Classifiers and Maxim Flouting

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Abstract

Numeral classifiers have been studied by both linguists who consider them to be function morphemes with no semantic significance and those who contend that they are semantically loaded. While considering both views not to be incorrect, this study, leaning toward the latter view, demonstrates that speakers use classifiers to achieve their intended communicative goals. Questionnaires were administered to native speaker informants to ascertain whether Thai native speakers are bound by linguistic rules when matching a noun with its classifier. In many cases, the assignment of classifier to noun was found to be indecisive. Such indecisiveness suggests that the assignment of a classifier to a noun is not rigidly rule-governed. In addition to the questionnaire, informants were asked to read four short scenarios, each of which consisted of a misuse or flouting of a classifier. Not judging the flouting as a mistake, they stated what communicative goal was achieved via such flouting. The results show that classifiers, in addition to having semantic contents, can be used as pragmatic devices.

Keywords: classifier, semantics, pragmatics, maxim flouting

Introduction

A linguistic item most intriguing to linguists interested in Southeast Asian languages is *numeral classifiers*. The ongoing debate on whether numeral classifiers are syntactic or semantic or both has loomed large. Occupying the space after numeral in Thai noun phrases to make the head nouns enumerable, the Thai numeral classifier is deemed merely a syntactic unit by many linguists (Kookiattikoon, 2001). Convincingly, Kookiattikoon (2001) argues that many numeral classifiers are identical in forms to their head nouns, thereby inevitably carrying no semantic load (p.1). Addressing their syntactic significance, Gil (2013) states that classifiers come to be used because in classifier languages a noun phrase (NP) consisting entirely of a bare noun may be understood as either mass or count, and as either singular or plural (Gil, 1987). For instance, in Mandarin, the NP *píngguǒ* 'apple' may be understood as 'apple' (mass), 'an apple' (singular), or 'some apples' (plural). This cross-linguistic generalization has led to a widespread belief that in such languages, a classifier is needed in order to individuate the noun and provide the necessary units to make nouns quantifiable. While not arguing that classifiers lack semantic load, Singhapreecha (2001), focusing on their syntax, posits a functional category for Thai classifiers and demonstrates the analysis of Thai complex nominals adopting the antisymmetric framework. Thai classifiers have an independently functional status and project the Classifier Phrase (CP) fundamentally because they work in the same way as an agreement with their head nouns (Singhapreecha, 2001).

Inasmuch as classifiers function syntactically, they are also semantically significant. Numerous linguists, when discussing classifiers, specify that the selection of classifier is

based on the physical shapes of the head noun with which it co-occurs. This study, agreeing with the latter view, aims at proving that, in addition to bearing semantic contents, classifiers also have a pragmatic function. The evidence of intentional misuse of classifiers (flouting) to achieve certain communicative purposes is abundant in real-life situations. To empirically verify that classifiers can be pragmatically manipulated, this study uses questionnaires and interviews to elicit data from native speakers of Thai. Two types of questionnaires are used to ascertain whether the informant involved has knowledge of classifier usages. Interviews were conducted to elicit the informants' pragmatic interpretation of the (mis)use of classifiers. In brief, this study aims to show Thai speakers indeed use classifiers to achieve a certain communicative goal, thus proving that classifiers have pragmatic functions. It also demonstrates how Thai speakers view and interpret the mismatch of noun-classifier use, as well as conclusively proves that the classifier is a linguistic element with both semantic and pragmatic implication and purposes.

Review of Literature

Semantics of Classifiers

As stated above, many linguists see classifiers as having both syntactic and semantic functions. Singnoi (2008) indicates that noun classifiers, occurring in nominal phrases, have a large number of grammatical functions not restricted to syntax but encompass semantics and pragmatics. To her (2008), though classifiers function syntactically (by constituting numeral phrases, standing for head nouns and substituting for nouns, acting as the head of modifier constructions, acting as noun modifiers and disambiguating ambiguous constructions), they are semantically significant in that they connote properties of the nouns with which they co-occur.

