Numeral Classifiers in Eastern Tamang[*]

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Barrie, Michael Jonathan Mathew & Jun, Jaehyun. (2022). Numeral classifiers in Eastern Tamang. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal, 30*(1), 113-131. In this paper, we examine numeral classifiers and number marking in one dialect of Eastern Tamang. As Tamang is a relatively understudied dialect continuum, we give a basic description of the empirical facts. We then employ various diagnostics from the literature and one we created ourselves to determine whether classifiers compose with nouns or with numerals. We conclude that since the classifier composes with numerals, the numeral classifier is a constituent that composes with the NP. We also examine number marking and observe that the plural marker is obligatory in some environments for animate nouns, but not for inanimate nouns. We conclude by making some tentative remarks that this dialect of Eastern Tamang might be undergoing a transition from a classifier language to a number language.

Key Words: numeral classifiers, Tamang, number, language change

1. Introduction

We examine the properties of number, plural marking, and use of classifiers in one dialect of Eastern Tamang (ISO: taj).[1)] There is considerable variation in Tamang dialects

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 1) The data for this study are from a male speaker of Eastern Tamang in his twenties from Lalitpur (historically Patan) in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. He speaks Tamang at home with his friends and family, English at school, and Nepali for everyday life outside the home with non-Tamang speakers.

in regards to numeral classifiers and number marking, so we concentrate on one dialect here, which we refer to as the Lilitpur dialect of Eastern Tamang for convenience, as this is where our speaker is from. We show that this dialect of Tamang has optional classifiers, a count mass distinction, optional number marking for inanimate nouns, and (nearly) obligatory number marking for animate nouns.

There are two models for classifier languages. Chierchia (1998) proposes that classifiers are needed to make nouns countable. This is the *classifiers for nouns* model. Krifka (1995) proposes that in some languages numerals require a classifier in order to be able to measure out what the numeral is counting. This is the *classifiers for numerals* model. Bale & Coon (2014), Jenks (2017), and Little *et al*. (forthcoming) suggest that both options exist in natural language and offer some diagnostics to distinguish between these two models. We furthermore add one of our own based on coordination. The results here clearly show that Lilitpur Eastern Tamang has the classifiers for numerals model; however, as mentioned above, the classifier is typically optional. So far, we have been unable to pinpoint any difference in meaning correlated to the presence versus absence of the classifier. We suggest that the classifier system in this dialect may be disappearing, in part due to the fact that it is found with such a restricted set of numerals. This view is further supported by the rise of obligatory number marking with animate nouns.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides the relevant background for this discussion. Pertinent aspects of Tamang grammar are presented followed by the diagnostics for distinguishing between the two models for classifier languages discussed above. Section 3 gives a full discussion of numeral classifiers in Lilitpur Eastern Tamang. Section 4 presents the discussion, in which the diagnostics are tested. Section 5 is a conclusion.

2. Background

This section provides the relevant background material for this investigation. We start with some background information on Tamang and then present some basic properties of numeral classifier constructions.

He is currently living in Seoul, South Korea. The data here were collected in South Korea in 2021.

2.1. Tamang

Tamang is a Sino-Tibetan language with about one million speakers in Nepal and parts of neighbouring India. There is a vast array of dialects, and it is more properly thought of as a dialect continuum. It is roughly divided into Western Tamang (tdg), Eastern Tamang (taj), Northwestern Tamang (tmk), and Eastern Gorkha Tamang (tge), although this classification is open to debate. As mentioned, the dialect under investigation here is part of the Eastern variety. See Figure 1 for a map showing the approximate locations of the dialects mentioned.[2] Tamang in general is an SOV language with fairly typical head-final properties (Mazaudon 2002; Poudel 2006; Lee 2011; Owen-Smith 2015; Regmi and Regmi 2018). Noun phrases are mostly noun-final; however, numeral-classifiers can appear in post-nominal position (as described below). The remainder of this section provides brief details on the structure of the nominal phrase.

