What do we really know about nominal classification systems? [*]

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1) Types of nominal classification systems (NCS)

- nouns are classified according to kind and degree of POSSESSION
(see also GENITIVE CLASSIFIERS below)

Kilivila (Austronesian):

kagu kaula	*'my food'*
agu tobaki	*'my tobacco (which I will smoke)'*
ula tobaki	*'my tobacco (which I will give away)'*
ina-gu	*'my mother'*

- MEASURE TERMS: express either quantities of mass nouns for which they identify units or quantities of count nouns for which they specify particular arrangements:

English: **a glass of** whisky   **a pile of** books

- CLASS TERMS: are classifying morphemes of lexical origin:

English: **straw<u>berry</u>, blue<u>berry</u>**   apple <u>tree</u>, olive <u>tree</u>

- CLASSIFIERS: constitute overt systems of nominal categorization of clear lexical origin used in specific morphosyntactic constructions; they distinguish themselves from purely lexical systems in their marking categories of nouns beyond the noun word itself, in independent morphemes or in affixes on other elements of the clause; they are distinct from noun class-gender systems in their incomplete grammaticalization, in remaining of a lexical nature and in having a discursive use within specific syntactic configurations.

VERBAL CLASSIFIERS: are found inside the verb form; they do not classify the verb itself but one of its nominal arguments.

Cayuga (Iroquioan, Ontario): **Skitú**   **ake-'treht-áe'**
skidoo   I-vehicle-have
'I have a skidoo (car)' \<classificatory noun
                                                  incorporation>

Athapaskan: **béésò**   **sì-ʔá**
money   perfect-lie (of round entity)
'A coin is lying (there)'

béésò	**sì-nìl**
money	perfect-lie (of collection)

'*Some money (small change) is lying (there)*'

béésò	**sì-X-tsòòz**
money	perfect-lie (of flat flexible entity)

'*A note (bill) is lying (there)*'

NUMERAL CLASSIFIERS: occur in the context of quantification as free or as bound morphemes. Classifier languages have a system, which can be (in principle) an open set, of classifiers. A classifier concatenates with a quantifier, loctive, demonstrative or predicate to form a nexus that (in general) cannot be interrupted by the noun which it classifies. In counting inanimate and animate referents the numerals obligatorily concatenate with a 'classifier' morpheme which classifies and quantifies nominal referents according to semantic criteria.

Kilivila: **yule-tala-ga**   **ma-kwe-na**
Classifier.bundle.of four-one-Emphasis Dem-Classifier.thing-Dem
da-buna-ga
Dual.incl.-cowrie-Emphasis
'Indeed one bundle of four of these cowrie shells belonging to the two of us'

The noun **buna** is first classified with the classifier -**yule**- prefixed to the numeral -**tala** and then classified with the classifier -**kwe**- infixed in the morphological frame **ma- -na** of the demonstrative pronoun

NOUN CLASSIFIERS: are realized as free morphemes standing in a noun phrase, next to the noun itself or within the boundaries of the noun phrase with other determiners of the noun; they are crucially found independently of the operation of quantification; they constitute a generally ignored type found in languages of Meso-America and Australia.

Jakaltek (Mayan): **xil**   **naj**   **xuwan**
saw   noun.classifier.man   John
no7   **lab'a**
noun.classifier.animal   snake
'*(man) John saw the (animal) snake*' <determiner of
                                           the noun>
kaj   **te7**
red   noun.classifier.plant
'*it (plant) is red*'   <independent 3rd.person pronoun>

GENITIVE CLASSIFIERS: (also: attributive, possessive, relational classifiers) appear in possessive constructions (see also POSSESSION): they are usually bound to the mark of the possessor while semantically classifying the possessed; this system selects a limited set of nouns of the language for classification; these nouns appear to have high cultural significance.

Ponapean (Austronesian):	**kene-i**	**mwenge**
	classifier.edible-Genitive	food
	'my food'	
	were-i	**pwoht**
	classifier.transport-Genitive	boat
	'my boat'	

- NOUN CLASSES and GENDER are treated as one major NCS.

NOUN CLASS SYSTEMS are typical of languages of the Niger-Congo linguistic stock, especially Bantu; they consist of 12-20 morphological classes and show agreement patterns within the NP and across to the predicate.