Discussing semantic universals of classifier systems, Croft (1994) provides details of many system types, e.g. predicate classifiers, numeral classifiers, etc. (p. 145). As for numeral classifiers which come in the form of free morphemes, Croft (1994) attributes that using a classifier to enumerate a noun, a speaker first has to individualize the unit being counted and, secondly, identify it as being of the same kind as other nouns co-occurring with the same classifier (p. 162). Resulting from individualizing and identifying of a noun by means of a classifier, such a classifier logically serves a categorizing function. As far as bases for categorization are concerned, Hundius and Kölver (1983) contend that classifiers categorize their head nouns on the basis of the inherent semantic structure of their associated nouns (p. 189). Adams (1989) investigates salient features of classifiers and finds that the common underlying features are animacy, inanimacy, shapes, and sizes (of the associated nouns), and other kinds of dimensions specific to languages and cultures (p. 18). For example, the Thai classifier /chuek3/ which literally means 'rope' is used to classify the elephant. Adams (1989) reasons that this word is used as a classifier because *rope* is used to lead this animal around (p. 18). Speculating that classifiers categorize nouns on the basis of physical properties of the classified nouns, Conklin (1981) describes classifier words, most of which are similar to plant parts, e.g. seed, leaf, etc. (p. 130).This leads Conklin (1981) to logically assume that classification underlying the classifier systems (Austroasiatic

languages), for example, are: 1) stick-based; 2) seed-based; 3) fruit-based; 4) leaf-based, and so forth (p. 136). Taking a step further to find the rationale behind such bases proposed by Adams (1989) and Conklin (1981), Jaturongkachoke (2001) finds noun classes (by means of classifiers) are radial categories with their prototypical and non-prototypical members (p. 263). The non-prototypes, according to Jaturongkachoke (2001), are linked to their prototypes by means of chaining principles including image-schematic, metaphorical, propositional, and metonymic chaining (p. 263).

Pragmatics of Classifiers

In addition to syntax and semantics of classifiers, many scholars study pragmatic functions of classifiers. Salehuddin, Winskel, and Maros (2011), for instance, find that Malay numeral classifiers, similar to those of Thai, Vietnamese, and Japanese, are used as anaphoric and cataphoric references to knit sentences into a text in modern Malay (p. 143). To Salehuddin et al. (2011), the presence of classifiers helps trigger the sense of definiteness and foregrounding of objects within a text (p. 149). Also discussed by Salehuddin et al. (2011) are the omission and the misuse of classifiers (p. 150). To this, Salehuddin et al. (2011) state that such cases demonstrate no ignorance of the users but the pragmatic knowledge of when and what classifier to use to effectively communicate their intents (p. 151). The users, for instance, may omit classifiers (when appropriate) in the interest of word economy. Similar to Salehuddin in mentioning that classifiers can be used to foreground their associated NPs, Li (2000) describes the pragmatic function of numeral-classifiers in Mandarin Chinese (p. 1113). Arguing that even though the most basic function of numeral-classifiers is to quantify and classify nouns, Li (2000) affirms the motivation for classifier use is mainly pragmatic (p. 1113). In other words, numeral classifiers foreground the NPs to indicate their discourse salience.

Another analysis of Thai classifiers which implies that they indeed have pragmatic functions is that of Campbell (1998), who notes that, "[for human beings], each new environment that a Thai person enters calls for a re-assessment of his/her social standing. Depending on the social identities of the speech act participants, the choice of a classifier will vary" (p. 1). Examining cultural aspects of classifier usages, Krasnoukhova (2007), avers that the Burmese and Thai human referents are categorized mainly on the basis of their religious and social status (p. 53). In these languages, accordingly, the classifier inventories include classifiers which make distinctions between deities, royalty, people of high or low religious status and function, and ordinary humans. For instance, in Thai, male and female referents who have some social standing in the community are referred to with separate classifiers (e.g., /*thaan*3/ for people with high status vs. /khon1/ for ordinary people). With this, Krasnoukhova (2007) concludes that "the choice of an appropriate classifier is dictated by the social context in which a speech act takes place" (p. 53).