Figure 1. Map of dialects of Tamang

There is considerable variation in the properties of nominal phrases across dialects. Native Tamang numerals operate on a base twenty system, which is described in detail in Regmi & Regmi (2018). For the dialect under discussion and the dialect discussed in Owen-Smith (2015), native Tamang numerals are used only for small amounts, up to around ten. Numerals appear, with or without a classifier depending on the dialect, either

2) Map courtesy of https://freevectormaps.com/nepal/NP-EPS-02-0001?ref=atr.

to the left or the right of the noun. Note, though, that this property is subject to dialect variation, too. Poudel (2006) gives the following example for Dhukante Tamang (an Eastern variety). The head noun *wʰai* ('song') is the final element in the nominal phrase, save for the possible post-nominal placement of the numeral. Note that "(one)" is added to the idiomatic translation by the authors for clarity on this point. Poudel notes, however, that only the numeral 'one' has this option. All other numerals precede the noun in the variety he describes.

(1) Hoza Pemba-la (gik) sjan lʰanan zja-ba wʰai (gik) nga-da sem la-zi
    that P-GEN (one) other very good-NZR song (one) I-DAT like do-PST
    'I liked the other (one) very good song of Pemba.'

One point of variation is the classifiers. Poudel (2006) reports two classifiers for human and non-human nouns *-mʰendo* and *-Tʰika*, respectively. Owen-Smith (2015) explicitly states that classifiers seem to be absent in the dialect of Tamang he discusses (also an Eastern dialect). Lee (2011) reports that numeral-classifiers can be post-nominal or pre-nominal in the variety of Central-Eastern Tamang that he examines. The classifier, *gor*, is optional in post-nominal position only. Regmi & Regmi (2018) reports a classifier *ma* for animate nouns in Western Tamang. As we discuss below, there is an optional classifier *goɾ* in Lalitpur Eastern Tamang.

Finally, there is also variation in number marking across Tamang dialects. Regmi & Regmi (2018) report a three-way distinction (singular, dual, plural) with the suffixes *-ngi* and *-ma* for dual and plural, respectively. Lee (2011) reports that *-kade* and *-dʰugu/-jugu* are in free variation and that these plural markers can co-occur with classifiers. Poudel (2006) reports *-dugu/-zugu* as a general plural marker, along with *-gade* as plural marker on pronouns only. Owen-Smith (2015) reports that nouns are optionally marked for plural number with the suffix *-pakal*.

This brief introduction to number and classifiers in Tamang illustrates the tremendous cross-dialectal variation and also illustrates the need for careful documentation. We move on to a discussion of two models of numeral-classifier constructions in the next section.

2.2. Numeral Classifiers

Classifiers and number marking are generally taken to be in complementary

distribution (Greenberg, 1977; Borer, 2005). In number marking languages such as English, for an NP to be counted it must merge with a Num head (Ritter, 1991, 1992). In classifier languages, however, an NP merges with a classifier, a Cl (Tang, 1990). Based on this complementary distribution, Borer proposed the label DivP that houses either a classifier or a number marker; however, for reasons to be made clear below, we continue Cl for classifiers and Num for plural markers. Greenberg further observed that if a classifier language has plural marking, plural marking is optional. Korean, a classifier language, provides a typical illustration of this optionality (see Kim, 2009; Kim and Melchin, 2018a,b; Park 2008, 2020 for further discussion).

(2) Haksayng-(tul)-un   manh-ta.
    student-(PL)-TOP   be.many-DECL
    'There's a lot of students.'

Two models for the structure of classifier languages have been proposed, based on their syntax and semantics. These two models are covered in detail in Bale & Coon (2014), Little *et al*. (forthcoming) and Jenks (2017), but we review the salient points here. The more well known model is advanced by Chierchia (1998), which we refer to as the *classifiers for nouns* model. This theory holds that in some languages all nouns are mass nouns. Such nouns cannot be counted directly (compare: **two garlics* vs. *two cloves of garlic*) and require a classifier to be counted. Thus, the difference between such languages and English is that in English, count nouns have the denotation of atoms (in the sense of Link 1983) and so can directly compose with a numeral. The structure under the *classifiers for nouns* approach is as follows. The classifiers compose with the noun first to make it countable. The classifier-noun constituent then composes with the numeral, #, to express a given quantity. Crucially, the classifier and the noun form a constituent.

