

## Some aspects of classifier in Kokborok

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### Abstract

This paper deals with some aspects of classifier in Kokborok language spoken mainly in the North Eastern State of Tripura. Kokborok has a rich set of classifiers. Classifiers in Tibeto-Burman and Bodo-Garo are expressed by bound morphemes. Classifiers in Kokborok always occur with the numerals while counting any nouns. The order is N CLF-NUM.

**Key words:** Classifier, Kokborok, Tibeto-Burman, Bodo-Garo

### 1. Introduction

Tripura is a small and hilly state that is located in the North Eastern parts of India and is surrounded by our neighbouring country Bangladesh on three sides i.e., the north, south, and west. Tripura on the eastern side shares the boundary with the state of Assam and Mizoram.

Kokborok (ISO 69303 trp) is a Bodo-Garo language Tibeto-Burman language spoken primarily in the North Eastern state of Tripura by approximately more than 1 million population. Kokborok is extensively used by majority of the tribes of Tripura. Speakers of two dominant language families mainly Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman are found in Tripura. Bengali is a dominant Indo-Aryan language in Tripura. Other than Kokborok speaking communities; Molsom, Hrangkhawl, Kaipeng, Munda, Santhal, Urang also speaks Kokborok. Two communities of Halam such as Rupini and Kalai also speak Kokborok language. Apart from Tripura Kokborok speakers are found in Assam and Mizoram. Kokborok is also spoken in Bangladesh. The primary data for the present study has been collected from the field where Kokborok is spoken. The data was collected through elicitation method. The data was collected in two consecutive years i.e., 2021 and 2022. The area of study is Unakoti district of Tripura which includes two villages namely Saidacherra and Rajkandi.

The present paper focuses on some aspects classifiers in Kokborok in terms of semantic criteria.

### 2. Review of Literature

No extensive work on classifiers in Kokborok has been carried out so far. Karapurkar (1976) has listed 27 classifiers of Kokborok in her Kokborok Grammar. She has stated that “classifiers classify the nouns into several sub-groups and are prefixed to the numerals.” She further stated that classification is done mainly on the basis of the shape or the quality of the nouns. She also said that classifiers are separate morphemes. According to Jacquesson (2007), numerals normally do not come without a classifier (CL), and the group classifier + numeral comes after what is to be counted. He has provided a list of the following classifiers viz. *p<sup>h</sup>an-*, *bar-*, *k<sup>h</sup>uŋ-*, *k<sup>h</sup>orok-*, *ma*, *lai-*, *dek-*, and *kai-*.

### 3. Classifier construction

Classifiers are defined as morphemes which occur ‘in surface structures under specific conditions’; denote ‘some salient perceived or imputed characteristics of the entity to which an associated noun refers’ (Allan 1977: 285).

Classifiers in Kokborok always occur with the numerals while counting, which makes it close bound syntactic unit in the following order: classifier + numeral. This syntactic unit may occur after or before the noun. However, the preferred order is N CLF-NUM as in (1) and (2). It is worth mentioning that the noun is never known to intrude between classifier and numeral.

- (1) *tak<sup>h</sup>um ma-sa*  
 duck CLF-one  
 ‘One duck’
- (2) *malk<sup>h</sup>uŋ k<sup>h</sup>uŋ-sa*  
 vehicle CLF-one  
 ‘One vehicle’

It is observed that the possible reverse order is CLF-NUM N as in (3) and (4).

- (3) *ma-sa tak<sup>h</sup>um*  
 CLF-one duck  
 ‘One duck’
- (4) *k<sup>h</sup>uŋ-sa malk<sup>h</sup>uŋ*  
 CLF-one vehicle  
 ‘One vehicle’
- (5) *kaŋ-sa ri*  
 CLF-one cloth  
 ‘One cloth’

### 4. Classifiers in Kokborok

All the classifiers in Kokborok are prefixes. Most of the classifiers in Kokborok are typically monosyllabic, mostly ending in consonant and some in a vowel as in (8) – (9) and few are bisyllabic as in (6). The following lists of classifiers are found in Kokborok.

*k<sup>h</sup>orok*-NUM

This classifier is used with human nouns. The classifier *k<sup>h</sup>orok*- is derived from the word *bok<sup>h</sup>orok* ‘head’.

- (6) *borok k<sup>h</sup>orok-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 person CLF-three  
 ‘Three person’

- (7) *borok k<sup>h</sup>orok-ba*  
 person CLF-five  
 ‘Five person’

*ma*-NUM

This classifier is used with animals including reptiles, birds, worms, and insects as such.

- (8) *pun ma-sa*  
 goat CLF-one  
 ‘One goat’

- (9) *sinjo ma-sa*  
 rat CLF-one  
 ‘One rat’

*p<sup>h</sup>aŋ*-NUM

This classifier is used with trees, plants, herbs and weeds. Etymologically, the morpheme *p<sup>h</sup>aŋ-* is copied from the second syllable of the word *bu-p<sup>h</sup>aŋ* ‘tree’.

