



# Sentence Classifiers and Verb Phrase Classifiers<sup>1</sup>

Udom Warotamasikkhadit

Fellow of the Royal Institute, Academy of Arts  
and Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

## *Abstract*

It is generally known that a classifier is designated by a noun dominating it. Some scholars consider it a semantic feature attached to a noun. Thai language scholars hardly pay attention to sentence classifiers and verb phrase classifiers in Thai. They are not mentioned in many Thai grammar books, including a booklet on classifiers issued by the Royal Institute of Thailand. There are several classifiers of time such as *khráŋ*, *hǒn*, *khraa*, *laa*, *thii*, *rǒp* and many others are employed as a sentence classifier for different actions of a noun or a verb phrase classifier of an abstract noun. Those who study Thai must learn how to use each word independently and separately in order to use it correctly.

**Key words:** classifier, semantic features

## **Introduction**

Thai is one of the languages of the world that has classifiers. Classifiers are normally analyzed as features of a noun, for example *múj* ‘mosquito net’ [+cl] [+lǎŋ]. The structure of a noun phrase showing a classifier is as follows: a noun + a numeral + a classifier or a noun + [+cl] + *nèŋ* ‘one’ or *diaw* ‘one only’. Udom Warotamasikkhadit (1995, 2004) observes that classifiers do not only co-occur with noun but also co-occur with sentences and verb phrases. The first edition of a pamphlet on classifiers (1995) and the revised edition of a pamphlet on classifiers (2008) published by the Royal Institute of Thailand did not include sentence classifiers or verb phrase classifiers. This shows that Thai scholars show no interest in sentence classifiers and verb phrase classifiers.

<sup>1</sup> The early version of this paper was presented at the 42<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics at Payap University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, November 2-4, 2009.



## 1. Classification of sentence classifiers and verb phrase classifiers

There are 8 categories of sentence classifiers and verb phrase classifiers.

1.1 Classifiers meaning ‘time,’ for example: khráŋ ‘time’, khraa ‘time’, khraaw ‘time’, laa ‘time’ co-occurring with hòo to be used in an undulating shout or cheer in a procession for a wedding or ordination ceremony’, rǔɔp ‘going around in one circle’ or ‘showing the film from the beginning to the end’, talòp ‘round of fainting’, thii ‘time’, thîaw ‘time’, hǒn ‘time’, yòk ‘a round of a boxing match’, thǔɔt or tòɔ ‘a transfer or a connection from one bus or a passenger boat to another.’

a. yaam tii rakhaŋ hâa khráŋ  
guard beat bell 5 time

‘the guard rang the bell five times.’

b. khǎw kràap ɲaam ɲaam sǎam khraa  
he prostrate grace grace three time.

‘He prostrated with the palms pressed together and the hands resting on the floor; the forehead rests against the hands gracefully three times.’

c. phǒm sòŋ sǐnkháa maa hây khun sǎam khraaw pen  
I send goods come give you three time be

ɲən sǎam phan bát  
money three thousand baht

‘I sent goods to you three times totaling three thousands baht.’

d. chaay khon nán hòo sǎam laa kòɔn khâw pay nay bân  
man cl. that give cheer three time before enter go in house

‘That man gave three long undulating cheers before entering the house.’

e. pâa pen lom pay lǎay talòp  
aunt faint go many time

‘Auntie fainted many times.’

f. khruu tii phǒm sǔɔŋ thii dūay máy banthát  
teacher beat I two time with ruler

‘Teacher beat me twice with a ruler.’

g. chûa cèt thii dii cèt hǒn  
evil seven time good seven time

‘There have been seven times of bad luck, (there will be) seven times of good luck.’

h. yâak rǔɔy hǒn con phan khraaw  
difficulty hundred time poverty thousand time



‘A hundred times of difficulty and a thousand times of poverty. (we will endure).’

- i. khǎw khàp rôt won sǎam rǒp  
he drive car circle three time  
‘He drove his car in a circle three times’
- j. khǎw ʔàan nǎjsh lêm nán sǎam thǎaw  
he read book cl. that three time.  
‘He read that book three times.’
- k. nákmuay khûu ní chók kan síp yók  
boxer pair this fight each other ten round  
‘The two boxers enter a ten round match.’
- l. phǒm nǎj rótmee sǎam tǒo kwàa ca thǎj plaay thaaj  
I sit bus three transfer till will reach end way  
It took me three transfers on the bus to reach the destination.’
- m. thəə nɔɔn thɔɔt diaw yan sawàaj  
she sleep lie one till dawn  
‘She sleeps straight through without interruption until morning.’

