Classifiers and Their Syntactic Functions in Nepal Bhasa

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Classifiers and Their Syntactic Functions in Nepal Bhasa

Daya R. Shakya
Portland Community College

Introduction

This paper discusses the classifying system of nouns in Nepal Bhasa, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal. The system analyzes nouns in different classes by the inherent semantic values of nouns. This type of inherent value is marked by a linguistic device called the classifier, which is suffixed to the numeral words. On the basis of the study of the classifier languages of the world, undertaken by Dixon (1968), the Nepal Bhasa classifier system was examined by Hale and Shresthacharya (1973). Further study in this subject were carried out by Rao and Joshi (1985) and Malla (1985). Their observations basically focused on the morphophonemic structure of classifiers which reflects the semantics of nouns. In addition to this, recently Hale and Shrestha (1992) have examined a usage of the animate classifier ‘mha’ in narrative discourse. This paper explores an inventory of the classifiers in section 1 and a discussion of classifiers in relation to syntactic categories; their structure and function in Nepal Bhasa syntax will be presented in section 2. The last section discusses the findings of this study.

Structure of Nepal Bhasa Classifiers

Nepal Bhasa is a good example of the numeral classifier languages which require the classifier morpheme in order to code the quantity of noun (N) as many south and east Asian languages do. The classifier morphemes are suffixed to numerals. Semantically it categorizes nouns into either animate or inanimate classes forming an underlying sequence of constituents:

(1) \[ N \text{ numeral} + \text{Classifier} \]

The numeral precedes the classifier morpheme. However, the head noun can either precede or follow the compound constituent. It is also noteworthy that all Nepal Bhasa classifiers do not follow the same sequence. Since the language distinguishes living beings from non-animate entities, a large number of classifying devices became necessary. The classifiers are good example of morphemes which differentiate the entities into different classes, and manifest native speakers' cultural beliefs by noun categorization.

1 I thank Prof. Collette Craig of the University of Oregon for her valuable comments and suggestions on the earlier version of this paper. I am using the historical term 'Nepal Bhasa' for the language popularly known as Newari in this paper. The nasalized vowels are used as follows: \( ā, ā̃, ō, ē, ū \)

2 The underlying form of the numerals from 'one' to 'ten' are /chi/, /nasi/, /sōl/, /pi/, /nyA/, /khu/, /nhasa/ /cyA/, /gu/ and /sAna/. The forms for one, two, four and ten change to different forms when they are used with classifier as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[cha-gu],</th>
<th>[nigu],</th>
<th>[pyè-gu],</th>
<th>and [jhi-gu]:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>छा-गू</td>
<td>निः-गू</td>
<td>प्ये-गू</td>
<td>ज्हि-गू</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By virtue of some phonological motivations, the rule given in (1) changes to noun + Numeral or classifier + numeral for some nouns. This type of change is also observed by Rao and Joshi (1985) as follows:

/cha dā/--> dā-čhi द-चि ‘one year’
/cha gĀ/--> gĀ čhè ग-चि ‘one village’
/cha cA/--> ca čhè च-चि ‘one night’
In Nepal Bhasa, some classifiers have a single function and some have more than one. On this basis, Nepal Bhasa classifiers can be categorized into two types:

(2) 1. General
    2. Specific

General Classifiers

The general classifier is a broad term which places nouns into either animate or inanimate classes. This type of classification is also available in Yagua (Payne 1986). In her work Payne has proposed a term 'material classification.' In Nepal Bhasa, animacy is classified by using the form /mha/ and inanimacy by /gu/. The animate classifier is derived from the lexical word /mha/ 'body' which categorizes all kinds of living beings into one group, from very tiny creatures like ants or bugs to huge animals like dinosaurs or giraffes. All other entities are considered the non-living objects. Structurally, both of these classifier morphemes are bound to numerals. However, they can also occur with other lexical categories such as adjectives, pronouns and verbs. This is discussed in section 2.

In terms of typological variation of classifier languages, the sequence of constituents denoting quantifier (Q), classifier (C) and noun (N) in numeral classifier languages are observed (Allan 1977) as follows:

(3) 1. N Q C
    2. Q C N
    3. C Q N
    4. N C Q

Among these, Nepal Bhasa demonstrates the first type of underlying structure, as in Burmese (Burling 1965), Thai (Carpenter 1986), Tuyuca (Barnes 1990) and Garo (Adam 1986). However, it is also possible to get the sequence 2 as in Amerindian languages, Semitic languages, Bengali, Chinese, and Vietnamese (Allan 1977). The numeral classifier languages establish some parameters which categorize and quantify the noun. This notion of quantifying a noun is also available in non-classifier languages such as English (Hale & Shresthacharya 1973, Malla 1985):

(4) one stack of books saphu: cha-pā

From this, it can be inferred that the non-numeral classifier languages may manifest structures similar to the classifier languages. Carpenter (1988) regards this as a matter of degree, rather than a strict dichotomy. Thus, similar to her argument for Thai, in the continuum of numeral and non-numeral classifier languages proposed by Collin, Nepal Bhasa could be placed in the far left, along with unambiguous numeral classifier languages such as Thai, Burmese and Garo, while a language like English would be placed in the far right. In the numeral classifier languages, the classifier (Cl) and numerals must occur simultaneously. This is observed in Nepal Bhasa in the following examples:

(5) manu: cha-mha
    saphu: cha-gu
    a man a book

Although the head noun precedes the numeral and classifiers /-mha/ and /-gu/, the order is not rigid in Nepal Bhasa. This can also be observed in a phrase consisting of modifiers to the noun. The general classifiers have a distinct function in Nepal Bhasa grammar. It also demonstrates grammatical function in syntax (see section 2). Some nouns take the general classifiers as in the following examples:

Animate

(7) misA-(ta) cha-mha
    woman-PI one-Cl
    a woman

(8) mecha cha-gu
    chair one-Cl
    a chair

Inanimate

(9) macA cha-mha
    child one-Cl
    A child

(10) nhyawa:sA cha-gu
    toy one-Cl
    a toy
These examples support the proposition that in Nepal Bhasa the numeral cannot occur by itself as the quantifier to the head noun. Countable nouns require the classifier suffix. It can also be noted that the head noun does not agree with the number in most of the examples. However, the animate noun requires the optional plural marker /-tal/ which is suffixed to the head noun. This observation supports the modification of rule (1) as follows:

(19) \[ N - (\text{Pl}) \text{ Numeral} + \text{Cl} \]

**Semantic Extension of the General Classifiers**

Although the general classifiers are restricted to animate and inanimate distinctions, the inanimate nouns are analogous to animate beings. For example, toys, statues, and animal-shaped cookies are also classified by the same animate classifier.

