

The grammar of Mayan languages
Glottothèque : Mayan Languages

Nominal Domain

THE JAKALTEK POPTI' NOUN CLASSIFIERS

**How the Jakaltek system of “Noun Classifiers”
has fed a “typology of classifier systems”**

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THE JAKALTEK NOUN CLASSIFIER SYSTEM

1. The system of Jakaltek noun classifiers

- 1.1. omnipresent: used as determiners and Pro forms
- 1.2. with an inventory of 24 classes

2. The history of its description

- 2.1. from within *anthropology* (since the 30ies)
- 2.2. in the linguistic context of *MIT transformational syntax* of the 70ies (Craig 1979)
- 2.3. within *cognitive linguistics* of the 80ies, as a categorization system (Craig 1986)

3. Feeding a “working” *functional typology* of classifier systems

- 3.1. as different from “numeral classifiers” ... of *Asia*
- 3.2. as very grammaticalized compared to ... N CL of *Australia*
- 3.3. ...helping identify “determinatives” of *Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs* as “classifiers” too!

CL. On remaining issues of terminology, origins and evolution as of today...

1. The system of Jakaltek noun classifiers

1.1. Noun classifiers are omnipresent (ex. Grinevald 2016 p277)

as **determiners** (before nouns)

(1) a. *swatx'e ix malin ixim wah?*
made CL/WOMAN Marie CL/CORN tortilla
'Did Mary make the tortillas?'

b. *ho', swatx'e ix ixim*
yes, made CL/WOMAN CL/CORN
'yes, she made them'

as **Pro forms**

1.2. Inventory : 2 subsystems, 2x12=24 classifiers

SOCIAL INTERACTION	PHYSICAL AND FUNCTIONAL INTERACTION			
1. DEITY MALE 2. DEITY FEMALE 3. RESPECTED HUMAN <hr/> Non-kin 4. MALE 5. FEMALE 6. YOUNG MALE 7. YOUNG FEMALE Kin 8. MALE 9. FEMALE 10. YOUNG MALE 11. YOUNG FEMALE <hr/> 12. INFANT		Generic	Specific	Unique
	Animal	13. ANIMAL		14. DOG
	Vegetal	15. PLANT/WOOD	16. CORN 17. THREAD 18. TWINE 19. CLOTH	
	Mineral	20. ROCK 21. DIRT/EARTH		22. SALT
	Natural elements	23. WATER		24. FIRE