Sesotho (Bantu)	**Ba-shányana bá-ne ba-fúmáné**
	2-boys 2-Dem 2-Subject.agreement.marker-found
	di-perekisi tsé-monáte
	10-peaches 10-good
	'*Those boys found some tasty peaches*'

The demonstrative modifying the class 2 subject noun **ba-shányana** is the class 2 demonstrative **bá-ne**; the subject marker on the verb agrees with this nominal subject; the nominal modifier for the class 10 noun **di-perekisi** takes a class 10 relative prefix **tsé-monáte**.

GENDER is assigned to all nouns and is obligatorily marked. It is the most limited NCS in terms of the number of its classes. The limited semantic motivation of assignment to classes is illustrated by the following examples:

German: **die Gabel** (F)   Spanish: **el tenedor** (M)   '*the fork*'

OPEN QUESTIONS: Are the systems or techniques of nominal classification ranked and ordered? Is there a transition from one technique to the other? Do NCS constitute a cline? Why do languages have more than one of these NCS? How do these types of NCS interact with each other?

II.) Bases for the differentiation of the classifying formatives

Classifiers are differentiated into classifiers, quantifiers, sortal classifiers, mensural classifiers, repeaters/echo-classifiers/identical classifiers/autoclassifiers, classificatory particles

OPEN QUESTIONS: Are there really different categories of classifiers? Are the classifications of classifiers emic or etic?

Claim: Maintain the requirement that to demonstrate the existence of a category, evidence of distinction in form is necessary!

III.) Semantic bases for the classification of nominal referents

Nominal referents are classified according to their specific characteristics. This classification is based on semantic principles and leads to a categorization of all the nominal conceptual labels. The units of this classification constitute semantic domains.

OPEN QUESTIONS: What are the semantic criteria for this kind of classification? Is the classification culturally determined? How do we describe and analyse how semantic domains are constituted in classifier languages? Do these descriptions really reflect the dynamics of these NCS?

IV.) Functions and meanings of classifiers

NCS also have the function of 'reference tracking'. Nouns in classifier languages can be characterized as nouns with generic reference. With their referential function classifiers individualize nominal concepts.

OPEN QUESTIONS: What do classifiers actually classify - extralinguistic referents (i.e. beings, objects, states, actions, etc) or the intralinguistic category 'noun'? In our descriptions of classifiers in the noun phrase we use sentences like 'this classifier refers to this noun' or 'this classifier refers to this nominal referent' - both sentences may be understood as a kind of 'shorthand' for 'this classifier refers to this noun which itself is used as the expression to refer to, e.g., an object in the extralinguistic reality': How do we resolve the ambiguity of these 'shorthand versions' with respect to this reference?

The description of how speakers of a classifier language actually use these classifiers reveals that classifiers must be understood as formatives that can be used strategically to serve certain means and ends a speaker wants to pursue and

express. Moreover, semantic domains are dynamic and interact with each other; they constitute a kind of network. Therefore, classifiers do have have meaning.

OPEN QUESTIONS: How do classifiers achieve meaning? If a noun is classified by a certain classifier, will the meaning of the noun either influence the meaning of the classifier or vice versa?

Example from Kilivila (Austronesian):

ma-gudi-na			**waga**
Dem-classifier.child-Dem			canoe
???????????????????????			

Ku-gisi	**ma-gudi-na**	**waga**	**ke-kekita**
2.-look	Dem-classifier.child-Dem	canoe	classifier.wood-small
okopo'ula	**waga**	**dimdim**	
behind	canoe	white men	

'Look (at) this small dinghy behind the motorboat!'

OPEN QUESTIONS: Did the meaning of the classifier influence or change the meaning of the classified noun or has the meaning of the noun influenced or changed the meaning of the classifier or is there an interactive "Sprachspiel" where both noun and classifier changed their meaning in and through the interaction? Can the act of referring with the classifier to the nominal referent be understood as the verbal reference to a language-internal or to a language-external context?

V.) Grammaticalization and classifiers

OPEN QUESTION: Where do classifiers come from?

Hypothesis: Classifiers may come from nouns (evidence from Kilivila, the Austronesian language of the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea): Hypothesis: Most if not all Kilivila classifiers originate in nouns: the system was constituted by 'repeaters', i.e. nouns that are used as their own classifiers:

bogi-tala	**bogi**
classifier.night-one	night

'one night'

In the course of time these repeaters were changed and modified (by phonological reduction). These changes are probably mere consequences of a grammaticalization process that affects the lexical form 'noun' and changes it into

the grammatical form 'classifier'. With some classifiers this grammaticalization process also resulted in a semantic bleaching, i.e. in a desemanticization of the former nouns.

There seem to exist linguistic processes that lead from classifier systems to noun class/gender systems.

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