1.2 Classifiers showing unit of time, such as wínaathii ‘second’, naathii ‘minute’, chûamooŋ ‘hour’, wan ‘day’, ween<sup>2</sup> ‘day’, khɪn ‘night’, sàpdaa ‘week’, ʔaathít ‘week’, dian ‘month’, pii ‘year’, phansǎa ‘year’ (royal language), thótsawát, ‘decade’, sàtàwát ‘century’

- a. ləp taa síp wínaathii  
close eye ten second  
‘Close your eyes for ten seconds.’
- b. khǎw ʔǒk pay dāy síp naathii léæw  
he leave go can ten minute finish  
‘He left ten minutes ago.’
- c. khun ca yùu thǎi ní kǐ chûamooŋ  
you will be place this how many hour  
‘How long will you be here?’
- d. khǎw phák kàp raw sǒŋ wan  
he stay with us two day.  
‘He stays with us two days’.

<sup>2</sup> Found in *The Royal Chronicle R.E. 120*. p. 72, with the spelling ๑๗๕, but ๑๗๖ in the other places meaning ‘day’



- e. raw pay kháṅ nay pàa nṅ khṅ  
we go sleep in forest one night.  
'We slept in the forest one night.'
- f. tháp lǎṅ rṅnræm yī sṅp hâa ween  
army royal travel two ten five day  
'The Royal Army traveled 25 days'
- g. mǎæ ca pay ʔameerikaa nṅ sàpdaa  
mother will go America one week.  
'Mother will go to America for a week.'
- h. phṅ ca pay bâannṅk nṅ ʔaathít  
father will go upcountry one week  
'Father will go upcountry one week.'
- i. phṅm ca mây yùu bâan tháj đian  
I will not be home whole month  
'I will not be home the whole month.'
- j. khǎw càak bâan pay hâa pii  
he leave home go five year  
'He left home five years ago.'
- k. sṅmḍèt phrá nareesṅan sawǎy râtchásṅmbàt sṅphòk phansǎa  
King Naresuan reign throne sixteen year  
King Naresuan reigned for sixteen years.'
- l. phrá ʔṅ ní bùat maa hâa phansǎa  
monk cl. this ordain come five year  
'This monk has been ordained for five years.'
- m. kwaam sǎmphān thay-ciin mii maa kṅn nṅ sàtawát  
relationship Thai-Chinese have come more one century  
'The Thai-Chinese relationship has been established for more than one century.'

1.3. Classifiers showing a unit of linear measurement, such as kràbiat 'one fourth of an inch', khṅp 'a span from the tip of a thumb to the tip of the middle finger', krṅak 'a span from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the forefinger or half a meter', níw 'inch', sṅk 'the distance from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow joint or half a meter', waa 'two meters', lǎa 'yard', mét 'meter', sṅ '40 meters', kiloomét 'kilometer', may 'mile', yṅt, '400 sṅ or 16,000 meters.'



- a. máay phæn níi nǎa sǒŋ kràbiat  
plank cl. this thick two one fourth of an inch  
'This plank is half an inch thick.'
- b. raw tôŋ cháý phâa kwâaŋ sǒŋ khâp<sup>3</sup>  
we must use cloth wide two a span from the tip of the thumb to the tip  
of the forefinger'  
'We need a piece of cloth about a meter wide'
- c. sǎw tôn níi sũuŋ sîp sòk  
pole cl. this tall ten half a meter  
'This pole is five meters tall.'
- d. sǎn khànàt níi yaaw sîi sên  
fruit farm cl. this long four 40 meters  
'This fruit farm is 160 meters long.'
- e. khǎw dǎn thaaŋ láay m̀m yòt  
he travel many 10,000 yòt  
'He travels a long distance.'
- f. phǒm sít phâa maa ỳisìpkhâaw lǎa  
I buy cloth come twenty-nine yard  
'I bought twenty-nine yards of cloth.'
- i. khǎw wîŋ siphâa may  
he run fifteen mile  
'He ran fifteen miles.'

