Numeral Classifiers and Word Order in Dimasa and Bodo-Garo

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a. Introduction:

Dimasa (also Graodima, ISO 639-3 dis) is a Bodo-Garo language. It falls under the Tibeto-Burman language family and is spoken in the states of Assam and Nagaland in North East India. Dimasa has a population of around 112,000 (2001 census), mainly centred in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. Like most of the languages in the South East Asia, Dimasa also falls under the category of a numeral classifier language.

The classifiers in Dimasa are basically bound morphemes. They are prefixed to a numeral which is also a bound morpheme. They bound together to form a single word. The classifier always precedes the numeral.

1. *aŋ*	[*boŋpʰaŋ*	***pʰaŋ-ʃi***]	*gai-ba.*
1SG	[tree	**CLF-one**]	plant(V)-PST
'I planted a tree.'			

In example 1- *pʰaŋ-ʃi* is a numeral classifier, where the ones inside the brackets is a classifier construction. Also in Dimasa, the classifiers are always dictated by a noun. Every noun has its own sets of classifiers. The classifiers are restricted to a single noun or a group of noun. No classifier can be altered for any other noun or a group of noun other than its own. With the change of a noun in a sentence, the classifier varies accordingly. For instance, the classifier /thai-/ is used for all nouns for fruits in Dimasa like- /thai-sa/ lemon; /thai-zu/ mango; /thai-lik/ banana; etc. But an interesting point to note here is that apart from fruits, the classifier /thai-/ is also used for nouns which ends with or has a suffix /-thai/ like /mu-thai/ eyes; /long-thai/ stone; /grau-thai/ words; etc.

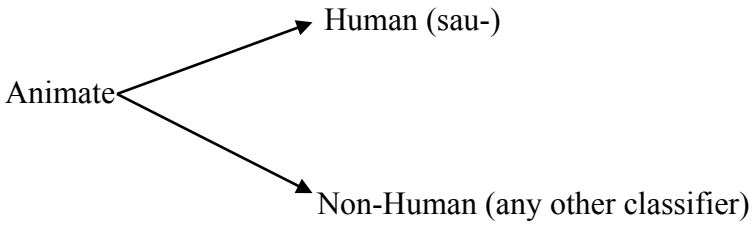
According to Craig (1986), no matter the form of classifier system, the same set of features is consistently chosen to characterize remarkably similar prototypical members of categories. Linguistic classification clearly categorizes the world in terms of various types of interactions that human beings carry out with the objects of their environment. These interactions are social, physical and functional. This view of categorization is focusing on how human interact with the objects in the world. Linguistic classification marks humanness and animacy first, then shape, then use and consistency.

Numeral classifiers divide into SORTAL and MENSURAL types. Sortal numeral classifiers describe inherent properties of referents and mensural classifiers describe the way they can be measured. In Dimasa, the semantic properties of classifiers can be divided into three classes: animacy, physical properties and function.

b. Semantics:

b.1.i Animacy:

"Like the languages Toba Batak, Makassar, Bugis, Mori and Gorontalo (Austroasiatic: Conklin 198:241) there may be a separate class for humans and a number of classes for non-humans."(Aikhenvald 2000) Keeping this in mind we can say that animacy in Dimasa may be divided into animate, Human and Non-Human, and inanimate.



The classifier /sau-/ is used for marking human whereas all the other classifiers are used to mark non-human aspects. The classifier that gives an idea about the dimension will fall into this the inanimate category. For example: /pher-/ is used for any flat objects as in biscuits.

b.1.ii Physical Properties:

Under the class of physical properties- size, shape and dimension are the parameters in this group. Numeral classifiers in Dimasa employ more values for physical properties. Shape and dimensionality are widely used in numeral classifier systems. In this, flat objects are classified by the classifier /pher-/ whereas long and slender objects are classified by /gong-/.

b.1.iii Functional properties:

Functional properties in numeral classifier systems are not as frequent as shape and dimensionality. In Dimasa language we can see that the classifier /thai-/ used only with fruits are also used with words which has compound /-thai/ suffixed to a morpheme. For example- /grao-thai/ means words or language, /mu-thai/ means eyes. So, the functional property of a language is highly culture specific.

