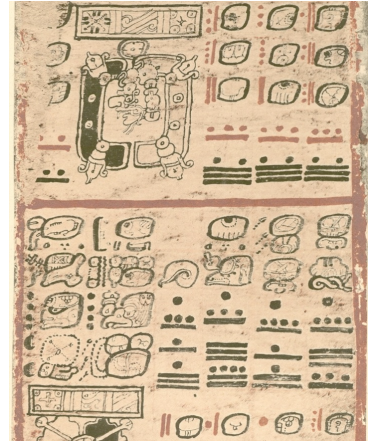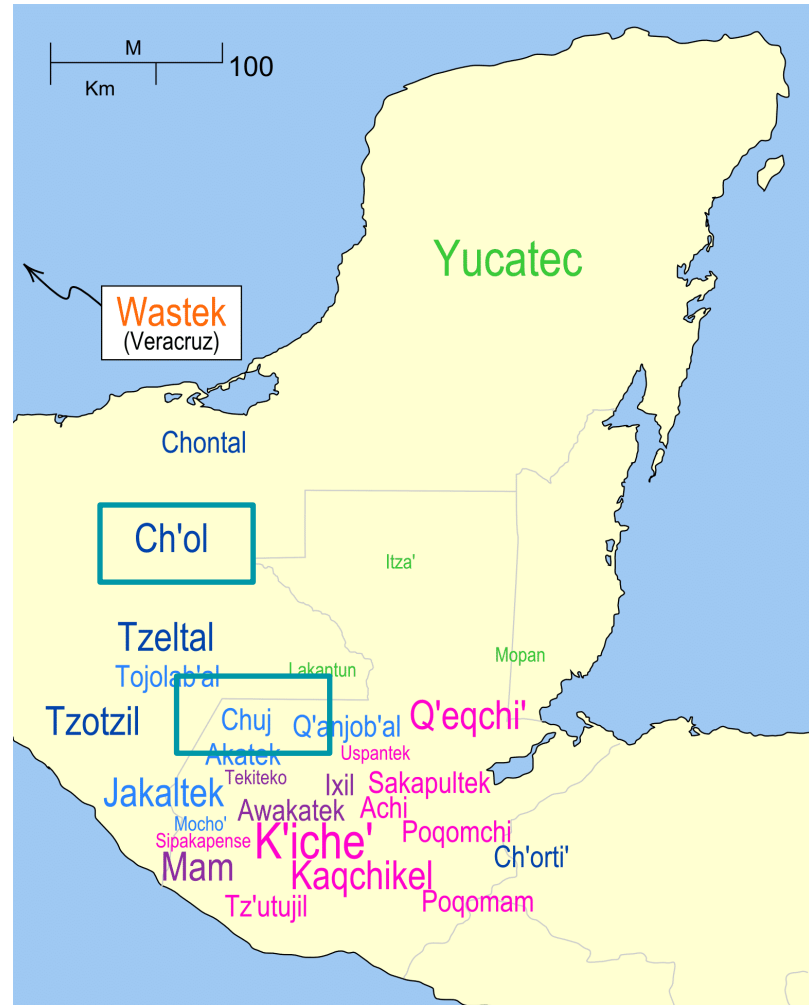