- (10) *bup<sup>h</sup>aŋ p<sup>h</sup>aŋ-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 tree CLF-three  
 ‘Trees trees’

- (11) *k<sup>h</sup>um p<sup>h</sup>aŋ-sa*  
 flower CLF-one  
 ‘One flower plant’

*dek*-NUM

This classifier *dek-* is used with branches of any weeds, trees and plants. This classifier is copied from the second syllable of the word *be-dek* ‘branch’.

- (12) *bedek dek-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 branch CLF-three  
 ‘Three branches’

- (13) *t<sup>h</sup>aipuŋ bedek dek-ba*  
 jackfruit branch CLF-five  
 ‘Five branches of mango’

*ceŋ*-NUM

The classifier *ceŋ-* is used with twig. The twig may be of trees, herbs, plants like bamboo etc. The classifier *ceŋ-* is copied from the second syllable of word *be-ceŋ* ‘twig’.

- (14) *becɛŋ*            *ceŋ-ba*  
 tree twig            CLF-five  
 ‘Five twigs of tree’
- (15) *wacɛŋ*            *ceŋ-tʰam*  
 bamboo.twig      CLF-three  
 ‘Three twigs of bamboo’

*kol*-NUM

This classifier is used with any kind of grains i.e., small piece of hard substance, seeds, eye etc. This classifier is copied from the second syllable of the word *bo-kol* ‘grain’.

- (16) *bokol*    *kol-tʰam*  
 grain    CLF-three  
 ‘Three grains/substances’
- (17) *mokol*    *kol-sa*  
 eye    CLF-one  
 ‘One eye’
- (18) *bucului* *kol-ba*  
 seed            CLF-five  
 ‘Five seeds’

*tɯŋ*-NUM

This classifier is used with long narrow or thin objects such as rope, wire, thread, roads, hair, blood vessels/veins, tails, bamboo strips etc. It is copied from the second syllable of the word *kʰu-tɯŋ* ‘thread’.

- (19) *kʰutɯŋ*            *tɯŋ-nui*  
 thread            CLF-two  
 ‘Two threads’
- (20) *lama*    *tɯŋ-sa*  
 road    CLF-three  
 ‘one road’
- (21) *buduk*    *tɯŋ-sa*  
 rope    CLF-one  
 ‘One rope’

*tʰop*-NUM

This classifier is used with any kind of drops of liquid such as water, blood, oil, kerosene etc.

- (22) *belɛntuitʰop-ba*  
 sap            CLF-five  
 ‘Five drops of sap’

- (23) *t<sup>h</sup>ok t<sup>h</sup>op-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
oil CLF-three  
'Three drops of oil'

*kaŋ*-NUM

This classifier is used with flat objects, like books, cloths, mat etc.

- (24) *kamcului kaŋ-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
shirt CLF-three  
'Three shirts'

- (25) *lamt<sup>h</sup>ai kaŋ-sa*  
mat CLF-one  
'One mat'

- (26) *kisip kaŋ-ba*  
fan CLF-five  
'Five hand fans'

*koŋ*-NUM

This is used with long or short objects like sticks, pen, spear, firewood and some of the body parts such as teeth, finger, limbs etc.

- (27) *buwa koŋ-sa*  
teeth CLF-one  
'One tooth'

- (28) *yak koŋ-nui*  
hand CLF-two  
'Two hands'

- (29) *suikoŋ koŋ-ba*  
pen CLF-five  
'Five pens'

*p<sup>h</sup>on*-NUM (*bo-p<sup>h</sup>on*)

This classifier is used with pieces, such as meat, fish etc.

- (30) *bahan p<sup>h</sup>on-ba*  
meat CLF-five  
'Five pieces of meat'

- (31) *wahan p<sup>h</sup>on-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
pork CLF-three  
'Three pieces of pork'

- (32) *a p<sup>h</sup>on-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 fish CLF-three  
 ‘Three pieces of fish’

*bar*-NUM

This classifier is used with blossoms of any plant, flowers or buds etc.

- (33) *k<sup>h</sup>um bar-sa*  
 flower CLF-one  
 ‘One flower’
- (34) *sotorobongo bar-sa*  
 marigold CLF-one  
 ‘One marigold flower’
- (35) *uribar bar-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 Hibiscus CLF-three  
 ‘Three blossoms of hibiscus flower’

*khun*-NUM

This classifier is used with voluminous objects like houses, vehicles etc.

- (36) *birk<sup>h</sup>un k<sup>h</sup>un-sa*  
 Plane  
 ‘One plane’
- (37) *malk<sup>h</sup>un k<sup>h</sup>un-sa*  
 vehicle CLF-one  
 ‘One vehicle’

*lai*-NUM (bu-lai)

This classifier is used with leaves of trees and plants, herbs etc.

- (38) *bulai lai-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 leaf CLF-three  
 ‘Three leaves’
- (39) *banta lai-nui*  
 basil CLF-two  
 ‘Two basil leaves’

*lep*-NUM

This classifier is used with coins and baked things like bread, biscuits etc. This classifier is copied from *be-lep* ‘flat object’.