The abovementioned studies remind us that it is essential that classifier systems be looked at on pragmatic grounds. As asserted by Singnoi (2008), though classifiers have a syntactic function, they also function pragmatically. To her (2008), it is their pragmatic functions that motivate the forms/structures of classifiers. Extending from Singnoi, this study investigates how Thai speakers use and misuse classifiers to reach their communicative goals.

Essentially, this study aims at analyzing incidents of intended use of wrong classifiers, which is pragmatically a type of *maxim flouting*.

Classifiers and Maxim Flouting

In naturally occurring conversations, there are cases of noun-classifiers being deliberately mismatched for certain intended communicative ends, e.g. to create humor. Levinson (1983), explaining this linguistic phenomenon on the basis of Grice's theory of communication intention, puts it this way:

> So communication is a complex kind of intention that is achieved or satisfied just by being recognized. In the process of communication, the sender's communicative intention becomes mutual knowledge to 'sender' (S) and 'receiver' (H), i.e. S knows that H knows that S knows that H knows (and so ad infinitum) that S has this particular intention. Attaining this state of mutual knowledge of a communicative intention is to have successfully communicated (p.16).

Levinson (1983) further elucidates that communicative intention is a significant factor for determining communicative success of a conversation as "it has the interesting consequence that it gives an account of how communication might be achieved in the absence of any conventional means for expressing the intended message" (p. 101). In this study, 25 informants revealed that, as native speakers of Thai, they are well aware of the Thai classification system. Their conversational purpose is still achieved despite misuse of classifier.

As far as conversational maxims are concerned, Grice (as cites in Levinson, 1983) divided four basic maxims of conversation—fundamental principles behind mutual use of language—including the maxim of (1) Quality, (2) Quantity, (3) Relevance, and (4) Manner (pp. 101-102). When a speaker intentionally breaches the conventional rule, Grice calls this phenomenon that the speaker "flouts the maxims" (Levinson, 1983, p. 104). In this study, even though the informants are Thai native speakers and their grammatically correct use of classifier is anticipated, they may use it in an unconventional way, yet achieve their communicative roles. That's why this study will specifically investigate the maxim flouting and its implicature.

For instance, one often comes across the classifier /*tua*1/ which is used for an animal being used with nouns denoting human beings to suggest that the person being referred to is considered an animal. When such incongruity occurs, the listener usually does not perceive it as a grammatical mistake. This, in turn, means that the speaker did not make a mistake and the seemingly misuse of classifier is not a grammatical error. In some instances, the rationale behind the intentional misuse was overtly stated. The speaker indicated why she used classifier "x" instead of "y." The listeners, in response, were also aware of the situation. In certain cases, they laughed and praised the speaker for being linguistically creative. This is a clear evidence of maxim of quality being violated or flouted in the sense that no true information was given, yet communication was a success since all interlocutors knew what was going on. At this point, one might argue that the misapplication of classifiers is not a flouting of maxim of quality. However, the justification here is that it is a maxim-flouting

phenomenon since the whole truth is purposely implied and the interlocutors on both sides are fully aware of it.

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, Grice's four primary maxims of conversation encompass (1) Quality, (2) Quantity, (3) Relevance, and (4) Manner (Levinson, 1983, pp. 101-102). When breaching the predictable grammatical rule, that particular speaker is flouting the maxims (Levinson, 1983, p. 104). Nevertheless, when interlocutors have mutual knowledge of a language, their maxim flouting is well understood and the conversational goal can be achieved.