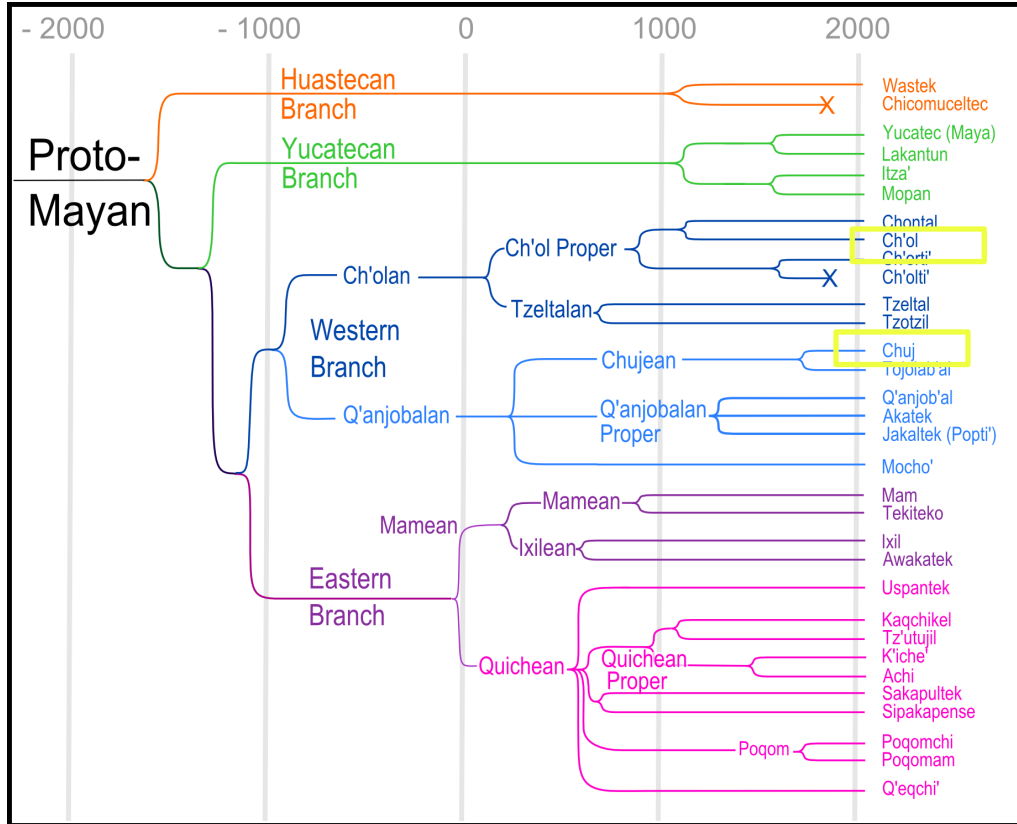# Numerals and classifiers in Mayan languages