(20) \[ \text{काटमारी छन्द} \]
katAmari cha-mha
doll one-Cl
A doll

(21) \[ \text{किसिमारी छन्द} \]
kisi cha-mha
elephant one-Cl
An elephant (a toy)

In addition to this, the deities and evil spirits which are neither living beings nor inanimate things are also categorized with the same animate classifier /mha/.

(22) \[ \text{दय छन्द} \]
dya cha-mha
god (Statue) one-Cl
A statue

(23) \[ \text{कावस्मारी छन्द} \]
kawā cha-mha
skeletal spirit one-Cl
A skeleton

**Specific Classifiers**

Some of the inanimate nouns cannot be categorized by the general classifier /gu/, but need specific classifiers. These are based on native speakers' cultural and cognitive view of entities. Although the appearance of the entities is universal, the speakers' belief may vary from one language to another. In Nepal Bhasa, the specific classifiers categorize the nouns in terms by their shapes and consistency. They also sort the nouns into different classes. This categorization is reflected in classifiers as sortal classifiers (Denny 1986). Accordingly, the specific classifiers which categorize the nouns in terms of arrangement and measuring units are mensural classifiers.

**Sortal Classifiers**

In the semantics of sortal classifiers, a shape can be perceived by three salient features of various dimensions (Allen 1977, Payne 1986) such as length, roundness, flatness, etc. This type of classification is
also examined in Garo (Adam 1986) and Yagua (Payne 1986). However, some classifications are idiosyncratic in Nepal Bhasa. The classification based on the physical properties of shape are as follows:

1. Length

The entity which has a property of both length and thinness in appearance is classified by the classifier /-pu/ which includes the following nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nepal Bhasa</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Nepal Bhasa</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nhAe</td>
<td>nose</td>
<td>cupi</td>
<td>knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lhA</td>
<td>hand</td>
<td>khipa:</td>
<td>rope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patl</td>
<td>finger</td>
<td>lā</td>
<td>way/path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kerA</td>
<td>banana</td>
<td>kathi</td>
<td>stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuti</td>
<td>leg</td>
<td>kalam</td>
<td>pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sā</td>
<td>hair</td>
<td>curas</td>
<td>cigarette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sukA</td>
<td>thread</td>
<td>mulu</td>
<td>needle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khusi</td>
<td>river</td>
<td>tā</td>
<td>bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mye</td>
<td>song</td>
<td>cinAkhā</td>
<td>poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bAkhā</td>
<td>story</td>
<td>pau</td>
<td>letter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that the classifier /-pu/ is used not only with the physical appearance of long and thin, but also used to illustrate the length in the case of abstract nouns, like literary works such as /mye/ 'song' and /bAkhā/ 'story' and /pau/ 'letter', etc. This type of classification is also available in the Ponapean language, but Nepal Bhasa does not count tree and canoe into this class as does Ponapean (Allen 1977). Thus, this classification could be assumed to be a specific feature of Nepal Bhasa.

2. Flatness

The nouns referring to things which have flatness or are two- dimensional in shape and size are classified by /-pAl as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nepal Bhasa</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Nepal Bhasa</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nyetA:</td>
<td>cheek</td>
<td>mari</td>
<td>bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lhA:</td>
<td>palm</td>
<td>panjA</td>
<td>glove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kapA:</td>
<td>forehead</td>
<td>mojA</td>
<td>sock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khwA:</td>
<td>face</td>
<td>lAkĀ</td>
<td>shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pAli</td>
<td>foot</td>
<td>mhicA</td>
<td>pocket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nhAepā</td>
<td>ear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nepal Bhasa makes a further distinction of flatness between big and small. An ordinary flatness is semantically derived from the shape of a leaf. However, a big flat thing is categorized by /pA/ by virtue of phonological process of the compensatory lengthening of the second syllable, the classifier /pA/ becomes [pA:] in surface structure. So, a noun which is larger in size than the nouns listed in (25) is classified with [pA:]. Some examples are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nepal Bhasa</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lapte</td>
<td>a plate made of leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhō</td>
<td>paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lAsA</td>
<td>mattress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>akhbAr</td>
<td>newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lā:</td>
<td>clothes worn on the torso (except hat, tie)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Roundness

The noun referring to something with some form of roundness or three dimensional in shape is classified by /-gala/ --> [ga:]. This includes small objects like pebbles, or huge objects like temples. Things which are neither flat, thin, or long are categorized by this classifier, as in the following examples:
The classifier [ga:] refers only to the countable substances with generally spherical properties, objects with roundness, or three dimensions. Some borrowed words which have no conventionalized classifiers but are three-dimensional are also denoted by this classifier. Some of them are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>Tape recorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, Nepal Bhasa does not make a distinction between large and small sizes as it does with flatness. All entities with dimensionality are indicated by this classifier. Besides this, there are many sortal classifiers in Nepal Bhasa. They are semantically based on other physical properties which cannot be generalized by basic shapes of length, flatness and roundness as given in the following table 1:

(28) **Table 1: Shape**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifier</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-twA</td>
<td>long folded/a section of a long object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-thu:</td>
<td>hollow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-phwa:</td>
<td>flower, objects in a shape of flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-dhi</td>
<td>frozen objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pwA:</td>
<td>hole, lamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pu:</td>
<td>thin sheet in vertical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, Nepal Bhasa also makes a distinction among other kinds of nouns which are rigid or flexible in shape and consistency as given in table 2.

(29) **Table 2: Shape and Consistency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifiers</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-gwa</td>
<td>spherical shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-tyA</td>
<td>solid cylindrical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-gwArA</td>
<td>solid spherical large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-dhā</td>
<td>solid without particular shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-dhĀ:</td>
<td>circular shape of liquid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mensural Classifiers**

Besides sortal classifiers, Nepal Bhasa also demonstrates a large number of mensural classifiers which categorize the nouns in terms of arrangement and measuring units. The classifiers, which indicate some sort

---

3 Historically, Nepalese coins are three dimensional in shape. Even though the modern coins are flat they take the classifier [ga].
of arrangement, are semantically referred to heap, mass or stack of entities. A dozen of these classifiers are listed in table 3.

(30) Table 3: Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifiers</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-pā</td>
<td>stack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-dwā</td>
<td>heap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ba:</td>
<td>thin layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-bhe:</td>
<td>pouch of bittle leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-bhu:</td>
<td>stripe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-cA:</td>
<td>circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-hAka:</td>
<td>long object in terms of length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-tA:</td>
<td>timing of a bell ringing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-dho:</td>
<td>row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-phi</td>
<td>thick layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-kale</td>
<td>bunch of short things (vegetables)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pw/Āe</td>
<td>bunch of things (hair, thread, keys etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pĀe</td>
<td>a loaf of meat or lump of clay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mensural classifiers can be either conventional or ad hoc (Carpenter 1986) depending upon the system of measurement used in the native speakers' society. The conventional measure classifiers are two types: borrowed and local. The conventional measurement uses the 'borrowed terms.' In Nepalese society, mass, liquid and area are by the metric system (for example Kilo, Liter and Meter). All of these measuring terms function as classifiers. The local measuring units are adopted by native speakers for other kinds of measurements which reflect semantic categories of different states of entities. Some specific classifiers used as unit terms are given in table 4.