(3)   ClP
          /   \
       #   ClP
            /   \
          Cl   NP
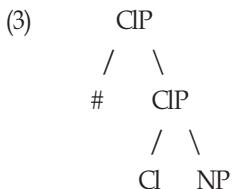
The other proposal is the *classifiers for numerals* model (Krifka, 1995; Bale and Coon, 2014). This theory holds that nouns have a uniform semantics, what differs is the denotation

of numerals. Specifically, numerals in English have an individuating function built in while numerals in classifier languages do not. The classifier composes with the numeral first before composing with the noun. This gives the following rough syntactic structure.[3]

(4)　　　NumP
　　　　 ／　　＼
　　　#P　　NumP
　　 ／＼　／＼
　　 #　Cl　Num　NP
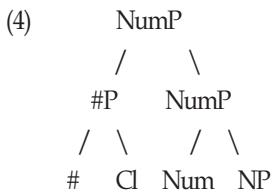
The structures above are merely meant to illustrate the differences between these two models for numeral classifier constructions. The crucial difference lies in the constituency of the classifier with either the noun (classifiers for nouns) or the numeral (classifiers for numerals). More precise details for Lalitpur Eastern Tamang will be worked out in section 4.

Bale and Coon (2014), Little *et al.* (forthcoming), and Jenks (2017) provide a number of syntactic diagnostics to distinguish between these two models, which we review here, in addition to adding a new diagnostic.[4] The first diagnostic concerns interactions between the classifier and either the noun or the numeral. The structure in (3) predicts the possibility of idiosyncratic interactions between the classifier and the noun. For instance, certain nouns could differ in their semantic denotation such that they do not require a classifier in order to be counted, while other nouns do require a classifier. Such a situation is possible only if the classifier merges directly with the NP as in (3). Little *et al.* discuss Shan (Sino-Tibetan) as an example of such a language. While most nouns require a classifier, there is a subset of nouns that do not. The structure in (4) predicts the possibility of idiosyncratic interactions between the classifier and the numeral. For instance, certain numerals differ in their semantic denotation such that they do not require a classifier, while other numerals do. Again, the classifier must merge directly with the

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3) The Num head in (4) is merely intended as a functional projection to host the numeral-classifier in the specifier projection. It is not intended to have the syntax and semantics of the Num head proposed by Ritter (1991, 1992). A reviewer points out that additional syntactic tests should be conducted to determined whether the XP in (4) is in the specifier of NumP or adjoins to it. Unfortunately such an investigation will require further field work, so I leave this question to future research.

4) The authors cited above give a number of empirical illustrations of these diagnostics. We refer the reader to their work for a fuller discussion and give illustrations from Tamang below.

numeral in this case, as in (4). Bale & Coon and Little *et al.* discuss both discuss examples in which some numerals in a given language require classifiers and others do not. This difference stems from the source of the numerals. In Ch'ol, for example, native numerals require a classifier while numerals borrowed from Spanish (a non-classifier language) do not. We will see a similar situation for Tamang below.

The model in (3) also predicts that there may be environments in which classifiers can appear without numerals, while the model in (4) predicts that the numeral-classifier might be found independently of the noun, although the possibility of NP ellipsis might be available in both kinds of languages obscuring the issue. As noted in the references given, Chinese languages do have constructions in which a classifier is found without a numeral. Again, the references cited give empirical illustrations of these two possibilities.

Jenks (2017) notes that classifiers and number morphology should be in complementary distribution in the model in (3), but not in (4). Observe that in (4) there is both a Cl position and a Num position. He notes data from Western Armenian, which is the classic illustration of the complementary distribution between classifiers and plural marking. The facts below suggest that Western Armenian has the structure in (3). Consider the following example (Borer, 2005, p. 94). Observe that either a classifier or a plural marker may be present, but not both.

(5) a. Yergu   had   hovanoc   uni-m
     two   CL   umbrella   have-1SG
     'I have two umbrellas.'   [Western Armenian]
  b. Yergu   hovanoc-ner   uni-m
     two   umbrella-PL   have-1SG
     'I have two umbrellas.'
  c. *Yergu   had   hovanoc-ner uni-m
     two   CL   umbrella-PL have-1SG
     'I have two umbrellas.'

