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Classifiers in Molsom

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Abstract
There is no work done so far on the classifiers in Molsom. This paper attempts to do so. Crosslinguistically eight classifiers are attested. Of these only the numeral classifiers are used Molsom. Numeral classifiers are used for indicating the semantic classes of concrete nouns in the context of counting. Abstract nouns do not take any classifiers as they defy quantification.

The numeral classifier immediately follows the head noun in a noun phrase: [[N] CL Num]$_{NP}$. A numeral classifier consists of two distinct words which must stay together. In other words, being independent words, they do not get attached to the noun within the noun phrase. Molsom has separate sets of numeral classifiers for count nouns and mass nouns. An exceptional numeral classifier called a repeater is also noticed in the language.

Keywords: Molsom, classifiers, numeral classifiers, count nouns, mass nouns, repeater

Introduction
A classifier (CL or CLF) occurs within a noun phrase as a word to accompany the noun in certain grammatical contexts. It is considered to classify the noun depending on its referent. In other words, a classifier generally reflects some kind of conceptual classification of the nouns based on features of referents. Languages use discrete classifiers to represent humans, flat objects, periods of time, etc. etc. To a certain extent, the assignment of classifier to a noun is unpredictable. This is because some nouns take certain classifiers by virtue of historically established convention. The classifier can also be an affix attached to the noun. When word, it is sometimes called a measure word or counter word. The South East Asian languages such as Chinese, Vietnamese, Korea, Japanese etc. use classifiers to carry out important linguistic functions. Classifiers are either absent or marginally used in European languages.

In this paper we discuss the classifiers in Molsom language, an undocumented and unstudied language belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family spoken in Tripura. Section 1.1 deals with the types of classifiers used in classifying nouns in the languages of the world. 1.2 takes up Numeral classifiers for focused discussion with evidence from Mandarin Chinese and Bangla. This is necessitated by the fact that Molsom language has numeral classifiers in plenty. The detailed discussion on the latter follows in 1.3. The study winds up with the findings in 1.4.

Kinds of classifiers
Aikhenvald (2000) [1] mentions about different classifiers noted across the languages. To quote him, 'Some languages have grammatical agreement classes, based on such core semantic characteristics such as animacy, sex, or humanness. These are called NOUN CLASSES or GENDERS.'

i. Gender Classifiers
Classifiers referring to gender vary in number from two to several dozen. Portuguese illustrate masculine and feminine genders by a suffix attached to the noun. The suffix is also marked on the accompanying article and adjective.

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Table 1: Gender Classifier in Portuguese

o ART: MASC.SG	menin-o child- MASC.SG	bonit-o beautiful- MASC.SG	'the beautiful child'
a ART: FEM.SG	menin-a child-FEM.SG	bonit-a beautiful-FEM.SG	'a beautiful boy'

ii. Noun Classifiers

'A classifier can just categorize the noun by itself, as in the following example from Yidiny' (Dixon 1982: 192) as mentioned in Aikhenvald (2000: 2) [1]. This is called Noun Classifier.

Table 2: Noun Classifier in Yidiny

bama CL: PERSON	Waguja man	'a man'

iii. Numeral Classifiers

Some languages use a special morpheme Numeral Classifier, so called by virtue of the position it takes in the noun phrase: it appears next a numeral or quantifier. Semantically, the classifier refers to the category of the referent of the noun in terms of the latter's animacy, shape, or other inherent properties. Aikhenvald (2000: 2) [1] exemplifies some such classifiers with a shopping list in Japanese (cf. Rie Hasada 1995).

Table 3: Numeral Classifiers with a shopping list in Japanese

Shopping list	Numeral	Classifier	Meaning of classifier
nasu (eggplant)	nana (7)	-ko	CL: Small. Equidimensional
kyuuri (cucumber)	hachi (8)	-hon	CL: Elongated
hamu	juu (10)	-mai	CL: Sheetlike

More discussion on numeral classifier is in the pipeline.

iv. Possessed Classifiers

In a possessive construction a suffix is attached to the possessive noun to characterize the possessed noun. This suffix is called a Possessed classifier. This is noted in Tariana, a South American language. (Table 4) below exemplifies this (cf. Aikhenvald (ibid)).