(31) Table 4: Local Measure units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifiers</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-jo:</td>
<td>pair in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ju</td>
<td>set of wearings (shoes, gloves, socks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ku</td>
<td>a vesselful of load (especially liquid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pe</td>
<td>a mouthful of food, especially mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-bhwĀ:</td>
<td>a mouthful of edible grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-khā</td>
<td>a serving of steamed rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-phuti</td>
<td>a drop of liquid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-tiki</td>
<td>a drop of liquid before it falls to the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pĀ</td>
<td>a unit of a pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ku:</td>
<td>a piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-mhū:</td>
<td>a handful of grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-thu</td>
<td>a bunch of vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-bo</td>
<td>a plate of food used in feast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-mhićA</td>
<td>sack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-pi:</td>
<td>land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-tā</td>
<td>step, house floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-jA:</td>
<td>height</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-tu</td>
<td>a scoopful of liquid or semi-liquid items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-tA</td>
<td>item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-co:</td>
<td>tip of long thin object (apex)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The adhoc measure has no specific term. However, some noun forms demonstrate a quantity of an entity which is being kept in a container. These noun forms also function as classifiers, as illustrated in the following examples:

(32) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>दूर</th>
<th>अन्नार्च</th>
<th>दूर</th>
<th>अन्नार्च</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>दूर</td>
<td>अन्नार्च</td>
<td>दूर</td>
<td>अन्नार्च</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

milk one-bowl

A bowl of milk

(33) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>थो</th>
<th>थो</th>
<th>थो</th>
<th>थो</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>थो</td>
<td>थो</td>
<td>थो</td>
<td>थो</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

beer one-pot (made of clay)

A pot of beer

(34) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>आईना</th>
<th>रानी</th>
<th>आईना</th>
<th>रानी</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>आईना</td>
<td>रानी</td>
<td>आईना</td>
<td>रानी</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

wine one-cup (made of clay)

A cup of wine

(35) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>आईना</th>
<th>रानी</th>
<th>आईना</th>
<th>रानी</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>आईना</td>
<td>रानी</td>
<td>आईना</td>
<td>रानी</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

milk one-pouch

A breast

In summary, all of these classifiers refer to things which have a specific physical appearance. Although these appearances are considered differently in different languages, the above mentioned entities are based on native cultural beliefs. For example, the classifier /pA/ is used for a flat, two dimensional object. But, it is also used to connote a pair. This is a language-specific feature of Nepal Bhasa.

In fact, the classifier for a pair is derived from the semantics of 'a couple made up of husband and wife.' This is expressed by verb phrase 'pA khAye'. I assume that the form /pA/ is used to express a unit of a pair of items, such as legs, hands, eyes, ears, or breasts. If these nouns are observed as an individual item, the sortal classifiers are used as follows:

(36) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A unit of an object</th>
<th>A unit of a pair</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tuti cha-pu</td>
<td>tuti cha-pA</td>
<td>leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lhA: cha-pu</td>
<td>lhA: cha-pA</td>
<td>hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duru cha-pwa</td>
<td>duru cha-pA</td>
<td>breast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the body parts are viewed as a pair, the quantity of a paired body parts implies the semantics of 'a unit of a pair.' When these nouns are counted, a unit of a pair is understood with each number as follows:

(37) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>tuti ni-pA</th>
<th>1 unit of pair + 1 unit of pair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>leg two-Cl</td>
<td>two units of a pair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>two legs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The notion of a pair can be extended to non-human and other kinds of countable inanimate objects. However, in these cases a pair is categorized by the classifier /jo:/ I assume that the classifier /jo:/ is derived from the verb /jolAe/ 'to look the same' - a pair of male and female non-human living beings or things that look similar in appearance (for example a pair of birds, a pair of bracelets, a pair of earrings and anklets, etc.) This demonstrates the native speakers' mental concept of a pair of entities. From this perspective, the animate and inanimate nouns given in (38) are categorized with classifiers /jo:/:

(38) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair with /jo:/</th>
<th>Non-human</th>
<th>Inanimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepal Bhasa</td>
<td>Gloss</td>
<td>Nepal Bhasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bakhù</td>
<td>pigeon</td>
<td>tuki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarpa</td>
<td>snake</td>
<td>curA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhatu</td>
<td>parrot</td>
<td>kalli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(39) 

| bakhù          | cha-jo:   | 'a pair of pigeons = two' |
| sarpa          | cha-jo:   | 'a pair of snakes = two'  |
| bhatu          | ni-jo:    | 'two pairs of parrots = four' |
| tuki           | ni-jo:    | 'two pairs of earrings = four' |
When inanimate things are used with /pA/ they are viewed as a flat object rather than in pairs.

(40) **Inanimate with /pA/**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nepal Bhasa</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tuki</td>
<td>earring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curi</td>
<td>bracelet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalli</td>
<td>anklet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panjA</td>
<td>glove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mojA</td>
<td>sock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lAkA</td>
<td>shoes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unique Classifiers**

Nepal Bhasa also makes a distinction between other kinds of inanimate nouns which take neither the general nor the specific classifiers. In this category, each noun has a unique classifier as in Burmese (Burling 1965). I assume that the nouns which do not demonstrate the physical properties mentioned in the inanimate category of nouns take unique classifiers.

(41) **Nouns** | **Classifiers** | **Gloss**
---|---|---
swA | phwa: | flower
chè | khA | house
mata | pwA: | lamp
mAsi | phyAè | female genital
lukhA | duwA: | door
pAli | khwAè | footprint
pujA | thA | ritual ceremony
sina: | patA | vermillion mark on forehead
si | gwö | a log of wood

**Unique Classifiers as the Repeaters**

There are some nouns which do not have a separate classifier but rather repeat the same noun as a classifier. This type of repeated classifying system is seen in some of the Southeast Asian languages as well (Carpenter 1986). In this category, the noun itself functions as its own classifier. Some of these nouns are as follows:

(42) हो छो-हो | (43) ना छा-ना
ho cha-ho | pwa: cha-pwa:
hole one-Cl | hole one-Cl

(44) गौ छा-गौ | (45) धो छो-धो
gau cha-gau | dho: cha-dho
ankle one-Cl | line one-Cl

