Numeral Classifiers in Lua

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The grammatical category of „numeral classifier" (NCl) is widespread in East- and Southeast Asia as well as in Oceania. NCls are generally acknowledged to pertain to the categorization of objects in counting and quantification situations.

There is a tradition of cross-linguistic typology of classifier studies that regards the numeral classifier system as a relatively structured system that is based on human cognition (e.g. Adams and Conklin 1973; Adams 1989, Allan 1977; Bisang 1999, etc.) where animacy, shape and function are universal and cognitively based features . In contrast, Carpenter 1992, Haas (1942), Matsumoto 1993, Downing 1996, etc. argue for a prototype analysis to characterize the semantic system of numeral classifiers, whereas Goral 1978 and Senft 1996 for a model of analysis that can be see as representing a cross between the two types of analyses.

The initial aim of this paper is to present the inventory of classifiers of Lua, an unwritten and endangered language of the Mon-Khmer family spoken in various dialectal variations in the province of Nan (Thailand) and which was collected in personal fieldwork over the past years. The inventory is contrasted with the comparatively well documented inventories of Japanese, Khmer, Mandarin, and Thai in the following sections of the talk to bring out not only the affinities of the Lua classifiers with related SEA classifier systems, but also its differences with East-Asian systems. This is done with the aim of demonstrating how the data of Lua can lend empirical support to the models sketched above.

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