Based on the Western Armenian facts, Borer argues that the classifier and the plural marking compete for the same position, namely the head of a DivP. As is common practice, when the Div head is filled with a classifier it is labelled as Cl. When the Div head is filled with a plural marker it is labelled Num. We must note here, however, that this diagnostic must take into account the findings of Wiltschko (2008, 2014). Specifically,

Wiltschko argues that heads can either project or adjoin to the syntactic structure being formed. Within Wiltschko's system, which assumes a universal functional hierarchy, the distinction between projecting and adjoining heads does not make a difference. Specifically, under Wiltschko's system, regardless of whether the Div head projects or adjoins, it can only host a classifier or a number morpheme (the plural marker). Of course if a more traditional notion of adjunction is assumed, then we anticipate the possibility of the classifier appearing on the Div head and an adjoined plural marker. Since the variety of Tamang under discussion here is argued to have classifiers for numerals, that is the structure in (4), we do not delve into this debate further here.

Finally, we offer a novel diagnostic from coordination. The model in (3) predicts that the numeral and classifier should not be able to be coordinated, while the model in (4) predicts that such coordinations may be possible. In both models, it may be possible to conjoin numerals. Example (6) shows a conjoined numeral in the specifier of ClP as represented in (3), the classifier for nouns model. Example (7a) shows conjoined numerals inside the #P in the specifier of NumP as represented in (4), the classifiers for numerals model. Example (7b) shows conjoined #Ps for the same model. Hypothetical examples for *three or four books* are given provided below to show what the expected patterns are. Note that (7a) and (6) have the same linear order, so it is the presence of (7b) that provides positive evidence for the classifiers for numerals model.

(6) [ClP [# or #] [ClP Cl NP]]
     three or four CL book
(7) a. [NumP [#P [# or #] Cl] [NumP Num NP]]
         three or four CL book
     b. [NumP [#P [#-Cl] or [#-Cl] [NumP Num NP]]
         three CL or four CL book

We return to these three diagnostics in section 4 but move next to a general discussion of numeral classifier constructions in Lalitpur Eastern Tamang.

3. Numeral Classifiers in Lilitpur Eastern Tamang

As Tamang is a relatively under-described language, this section gives a preliminary

description of the number system of this dialect of Eastern Tamang. Classifiers are typically found when counting objects in Tamang; however, there is only one classifier in the language, *goɾ*, regardless of the noun. Examples of animate nouns are given in (9). Observe the variable order in (8). Although we tested a variety of semantic properties, we have not yet been able to pinpoint a meaning contrast between these two orders.

(8) a. goɾ-som ʃaʊ
   CL-three apple
   'three apples'
  b. ʃaʊ   goɾ-som
   apple   CL-three
   'three apples'
(9) a. goɾ-ŋʰi   tsʌɾa(-kade)
   CL-two bird(-PL)
   'two birds'
  b. goɾ-ŋʰi   t͡ʃaʊɾa(-kade)
   CL-two   child(-PL)
   'two children'

Tamang uses native Tamang numbers for quantities of about up to ten. Above that, Nepali numbers are borrowed (Lee, 2011; Owen-Smith, 2015). For the numbers borrowed from Nepali no classifier is used.

(10) a. gʰjaɾt͡sa ghi mʰi
   hundred   one person
   '100 people'
  b. *goɾ-gʰjaɾt͡sa ghi mʰi
   CL-hundred one person
   '100 people'

Furthermore, in casual speech, the classifier is sometimes dropped. So far, we have not found any semantic correlation with the presence or absence of classifiers.[5]

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5) Little & Wintaro (2019) argue that the presence or absence of classifiers with numerals in Indonesian correlates with definiteness, although see Sato (2009) for a different take.

(11) (goɾ-)som   ʃaʊ̃
      CL-three   apple
      'three apples'

Many languages of East Asia, such as Korean, have a variety of classifiers that depend on the semantic or lexical properties of the noun. Note that the dialect of Tamang investigated here has only the one classifier, *goɾ*, for all count nouns. Evidence that this form is indeed a classifier comes from the fact that it is only found with numerals.

Although Chierchia (1998) proposes that all nouns in classifier languages are essentially mass nouns, there is evidence for a count/mass distinction in Tamang.[6] Ontologically mass nouns do not appear with the classifier *goɾ* unless it denotes a culturally salient unit. This is akin to *three coffees* in English, which means, "three cups of coffee". Consider the following examples. To measure a mass noun such as 'water' the form $k^h\wedge p$ is used as a classifier, (12a). Unlike the classifier *goɾ*, however, this classifier can be used in a partitive construction (12b).