2. The history of its description: about “frameworks”

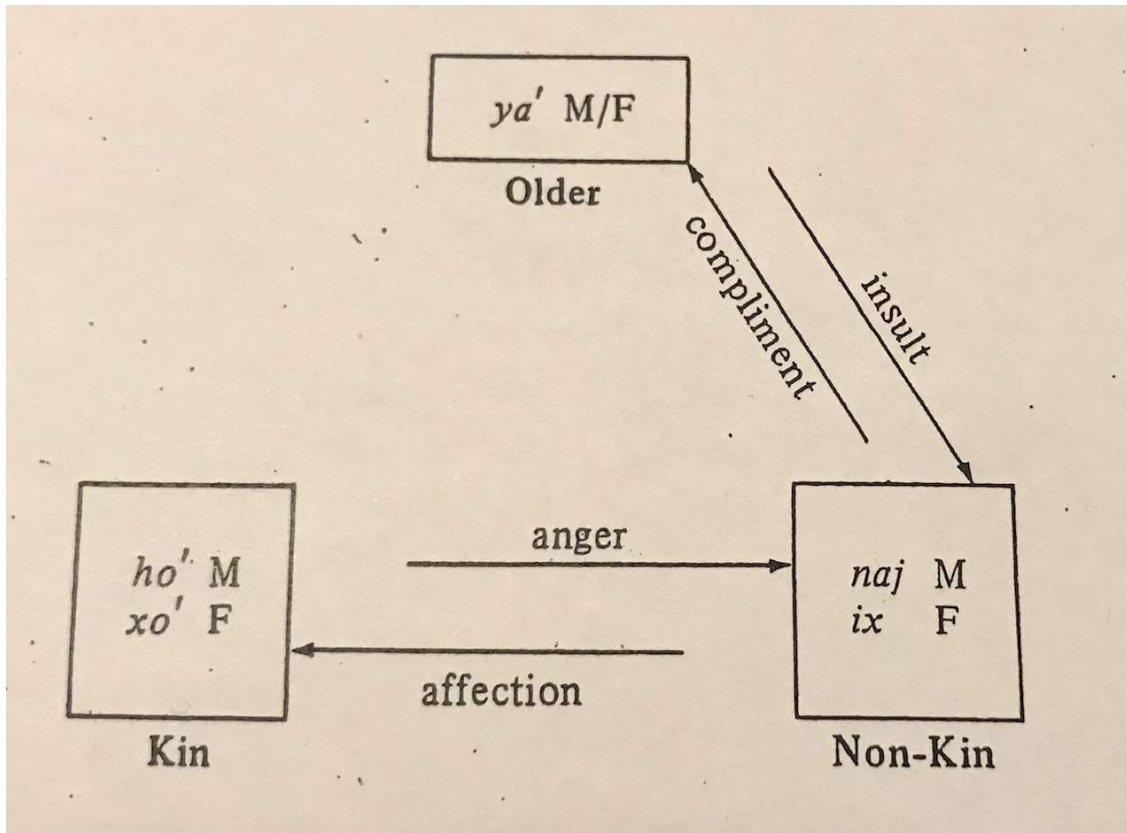
2.1. Within **social anthropology**

- **La Farge, O. & Byers, D. 1931.** *The Year Bearer's People*. Middle American Research Series. Publication 3. Tulane University. New Orleans
- **Day, C. 1973a** *The Jacaltec Language*. Indiana University Press

with focus on the “social interaction” subsystem of classifiers....

- **Day, C. 1973b** “The semantics of social categories in a Transformational grammar of Jacaltec”. In *Meaning in Mayan Languages*. M.S. Edmonson Ed. The Hague Mouton
- **Breitborde, L. 1973** “Selection and setting in Jacaltec noun classifier usage”. LSA meeting, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Possible switch of classifier of social interaction in specific pragmatic contexts:



How I, Colette (klaxh),
have been called in the 70ies

ya' klaxh
(respected Colette)

ho' klaxh
(sister Colette)

ix klaxh
(woman Colette)

See Craig 1979 section 2.3. on noun classifiers, 2.3.2. on insults and compliments p43 (with exercise!)

2. The history of its description

2.2. In the **linguistic context** of Harvard & MIT “*transformational syntax*” of the 70ies ...

A Harvard PhD thesis of 1975 focusing on “complex sentence structure”:

- **Craig, C. Grinevald. 1977. *The Structure of Jacaltec*.** University of Texas Press

... with a section on “anaphora”

Chapter 4 : Pronominalization (pp133-156)

re noun classifier as markers of referential and specific nouns

Chapter 5 : Noun Classifier Deletion (pp158-190)

...in the context of identity of reference, and across certain clause boundaries!

2. The history of its description

**2.3. then within “cognitive linguistics” of the 80ies:
in which “classifiers” are interesting as categorization systems**

Lakoff, G. 1986. Classifiers as a reflection of *Mind*. in C. G. Craig ed. *Noun Classes and Categorization*. John Benjamins. Pp13-52

Craig*, C. 1986. Jacaltec Noun Classifiers: A Study in Language and *Culture* in C.G. Craig ed. *Noun Classes and Categorization*. John Benjamins. Pp263-293

