitative on the basis of whether it implies aggregation of more than one entity, division of a whole or quantity/number in terms of some non-numeric standards. The collective type can be used with count and mass nouns to encode notions like group/team/aggregation, bunch, flock/heard, pile/heap, sequences/series/rows of referents. They may be distinguished as animate/inanimate and human/non-human, with all having diminutive variants. The divisive type encodes something less than a whole to refer to a part, piece, section/segment or division of a referent simultaneously specifying the physical properties. She further said that the quantitative types encode weight, size or volume. Kokborok exhibits all three sub-categories as exemplified below:

jor-

The classifier *jor-* occurs with nouns denoting a pair of things, animals or birds. As illustrated in the following examples:

(27)   *takʰum   jor-sa*

duck   CLF-One

'A pair of duck'

(28)   musuk   jor-sa

cow   CLF-One

'A pair of cow'

dek-

The classifier *dek-* occurs with nouns denoting branch of a plant or tree. Consider the following examples:

(29)   *tʰaicʰuk bupʰan bedek   dek-sa*

mango   tree   branch CLF-One

'One branch of mango tree '

(30)   *tʰaipoŋ   bupʰan bedek   dek-nwi*

jackfruit tree   branch CLF-two

'Two branches of jackfruit tree'

taN-

This classifier occurs with noun denoting series of fruits or things. As illustrated in the following examples:

(31)   *tʰalik   taŋ-sa*

banana   CLF-one

'A series of banana'

(32)   *mai   taŋ-sa*

rice   CLF-one

'A series of rice'

cʰap-

The classifier *cʰap-* occurs with noun denoting things which are in bunches or in bundle. As illustrated in the following examples:

(33)   *ri   cʰap-sa*

cloth   CLF-One

'One bundle of cloth'

(34)   *ra*n   *cʰap-nwi*

money   CLF-two

'Two bundle of money'

dol-

The classifier *dol-* occurs with noun denoting a group of people, animal or flock of birds. As illustrated in the following examples:

(35)   *borok   dol-sa*

people   CLF-One

'A group of people'

(36)   *mayun*   *dol-sa*

elephant CLF-one

'A group of elephant'

(37)   *pʰaruk*   *dol-sa*

pigeon   CLF-One

'A flock of pigeon'

pʰon-

This classifier occurs with nouns denoting piece of a meat/fish. As illustrated in the following examples:

(38)   *tohan*   *pʰon-sa*

chicken   CLF-one

'A piece of chicken'

(39)   *wahan*   *pʰon -sa*

pork   CLF-one

'One piece of pork'

tʰop-

This classifier occurs with noun denoting any liquid substances, like drop of water, drop of rain, drop of honey, drop of tear, drop of blood etc. As exemplified below:

(40)   *twi*   *tʰop-sa*

Water   CLF-one

'One drop of water'

(41)   *tʰok*   *tʰop-nwi*

oil   CLF-two

'Two drops of oil'

lap-

This classifier occurs with noun denoting pieces of wood or any things which is made of wood. Consider the following examples:

(42)   *kat*   *lap-sa*

wood   CLF-one

'One piece of wood'

(43)   *doga*   *lap-sa*

      door   CLF-one

      'One piece of door,

kʰop-

      The classifier *kʰop-* occurs with noun denoting a sip or morsel of rice. As exemplified below:

(44)   *mai*   *kʰop-sa*

      rice   CLF-one

      'A morsel of rice'

(45)   *twi*   *kʰop-sa*

      water   CLF-one

      'A sip of water'

mocʰom-

      This classifier occurs with the noun denoting an amount that contains in one open palm. As illustrated in the following examples:

(46)   *mairum mocʰom-sa*

      rice   CLF-one

      'A handful of rice'

(47)   *cʰini*   *mocʰom-sa*

      sugar   CLF-one

      'A handful of sugar'

Table 2: Mensural Classifiers of Kokborok

Sl	CLF	Literal Meaning		Examples of Referents
Collective:				
2.	*jor-*	association		'duck' 'cow' etc.
3.	*dek*	bunch		'tree' etc
4.	*taŋ*	sequence		'banana' 'rice' etc.
5.	*cap*	bundle		'cloth' 'money' etc.
6.	*dol-*	team		'people' 'elephant' pigeon'
Divisive:				
	CLF	Semantic Parameter		Referent
7.	*pʰon-*	broken piece of solid object (edible)		'chicken' 'pork' etc.
8.	*tʰop-*	fall of liquid thing		'honey' 'water' 'oil' etc.
9.	*lap-*	broken piece of solid object (non-edible)		'wood' 'door' etc'
Quantative:				
	CLF	Lexical Meaning	Derived Meaning	Referent
10.	*kʰop-*	drink/eat	mouthful	'water' 'rice' etc
11	*mocʰom*	palm	handful	'rice' 'sugar' etc'

CONCLUSIONS

The above examples show that Kokborok is a classifier language. Like other Tibeto-Burman language, Kokborok also has a large set of classifier. The numeral is always accompanied by classifier, which classifies the nouns into classes on the basis of their physical features. The classifiers in Kokborok language can occur before or after the nouns or pronoun. Noun morphology is dominated by numeral classifiers, which are not only able to describe and categorize all nominals, but are also used extensively for enumeration. Most of the classifier roots are monosyllabic with few disyllabic roots. Classifiers generally occur with the numerals and in the form of prefixes.

ABBREVIATION

CLF   Classifier

DEM   Demonstrative

N   Noun

NOMZ Nominalizer

NUM   Numeral

PL   Plural

PM   Pronominal marker

PRES   Present

PST   Past

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