(12) a. kʰʌp   ŋhi   kʉi(-kade)
         cup   two   water(-PL)
         'two cups of water'
     b. kʉi-la   ŋʰi   kʰʌp(-kade)
         water-GEN   two   cup(-PL)
         'two cups of water'

Here is another example with 'sand'. The form *dʰulu* ('grain') can be used either as a classifier or in a partitive construction as above. When used as a classifier, (13a), it cannot bear a plural marker. The plural marker can appear in the partitive construction, however, (13b). We take this as further evidence for classifiers as a distinct functional word class in Tamang.

(13) a. dʰulu(*-kade)   ŋʰi   baluwa(-kade)
         grain(*-CL)   two   sand(-PL)
         'two grains of sand'

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6) There is, in fact, evidence for a count/mass distinction in Chinese languages (Cheng and Sybesma 1988). See also Bale & Coon (2014) for a suggestion that a coarse mass/count dichotomy may not be appropriate to describe natural language and that a more nuanced classification may be necessary.

    b. baluwa(-kade)-la   ŋʰi   dʰulu(-kade)
       sand(-PL)-GEN   two   grain(-PL)
       'two grains of sand'

Note that these forms, $kʰ\Lambda p$ and $dʰulu$, can be used both as nouns and as classifiers. We suggest, then, that the partitive construction uses the nominal variant. Crucially, $goɾ$, as a pure classifier, cannot appear in the partitive construction.

(14) *ʃaʊ̈-la   ŋʰi   goɾ(-kade)
     apple-GEN   two   CL(-PL)
     ('two apples')

Further evidence that the forms $kʰ\Lambda p$ and $dʰulu$ can be used both as nouns and as classifiers is observed in the following examples. Recall that large numbers do not appear with classifiers. The partitive construction in (15a) is fine as $dʰulu$ is used as a noun. The classifier construction in (15b) is ungrammatical because $dʰulu$ is being used as a classifier and, as mentioned, large numbers do not appear with classifiers.

(15) a. baluwa(-kade)-la   gʰjaɾt͡sa ghi   dʰulu(-kade).[7]
      sand(-PL)-GEN   hundred one   grain(-PL)
      'one hundred grains of sand'
    b. *dʰulu   gʰjaɾt͡sa gʰi   baluwa(-kade).
      grain   hundred one sand(-PL)
      ('one hundred grains of sand')

To summarize, numeral-classifiers can be either pre-nominal or post-nominal. In both cases the classifier is optional. The plural marker is optional on inanimate nouns, but obligatory on animate nouns, unless an overt marker of plurality is otherwise present (such as a numeral greater than one). There is a count/mass distinction in Lilitpur Eastern Tamang as shown by the use of counters in a partitive construction for mass nouns.

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7) Although the plural marker -kade can appear on either the lexical noun or on the counter noun $dʰ$ ulu, it cannot appear on both. Our speaker said it sounded redundant to use both.

4. Discussion

Recall that there are two proposals for the syntax and semantics of classifiers in natural language. Chierchia proposes that all nouns in classifier languages are mass nouns and that a classifier is needed to atomize the noun to make it countable. Krifka proposes that numerals in classifier languages are not capable of measuring nouns, so a classifier is needed. In the next few paragraphs, we outline various diagnostics to distinguish between these two models.

Bale & Coon (2014) and Little *et al.* (forthcoming) both argue that in languages where the numeral selects the classifier idiosyncratic relationships may arise between the numeral and the classifier. They report for Mi'gmaq (Algonquian) and Ch'ol (Mayan), respectively, that such idiosyncracies are found. In Mi'gmaq the numerals from one to five cannot appear with a classifier, while numerals six and higher require one. In Ch'ol, the numerals from one to six require a classifier. The numerals seven and higher, which are borrowed from Spanish, do not. Recall that for Tamang only the smaller numerals, which are native to Tamang may appear with a classifier. The higher numerals, which are borrowed from Nepali, cannot appear with a classifier. Recall further that in the partitive construction we argued that the counter is a noun not a classifier. Thus, the counter $d^ɦulu$ in (15a) is a noun rather than a classifier and can thus appear with any numeral.