*Grinevald

3. How the Jakaltek noun classifier system has been feeding a “working” typology of classifier systems

3.1. “Noun classifiers” are different from “numeral classifiers” ... of *Asia*

Argument 1: Different morphosyntax

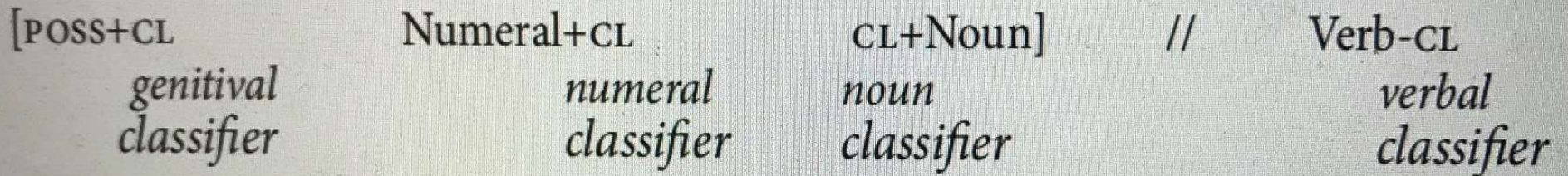


Figure 1. Major subsystems of nominal “classifiers” (after Craig 1987 and Grinevald 2000)

3.1. “Noun classifiers” are different from “numeral classifiers” ... of *Asia*

Argument 2: they have a distinct “semantic profile”

Table 1. Different semantic profiles for different types of classifiers

numeral classifiers = physical categories

→ one-LONG RIGID canoe

two-LONG RIGID pencils; three-ROUND oranges;
four-FLAT FLEXIBLE blankets

genitival classifiers = functional categories

my-TRANSPORT canoe

your-TRANSPORT bicycle; his EDIBLE fish;
his-DRINKABLE potion

noun classifiers = material/essence categories

→ a PLANT canoe

a PLANT house, a ROCK cave; an ANIMAL deer

3.2. The level of grammaticalization of a classificatory system is independent of its type

- **As shown by the way Jakaltek Noun Classifiers are very grammaticalized in their syntactic functions of determiners and pro forms,**
- **when compared to Australian “generics”, originally taken as the prototype of noun classifier systems, which are much less grammaticalized (Dixon 1982 for Yidiny, Wilkins 2000 for Arrernte)**

Craig, C. 1986. *Jacaltec Noun Classifiers: A Study in Grammaticalization*

Grinevald, C. 2002. *Making sense of nominal classification systems: noun classifiers and the grammaticalization variable*

3.3. Jakaltek noun classifiers feeding an updated inventory of classifier systems

Recent comparison of Jakaltek noun classifiers and *Ancient Egyptian “determinatives”* with Egyptologist Goldwasser has demonstrated

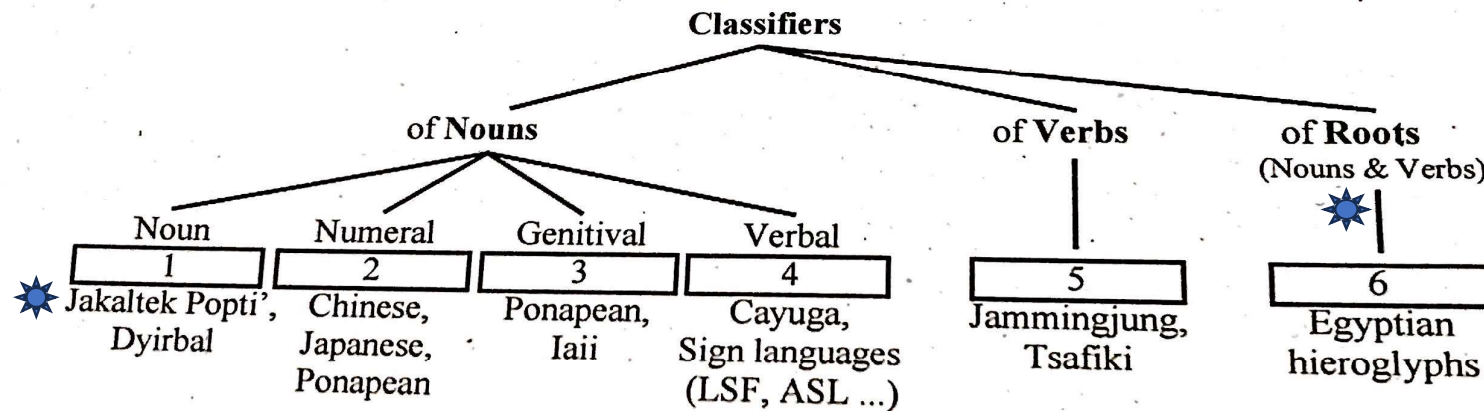
a/ that those “determinatives” were indeed “classifiers”

b/ but of both nouns and verbs within the same system,

...hence expanding the inventory of classifier systems, to include a new type of “root classifiers”

816 *Classifiers, Linguistics of*

Table 11 Diversity of subtypes of classifiers (and sample languages)



In Goldwasser & Grinevald 2012, Grinevald, C. 2015.