Table 4: Possessed Classifier in Tariana

tʃinu dog	nu-ite 1SG-CL: ANIMATE	'my dog'

v. Relational Classifiers

Defining a relational classifier, Aikhenvald (2000: 2) [1] states 'A special morpheme in a possessive construction may characterize the way in which the referent of a possessed noun relates to that of the possessor.' Illustrations are provided from Fijian.

Table 5: Relational Classifier in Fijian

na ART	me-qu CL: DRINKABLE-my	yaqona kava	'my kava' (which I intend to drink)
na ART	no-qu CL: GENERAL-my	yaqona kava	'my kava' (that I grew, or that I will sell)

vi. Verbal Classifiers

A verbal classifier appears on the verb but it categorizes a noun. The latter is typically the subject of an intransitive verb or the direct object of a transitive verb. The classifier denotes the shape, consistency and animacy of the noun. The example below from Waris, a Papuan language, testifies this. Here the classifier put- 'round objects' is used with the verb ra 'get' to characterize it object noun i.e., 'coconut'.

Table 6: Verbal Classifier in Waris

sa coconut	ka-m 1SG-to	put-ra-ho-o VCL: Round-GET-BENEFACT-Imperative	(lit. 'coconut to-me round.one-give') 'Give me a coconut'

vii. Locative Classifiers

Adpositions in locative constructions are called locative classifiers. These are rare varieties found in Palikur, an Arawak language from Brazil. In (Table 9-10) below they are shown as underlined.

Table 7: Locative Classifier in Palikur

pi-wan 2SG-arm	min on+VERT	'on your (vertical) arm'
ah tree	peu on+BRANCH.LIKE	'on (branch-like) tree'

viii. Deictic Classifiers

As Aikhenvald (2000: 176) [1] states 'Deictic classifiers obligatorily occur with deictic elements such as articles and demonstratives. Their choice is semantic, and they categorize the noun in terms of its shape, animacy, and position in space; they do not always appear on the noun itself…. The classifier morphemes come from grammaticalized stance verbs 'sit', 'stand', and 'lie'…. They indicate the stance of the antecedent, as well as the form of the antecedent: one dimensional (long, vertical, or 'standing'), two-dimensional (horizontal, or 'lying'), or three dimensional (round, or 'sitting')'. Examples given by

the author from Mandan, a Siouan language are in (Table 8) below.

Table 8: Deictic Classifier in Mandan

dε-mãk this-DEICTIC.CL: LYING	'this one (lying)'
dε-nãk this-DEICTIC.CL: SITTING	'this one (sitting)'
dε-hãk this-DEICTIC.CL: STANDING	'this one (standing)'

1.2 Numeral Classifiers: Chinese and Bangla

Languages having classifiers often use them when the noun is being counted: in other words, the classifiers appear with a numeral. A phrase like 'two people' is obligatorily expressed as 'two X (of) people' where X is a classifier appropriate to the noun for 'people'. Classifiers are also accompanied by demonstratives ('this', 'that' etc.): Chinese is an ideal example. Languages with noun classes (especially genders) tend to have a smaller number of classes. Further, noun classes are not always dependent on the noun's meaning: they have a variety of grammatical consequences. We now present some examples of classifiers used with numerals from Mandarin Chinese and Bangla. In both 'Numeral CL Noun' is the sequence of words.

Mandarin Chinese

Table 9: Numeral Classifier in Mandarin Chinese

sān three	gè [human-classifier]	xuéshëng student	'three students'
sān three	kë [tree-classifier]	shù tree	'three trees'
sān three	zhī [bird-classifier]	niǎo bird	'three birds'
sān three	tiáo [long-wavy-classifier]	hé river	'three rivers'

Bangla

Table 10: Numeral Classifiers in Bangla

tin three	jon [human-CL]	manush person	'three people'
ɔnek many	jon [human-CL]	lok person	'many people'
ek one	ṭa [generic-CL]	boi book	'one book'
noy nine	ṭa [generic-CL]	ghori watch	'nine clocks'

Every noun in Bangla must have its corresponding classifier when used with a numeral or other quantifier. Common practice for nouns is to take the generic classifier ṭa. There are also other specific measure words i.e., classifiers in the language. Of them, jon is very often used only to count humans. However, ṭa and jon are also used interchangeably for humans. (cf. Table 11). For [-human] nouns this is not allowed. (cf. Table 12).