In this study, I provide cases of how maxim of quality is flouted by means of classifiers. To make my claim valid, instead of interpreting the data on my own, I asked Thai native speakers who, in Chomsky's sense, are idealized native speakers with full competence of the Thai language. Resulting from my interest in classifiers, I find myself paying attention to the use of classifiers in naturally occurring interactions. As such, the unit of analysis in this study came from my collection of classifier use over the years. Whenever I heard a creative use or an omission of classifiers, I wrote it down. The interactions analyzed in this study are a few incidents I gathered. It should be made clear here that in classifying; I excluded class terms such as หวี and ช่อ on purpose and nonpermanent classifiers such as ลอน.

Data are elicited from 50 informants (25 males and 25 females). As this study is the least quantitative in nature, the number of informants is not statistically significant. They were selected solely on the basis of their native language (of course, in this case, Thai). They were given two questionnaires; one consisting of a list of 10 nouns to which they had to provide correct classifiers, the other consisting of 15 sentences with classifier words. The informants were asked to judge whether the use of each classifier was correct. After this questionnaire stage, informants were asked to read the instances of classifier usage and they were to form three judgments: 1) whether such uses were acceptable, 2) why they were acceptable, and 3) what communicative effects they created.

Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

The data came from two sources: two questionnaires and an interview. Each source is analyzed and discussed as follows.

Questionnaire Results

The first questionnaire

The first questionnaire, as previously mentioned, comprises 10 words to which the informant had to assign correct classifiers. My impulsion here is only to demonstrate that the application of classifiers is (semantically) rule-governed. This claim is validated by the results shown in Table 1. There are cases in which the answers were not unanimous. I attribute this to the formality and informality use of classifiers. For example, classifier /phon5ผล/ is used with nouns denoting fruits (in this case "orange" /som3 ส้ม/in a formal usage. Informally, the classifier /luuk3ลูก/ is more common. Likewise, the formal classifier

/fo**ŋ**1ฟอง/ which co-occurs with the noun "egg" /khai2ไข่/ is usually replaced by /luuk3ลูก / in an informal usage.

Table 1 below summarizes the results.

Table 1. Summary of results on classifier use of 25 males followed by 25 females

(M1) A Summary of Classifier Use in Males (*N* = 25 persons)				
No.	Noun	Most Frequently Used Classifiers	Number (persons)	Percentage
1	orangeส้ม	phon5ผล	24	96%
2	hair ผม	sen3 เส้น	25	100%
3	steel เหล็ก	sen3 เส้น	21	84%
4	big water jar โอ่ง	bay1ใบ	21	84%
5	monkey ลิง	tua1ตัว	25	100%
6	Childเด็ก	khon1คน	25	100%
7	pen ปากกา	daam3ด้าม	21	84%
8	pencil ดินสอ	thɛŋ3แท่ง	22	88%
9	pole เสา	Ton3ต้น	25	100%
10	Egg ไข่	Foŋ1 ฟอง	20	80%

(F1) A Summary of Classifier Use in Females (*N* = 25 persons)				
No.	Noun	Most Frequently Used Classifiers	จำนวน (คน)	(%)
1	orangeส้ม	phon5ผล	22	88%
2	hair ผม	sen3เส้น	24	96%
3	steel เหล็ก	sen เส้น	20	80%
4	big water jar โอ่ง	bay1ใบ	19	76%
5	monkey ลิง	tua1ตัว	25	100%
6	childเด็ก	khon1คน	23	92%
7	pen ปากกา	daam3ด้าม	23	92%
8	pencil ดินสอ	thɛŋ3แท่ง	24	96%
9	pole เสา	Ton3ต้น	24	96%
10	Egg ไข่	Foŋ1 ฟอง	18	72%

The second questionnaire

The second questionnaire consists of 15 Thai sentences, each with the head noun and classifier underlined. The supposedly incorrect ones are marked with an asterisk. It is important to note here that the asterisk does not exist in the questionnaire. I merely inserted it with an objective to check whether the participants automatically recognize them or not. They are:

1. ตอนเช้าเขาจะทานยาวิตามินวันละหลายเม็ด (He takes many vitamins in the morning.)
2. ลูกหมาในบ้านเรามีทั้งหมดหกตัว (We have altogether six dogs at home.)
3. ส้มทุกผลในตระกร้าไม่มีผลไหนสุกเลย (All the oranges in the basket are not ripe.)
4. อาจารย์ทุกคนปรารถนาดีต่อศิษย์ (All teachers wish their students well.)
5. *ดาบด้ามนี้เป็นของโบราณที่ตกทอดมาในตระกูลของข้าพเจ้า (This sward is an antique which got passed on in my family.)
6. *เพิ่มไข่สักเม็ดก็จะอร่อยขึ้น (Adding one more egg will make it taste better.)
7. *โต๊ะทุกอันสกปรกมาก (All the tables are very dirty.)
8. *เตียงตัวเดียวจะไม่พอนอน (One bed is not enough for us to sleep in.)
9. *จานชามทุกลูกต้องล้างให้สะอาด (All the dishes must be washed clean.)
10. *เขาใช้สมุดหลายหัวมาก (He used many notebooks.)
11. *เด็กคนนี้มีผมหลายแท่ง (This child has a lot of hair.)
12. *ดินสอด้ามนี้ไม่แหลมพอที่จะใช้เขียนได้ (This pencil is not sharp enough to write.)
13. มีดเล่มไหนคมที่สุด (Which knife is the sharpest?)
14. ตะกร้าใบนี้สวยมาก (This basket is very beautiful.)
15. *โอ่งลูกนั้นใหญ่จริงๆ (That jar is very big.)

Some sentences (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,11, 12, and 15) were intentionally constructed to consist of wrong or inappropriate classifiers. While some are grammatically wrong, others are not. Sentence 15, for instance, with the noun "jar" /?ong 2 โอ่ง/ being used with the classifier /bay1 ใบ/, cannot be considered incorrect. It is just the case of such noun being classified as a non-prototypical member of the class of nouns co-occurring with the classifier /luuk2 ลูก/ (Jaturongkachoke, 2001, p. 262).The result confirms this claim. The informants unanimously marked the unacceptable ones as wrong, but showed hesitation with those that are not decisive (sentences 5, 8, 12 and 15). Table 2 summarizes the results.

Table 2: Summary of results on grammatical judgment of 25 males followed by 25 females (1 = correct, 0 = incorrect)

Question#	Q#1	Q#2	Q#3	Q#4	Q#5	Q#6	Q#7	Q#8	Q#9	Q#10	Q#11	Q#12	Q#13	Q#14	Q#15	Total Score of correct answers
M1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	12
M2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
M3	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	11
M4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	12
M5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	12
M6	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	12
M7	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
M8	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	11
M9	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
M10	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	11
M11	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
M12	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	12
M13	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	11
M14	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	13
M15	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	11
M16	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
M17	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	12
M18	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	12
M19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	13
M20	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
M21	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	11
M22	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	11
M23	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	12
M24	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	10
M25	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	13
Total	**24**	**24**	**21**	**21**	**15**	**25**	**24**	**16**	**1**	**25**	**24**	**15**	**22**	**25**	**13**	

Question#	Q#1	Q#2	Q#3	Q#4	Q#5	Q#6	Q#7	Q#8	Q#9	Q#10	Q#11	Q#12	Q#13	Q#14	Q#15	Total Score of correct answers
F1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	10
F2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	9
F3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	12
F4	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	10
F5	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	11
F6	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
F7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	13
F8	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	13
F9	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	12
F10	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	12
F11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	11
F12	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
F13	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
F14	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	10

Question#	Q#1	Q#2	Q#3	Q#4	Q#5	Q#6	Q#7	Q#8	Q#9	Q#10	Q#11	Q#12	Q#13	Q#14	Q#15	Total Score of correct answers
F15	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	11
F16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	12
F17	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
F18	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	12
F19	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	12
F20	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	12
F21	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
F22	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
F23	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	13
F24	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	12
F25	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
Total	**22**	**24**	**21**	**23**	**17**	**23**	**25**	**17**	**3**	**24**	**24**	**13**	**23**	**25**	**15**	

The results from the two questionnaires do not statistically confirm any claim. Rather, they show that the use of Thai classifiers, while linguistically rigid, is indeed socio-situationally flexible, hence, as will be shown in the next section, communicatively adaptable.