CL. On remaining issues of terminology, origins and evolution as of today...

1. **Terminology:** *nominal/noun* classifiers...
2. **Origins:** as only found in Q'anjob'alan branch (+Mam) of Mayan family:
...issue of innovation in Mayan or borrowing from other family?
3. **Evolution of the system,** from description developed in the **70ies...**
to 2000 : experimental approach à la MPI showed *notable changes to incorporate new materials (plastic objects etc...)* (Grinevald 2016)
to today? in the midst of active revitalization by Academia de la Lengua Maya Popti'
(ALMG Popti')?

Selected PUBLICATIONS re Jakaltek Noun Classifiers As CRAIG, Colette (Grinevald)

1977. **The Structure of Jacaltec.** University of Texas Press, Austin.
xi+432pp *re discourse/PRO role*
- 1979 **Jacaltec: Field Work in Guatemala**, in T. Shopen, ed *Languages and Their Speakers*, Winthrop Publishers, Cambridge (MA), pp. 3-57.
(1987 2d) *re N Cl culture/pragmatics (like insult and compliments*
- 1986 **Jacaltec Noun Classifiers: A Study in Language and Culture**, in C. G. Craig (Ed.), *Noun Classes and Categorization*, Benjamins North America, pp. 263-295 (pdf) *Re system of culturally relevant categorization*
- 1986 **Jacaltec Noun Classifiers: A Study in Grammaticalization**, *Lingua*70. pp 241-284. *(re high level of grammaticalization)*
- 1990 **Los clasificadores de nombre en Jacalteco: una innovación kanjobalana**, in Nora England (Ed.), *Lecturas sobre la lingüística maya*, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.
- 1992 **Classifiers in a functional perspective**, in M. Fortescue et al, Eds, *Layered Structure and Reference in a Functional Perspective. (Papers from the Functional Grammar Conference in Copenhagen 1990)*, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia, pp. 277-303

Under GRINEVALD since 1997

- 2000 **A morpho-syntactic typology of classifiers.** in *Systems of Nominal Classification* G. Senft ed. Cambridge University Press. Pp 50-92
- 2002 **Making sense of nominal classification systems: noun classifiers and the grammaticalization variable.** in Ilse Wischer and G. Diewald eds. *New reflections on Grammaticalization.* John Benjamins TSL.49 pp. 259-275
- 2003 **El mundo jakalteko visto a través de los clasificadores nominales.** In *Los espacios mayas: usos, representaciones, creencias.* A. Breton, A. Monod Becquelin & M. Ruz (eds), Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Mayas / CEMCA. pp. 261-285
- 2015 **Classifiers. Linguistics of** .in *International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences 2d edition (Area 5)* Article 53003. *Elsevier*
- 2016 **The Jakaltek Popti' noun classifier system: Changes due to Spanish contact.** In A. L. Berez Kroecker, D. Hintz, C. Jany (eds). *Language Contact and Change in the Americas: Studies in honor of Marianne Mithun.* Pp 273-296.

Co-authored on ancient scripts

Goldwasser, O & Grinevald, C

- 2013 **What Are Determinatives Good For?** in E. Grossman et al (eds.), *Lexical Semantics in Ancient Egyptian*, *Lingua Aegyptia Studia Monographica*, Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie.

Selz, G, Grinevald C.& Goldwasser O.

- 2017 **The Question of Sumerian “Determinatives”: Inventory, Classifier Analysis, and Comparison to Egyptian Classifiers from the Linguistic Perspective of Noun Classification.** *Lingua Aegyptia - Journal of Egyptian Language Studies*, 25, pp.281-344.