Table 11: ṭa and jon for Humans

car four	jon [human-CL]	lok person	'four people'
car four	ṭa [generic-CL]	lok person	'four people'

Table 12: jon for Humans only

*car four	jon [human-CL]	ghori watch	'four watches'
*baro twelve	jon [human-CL]	goru cow	'four cows'

As in Chinese, measuring units in Bangla without their corresponding measure words are ruled out: tero biṛal is ruled out as against tero ṭa biṛal 'thirteen cats'. However, the classifier is omitted when it counts a noun that is not in the nominative case. For example, consider (Table 13-14).

Table 13: Classifier Omitted in Genitive Case in Bangla

tero thirteen	biṛal-er cat-possessive	deʃ country		'country of thirteen cats'
*tero thirteen	ṭa [generic-CL]	biṛaler cat-possessive	deʃ country	'country of thirteen cats'

Table 14: Classifier Omitted in Locative Case in Bangla

tin three	bhute ghost-instrumental	khelo ate		'three ghosts ate'
*tin three	ṭa [generic-CL]	bhute ghost-instrumental	khelo ate	'three ghosts ate'

Classifier is also omitted when the number is very large (Table 15).

Table 15: Omission of Classifier in Bangla I

du two	ʃo hundred	lok people	khay eat	'two hundred people eat'

Using classifier is redundant if the focus of the sentence is not on the actual counting but on a statement of fact.

Table 16. Omission of Classifier in Bangla II

rajar king-possessive	tin three	rani queen	'the king has three queens'

In Bangla omission of the noun itself is also noticed; but the classifier is preserved.

Table 17: Omission of Noun in Bangla

ek one	jon [human-CL]	geche go-Pres. Perfect'		'one person has gone'
ar more	baro twelve	ṭa [generic-CL]	chilo were	'twelve more were there'

The nouns are missing in (Table 17) but they are implied by the respective classifiers. In Bangla nouns are not inflected for number just as in Chinese.

In this paper we discuss the classifiers in Molsom language.

Numeral Classifiers in Molsom

Molsom uses numeral classifiers for classifying the referents of concrete nouns. They are used when a noun is counted. The absence of a classifier in counting of noun is unacceptable in this language. So, with few exceptions, classifiers are obligatory for every noun in the expressions of counting. The example in (Table 18) does not take a classifier since it is not quantified, but (Table 19) takes a classifier because the noun is quantified i.e., counted.

Table 18: Absence of Classifier in Molsom

kuu-ṭɛbɪl 1Sg. Poss. table	tʰar new	'my new desk'

Table 19: Mandatory Presence of Classifier in Molsom

kuɪma 1Sg.Nom	kʰɛtɔ quilt	[pɔk nɪka] CL two	kɪnuɪ 1Sg. have	'I have two quilts'

Numeral Classifiers Structure in Molsom

In Molsom, numeral and classifier always appear together within the Noun Phrase (NP).

They follow the head noun in the sequence: [[N] CL Num]$_{NP}$ as in (Table 20).

Table 20: Numeral Classifier Structure in Molsom

[[lɔtʰɔ] koŋ tʰʊmka] stick CL three	'three sticks'

Here, lɔtʰɔ is a count noun. koŋ is a classifier inanimate i.e., [-human] that indicates a rod-like or vertical straight-line object. The form tʰʊmka is the combination of tʰʊm 'three' and ka 'quantifier morpheme'. -ka is always suffixed to a numeral to produce a quantifying form like tʰʊmka 'three'. Let us now discuss in detail different categories of numeral classifiers in Molsom.

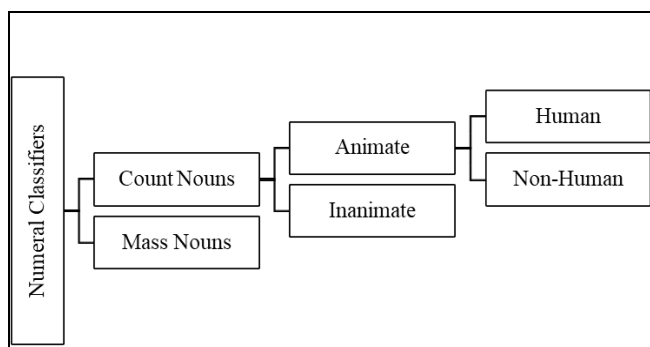**Different Types of Numeral Classifiers in Molsom**

Fig 1: Types of Numeral Classifiers in Molsom

As shown in Figure 1 above numeral classifiers in Molsom are of two major types: those used for count nouns (total 18) and those for mass nouns (total 3).