b.2 Functions of Dimasa classifiers:

b.2.i Quantifying:

One of the functions of classifiers in Dimasa is quantification. We cannot count the nouns in Dimasa without numerals and classifiers. Nouns in Dimasa refer not only to mass or solid nouns but also others. Numeral classifiers in Dimasa express a unit of collectivity expressed by the noun. The noun in Dimasa refers to the collectivity of individuals, whereas the quantifying role of the classifier is to refer to a unit, a single individual, from this collectivity.

b.2.ii Classifying:

The main function of the classifier in Dimasa is classifying nouns. Classifiers type the nouns according to its class or characteristics. For example- /gong-shi/ is a numeral classifier that is used for quantifying as well for classifying the nouns which are long and thin. Similarly, /thai-shi/ is used for classifying all the nouns under the group of fruits but it also classifies words that uses the suffix /-thai/.

But the classifier /ma-shi/ is an exception to this function of classifiers. It is the most common used classifier in Dimasa language. It is not fixed to a specific group of noun or an individual noun. It can co-occur with all types of nouns that are not classified by the classifiers mentioned in the list. It can occur with a range of nouns and functions only as a quantifier rather than a classifier.

c. Types of Numeral Classifiers in Dimasa:

The classifiers in Dimasa are not many. In the examples provided, we will come across a number of classifiers wherein a single classifier can be used along with more than one noun belonging to a specific group, whereas some classifiers can be used only with a specific morpheme or a noun.

i. do- NUM

The classifier /do-shi/ is used for counting small cut pieces of meat or a piece of sweet, etc. It is basically related to the size of the referent noun.
Example:

antha-ne	*mogong*	***do-shi***	*ri.*
me	meat	**CLF-one**	give

'Give me a piece of meat.'

ii. phong- NUM

The classifier /phong-shi/ is used for counting blows or hit. For example: punch, slap, etc. It is also used to refer to a long wooden container 'di-phong'.
Example:

ang	*bukhe*	*bakhaulai*	***phong-shi***	*riba*.
1SG	3SG	slap	**CLF-one**	gave

'I gave him a slap'

di-phong	***phong-shi***	*labu.*
water container	**CLF-one**	bring

'Bring a container.'

iii. khathai-NUM

The classifier /khathai-shi/ is used for a measuring a handful amount of vegetables like chili, beans or fruits like mulberry, etc. which are usually packed or bind in a leaf.
Example:

khathai-shi	*morshai*	*bilijadu?*
CLF-one	chilli	how much

'How much does a pack of chili costs?'

iv. phang-NUM

The classifier /phang-shi/ is used for counting the number of plants or trees. Any type of a plant or tree will be classified by this classifier.
Expmple:

bongphang	***phang-shi***	*gai.*
tree	**CLF-one**	plant

'Plant a tree.'

v. deb-NUM

The classifier is used for counting branch of a tree or a plant.
Example:

bedeb	***deb-shi***	*bai-kha.*
branch	**CLF-one**	break-PRF

'A branch broke.'

vi. grang-NUM

The classifier /grang-shi/ is used for counting flat objects like leaves, books and clothes. But an interesting fact is that even the word for the noun ‘house - noh’ is classified by the same classifier. It might be a possibility that since the word for village is ‘noh-lai’ it might use the classifier /grang-shi/
Example:

ang	*ri*	***grang-shi***	*shu-ba.*
1SG	cloth	**CLF-one**	wash-PST

‘I washed a piece of cloth’

vii. grong-NUM

The classifier /grong-shi/ is used to for any grain or seed like objects for instance, rice, sugar, pulses, etc. It basically gives an idea about the size of a noun.
Example:

ang	*ira-ha*	*mairong*	***grong-shi***	*maiba.*
1SG	here-LOC	rice	**CLF-one**	found

‘I found a grain of rice here.’

viii. ma-NUM

The classifier /ma-shi/ is generally used for any other objects that cannot be classified by any other classifiers.
Example:

ira-ha	*table*	***ma-shi***	*labu.*
here-LOC	table	**CLF-one**	bring

‘Bring a table here.’