(46) माहिंगा | (47) पु प्पा
mA: cha-mA: | pu cha-pu
garland one-Cl | bead one-Cl

(48) ता छा-ता | (49) दा छा-दा
tA cha-tA | sa: cha-sa:
item one-Cl | sound one-Cl

**Class Terms**

Apart from classifiers, Nepal Bhasa employs another type of classification which includes all varieties of plant life. In Nepal Bhasa, a plant is categorized by /mA/, which can occur with all kinds of nouns describing fruits, vegetables, beans, grains, spices, nuts, and roots, as follows:
The form /mA/ is a general term for plants or a class term as proposed by Delancey (1986) in his study of Thai classifiers with reference to the work of Haas in 1942. For this type of classifier, Delancey proposes that a cover term is used as a head of compound nouns. In Nepal Bhasa /mA/ is also used as a classifier for plant beings. When it appears with a numeral, it simply refers to a general plant. However, in structure, it is duplicated using the first one as a noun and the second one as a classifier as in the case of repeaters mentioned above:

![Example of classifier usage](image)

In order to specify a plant the noun precedes the numeral and classifier. When the form other than /mA/ is used it refers to an object of the same entity as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>santrAsi cha-mA</td>
<td>santrAsi cha-ga:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orange one-Cl</td>
<td>orange one-Cl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an orange tree</td>
<td>an orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kAule cha-mA</td>
<td>kAule cha-thwA:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cauliflower one-Cl</td>
<td>cauliflower one Cl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a plant</td>
<td>a head of cauliflower plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cho cha-mA</td>
<td>cho cha-ga:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wheat one-Cl</td>
<td>wheat one-Cl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a wheat plant</td>
<td>a grain of wheat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the classifier is suffixed to the numeral heads. The noun head precedes the numeral and classifiers. However, this is not the fixed order in most cases. When the underlying form of numeral 'one' /chi/ is used in a sentence, the classifier is prefixed to the numeral head (see notes 2).

Nepal Bhasa classifiers are of two types: general and specific. The general classifiers distinguish the nouns as either animate or inanimate. The inanimate classifiers can be further extended into several classes based on semantic features such as the shape and size of the objects. In addition, some inanimate nouns are unique. Some nouns do not employ classifiers. However, the noun form itself is repeated and functions as the classifier. They appear only with a certain noun. Nepal Bhasa measuring unit terms also function as the classifiers and are of two types: borrowed and local. The borrowed are universal terms, whereas the locals are used as the language specific measuring terms. In addition, Nepal Bhasa also uses other kinds of classification which do not function as true classifiers, but as a class term. Since the class term is used only with the plant nouns, it behaves like the unique classifiers in Nepal Bhasa. So, in order to conceptualize the classifier system in Nepal Bhasa, I propose the following generalization which helps to choose the right classifier for a noun:
This configuration tells us that a speaker of Nepal Bhasa needs to distinguish a noun in terms of animacy in order to pick up the right classifier. If a noun belongs to the inanimate category, the first choice would be to see whether the noun has a classifier or a class term. Since the class term is used only with plant nouns, the next task is to identify the specific classifiers which are divided into unique, sortal and mensural classifiers. The unique classifier is indivisible, and appears with only one specific noun. The sortal classifier consists of shape, size, and consistency, while the mensural classifier includes arrangement and measuring unit terms. There are many classifiers under these categories. They are considered to be the true classifiers (Hale & Shresthacharya 1977) in Nepal Bhasa. These classifiers need to be memorized in order to conceptualize the nouns. The measuring unit terms do not manifest the same characteristics as the true classifiers do. They appear only with a numeral head in counting the nouns. If the noun does not take any of these classifiers then the speaker has no choice, so in this case the noun takes the inanimate general classifier by default. Most of the borrowed words also take the general classifier /gu/.

**Syntactic Features of Classifiers**

The previous section discussed the typological variation of classifiers depending upon the semantics of nouns. This section discusses the morphosyntactic usage of classifiers. As was mentioned before, the classifiers only occur with a numeral head, but they also show syntactic characteristics which can be considered as specific features of Nepal Bhasa classifiers. However, not all classifiers carry syntactic function. So the problem is, what types of classifiers demonstrate the syntactic features? Do these classifiers also occur with any constituents of syntactic or grammatical categories? What function do these classifiers fill when they occur with constituents other than a numeral head? These issues will be examined in this section.

Among the classifiers mentioned, the general and true classifiers (i.e. specific and unique) also occur with lexical categories such as adjectives, pronouns, question words, verbs, and as gender modifiers. Basically the general classifiers have several functions that differ from true classifiers. In some syntactic constructions, two classifiers, general and unique, are obligatory. In this construction the true classifiers cannot stand by themselves, but need to be modified by the general classifiers in order to demonstrate their grammatical function.
Classifiers and Adjectives

Adjectives are not distinct and independent categories in Nepal Bhasa as they are in English (Kolver 1977). They appear as verbs with an infinitive marker /-e/. By definition, the adjective modifies a noun. The adjectives which modify nouns are specified by the general classifiers /mha/ or /gu/, and differentiate nouns into either animate and inanimate classes. The general classifier is suffixed to the adjective forming a noun phrase (NP) with the noun preceded by the adjective head. In this case, the classifier functions as the relativizer in clausal construction. If the classifier is omitted from the adjective, the two constituents function as one compound noun without attribution of adjective. So, in order to modify a head noun, the classifiers are obligatory for the adjective. This allows one to generate a rule (59) for constituent order as follows:

(59) Adj-Cl N

(60) hAku-mha manu:

a. black-Cl man
   a black man

b. * hAku manu

(61) birAmi-mha macA
    sick-Cl child
    a sick child

(62) gwArA-mha sA
    fat-Cl cow
    a fat cow

* Notice that the example (60 b) is not acceptable. When a classifier does not appear in the phrase the adjective does not modify the noun. In addition, an NP which consists of an adjective and a numeral requires classifiers for both constituents. In the case of animate nouns, the same general classifier /-mha/ occurs with numerals and adjectives:

(63) Adj-Cl N Num-Cl
    Gen(Anm) Gen(Anm)

(64) hAku-mha manu: ni-mha
    black-Cl man two-man
    two black men

(65) birAmi-mha macA swa-mha
    sick-Cl man three-Cl
    three sick children

(66) a. gwArA-mha sA ni-mha
    fat-Cl cow two-Cl
    two fat cows

b. * gwArA sA ni-mha
   * gwArA-mha sA ni

(67) nhu-mha misA cha-mha
    new-Cl woman one-Cl
    A new woman (recently known to the family)
As with the animate nouns listed above, the inanimate general classifier also must appear with adjectives to form an NP.

(68) हाकु-गु सफ्नु
hAku-gu saphu: black-Cl book
a black book

(69) ह्यातु-गु मेच
hyAü-gu mec red-Cl chair
a red chair

So two classifiers are obligatory in a NP consisting of an adjective and a numeral head:

(70) ह्यातु-गु मेच स्वागु
hyAü-gu mec swä-gu red-Cl chair three-Cl
three red chairs

(71) हाकु-गु सफ्नु स्वागु
hAku-gu saphu: swä-gu black-Cl book three-Cl
three black books

These examples suggest that the attributive construction requires the general classifiers in order to function as the modifier to the head noun.