Count nouns: Animate

There are two classifiers for animate count nouns: lʊ and pʊm: lʊ is specific to humans and pʊm is for the non-humans. For convenience of presentation let us avoid using the structure of the NP.

Table 21: Classifier for human nouns: lʊ

manɪɔ human	[lʊ nɪka] CL two	'two humans'
nɔʊpaŋ child	[lʊ nɪka] CL two	'two children'
nʊpaŋ girl	[lʊ nɪka] CL two	'two girls'
ʊpɔ boy	[lʊ nɪka] CL two	'two boys'
campʊɪ friend	[lʊ nɪka] CL two	'two friends'

Table 21: Classifier for non-human nouns: pʊm

posʊ animal	[pʊm nɪka] CL two	'two animals'
meŋ cat	[pʊm nɪka] CL two	'two cats'
sarɔt cow	[pʊm nɪka] CL two	'two cows'
wok pig	[pʊm nɪka] CL two	'two pigs'
ʊɪ dog	[pʊm nɪka] CL two	'two dogs'

Count nous: Inanimate

For inanimate count nouns there are sixteen classifiers in Molsom. They are as follows (Table 22-37).

Table 22: Classifier for fruits and vegetables: mʊ

tʰuɪhɔɪ mango	[mʊ nɪka] CL two	'two mangoes'
musɛr lime	[mʊ nɪka] CL two	'two limes'
mantɔʊ eggplant	[mʊ nɪka] CL two	'two eggplants'
gɔɪpʰɔl papaya	[mʊ nɪka] CL two	'two papayas'

Table 23: Classifier for referring to flat objects (book, shirts, pants, clothes, etc.): pɔk

lɛkʰabʊ book	[pɔk nɪka] CL two	'two books'
kancɪlɪ shirt	[pɔk nɪka] CL two	'two shirts'
tʊman pant	[pɔk nɪka] CL two	'two pants'
pon cloth	[pɔk nɪka] CL two	'two clothes'

Table 24: Classifier for referring to half of a thing: pʰal

gɔjam guava	[pʰal nɪka] CL two	'two halves of guava'
gɔɪpʰɔl papaya	[pʰal nɪka] CL two	'two halves of papaya'
mɔrʈʉɪ pineapple	[pʰal nɪka] CL two	'two halves of pineapple'
mɔnpʰɔl watermelon	[pʰal nɪka] CL two	'two halves of watermelon'

Table 25: Classifier for referring to pieces of anything: rɛcɛk

t̪ʰʉɪhɔɪ mango	[rɛcɛk nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of mango'
gɔjam guava	[rɛcɛk nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of guava'
gɔɪpʰɔl papaya	[rɛcɛk nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of papaya'
mɔrʈʉɪ pineapple	[rɛcɛk nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of pineapple'

Table 26: Classifier for referring to small pieces of anything: lɛp

t̪ʰɪŋt̪ak wood	[lɛp nɪka] CL two	'two small pieces of wood'
ro bamboo	[lɛp nɪka] CL two	'two small pieces of bamboo'

Table 27: Classifier for referring to any tree: kʊŋ

t̪ʰɪŋ tree	[kʊŋ nɪka] CL two	'two trees'
pɔr flower	[kʊŋ nɪka] CL two	'two flower trees'
t̪ʰʉɪhɔɪ mango	[kʊŋ nɪka] CL two	'two mango trees'
mʉʉsɛr lime	[kʊŋ nɪka] CL two	'two lime trees'

Table 28: Classifier for referring to small lines or thread like things: t̪ʉŋ

sarʉʉn thread	[t̪ʉŋ nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of threads'
sam hair	[t̪ʉŋ nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of hairs'
mʊl body-hair	[t̪ʉŋ nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of body-hairs'
rʊɪ rope	[t̪ʉŋ nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of ropes'

Table 29: Classifier for referring to anything in linear position: t̪on

lɔ song	[t̪on nɪka] CL two	'two lines of a song'
lampʊɪ way	[t̪on nɪka] CL two	'two lines of a way'
sarel pestle	[t̪on nɪka] CL two	'two pestles'
t̪ʰɪŋ firewood	[t̪on nɪka] CL two	'two firewood'