ix. mung-NUM

The classifier /mong-shi/ is used for showing the variety of items like cooked dish, fruits, etc.
Example:

bu	*shamlai*	***mung-shi***	*shong-ba*.
3SG	curry	**CLF-one**	cooked-PST

‘He cooked one type of curry.’

x. dzi-NUM

The classifier /dzi-shi/ is only used for counting eggs.
Example:

dau-noh	*dau-dzi*	***dzi-shi***	*dzi-ba.*
bird-house	bird-egg	**CLF-one**	laid-PST

‘The hen laid an egg’

xi. sau-NUM

The classifier /sau-shi/ is used to count the number of person irrespective of gender. But when it exceeds count ‘one’, it omits the classifier /sau-/ and the count starts as /shubung gini/, /shubung gtham/, etc. where /shubung/ stands for ‘human’.
Example:

sau-shi	*shubung*	*phai-ba.*
CLF-one	man	came-PST

‘A man came.’

gini *shubung* *phai-ba*.
NUM-two man came-PST
‘Two men came.’

xii. thai-NUM

The classifier /thai-shi/ is usually used to count any fruit or vegetable. Interestingly it is also used for any other words that uses suffix /-thai/ for instance /grau-thai/ ‘words’, /mu-thai/ ‘eyes’, etc.
Example:

thai-ju ***thai-shi*** *labu*.
mango **CLF-one** bring
‘Bring a mango.’

grauthai ***thai-shi*** *thi-ma-mu*.
words **CLF-one** say-IFUT-DSD
‘I would like to say a few words.’

xiii. jor-NUM

The classifier /jor-shi/ is used for counting a pair of nouns. It is also used for clothes, especially Dimasa traditional clothes or ornaments.
Example:

rih ***jor-shi*** *ri-shain*.
cloth **CLF-one** give-IMPP
‘Please give me a pair of cloth.’

xiv. gong-NUM

The classifier gong-shi is used for any long slim object. For example: a stick like object, even hands, etc.
Example:

wa ***gong-shi*** *labu.*
bamboo **CLF-one** bring
‘Bring a bamboo stick.’

xv. pher-NUM

The classifier /pher-shi/ is used for counting flat biscuit like objects.
Example:

pher-shi *homau* *ri-ma* *nang-du.*
CLF-one medicine give need-REALIS.
‘It is necessary to add a piece of homau.’

xvi. dol-NUM

The classifier /dol-shi/ is used for referring to a noun in a group or as a whole.
Example:

bai-yarau ***dolshi*** *phai-kha.*
dancers **CLF-one** came-PRF
‘A group of dancers came.’

xvii. mezeb-NUM

The classifier /mezeb-shi/ is used to refer to a handful of something.
Example:

shem ***mezeb-shi*** *ri-phu-nang?*
salt **CLF-one** give-POT-DFUT
'Can you give me a handful of salt?'

xviii. shreng-NUM

The classifier /shreng-shi/ is used for referring to a spool of thread or rope.
Example:

wadu ***shreng-shi*** *lau* *bang-kha.*
Thread **CLF-one** long many-PRF
'The spool of thread is too long.'

xix. khabau-NUM

The classifier /khabau-shi/ is used for referring particularly to a bite of food.
Example:

ang *makham* ***khabau-shi*** *ji-kha.*
1SG food **CLF-one** eat-PRF
'I had a bite of food.'

xx. ding-NUM

The classifier /ding-shi/ is used for counting a thin hair like objects, for instance; hair, thread, etc.
Example:

wadu ***ding-shi*** *jagau-ba*.
thread **CLF-one** snapped-PST
'A strand of thread snapped.'

xxi. khlep-NUM

The classifier /khlep-shi/ is used for referring to any thin sliced object.
Example:

ang *laimuri* ***khlep-shi*** *jima.*
1SG pineapple **CLF-one** eat-IFUT
'I will eat a slice of pineapple.'

xxii. mon-NUM

The classifier /mon-shi/ is used for measuring a tin of rice, pulses, etc which amounts to around 25 kgs.
Example:

mai ***mon-shi*** *lu-kha.*
Rice **CLF-one** poured-PRF
'Poured a tin of rice.'

xxiii. khong-NUM

The classifier /khong-shi/ is used to refer to a paper packet or a container.