Another diagnostic to distinguish between these two analyses for classifiers is that in languages in which classifiers are for nouns the classifier can appear independently of the numeral. In Mandarin Chinese, for example, the classifier appears with demonstratives, while this is not possible in Tamang. We have found no situations in our field work (or in research on other dialects of Tamang) in which classifiers are found independently of numerals. Observe that in (16a) the classifier is obligatory even though no numeral is present. The structure in (3) predicts that the ClP can be present without its specifier, giving rise to a phrase with a classifier but no numeral, as in (16a). In Tamang, on the other hand, the classifier is not found with demonstratives or in any other environment without numerals, as mentioned above. The structure in (4) predicts that if the specifier of DivP is absent, then both the classifier and the numeral will be missing, while if the specifier is present, then both the numeral and the classifier will be present. (16b) shows that the classifier cannot be present without a numeral, as predicted by the structure in (4).

(16) a. zhe   *(ben)   shu
       DEM   (CL)   book
       'this book'   [Mandarin]
   b. tʰe   (*goɾ)   kitaab
       DEM   (CL)   book
       'this book'   [Lilitpur Eastern Tamang]

The reader may recall examples above in which both a plural marker and a numeral-classifier are present. Example (9a) is repeated for convenience. Although the plural marker is optional, it may be present with the numeral-classifiers. Again, following the discussion in Jenks (2017). This fact suggests that this dialect of Eastern Tamang has the structure in (4)

(17) goɾ-ŋʰi   t͡sʌɾa(-kade)
   CL-two   bird(-PL)
    'two birds'

Finally, we examine cases of coordination. Consider the following data.

(18) a. Sujan-se   goɾ-ŋʰi hwa goɾ-som   ʃaʊ   t͡samu-ba.
       Sujan-ERG   CL-two or CL-three   apple   eat-PST
       'Sujan ate two or three apples.'
   b. Sujan-se   goɾ-ŋʰi hwa som   ʃaʊ   t͡samu-ba.
       Sujan-ERG CL-two or three   apple   eat-PST
       'Sujan ate two or three apples.'
   c. Sujan-se   ŋʰi hwa som   ʃaʊ   t͡samu-ba.
       Sujan-ERG   two or three   apple   eat-PST
       'Sujan ate two or three apples.'
   d.* Sujan-se   ŋʰi hwa goɾ-som   ʃaʊ   t͡samu-ba.
       Sujan-ERG   two or CL-three   apple   eat-PST
       ('Sujan ate two or three apples.')

Example (18a) shows that the classifier + numeral string can be coordinated, strongly suggesting that it is a constituent. We interpret (18b) as indicating that the classifier can

appear with a conjoined numeral. We do not delve into the internal structure of the numeral-classifier in this study, however. Recall that classifiers in Tamang are optional. As such the absence of the classifier in (18c) is unsurprising.

Taken in their entirety the results of the diagnostics here indicate that this dialect of Tamang has the classifiers for numerals model in (4). We illustrate this conclusion with the structure for (17). We assume head movement of the noun to Num, but, as stated, we do not investigate the internal structure of #P.[8]

(19)

```
              NumP
            /      \
        #P          NumP
        / \         /   \
      Cl    #    Num    NP
      |     |     |      |
     goɾ   som  -kade  tŝʌɾa
```
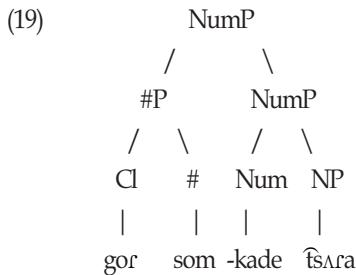
Before concluding, we discuss the number properties of Lilitpur Eastern Tamang, as numeral classifiers interact with number marking. Specifically, it is well known that languages with classifiers typically do not have obligatory plural marking. Rullman & You (2006) offer a diagnostic for general number. They note that if a lexical item is ambiguous between two senses, it must be interpreted in the same way under ellipsis or conjunction. Here is an example with *pen*, which is ambiguous between a writing instrument and a cage for animals.

(20) John and Mary both saw a pen.

There are two possible meanings for (20). Either John and Mary both saw a writing instrument or they both saw a cage for animals. It cannot be the case that one saw a writing instrument and one saw a cage for animals. The same situation holds in Lilitpur Eastern Tamang, where *dini* is ambiguous between 'sun' and 'day'.