In addition, all adjectives do not require the general classifiers in Nepal Bhasa. So what is the motivation for the occurrence of classifiers with adjectives? Are they arbitrary? The answers to all these questions would be available in examining the types of syntactic structure. In order to identify a relationship between classifier and adjectives, consider some simple sentences (72-77) in which the adjectives function as the predicate to the subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Adjective Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(72) व न्या चीधि</td>
<td>Dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa nyA ci:dhi: The fish is small.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(73) व ल्या झापावु</td>
<td>Physical property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa lô jhyAtu The rock is heavy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(74) व मनु हाकु</td>
<td>Color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa manu: hAku The man is black.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(75) व मनु हुरा</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa manu burA The man is old.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(76) व मिसा धनी</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa misA dhani The woman is rich.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(77) व मिजा बाला</td>
<td>Human attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa mijä bAllA The man is strong.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These examples show that the classifiers are optional in some constructions. The adjectives which function as the predicate to the subject do not necessarily require the general classifiers. The adjectives can also function as verbs when they take the verbalizer suffix /-e/ such as jhyAtu-e 'to be heavy', hAku-e 'to be black', ballA-e 'to be strong.' However, adjectives like /burA/ in (75) and /dhani/ (76) do not take verbalizer /-e/. These sentences require an independent verb either /kha/'copula' or /jul-a/ 'happened'. Since the adjectives /dhani/ 'rich' and /burA/ 'old' are also used in Nepali, they could be borrowed adjectives which do not use morphology as the other adjectives do. The adjectives which attribute the noun take the general classifier, whereas the predicative construction does not take them. In addition, although the adjectives (such as color, physical property, value, human propensity) take the general classifiers, the numerals take the specific classifiers as the NP structure rule states:

\[ (78) \quad \text{Adj-Cl N Num-Cl} \]
\[ \text{Gen Spe} \]

This shows that two classifiers can occur in a NP which consists of an adjective and a numeral unit:

\[ (79) \quad \text{hyAu-gu darAj ni-ga:} \]
\[ \text{red-Cl shelf two-Cl} \]
\[ \text{Gen Sp} \]
\[ \text{two red shelves} \]

\[ (80) \quad \text{ja:-gu cupi ni-pu} \]
\[ \text{sharp-Cl knife two-Cl} \]
\[ \text{two sharp knives} \]

\[ (81) \quad \text{thike-gu bh6 pye-pA:} \]
\[ \text{expensive-Cl paper four-Cl} \]
\[ \text{four expensive papers} \]

\[ (82) \quad \text{pulA-gu saphu:} \]
\[ \text{old-Cl book} \]
\[ \text{an old book} \]

\[ (83) \quad \text{* hyAu-ga darAj ni-ga} \]
\[ \text{Sp Sp} \]

\[ (84) \quad \text{* hyAu-gu darAj ni-gu} \]
\[ \text{Gen Gen} \]

Referring to Dixon's (1982) observation on adjectives, Schachter (1985) and Philips (1989) categorize adjectives in Igbo and Tibetan as follows:

\[ (85) \]
\[ 1. \text{Dimension:} \quad \text{big, tall, long, short, fat, thin} \]
\[ 2. \text{Physical Property:} \quad \text{heavy, warm, dry, loud, soft, flat, clean, hot} \]
\[ 3. \text{Color:} \quad \text{red, white, blue, yellow, black, green} \]
\[ 4. \text{Age:} \quad \text{young, old} \]
\[ 5. \text{Value:} \quad \text{rich, cheap, expensive, poor, easy, beautiful, convenient} \]
\[ 6. \text{Speed:} \quad \text{fast, slow} \]
\[ 7. \text{Human propensity:} \quad \text{strong, good, bad, selfish, happy, sick, sad, angry, etc.} \]

All these adjectives (except the dimensional adjective) take general classifiers. In Nepal Bhasa, the form of adjective which indicates the dimension of a noun does not stand by itself as the other adjectives do. It is
interesting that the dimensional adjectives are derived from the stems /ta-/ 'big' and /ci-/ 'small', which require the true classifiers as illustrated below:

(86) Big Gloss  Small Gloss
    ta-pu  long  ci-pu  short thin
    ta-khA house  ci-khA house
    ta-mA tree  ci-mA plant
    ta-ha: leaf  ci-ha: little leaf

In contrast, the general classifiers cannot be suffixed to these adjective stems.

(87) * ta-gu  * ci-gu  inanimate general
    * ta-mha  * ci-mha  animate general

However, they can be affixed to the true classifiers with the adjective base.

(88) ta-pu-gu 'big thick'  ci-pu-gu 'short thin'

These examples show that the dimensional adjectives require two classifiers: true and general. The true classifier demonstrates the semantic of noun which is modified by an adjective stem, whereas the general classifiers code the relation between an adjective and a noun as in the examples (89-94) below. This will be discussed later in a section on relativization.

(89)  
    ta-pA:-gu bho
    big-Cl-Cl paper
    a big sheet of paper

(90)  
    ta-dhi-mha manu:
    big-Cl-Cl man
    a big man

(91)  
    ta-pu-gu cupi
    big-Cl-Cl knife
    a big knife

(92)  
    ta-gwa-gu bal
    big-Cl-Cl ball
    a big ball

(93)  
    ta-pA:-gu bhö
    big-Cl-Cl paper
    a big sheet of paper

(94)  
    ta-pu-gu kerA
    big-Cl-Cl banana
    a big banana

Thus, if the adjectives take the specific classifiers, as in dimension, the general classifier is also obligatory to show a relationship between noun and adjective. In this case the general classifier codes semantic referentiality, which differentiates the nouns into animate and inanimate classes. This modifies the rule (84) as follows:

(95)  
    Adj -specific Cl -General Cl N

In addition, the true classifier occurs with the dimensional adjectives, and is repeated with the numerals also specifying the noun as inanimate, while the animate takes only the general classifier for both constituents:

(96)  
    ta-pu-gu kerA swa-pu
    big-Cl-Cl banana three-Cl
    three big bananas

(97)  
    ta-khA-gu che swa-khA
    big-Cl-Cl house three-Cl
    three big houses
Notice that the classifier /-pu/ and /-khA/ classifies the noun as inanimate in (96) and (97). However, (98) shows that the two classifiers /-gwAra/ and /-mha/ occurring with the adjective code refers to the big and fat person, while /-mha/ occurring with the numeral simply refers to animate nouns in general. This leads to the modification of the NP structure rule (95) as follows:

(99)  [ Adj-Cl ]-Cl + N + [Num-Cl] Inanimate
     { Sp Gen Sp }NP

(100) [ Adj-Cl ]-Cl + N + [Num-Cl] Animate
      { Sp Gen Gen }NP

In summary, all adjectives take classifiers. The adjectives that specify physical property, color, age, and human propensity take the general classifiers. However, the dimensional adjectives do not stand by themselves. They take either a specific, unique, class term or repeater as the modifier to the head noun. In addition, the general classifiers are obligatory to attribute the noun. An NP consisting of a dimensional adjective and a numeral requires the same classifier with both categories. However, in this case the general classifier is suffixed to a phrase consisting of an adjective and a classifier.