Example:

bokhong	***khong-shi***	*khaikho.*
Packet	**CLF-one**	take out

'Take out a packet.'

xxiv. bar-NUM

The classifier /bar-shi/ is used for classifying flowers.
Example:

maibar	***bar-shi***	*bar-du.*
paddy flower	**CLF-one**	bloom-PRS

'A paddy flower blooms.'

xxv. jom-NUM

This classifier is used to refer to nouns in Dimasa which denotes a group or an organization.
Example:

bojom	***jom-shi***	*phai-ya.*
group	**CLF-one**	come-NEG

'A group didn't arrive.'

xxvi. song-NUM

This classifier is used to refer to a variety of bamboo.
Example:

wa-song	***song-shi***	*mai-ba.*
bamboo	**CLF-one**	found-PST

'Found a bamboo (wa-song variety).'

xxvii. khro-NUM

The classifier /khro-shi/ is used to refer to a head of a creature. The classifier is always dictated by the noun /bokhro/.
Example:

jing	*mishai*	*bokhro*	***khro-shi***	*shong-ba.*
We	deer	head	**CLF-one**	cook-PST.

'We cooked a deer head.'

xxviii. khep-NUM

The classifier is used for referring to a part of something. For example, a part of the land, half of the nut, part of a work, etc.
Example:

haa-ni	***khep-shi***	*gede*	*khushi*	*dang.*
land-GEN	**CLF-one**	side	work(N)	work(v)

'Work on one side of the land.'

d. Verbal Classifier:

Though there is only one Verbal Classifier in Dimasa the importance of it cannot be neglected. It goes with every verb. It is interesting to note that the verbal classifier only goes with the numeral 'one'. The same verbal classifier is also present in Boro and has the same function.

xxix. *phai-**ga-shi*** *ji-**ga-shi***
come-VCLF-one eat- VCLF-one
'Everytime (he/she) comes (he/she) eats.'

e. Numeral-Classsifier word Order in Bodo-Garo:
Aikhenvald (2000) claims that the sequence 'CLF-NUM' is typologically, highly, unusual. However, it is the only attested sequence of classifier and numeral for Dimasa and the other Bodo-Garo languages investigated in this study (Bodo, Garo, Rabha, Kokborok). Other Sino-Tibetan languages follow the expected pattern in which classifiers follow numerals. So, the normal order of classifier in Bodo-Garo looks like-

[Noun Classifier + Numeral]

Dimasa	**Bodo**	**Kokborok**	**Garo**	**Rabha**
sau-NUM	sa-NUM	kʰorok-NUM	sak-NUM	sak-NUM
person	person	person	person	person
pheɾ-shi	gaŋ-se	baɾ-sa	diŋ-sa	pʰaŋ-sa
flat(CLF)-one	long(CLF)-one	flower(CLF)-one	thin(CLF)-one	plant(CLF)-one

Table: Classifiers in Bodo-Garo languages

Also, the reason why I'm using the term 'normal' is because the position of a 'Classifier+Numeral' in a noun phrase alters. In Dimasa,

2. i) [*thaisa* ***thai-shi***] *ri.*
[lemon **CLF-NUM]** give

ii) [***thai-shi*** *thaisa*] *ri.*
[CLF-NUM lemon] give

'Give me a lemon'

Well, in Dimasa the order of the position of a classifier is less likely to make any difference in semantics but the difference is more on the pragmatic aspect of the sentence. In example 2 i) we have the noun positioned before the classifier and in 2 ii) we have the noun positioned after the classifier. Though the difference in the position of classifier do not bring in any semantic change, we see that in i) the "focus" is more on the noun or the referent whereas in ii) the "focus" is more on the number of the classifier.

This is also the case in Kokborok, the syntactic unit (Classifier+Noun) may occur after or before the noun (Baskaran, 2015). However, Baskaran doesn't give any reasons as to why the change occurs nor does he state anything about the change in meaning during the order change.