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8) A reviewer points out that a full analysis of the facts requires an analysis of the internal structure of #P. There is a tremendous cross-linguistic diversity in the properties of classifiers (Aikhenvald, 2003), and we simply do not understand all the facts of Tamang. We leave this question to future research.

(21) Sujan den Ram-se   dini-la   bare-ɾi   sochap lamu-ba
     Sujan and Ram-ERG   sun/day-GEN about-LOC   think do-PST
     'Sujan and Ram thought about the sun/day.'

As with the English example above, either Sujan and Ram both thought about the sun or both thought about the day. It cannot be the case that one thought about the sun and the other thought about the day.

Rullman & You further show that general number does not fall out from an ambiguity between singular and plural readings, but is rather the lack of any distinction between singular and plural. Consider the following example. This sentence is true if both Sujan and Ram ate one apple each, if they ate several apples each, or if one ate one apple and the other ate several apples. That is, it does not have the same ambiguity as in (21). This suggests that this dialect of Tamang has general number rather than a singular/plural distinction as in English.

(22) Sujan   den   Ram-se   ʃaʊ̃   t͡samu-ba
     Sujan   and   Ram-ERG apple   eat-PST
     'Sujan and Ram ate apples.' (translation approximate)

Finally, predicates that require a plural argument offer another avenue of insight into number. Consider the following examples. The object of a verb such as gather ('put together' in Tamang) requires a plural object. The plural marker is optional for inanimate objects but obligatory for animate objects. Corbett (2000), in fact, notes a number of languages in which the expression of plurality is obligatory for either human or animate nouns, but optional otherwise. This contrasts with the conclusion above that Tamang has general number. We leave for future research how number fits into the picture with numeral classifiers.

(23) a. Sujan-se   goɾ-kʰi gʰla-ɾi   kitab(-kade)   ɾʰup lamu-ba.
       Sujan-ERG   CL-one spot-in   book(-PL)   together put-PST
       'Sujan gathered the books in one spot.'
     b. Sujan-se   goɾ-kʰi   gʰla-ɾi nʌgi*(-kade)   ɾʰup lamu-ba.
       Sujan-ERG   CL-one   spot-in dog(-PL)   together put-PST
       'Sujan gathered the dogs in one spot.'

Recall that classifiers are generally optional in this dialect of Tamang. In light of this optionality, the obligatoriness of the number marking in (23b) strongly suggests that at least this dialect of Tamang might be transitioning into a number marking language from a classifier language. This change is not complete, of course, as number marking, even with animate nouns, is still optional when a numeral is present.

5. Conclusion

We have reviewed several properties of numeral-classifier constructions in Lilitpur Eastern Tamang and have shown that this dialect has the classifiers for numerals model as shown in (4) and illustrated in (19). We tested several diagnostics from previous literature (Bale and Coon 2014; Jenks 2017; Little *et al.* forthcoming) and added one diagnostic of our own, which uses coordination. These diagnostics are summarized here as follows: (i) Classifiers appear only with numerals, model in (4), or classifiers appear with other elements (demonstratives, possessives, etc.), model in (3). (ii) Classifiers have idiosyncratic interactions with numerals, model in (4), or classifiers has idiosyncratic interactions with nouns, model in (3). (iii) Classifiers can appear with a plural marker, model in (4), or classifiers cannot appear with a plural marker, model in (3). (iv) Numeral-classifiers can be conjoined, model in (4), or numeral-classifiers cannot be conjoined, model in (3). All four diagnostics above revealed that Lilitpur Eastern Tamang has the structure in (4), in which the numeral and the classifier forms a constituent.

Finally, we suggested that at least this dialect might be transitioning away from a classifier language into a number language. Recall that classifiers are optional in this language and that this optionality has so far not been shown to be correlated to any semantic contrast (as is the case for Indonesian, as discussed above). Further, number marking was shown to be obligatory in some cases for animate nouns, a property not typical of classifier languages. We note, incidentally, Sato (2009), who proposes that Indonesian may be undergoing the same process. Furthermore, we are not aware of any historical studies that investigate this kind of change. We leave the status of the ongoing change in the numeral system of Tamang and its similarity with Indonesian for future research.

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