Classifiers and Pronouns

In possessive construction, the general classifiers is used with pronouns. If the possessed noun is animate, the classifier /mha/ or if the noun is inanimate, the classifier /gu/ occurs with the pronoun, as shown in the following examples.

(101) जी-म्या काप  j-i-mha kAe My son
(102) जी-गु स्किप  ji-gu sabhu: My book

If the possessor is a full noun then the genitive marker /yA/ is suffixed to the noun and the classifier becomes optional:

(103) जोन-या न्या काप  j-o-n-yA (mha) kAe John's son

In contrast, if the possessed noun is inanimate, then the classifier is obligatorily suffixed to the nominal after the genitive marker:

(104) जोन-या चु  j-o-n-yA-gu chê J-GEN-Cl house

In a construction with an inalienable inanimate noun, the general classifier becomes optional:

(105) जोन-या छप  j-o-n-yA-(gu) chyā J-GEN-(Cl) head

John's head
However, in the case of pronouns the classifier is obligatory and the genitive marker becomes optional:

(106) रि-(गा)-रु घर
    ji-(yA)-gu chyā
1sg-GEN-Cl head
    My head

This suggests that the general classifiers are obligatory with pronouns in possessive construction, like a reduced relative clause.

**Classifier and Question Words**

Since Nepal Bhasa has a numeral classifier system, the interrogative quantifiers also require classifiers. An interrogative quantifier /go-/ is used for countable nouns which are specified by classifiers as animate or inanimate. The quantifier /go-/ can take class terms or any classifier from general, sortal, unique and mensural as follows:

(107) 1. Class Term  
       go-mA how many plants

2. Classifier: 
   a. General 
      go-mha how many (animate) 
      go-gu how many (inanimate) things
   b. Unique 
      go-khA how many houses 
      go-pwA: how many holes.
   c. Sortal 
      go-pA how many flat objects 
      go-pu how many long thin objects
   d. Mensural 
      go-pā how many stacks 
      go-muri how many muris (heap)

In contrast, the quantifier /go/ used with the measuring unit term also requires the inanimate general classifier. However it becomes optional with the local measuring terms:

(108) Borrowed: 
      go-gu kilo Alu How many kilos of potatoes? 
      go-gu mitar kApa: How many meters of fabric? 
      go gu liter cikā How many liters of oil?

Local: 
      go-(gu)-dhAni Alu How many dharnis of potatoes? 
      go-(gu) gaj kApa: How many yards of fabric? 
      go-(gu) manA jAk How many manas of rice?

Uncountable nouns are quantified by /guli/, which do not require a classifier or a mensural term:

(109) guli jA How much rice (cooked)? 
      guli duru How much milk?

However, if measuring terms are used with the /guli/, only the conventionalized terms can occur:

(110) guli kilo Alu How many kilos of rice? 
      guli liter duru How many liters of milk?

**Classifiers and Gender**

In Nepal Bhasa gender is not marked morphologically. However, the words like /mijā/ 'man' and /misA/ 'woman' illustrate the gender difference for non-human nouns. The nouns which are not differentiated by gender require the animate general classifier /mha/ suffixed to /mijā/ and /misA/:

(111) निज-म्हा खिचा
    mijā-mha khicA

(112) निसा-म्हा रल
    misA-mha sala

man-Cl dog
    woman-Cl horse

the male dog
    The female horse
This suggests that Nepal Bhasa distinguishes gender in animate nouns with lexical items /misA/ and /mija/. The inanimate noun is not a matter of gender based concern in Nepal Bhasa.

**Nominalizing Function of the Classifiers**

An interesting feature of Nepal Bhasa classifiers is that they also demonstrate other functions besides classification of nouns. I have mentioned above that the general classifiers /mha/ and /gu/ occur with nominal constituents such as numerals, pronouns, question words, and gender determiners. They can also occur with a verb phrase. Since the classifiers coordinate with noun categories, they can turn a non-noun category into a nominal form. The discussion presented in section 2.1 on adjectives shows that the general classifiers occurring with adjectives determine the nominal form of adjectives such as /tadhā-mha/ 'big animate being', /tadhā-gu/ 'big inanimate thing'. Similarly when these general classifiers occur with the verbs they tend to function as nouns rather than verbs. In this case, the classifier reduces the degree of verbal behavior and functions as a nominalizer (Kolver 1977). This extends the function of classifiers from noun classification to the grammatical process of nominalization in Nepal Bhasa:

(113) न मू भालास्

wā na:-gu bālā-t-a
3sg-ERG eat-Cl nice-Stem-Pst (Inanimate)
His (style of) eating became nice.

(114) न न्या धू य

wa lwā-gu ya:
3sg fight-Cl likeHAB(1s/Pl)
I like his fighting.

(115) न मू त ब

na:-mha wa kha
eat-Cl 3sg COP
He is the eater.

(116) आखा बो फोह

Akha: bwāki-mha wa-i
alphabet teach-Cl come-Npst
The teacher will come.

These sentences illustrate that the classifiers /mha/ and /gu/ appearing with the verb /na-/ 'eat', /lwā-/ 'fight' and /bwāki-/ 'teach' function as nominals equivalent to the English gerund (-ing) and agentive (-er) suffixes. In addition the classifiers also code the determinative function of relativization. This occurs with all nominalized NPs, regardless of any grammatical categories.

**Subject Nominalization:**

(117) ह्यु धू ले गूत

hyu-gu là gut-a
wash-Cl cloth be torn-Pst
The washed cloth is torn.
i.e., the cloth [that is washed] is torn.

(118) ह्यु मू तन

hyu-mha manu wal-a
wash-Cl man come-Pst
The washerman came.
i.e., the man [who washed X] came.

---

4 It is noteworthy that the classifiers code only singular forms. In order to code plurality with nominalization in animate nouns, the plural marker /-pl/, which occurs only with kinship terms, functions as the nominalizer (Kolver 1977):

/kAe/ 'son'
/kAe-pl/ 'sons'

/nā:-mha/ 'eater'
/nā:-pl/ 'eaters'.
Notice that these sentences consist of the general classifiers /mha/ and /gu/ suffixed to the verb /hi-/ 'wash' differentiating the animate and inanimate NPs /hyu-mha manu/ and /hyu-gu lā/. These phrases function as the subject of the finite verb /gut-a/ 'torn' and /wal-a/ 'came'. Similarly, these classifiers can also occur with NP constituents functioning as the object of the finite verb, as shown in the following examples:

Direct Object Nominalization:

(119)  

john-ā dA-mha manu tan-a  
J-ERG hit-Cl man loose-Pst  
The man beaten by John was lost.  
i.e. the man [whom John beat] was lost.