(40) *cuwan lep-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
yeast CLF-three  
'Three bread of yeast'

(41) *puisa lep-sa*  
paise CLF-one  
'One coin of paisa'

*tui*-NUM

This classifier is used with eggs, underground tubers or roots and yam etc.

(42) *butui tui-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
egg CLF-three  
'Three eggs'

(43) *t<sup>h</sup>akun tui-nui*  
yam CLF-two  
'Two yams'

(44) *t<sup>h</sup>akun tui-nui*  
yam CLF-two  
'Two yams'

*k<sup>h</sup>or*-NUM

This classifier is used with holes in tree, bamboos, earth etc.

(45) *hakor k<sup>h</sup>or-ba*  
hole CLF-five  
'Five holes in earth'

(46) *bok<sup>h</sup>or k<sup>h</sup>or-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
tree hole CLF-three  
'Three tree holes'

*jor*-NUM

This classifier is used for pair of things or animals etc. It is copied from the word *bo-jor* 'pair'

(47) *bojor jor-sa*  
pair CLF-one  
'One pair'

(48) *kamcului jor-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
shirt CLF-three  
'Three pair of shirts'

*k<sup>h</sup>op*- NUM

This classifier is used with swallows of eatable or drinkable items etc.

(49) *urum*            *k<sup>h</sup>op-sa*  
 puffed rice      CLF-one  
 ‘One swallow of puffed rice’

(50) *mai*    *k<sup>h</sup>op-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 rice      CLF-three  
 ‘Three swallows of rice’

(51) *kuwai*            *k<sup>h</sup>op-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 betel-nut          CLF-three  
 ‘Three swallows of betel-nut’

*p<sup>h</sup>ak*-NUM

The classifier *p<sup>h</sup>ak*- is used with bundles of bamboo, wood, firewood etc. as exemplified below.

(52) *wa*                *p<sup>h</sup>ak-sa*  
 bamboo            CLF-one  
 ‘One bundle of bamboo’

(53) *bol*                *p<sup>h</sup>ak-nui*  
 fire wood          CLF-two  
 ‘Two bundles of fire wood’

*dul*-NUM (*bu-dul*)

This classifier is used with clod, molded things like molded pellets, and rice balls etc. It is copied from the second syllable of *bu-dul* ‘clod’.

(54) *budul*    *dul-sa*  
 clod      CLF-one  
 ‘One clod’

(55) *hadul*            *dul-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 mud.clod          CLF-three  
 ‘Three clods of mud’

*k<sup>h</sup>ok*-NUM

This classifier is specifically used for rupee.

(56) *rang*    *k<sup>h</sup>ok-sa*  
 money CLF-one  
 ‘One rupee’



- (57) *raŋ k<sup>h</sup>ok-dok*  
 money CLF-six  
 ‘Six rupees’

*eŋ*-NUM

This classifier is used to with node of bamboo and sugar cane etc.

- (58) *wa eŋ-sa*  
 bamboo CLF-one  
 ‘One node of bamboo’
- (59) *kuruk eŋ-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 sugar cane CLF-three  
 ‘Three nodes of sugar cane’

*mocom*-NUM

This classifier is used for amount in a single or doubled-up hand i.e., fistful.

- (60) *gundak mocom-sa*  
 husk CLF-one  
 ‘One fistful amount of husk’
- (61) *haiciŋ mocom-nui*  
 sand CLF-two  
 ‘Two fistful amount of sand’

*tuk*-NUM

This classifier is used for counting pots of rice, rice beer etc.

- (62) *maituk tuk-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 rice pot CLF-three  
 ‘Three pots of rice’
- (63) *cuwak tuk-ba*  
 wine CLF-five  
 ‘Five pots of wine/rice beer’

*t<sup>h</sup>ai*-NUM

This classifier is used for counting fruits.

- (64) *t<sup>h</sup>aicuk t<sup>h</sup>ai-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 Mango CLF-three  
 ‘Three mangoes’

- (65) *t<sup>h</sup>ailik*                      *t<sup>h</sup>ai-t<sup>h</sup>am*  
 Banana                      CLF-three  
 ‘Three bananas’

### 5. Basic word order of Kokborok

Like most of the Tibeto-Burman languages, Kokborok is an SOV language where the verb usually follows both the subject and object. The word order in Kokborok is rigid.

- (66) *bo*      *bo-no*                      *nuk-k<sup>h</sup>a*  
 he      he-ACC see-PST  
 S      O                      V  
 ‘He went to eat’
- (67) *bo*      *mai*      *pai-na*                      *t<sup>h</sup>aŋ-nai*  
 he      rice      buy-INF go-FUT  
 S      O      V  
 ‘He will go to buy rice’

### 6. Conclusion

Kokborok uses classifier while enumerating nouns from lower to higher numerals. Most of the bound classifiers in Kokborok are monosyllabic. But few disyllabic classifiers are also attested in the language. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages of the Northeast India the order in Kokborok is CLF NUM. As like other Bodo-Garo languages, classifiers in Kokborok are bound morphemes that are only prefixed to the numerals.

### Abbreviations

CLF	classifier
FUT	future
INF	infinitive
N	noun
NUM	numeral
O	object
S	subject
V	verb

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