Table 30. Classifier for referring to a vertical in appearance: koŋ

lɔt̪ʰɔ stick	[koŋ nɪka] CL two	'two sticks'
ro bamboo	[koŋ nɪka] CL two	'two bamboos'
pʰʉɪ leg	[koŋ nɪka] CL two	'two legs'
ɪn co house pillar	[koŋ nɪka] CL two	'two house pillars'

Table 31: Classifier for referring to pieces of meat: t̪ɪn

wɔk me pig meat	[t̪ɪn nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of pork'
ɔr me chicken meat	[t̪ɪn nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of chicken'
kel me goat meat	[t̪ɪn nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of mutton'
sarɔt̪ me cow meat	[t̪ɪn nɪka] CL two	'two pieces of beef'

Table 32: Classifier for referring to a lump or mass of anything: kʰoʊ

lʊŋ stone	[kʰoʊ nɪka] CL two	'two solid pieces of stone'
neŋ mud	[kʰoʊ nɪka] CL two	'two solid pieces of mud'
bʊ rice	[kʰoʊ nɪka] CL two	'two solid pieces of cooked-rice'

Table 33: Classifier for referring to cloves of vegetables: kɔrɔ

mʉʉzoʊŋoʊ white onion	[kɔrɔ nɪka] CL two	'two cloves of garlic'
caɪkəmɔrɔ pumpkin	[kɔrɔ nɪka] CL two	'two cloves of pumpkin'

Table 34: Classifier for referring to anything round in size: lʊm

neŋ earth	[lʊm nɪka] CL two	'two earthen ball'

Table 35: Classifier for referring to anything flat and large in size: t̪ɔp

baɪ bread	[t̪ɔp nɪka] CL two	'two large pieces of bread'

Table 36: Classifier for referring to anything flat and small in size: t̪ep

baɪ bread	[t̪ep nɪka] CL two	'two small pieces of bread'

Table 37: Classifier for referring to a half of anything: bɔŋ

ŋɔ fish	[bɔŋ nɪka] CL two	'two halves of fish'

Mass Nouns

Numeral classifiers or measure words for mass nouns are only three in Molsom: sɔp, mʊsʊm, and t̪ɔm. They are exemplified in (Table 38-40). The numeral word is kʰat̪-ka 'one Quantifier' in the underlying representation. However, on the surface the native speakers reduce it to ka. Explaining the phenomenon will lead the discussion astray to the zone of prosodic phonology. Hence let us eschew doing so.

Table 38: Classifier for referring to a bunch of anything: sɔp

grɛp grape	[sɔp ka] CL one	'a bunch of grapes'
lɛcʊ litchi	[sɔp ka] CL one	'a bunch of litchis'
cɔpɪ key	[sɔp ka] CL one	'a bunch of keys'
kʊwaɪ betel nut	[sɔp ka] CL one	'a bunch of betel nuts'

Table 39: Classifier for referring to a small quantity of a mass noun: mʊsʊm

sɔɪ rice	[mʊsʊm ka] CL one	'a handful of rice'
mɪcɪ salt	[mʊsʊm ka] CL one	'a handful of salt'
cɪnɪ sugar	[mʊsʊm ka] CL one	'a handful of sugar'
muʊrsʉ chili	[mʊsʊm ka] CL one	'a handful of chilies'

Table 40: Classifier for referring to a bundle of anything: t̪ɔm

lɛkʰɔ paper	[t̪ɔm ka] CL one	'a bundle of paper'
ro bamboo	[t̪ɔm ka] CL one	'a bundle of bamboo'

Repeater

A unique numeral classifier employed by Molsom is repeater. It is used only with seeds of fruits and vegetables. Here, the noun is copied into the empty classifier slot, causing its repetition in the quantifying phrase. Consider the illustrations of repeater in Molsom in (Table 41).

Table 41: Classifier for referring to seeds: cɪ

t̪ʰuɪhɔɪ cɪ mango seed	[cɪ nɪka] CL two	'two mango seeds'
gɔɪpʰɔl cɪ papaya seed	[cɪ nɪka] CL two	'two papaya seeds'
bɛ cɪ bean seed	[cɪ nɪka] CLtwo	'two bean seeds'

Conclusion

We have discussed the numeral classifiers in Molsom which are chiefly twenty-one in number: for count nouns eighteen and for mass nouns three. A minor type of classifier called repeater used for count nouns is also discussed as attested in the language. As a first attempt in exploring this aspect of grammar of an unstudied Sino-Tibetan language, this study promises to open up a vista of possibilities for future research.

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