Indirect Object Nominalization:

(120)  

jon-ā dA:-gu kathi tan-a  
J-ERG hit-Cl stick loose-Pst  
The stick used by John was lost.  
i.e., the stick [that John has used to beat the man] was lost.

Thus, when the general classifiers occurs with the verb root, there is a strong tendency for the verb to act like a nominal phrase. This may be a language-specific feature of Nepal Bhasa. This feature generates an additional NP structure rule for the occurrence of the classifiers, as follows:

(121)  

NP--> V.root-Cl N

Apart from this, the same classifiers can be affixed to a clause. Sentences (122) and (123) are finite clauses identified by the tense markers -/A/ and /-a/.

Simple Clauses:

(122)  

jī nay-A  
1sgERG eat-PC  
I ate (it).

(123)  

wā sil-a  
3sg know-PD  
He knew it.

These two sentences can be joined by the classifiers /gu/ and /mha/ forming nominalized clauses (124) and (125). They show that the same finite clauses (in 122 and 123) become dependent to the verb /sil-/ 'know' when the clause is affixed with the classifiers /-gu/ and /mha/.

Compound Clauses:

(124)  

wā [ jī nay-A-gu ] sil-a  
3sgERG [ 1sgERG eat-PC-Cl] know-PD  
SUB OBJ  
He knew [that I ate it].

(125)  

wā [ jī nay-A-mha ] sil-a  
3sgERG [ 1sg eat-PC-Cl ] know-PD  
SUB OBJ  
He knew [that I ate it (animate thing like fish)].

These examples indicate that the usage of classifiers can be extended from their morphological behavior to syntactic functions. In (124) and (125) the whole clause functions as the object to the main verb /sil-/ 'know'. The general classifiers can be identified as multi-functional units in Nepal Bhasa. In terms of clause level construction, they occur only with the embedded clause.

Finally, the inanimate general classifier can also be suffixed to a complement clause consisting of a finite verb. In this construction, the clause is embedded within the matrix clause, with an auxiliary verb functioning
as the main verb. In order to show the relationship between the complement clause and the main clause, the quantitative marker or complementizer /dhakA:/ is used as in the following sentence.

(126)  क नापाम्, धका धान
     wa nayA-gu dhakA: dhAl-a
     3sg eat-PC-Cl COMP say-Pst
     He said "I ate (it)".
     He said that he ate (it).5

In summary, the discussion of this section shows that the general classifier not only occurs with the NPs but also with verbs demonstrating their nominalizing function in Nepal Bhasa syntax.

Relativising Function of Classifiers

In addition, the general classifiers also occur with subordinate clauses which modify to the head noun of the main clause. As in the case of nominalization, the classifiers /mha/ and /gu/ are used depending upon the animacy of the head noun. A syntactic structure which consists of a classifier suffixed to the verb is also found in Tuyuca (Barnes 1990, Craig 1991), a South American Indian language. The kinship and pronominal plural marker /pi/ is also used if the modified head noun is coded with plural form. In this type of construction the classifiers /mha/, /gu/ and the plural marker /pi/ code the relation between the main and subordinate clause. These classifiers are suffixed to the verb in a subordinate clause with tense inflection marked with conjunct and disjunct variation (Hale 1973, Hargreaves 1991), coded in the verb as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Non-past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conjunct</td>
<td>-A-gu/mha</td>
<td>-e-gu/mha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disjunct</td>
<td>V:rt-gu/mha</td>
<td>-i-gu/mha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The past tense disjunct inflection requires a verb stem which does not appear when the classifiers are suffixed but rather only attached to the verb root. The classifiers suffixed to the inflected verbs of the dependent clause are illustrated below:

(128)  ज धय-म्व मनु चे बन
     [ji dhay-A-mha] manu che wala
     1sgERG say-Pst-Cl man house come-PD
     The man [about whom I told X] came home.

(129)  ज चव-पत लत य
     [ji cwa-e-gu] pau bAI-A-i
     1sgERG tell-Pst-Cl letter be nice-Npst
     The letter [which I will write] will be nice.

(130)  ज धय-म्व मनु चे बन
     [wa dhA-mha manu] che wal-a
     3sgERG say-Pst-Cl man house come-Pst
     The man [about whom he told you] came home.

(131)  ज धय-म्व मनु चे बन
     [wa cwa-i-gu] pau bAI-A-i
     3sgERG write-Npst-Cl letter be nice-Npst
     The letter [which he will write] will be nice.

5 In this sentence the eater and the teller is the same person. However, in the following sentence two participants are involved.

wā na:-gu dhakA: dhAl-a
He (1) said that he (2) ate (it)
Each of these sentences consists of a main clause and a subordinate clause. The main clauses are /manu chè wala/ 'A man came home' and /pau bÅ lAi/ 'A letter will be nice' while the subordinate clauses are /jì dhay-A/ 'I said' and /jì cwa-e/ 'I will write'. The head nouns in (128) and (130) are animate, while in (129) and (131) they are inanimate. The propositions /jì dhayA/ and /jì cway-A/ modify the head noun of the main clauses. They are conjoined with the classifiers /mha/ and /gu/, and function as the relativizers. Even though /manu/ 'man' and /pau/ 'letter' are head nouns they are not syntactically obligatory in clause combination. The function of the head noun is fulfilled by the classifiers and the main clause becomes headless. However, the classifiers tend to recover the feature of the subject as an either animate or an inanimate noun which is considered the arguments to the verb /wal-/ 'come' and /cwa-/ 'write' as follows:

(132)  

[jì dhay-A-mha] chè wala  
[The (one) which I said] came home.

(133)  

[jì cwa-e-gu] bÅ lA-i  
[The one which I will write] will become nice.

Thus the general classifiers can be affixed to a clause which functions as the modifier to the head noun of the main clause. This generates a syntactic rule affixing the general classifier, as follows:

(134)  

S  
/\  
\_\  
NP /\  
S \  
\  NP  
\  \  V + Cl

This rule tells that the classifier suffixed to the final verb of the relative clause agrees with the head noun.

In addition, the verb of the main clause in the above sentences are intransitive, so the subject is in the absolutive case. If the verb is transitive the subject is coded in the ergative case which is marked by /V-/ . If a subordinate clause functions as the modifier of the subject of the transitive main clause, the case is marked on the classifiers. The proposition becomes an agent relative clause:

(135)  

[jì dhay-A-mhā] wa-yAta dAl-a  
[SUB 1sgERG say-Pst- Cl-ERG 3sg-ABS hit-Pst.  
[The (person) about whom I talked] hit him (another).  

