

Classifiers and plurality: Evidence from a deictic classifier language

Filomena Sandalo, Dimitris Michelioudakis

State University of Campinas, University of York

fsandalo@gmail.com, dimitris.michelioudakis@york.ac.uk

This paper investigates the interaction of plurality and classifiers, drawing on evidence from Kadiwéu, a deictic classifier language of the Guaikurú family. It is commonly assumed that number and classifiers are in complementary distribution cross-linguistically (Chierchia 1998) and that in fact they may be two different morphological realisations of/competing for the same semantic/syntactic position (Borer 2005, Krifka 1995). This has been partly challenged and revised due to the co-existence of classifiers and plural morphology in Western Armenian (Bale & Khanjian 2014), which however does not allow them to co-occur. If Western Armenian challenges the idea of complementarity partially, Kadiwéu presents us with a more radical challenge. In this paper, we first establish that elements previously analysed as demonstratives are in fact classifiers, necessary for any construction requiring an atomized reading, and indeed an instantiation of Aikhenvald's (2000) 'deictic classifiers'. We then show that Kadiwéu possesses two kinds of plurality, one of which obligatorily co-occurs with a classifier. Finally, we suggest that this case can still be accommodated in Bale & Khanjian's system and is indeed predicted to be possible, and we propose a syntactic analysis capturing the observed patterns.

In Kadiwéu, classifiers (CL in 1) are an obligatory ingredient of all determiner-like elements, such as quantifiers, numerals, and wh-words for arguments (2-4). A classifier may also appear by itself, obligatorily inflected for gender (5), or with the proximal/anaphoric marker *nG-* (6). What all elements with classifiers have in common is that they contribute an atomized/individualized interpretation of the NP. So, in our view, deictic classifiers are elements with a function similar to that of the well-known class of numeral classifiers, but they occur inside determiners. Bare nouns are normally interpreted as number neutral (7). In the case of count nouns, a bare singular NP is interpreted as a group (of 1 or more representatives of the kind), while a bare singular mass noun is interpreted as an unspecified amount of a substance. Even bare plurals of count nouns are interpreted as denoting several groups rather than individuals (8). Once a classifier is present, count nouns are seen as atoms in the singular (5-6), and as more than one individual in the plural (9), and masses are necessarily interpreted as packaged/coming in (a number of) containers (10). Note that, to encode plurality, classifiers are obligatorily inflected for number (marked with an invariable –*wa* morpheme), but nouns only optionally (9), with lexically selected suffixes.

Bale & Khanjian (2014) propose that classifiers are like measure nouns in English in that they require their complements to be interpreted as complete semi-lattices, i.e. as constituents compatible with kind reference, the most telling diagnostic being that such phrases obligatorily scope under negation. Thus, they derive the complementarity between classifiers and plurality from the fact that, unlike English plurals, Western Armenian plurals are not interpreted as complete semi-lattices. Nevertheless, this does not in principle rule out languages with classifiers and English-type plurals, which would allow them to co-occur. Turning to Kadiwéu, even though plural morphology on nouns is sufficient for plural reference (and for controlling obligatory plural agreement) when CL is not present, it is not enough to license determiners with CL but without the –*wa* plural (9); CL alone in non-singular contexts is not licit even with numerals (i.e. unlike Chinese), see (3), or other quantifiers. Indeed, in accordance with Bale & Khanjian's prediction, nouns with plural suffixes without CL do not obligatorily scope under negation (11), like Western Armenian plurals. On the contrary, CL-*wa* N-(PL) sequences obligatorily scope under negation (12).

We argue that the typological rarity of number in classifier languages is due to the fact that D in such languages does not carry an interpretable [Number] feature, hence no number distinctions are expressed as high as D; in other words, when [Number] is in D (cf.

Longobardi 2008) or in the high functional area of DP (as in most of Indo-European), D (or: the corresponding head in an articulated DP) does not select ClassP. On the other hand, as clearly seen in the polysynthetic structure of Kadiwéu determiners (13), which directly reflects the order of the relevant projections, as well as in W. Armenian, which obeys the Mirror Principle and strictly has one invariable definiteness morpheme to the right of a number suffix, UG also allows for languages with low/lexical plurals, both of the type that does not form complete semi-lattices (all W.Armenian plurals/an array of lexical suffixes in Kadiweu) and of the type that does (–wa in Kadiwéu). The two types of PL may differ in terms of properties such as distributivity entailments etc. but are not incompatible with each other; given the selectional properties of CL, then, classifiers can co-occur with the latter, which gives rise to what looks like pluralised CLs, but not with the former (hence CL-**(wa)* N-PL).

- (1) CL roots: -d:a- ‘standing’, -n:i- ‘sitting’, -n:a- ‘coming’, -d:i- ‘lying’, -jo- ‘going’, -ka- ‘absent’
- (2) *on-i-n:i-te-ki-beke* Gonel:egiwa
one-masc-CL-3AGR-applicative-separately man ‘All men’
- (3) *i-n:i-wa-tale* Gonel:egiwa
masc-CL-pl-2 man ‘Two men’
- (4) ame-i-n:i ika João
interrogative-masc-CL *masc-CL João* ‘Which John?’
- (5) João dawi i-jo negediogo
John 3-buy masc-CL jaguar ‘John buys a/the jaguar’
- (6) Joao dawi nGijo negediogo
John 3-buy nG-masc-CL jaguar ‘John buys this jaguar (pointing at it)’
- (7) joão dawi negediogo
John 3-buy jaguar ‘John buys jaguar(s) (one or more)’
- (8) Gonel:egiwa-tedi
Man-pl ‘Groups of men’
- (9) i-d:i-wa Gonel:egiwa ~ i-d:i-*(wa) Gonel:egiwa-tedi
masc-CL-pl man masc-CL-pl man-pl
'Men' (perceived as atomised/individuated)
- (10) l-oti-di ~ i-d:i-wal-oti-di
3-milk-*n* ~ masc-CL-pl milk-*n*
'milk'~'milks' (packaged/in several containers, e.g. bottles)
- (11) apolikanaGan-**adi** aG o-y-eligible manga
horse-n-pl neg pl-3-eat mango
(Groups of) horses don't eat mangos → there are horses that don't, but: ?Maybe one does.
- (12) i-ko-wa apolikanaGa(n) oG o-y-eligible manga

masc-CL-pl horse-n neg pl-3-eat mango

(The) horses don't eat mangos → no horse does.

(13) [QP Q [DP (Person) [Prox/AnaphP -nG(a)- [GenderP -i/a- [CIP CL [#P (-wa) [nP n[±Pl] NP]]]]]]]