3. i) *tók* ***ma-sa***
bird **CLF-one**

ii) ***ma-sa*** *tók*
CLF-one bird

'One bird' (Baskaran, 2015)

4. i) *kʰum* ***bar-sa***
flower **CLF-one**

ii) ***bar-sa*** *kʰum*
CLF-one flower

'One flower' (Baskaran, 2015)

Also, the classifier construction in Rabha is a combination of a classifier (CL) and a numeral (NUM) used adjectivally to enumerate a noun (N) (Joseph, 2007).

5. *aŋ-i* *másu* ***maŋ-aníŋ*** *to-a*
I-GEN cattle **CL-two** there.be-PRES
'I have two cattle' (Joseph, 2007)

6. *caŋ-ba* ***sak-sa*** *kai* *riba-eta*
who-INDEF **CL-one** person come-CONT
'someone (some one person) is coming' (Joseph, 2007)

Joseph goes on to say that the order of the noun and the CL-NUM combination is relatively free but the preferred order is "N CL-NUM", as in

7. tó **maŋ-sa**
bird **CL-one**
'one bird' (Joseph, 2007)

8. *kai* ***sak-sa***
person **CL-one**
'one bird' (Joseph, 2007)

He says that the greater importance is given to the fronted term. When the noun chooses a particular classifier by virtue of its inherent quality as we see in example 7 and 8, it becomes the determining and the important term. But when the classifier does not classify a noun on semantic criteria, but has more reference to quantitative aspects, the noun is positioned in the final position (9). In cases where the emphasis is on the CL-NUM, the bond between the noun and the classifier is weak.

9. ***lop-sa*** *mairuŋ*
CL-one rice
'a handful of rice' (Joseph, 2007)

Again in Boro, we find the same word order alteration occuring in the noun phrase.

10. *filter* ***goŋ-tham****-ni* *mwnselo* *mwzaŋ*
filter **CLF-three-** fine
'All the three filter works fine.'

11. *aŋ* *hatʰai-au* *thaŋ-bla* ***sa-tham*** *mansi* *nudwŋ-mwn*
1SG market-LOC go-PST **CLF-three** person saw- PST
'I saw three people in the market.'

f. Explanation:

Numeral classifier languages are the paradigm type; they are so called because a classifier is obligatory in many expressions of quantity (Allan, 1977 pp 285-311). Thus we see that the Bodo-Garo is typically a numeral classifier language group. And the ''Noun

Classifier-Numeral'' word order alteration is a phenomenon that we find across the Bodo-Garo languages. It is very complicated to state as to why the word order alteration occurs and what the outcomes of such a change are. As I have stated earlier the changes are more pragmatic than semantic. Since, the meaning is really intricate it is difficult to come up with a one point answer. But there may be a few reasons:

f.1 Definiteness:

Definiteness might be one of the many reasons for the word order alteration. For example:

12. ***sau-shi*** *subung* *phai-ba*
CLF-one man come-PST
'A man came.'

13. *subung* ***sau-shi*** *phai-yaba-de* *cha* *ling-ya*
man **CLF-one** come-NOMZ-TOP tea drink-NEG
'One of the person who came won't have tea.'

In example 12 we can see that the noun is referred to as indefinite. In this case, the man can be any person whose identity is not known, whereas in example 13 the noun is definite.

f.2 Emphasis:

In example 14, we can find that the emphasis is on the noun that's why it governs the classifier. In 15 the emphasis is on the quantifier.

14. *dini* *students* *phai-yarao* ***g-tham*** *ja-du*
today students come-PNOMZ **CLF-three** happen-REALIS
'There are three students who came today.'

15. *dini* ***gtham*** *students* *phai-ba*
today **CLF-three** students come-PST
'Three students came today.'

g. Conclusion:

Abbreviation:
1SG – First person Singular
3SG – Third person Singular
CLF – Classifier
CONT – Continuative
DFUT – Definite Future
GEN - Genitive
IDEF - Indefinite
IFUT – Indefinite Future
LOC – Locative
NEG – Negative
NOMZ – Nominalizer
PL – Plural

PNOMZ – Plural Nominalizer
POT – Potential
PRF – Perfect
PRS – Present
PST – Past
REAL – Realis
TOP – Topic Marker
VCLF – Verbal Classifier

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