SUB]

In contrast, if the subject of the main clause is inanimate, the subordinate clause becomes an object relative clause which is marked with instrumental oblique case:

(136)  

[jì dhay-A-gu(l)]-i wa-yAta dAl-a  
[1sgERG say-Pst- Cl-INST 3sg-ABS hit-Pst.  
[The (thing) about which I talked] was used to hit him.

In addition, if the subordinate clause modifies the object of the main clause, the absolutive marker /-yAta/ is affixed to the animate classifier, and the proposition becomes a patient relative clause:

(137)  

[wā [jì dhay-A-mhā(s)]-yAta] dAl-a  
[SUB 3sgERG 1sgERG say-Pst- Cl-ABS hit-Pst.  
He hit [the person about whom I was talking].

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In contrast, if the same clause has an inanimate object then the clause functions as an oblique relative clause of location.

(138) न वि भार-भुविन दल
wā [jī dhay-A-gu-] (l)i dAl-a
SUB OBJ
3sg/ERG 1sg/ERG say-Pst- CI-LOC 3sg-ABS hit-Pst.

He hit (at the thing) about which I was talking.

It is noteworthy that, in all these sentences, the case marker is affixed to the classifiers; in addition, some phonological segments appear, such as [s] with animate classifier and [l] with an inanimate classifier. These segments support the hypothesis that the proto-forms of the general classifiers can be identified as */mhasa/ and */gula/.

In summary, the general classifiers demonstrate several usages in Nepal Bhasa syntax. They occur with numeral, adjective, and verbs as well as with clauses. In the case of clause construction, the classifiers have functions besides the classification of nouns. In NP construction, the classifiers occur with numerals and adjectives, whereas in the case of clause construction the classifiers code the process of nominalization which distinguishes an action and an agent by the inanimate and animate general classifiers. This process also allows the coding of the derivational function of verbs into nominal constituents. In addition, the general classifiers also occur with a non-finite clause which functions as a relative proposition to modify the head noun by the process of relativization. In this construction, the relative clause is fully embedded within the main clause. If the subject of the main clause is an agent then the relative clause is marked in ergative case. If the object of the main clause is patient, the relative clause is marked in absolutive or dative case. These case marks are affixed to the classifiers. The occurrence of animate or inanimate classifiers in relative clause construction changes the grammatical categories from subject to instrumental oblique and from object to locational oblique. These classifiers also occur with complement clauses which are embedded in the main clause and are complementized by the morpheme /dhakA:/.

In order to examine more syntactic functions of classifiers further study is needed.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the categorization of nouns starting with a coding by class terms or classifiers. They are suffixed to numerals. The class term is used only for plant related nouns, whereas the classifiers code various types of animate and inanimate nouns. The earlier section discusses the structure, semantics, and types of classifiers. Basically, the classifiers are bound morphemes suffixed to numerals. They categorize nouns into two major groups: animate and inanimate. Among the inanimate group there are several structure. Some of them only occur with certain nouns. They are labeled as unique classifiers. Some nouns themselves function as classifiers and also repeat the form with numerals.

In addition, there are several other types of classifiers which based on the physical semantics of nouns, such as sortal and mensural. The sortal classifiers sort the nouns into several classes shape, size, and consistency of entities. The mensural classifiers categorize the nouns in terms of arrangement and measuring unit terms. The classifiers based on semantics of shape, size, consistency and arrangement are considered to be the true classifiers of Nepal Bhasa. The classifiers based on shape and size can be divided further into long-thin, flat, and round or three-dimensional. There are a dozen classifiers based on the consistency, while classifiers based on arrangement number a half dozen. These classifiers are similar to expression of quasi-units, such as heap, stack, row, layer, pouch, stripe, etc. The measuring unit terms are not real classifiers, but they function as the other classifiers. They are of two types, conventionalized and adhoc. The conventionalized measuring terms are of borrowed and local types. The borrowed units are used universally in most of the languages whereas the local measuring units imply the traditional concept of quantifying nouns. If a noun does not take any of these classifiers, the inanimate general classifier is used by default.

The second section discussed the syntactic usage of classifiers. Although these classifiers are suffixed to numerals, they can also occur with adjectives, pronouns and verb phrases. All adjectives (except dimensional) take general classifiers which depend upon the animacy of nouns, while the dimensional adjectives take all types of inanimate classifiers except the borrowed measuring unit terms. The adjectival predicate construction does not require general classifiers. However, the attributive adjectives take the general and the specific classifiers.

When general classifiers occur with the pronominals, they code possession of animate or inanimate nouns. They can also be suffixed to the nouns, but they occur only after suffxing the genitive marker to the
noun. The general classifiers also occur with the verb phrase, and function as the nominalizers. They are suffixed to the inflected finite verb forms.

Finally the classifiers can be suffixed to a subordinate clause functioning as the complement to the main clause, or in order to relativize and attribute the head noun of the main clause. This is a specific feature of general classifiers in Nepal Bhasa. A detailed study on these features of classifiers in Nepal Bhasa syntax would be an excellent field for further research. In terms of overall study of the Nepal Bhasa classifier system, Hale and Shresthacharya (1973), and Bhaskar Rao and Joshi (1984) have shown the features of classifying languages and semantics of Nepal Bhasa classifiers. I have shown how Nepal Bhasa is similar to other classifier languages, and how the native speakers of Nepal Bhasa conceptualize the nouns in order to select the right classifier and how they function in Nepal Bhasa syntax. It is also noteworthy to remember that Hale and Shrestha (1992) have presented some evidence based on a narrative discourse that the animate general classifier /-mha/ is used with kinship terms and to demonstrate the indefinite sense with a numeral and verb base (pg 4). This needs to be verified with more narrative discourses. As a native speaker I assume that the general classifier is also used to demonstrate the definiteness in one of the clause combining processes. This also needs to be examined.

Appendix:
Inventory of Classifiers in Nepal Bhasa

-gu inanimate object
-mha animate beings
-pu long thin
-pA flat
-pA: flat sheet
-ga round
-gwa: spherical
-twA: a section of long
-thu: hollow object
-phwa: flower
-dhi frozen object
-pwA: hole
-pu: layer
-tyA: solid long
-gwArA solid large round
-dhi frozen
-dhA: spherical liquid
-pa stack
-dwA heap
-ba: layer
-bhe: pouch
-bhu: layer
-cA: circular
-hAka: length
-tA: timing
-dho: line
-phi thickness
-kale bunch
-pwAe handful of hair
-pAe lump
-jo: pair
-ju pair
-ku load
-pe handful of meal
-bhwA: handful of food tossed into the mouth

-khā a subject of matter
-phuti drop
-tiki drop
-pA pair
-ku: piece
-mhu: fist
-thu timing
-bo feast
-tA item
-pi: field
-tā step
-jhA: short timing
-ta a floor of a building
-tu scoop
-tA item
-co: apex
-mA plant
-bhe a portion
-bhi a section of orange

References


Stupa at Swayambhu (photograph by Ter Ellingson)