1.4 Classifiers showing a monetary unit, such as bàat 'baht', sàlĩŋ 'a quarter of one baht', tamlŋ 'four baht', chǎŋ '80 baht' rĩan 'dollar', ruupii 'rupee', yeen 'yen', pɔɔn 'pound'

- a. wan níi khun cháý ŋəŋ pay kii rĩan  
day this you spend money go how many dollar  
'Today how many dollars did you spend?'
- b. khâa chǎw bâan khǎw đian lá phan pɔɔn  
cost rent house he month one thousand pound  
'His rent is 1,000 pounds a month.'
- c. khǎw đâay ŋəndian đian lá lán yeen  
he get salary month one million yen  
'He receives a salary of a million yen a month.'

<sup>3</sup> One khâp is .025 meter



- d. khǎw mii ηən phiaη hòk sàlǎη  
he has money only six a quarter of one baht  
'He has only 1.50 baht'
- e. mǎæ ráp ηən pay sii tamliη  
mother receive money go four four baht  
'Mother received 16 baht.'
- f. khâadooysǎan rótraη sîp ruupii  
fare tram ten rupee  
'The tram fare is ten rupee.'

1.5 Classifiers showing unit of weight such as hǔn 'a Chinese unit of weight used by jewelers, equal to 375 mg.', sàlǎη 'unit of weight for silver or gold, equal to 3.75 gm.', bàat 'unit of weight for silver or gold, equal to 15 gm.', tamliη 'unit of weight for silver or gold, equal to 60 gm.', chǎη '600 gm.', hàap 'unit of weight equal to 60 kg.', kram 'gram', kilookram 'kilogram', ʔɔɔn 'ounce', pɔɔn 'pound', tan 'ton equal to 1,000 kg.'

- a. thɔɔη phǎen níi nàk sii hǔn  
gold piece this weigh four 375 mg.  
'This piece of gold weighs 1.5 gm.'
- c. sɔɔy thɔɔη níi nàk nǎη bàat  
chain gold this weigh one 15 gm.  
'This gold chain weighs 15 gm.'
- d. phǎm khǎɔ sǎi náamtaan sɔɔη kilookram  
I request buy sugar two kg.  
'I want to buy two kilograms of sugar.'
- e. tua khǎw mii náamnàk róɔy pɔɔn  
body he have weight hundred pound  
'He weighs one hundred pounds.'

1.6 Classifiers showing volume such as thanaan 'one liter', thǎη or sàt '20 liters', kwian '2,000 liters', lít 'liter', sii sii 'c.c.' kǎænlon 'gallon'

- a. nóɔη hǔη khǎaw sɔɔη thanaan sǎmràp (khon) hòk khon  
sister boil rice two liter for (man) six person  
'Sister boiled two liters of rice for six persons.'



- b. náamplaa khùat níi bancù cèt róy hâa sîp sii sii  
fish sauce bottle this contain seven hundred five ten c.c.  
'This bottle of fish sauce contains 750 c.c.'
- c. khun khuan ðim náam wan lá sǎy lít  
you should drink water day one two liter  
'You should drink two liters of water a day.'
- d. Máyúrii kîaw khâaw dâay róy kwian  
Mayuree harvest rice get hundred kwian  
'Mayuree harvested 100 kwian of rice.'
- e. rót khan níi kin náamman wan lá sîp kæænlon  
car cl. this eat gasoline day one ten gallon  
'This car consumes 10 gallons of gasoline a day.'

1.7 Noss (1964:109) noticed imitative classifiers in Thai such as pang 'bang', práŋ 'a crash of thunder', khroom 'the sound of heavy objects crashing to the ground or the floor', tuum 'boom', plæp 'a flash of lightning', ?ûu 'the sound of a strong wind blowing', fíaw 'the sound of bullets going through the air', bîm 'the sound of a bomb explosion'

- a. raw dâyyin sǎŋ pŋn daŋ lǎy pang  
we hear sound gun loud many bang  
'We heard many loud bangs of the guns.'
- b. fáa phàa loŋ maa sǎam práŋ  
sky split down come three time  
'Thunderbolts struck three times.'
- c. khǎw yoon nǎŋsŋ maa khroom diaw yîi-sîp lêm  
he throw book come sound of heavy objects one twenty cl.  
'He threw 20 books down on the floor together at one time.'
- d. rábèetmŋ daŋ khîn sǎam tuum.  
bomb hand loud up three boom  
'Three loud booms of hand grenade explosions were heard.'
- e. fáa lêp sǎy sǎam plæp kòon fŋn tòk  
sky flash two three flash before rain fall  
'Lightning flashed two or three times before it started raining.'
- f. sǎŋ rábèet daŋ lǎy bîm  
sound bomb loud many cl.  
'Many explosions were heard.'



