

NOUN CLASSIFIERS IN KAM AND CHINESE KAM-TAI LANGUAGES:  
THEIR MORPHOSYNTAX, SEMANTICS AND HISTORY

**Matthias Gerner**

*City University of Hong Kong*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse the system of Kam noun classifiers in synchronical typological and diachronical pan-Kam-Tai perspective. While Kam is at the center stage of this investigation, additional data are presented from a survey of 22 Kam-Tai languages which belong to four nationalities in the P.R. of China: the Dong, Bouyei, Shui and Zhuang nationalities. The main morphosyntax function of these Chinese Kam-Tai languages is to occur in quantificational constructions (numeral and quantifier) and in referential expressions (indefiniteness, demonstrative pronouns and nominalization). Classifiers in Chinese Kam-Tai languages appear in pre-nominal position and stand in contrast to classifiers of the Kam-Tai languages located in Burma, Thailand and Vietnam which typically project the classifier into post-nominal position. Concerning the semantics of classifier systems, the Chinese Kam-Tai languages involve animacy as primary parameter, dimensionality (shape) as secondary parameter, and functionality (or instrumentality) as tertiary parameter. The sound structure of a number of core-classifiers displays a surprisingly homogenous picture across the range of Kam-Tai languages surveyed.

SUBJECT KEYWORDS:

Kam-Tai, Dong, Zhuang, classifier, referential, quantificational

1. INTRODUCTION

This study presents the morphosyntax, semantics and history of the Kam (Dong) noun classifier system in a comparative Kam-Tai perspective. Conklin's