Interview Results

In this section, the 25 informants were to read four scenarios. Each contains a mismatched noun-classifier phrase. They were then asked to judge whether such mismatch was acceptable. Interview questions followed to ascertain why they thought each mismatch was used. Given that the interview transcript is lengthy, I will summarize the essence and interpretations extracted from each scenario.

Scenario 1

> The event took place in a living room where a few men were conversing. The discussion of local political election came up and they all were commenting about the candidates. Apparently, the men dislike those candidates. One of them commented that "ไอ้พวกนี้เลวเสมอกันทุกตัว," which can be translated into an English sentence: "These people are equally bad."

In this statement, the classifier used is /tua1 ตัว/ which normally co-occurs with nouns denoting animals. All informants interviewed have no problems with this mismatch. Most laughed and said they agreed that politicians should be assigned the classifier used for animals. The use of this classifier, according to some, is right. One contended that this classifier should be prescribed to all politicians. Asked as to why they thought this classifier was used, the informants reasoned that the speaker intentionally used this as he wanted to be sarcastic and to communicate his contemptuous feeling toward politicians. A few informants stated that the use of /tua1/ for politicians, while not incorrect, was socially inappropriate, but all essentially had no difficulty understanding this mismatch.

Scenario 2

> The event took place in a beauty salon where a few clients were present. One who came to get a perm had just left. After she was gone, the hairdresser commented "ผมเป็นแท่งเชียว ดัดยากจริงๆนั่งตั้งแต่เช้า เพิ่งจะเสร็จ," which can be translated into an English sentence: "Her hair was coarse and difficult to perm. She had been here since this morning and I just got it done now."

In this sentence, the classifier /thɛŋ3แท่ง/, which normally co-occurs with hard object (e.g., pencil, iron), was used with the noun "hair" (normally used with /sen3 เส้น/. Again, all the informants stated that they could understand why such mismatch occurred. In this case, the speaker wanted to hyperbolize that the hair was very difficult to perm. The intentional misuse was, according to the informant, was not far-fetched. Some indicated that the speaker, apart from emphasizing the hair quality, expressed (via this mismatch) frustration that she had to work long hours to complete the task. While not saying that it is not inappropriate, a few informants commented that the hairdresser was not professional and unkind to make a comment as such.

Scenario 3

> In this event, a woman with her four daughters were visiting her best friend. Upon arrival at her friend's house, the host greeted them with "อ้าว วันนี้มากันครบทั้งสี่ใบ เข้ามาเลยค่ะ ทำอาหารรอไว้เยอะ กินกันให้กลิ้งกลับบ้านเลยนะ" This can be translated into an English sentence: "Oh, all four girls came. Come in. I prepared lots of food for you. Eat a lot and roll yourselves back home."

The classifier used in place of /khon1คน/ (which should be used for the four daughters) was replaced with /bay1ใบ/ which is typically used with big round containers (water jar). Most informants laughed at this mismatch and some commented that they could see in their mind that the four daughters are chubby. The use of this classifier, according to them, served the point, and the verb กลิ้ง (roll) made it clear. A few said that it was normally not very nice to blatantly say that someone is fat, but the use of the classifier in this case made the insult much milder.

Scenario 4

> In this event, a woman was shown a three-month-old baby girl (of a friend) to. She used the baby talk register to greet the baby "ดูสิ สวยจังเลย ปากนิด จมูกหน่อย แต่ไหน ตาอยู่ไหนคะ โอ้โห ตาสองเส้นสวยจัง" which translates to "Let me have a look at you. You are so pretty, your tiny mouth and tiny nose, but where are your eyes? Goodness your two eyes are so beautiful."