- g. phaayú maa lǎŋ lom phát rææŋ sǎam sǐi ʔúu  
storm come after wind blow strong three four time  
'The storm came after the sound of a strong wind blowing 3-4 times.'
- h. kràsũn daŋ phaan ʔaakàat khâam hûa pay pen róoy róoy  
bullet loud through air over head go be hundred hundred  
fíaw  
time  
'Bullets were heard many hundreds of times going through the air over our heads.'

### 1.8 Miscellaneous classifiers for different sentence or verb phrases

- a. thəə lǎp pay sǎam tɨn<sup>4</sup> sǎamii yaŋ mây klàp bâan  
she asleep go three awakening husband still not return home  
'She was asleep and woke up three times, but her husband did not return home.'
- b. thǎŋ khûu yâaŋ sǎam khũm khâw hǎa kan  
all both walk three step toward meet each other  
'Both step forwards toward each other triumphantly.'
- c. phǒm tŏŋ kǎæ bon cèt wát cèt waa  
I must pay vow seven temple seven monastery  
'I must pay a vow to fulfill my promise at seven temples.'
- d. raw tŏŋ phaay lǎy câm háy pay thŏŋ fâak nŏon  
we must paddle many quick stroke let go to bank opposite  
'We must paddle with many quick strokes to reach the opposite side.'
- e. khun thǒoy lǎŋ pay nŏŋ kâaw  
you move back go one step  
'You move back one step.'
- f. pɨn yây yin sàlùt yŏi sŏp ʔèt nát  
cannon big fire salute twenty one shot  
'The cannons fire twenty one shots for a salute.'
- g. khǎw tham hâa tâæm<sup>5</sup> tham hây raw plŏoy sǎa nâa  
he make five faux pas make let we follow suit loose face  
'He commits a faux pas and make us loose face.'

<sup>4</sup> It is strange to find that a classifier of being asleep is the verb meaning 'waken.'

<sup>5</sup> The literal meaning of hâa tâæm is five points but it is an idiom meaning 'to commit a faux pas.'





- h. raw kamlaj pay kin sîi thûay<sup>6</sup> bâan kamnan  
 we now go eat four bowl house elder headman  
 ‘We are going to have a feast at the elder headman’s house.’

## 2. Conclusion

The sentences above certainly show that sentences and verb phrases can take classifiers. Professor Prasert Na Nagara considers that sentences or verb phrases can function as abstract nouns in Thai and they can contain classifiers like other nouns. Thus it is normal for those learning Thai to memorize specific classifiers for certain nouns, sentences and verb phrases.

## References

- Apiluck Tumtavikul, Chirapha Niwataphant, Philipp Dill, 2009. ‘Classifiers in Thai Sign Language’. *Festschrift in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Language and Literature in Honor of Professor Dr. Udom Warotamasikhhadit on his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Bangkok, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University Press.,pp 255-275.
- Department of General Education, 2007. *The Royal Chronicle of R.E. 120*. Second Printing. Bangkok, Matichon.
- Noss, Richard B, 1964. *Thai Reference Grammar*. Washington, DC, Foreign Service Institute.
- Somsongse Burusphat, Zhou Guoyan, 2009. *A Comparison of Classifiers in Tai-Kadai Languages*. Nakhon Pathom, Language and Culture Institute for Rural Development, Mahidol University.
- The Royal Institute of Thailand, 2003. *Classifiers*. Revised edition. Bangkok, Sahamit Printing.
- The Royal Institute of Thailand, 2008. *Classifiers*. Seventh printing. Bangkok, Idea Square Partnership.

<sup>6</sup> Traditional Thai desserts are of four kinds consisting of น้ำกะทิ ‘sweetened coconut cream mixed with palm sugar or coconut sugar’ in the center bowl of the tray, and four other bowls containing: one bowl of ไข่กบ ‘frog eggs’ which are ‘cooked tapioca, or water soaked mint seeds’, one bowl of นกปล่อย free birds’ or ‘ทอดช่อง’ which are ‘sweetmeats similar to light green noodle’, one bowl of มะลิลอย ‘floating jasmynes’ which are ‘popped rice’, and one bowl of ข้าวคั่ว ‘dark or white cooked sticky rice’ which were popular dessert in the old day.



Udom Warotamasikkhadit, 1995. *Thai Grammar in Linguistics*. First Edition. Bangkok, Ramkhamhaeng University Press.  
\_\_\_\_\_, 2004. *Thai Grammar in Linguistics*. Third Edition. Bangkok, Ramkhamhaeng University Press.