The classifier /sen3 เส้น/ which is typically used with nouns that are long and thin (thread, chain, etc.) was used to replace /duaŋ1ดวง/ (normally used for eye). The speaker intended to

suggest that the girl's eyes were small and narrow, like a piece of thread. In this actual event, everybody laughed at the remark. This suggests that the statement was not taken seriously. Most informants, as in the above scenario, indicated that the misuse of classifiers served the purpose of emphasizing that the girl had very narrow eyes. One commented that this misuse was creative and she had heard it being done before when someone makes a comment about the eye size of a Korean woman (before she got her plastic surgery to enlarge her eyes).

The questionnaire data above suggest that while classifiers serve a linguistic function (to make nouns countable), they also have meanings and connotations. Speakers of the Thai language apply rules for classifier selection. While most linguistic rules are decisive, the assignment of classifiers to nouns is somewhat flexible. Their syntactic competence enables Thai speakers to put a classifier in thecorrect place in a numeral noun phrase. However, their semantic competence helps the speakers apply the socio-contextually appropriate classifier. The data from the naturally occurring events highlight the fact that classifiers indeed have meanings and implications. People's pragmatic competence enables them to manipulate classifiers (intentionally misuse or flout) to achieve certain communicative goals. As the misuse did not lead to a communication failure but success, one can claim that both the speaker and the listener have a full understanding of what was occurring and the mismatching of classifier was not a mistake. It is therefore reasonable to assert that classifiers are elements with many functions. Users must follow the rules of usage, but have room to manipulate classifiers to suit their contextual needs.

Conclusion

This study provides arguments for and against classifiers having semantic load. While a classifier has to be put into the right phrase in a numeral noun phrase, the data in this study suggest that speakers select which classifier to use on the basis of its semantic content. The questionnaire data show that in most cases the use of classifier is rigid (e.g., classifier /khon1/ with human). In certain instances, however, socio-contextual factors (formality/informality) can influence the selection. The final set of the data only stresses the fact that people indeed play with classifiers in real life conversations. It is evident that people flout maxim of quality by mismatching noun/classifier to achieve their communicative goals. Communication was successful and people who were not in that situation (informants), upon reading about it, can make sense of the situation. Maxim flouting is a two-way process. The speaker has to select the classifier that is not far-fetched to allow the listener to grasp the point, and the listener has to be aware that a mistake is deliberate. This study aims to show that Thai speakers indeed deploy classifiers to achieve certain communicative goals (and thereby proving that classifiers have pragmatic functions), to demonstrate how Thai speakers view and interpret the mismatch of noun-classifier use, and ultimately to prove that the classifier is not a mere linguistic element without semantic and pragmatic connotations and functions.

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Appendix A

Classifier Words and their Dictionary Meanings

bay1(ใบ): leaves, fruits, eggs, various kinds of containers (e.g., baskets, boxes, cups, bags) basins, etc.); also for slips or sheets of paper (e.g., notes, certificates, tickets)

daam3 (ด้าม): handle, hilt, holder; classifier for pen

duaŋ1(ดวง): certain round shapes or objects, e.g., seals, stamps, lights, stars, eyes

khon1 (คน): human beings

luuk3(ลูก): fruit of any kind; for mountains; for certain round and small objects

lem3(เล่ม): sharp-pointed objects (e.g., knives, axes, pins, needles, (swords, etc.); for candles, books, carts, etc.

met4(เม็ด): seeds, grain, pills, gems, pimples, etc.

phon5 (ผล): fruits

sen3(เส้น): strand of hair, thread; for string, wire, bracelets, automobile tires, etc.

thɛŋ3 (แท่ง): bar, ingot, classifier for pencil

than3(ท่าน): human beings with high status