Glottothèque: Mayan Languages

Dr. Carol Rose Little
University of Oklahoma

Mayan languages

Fieldwork with Ch'ol and Chuj

Numerals and classifiers in Ch'ol and Chuj

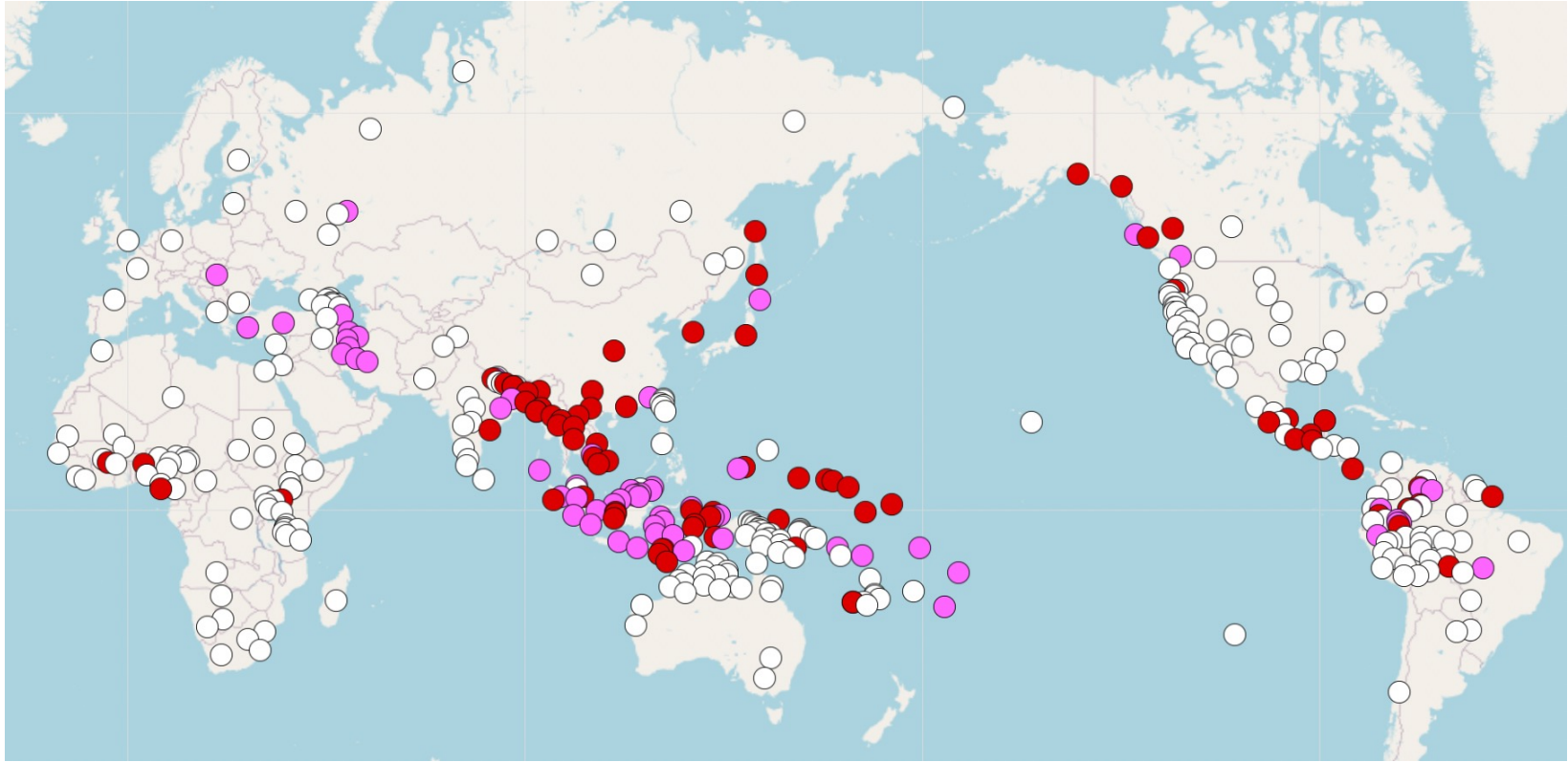Ch'ol

1. Tsa' kubi   [ux-kojty   ts'i'].
   PFV I.heard   three-CLF.NUM dog
   'I heard three dogs.'

Chuj

2. Ixwab' [ox-wanh   nok'   tz'i'] .
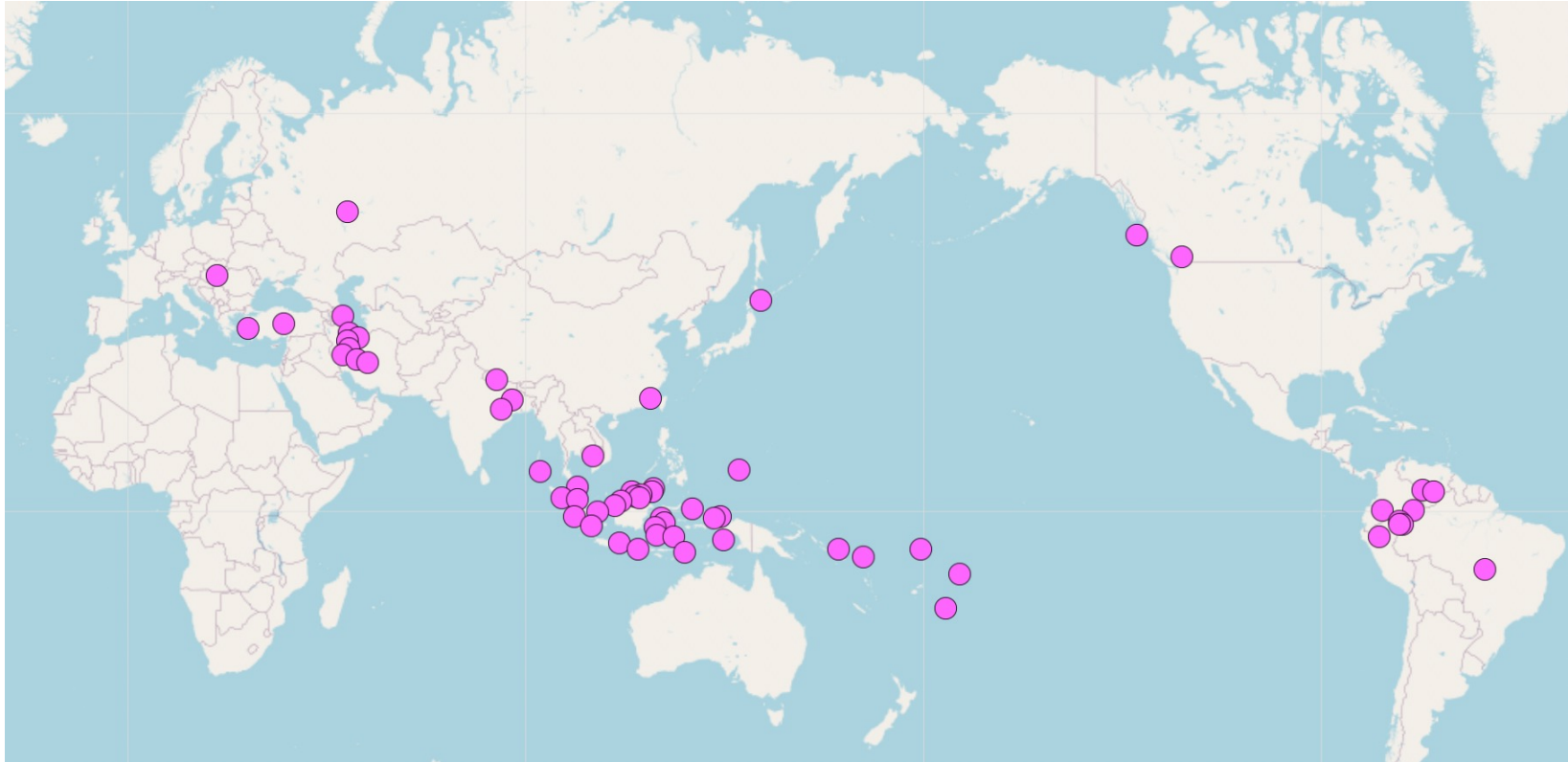   I.heard three-CLF.NUM   CLF.N   dog
   'I heard three dogs.'

Distribution of languages with and without classifiers

Languages with obligatory classifiers

Languages with optional classifiers

What do classifiers do linguistically?

- Languages with classifiers usually have number neutral nouns

1. two cat-s   English must mark plural

2. cha'-kojty mis   Ch'ol doesn't mark plural

- Similar to plural in English, classifiers can be thought of as elements that mediate between a number and a noun with additional information about the noun class

What do classifiers do linguistically?

- Languages with classifiers usually have number neutral nouns

1. two cat-s   English must mark plural

2. cha'-kojty mis   Ch'ol doesn't mark plural

- Another way to think about classifiers:

- Similar to how it is strange to say *two sands*—we must specify *grains, cups, handfuls*, etc.

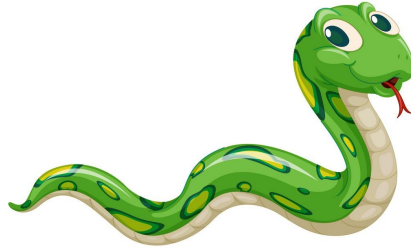- Languages with classifiers do this with *all* nouns

Types of classifiers in Ch'ol

Form	Used to count	Example	Translation
-p'ej	inanimate	uxp'ej juñ	'three books'
-kojty	animals	cha'kojty mis	'two cats'
-tyikil	people	chäñtyikil ixik	'four women'
-k'ej	flat, round objects	uxk'ej waj	'three tortillas'
-ts'ijty	long things	juñts'ijty tye'	'one tree'
-bujch	propped up things	jo'bujch bux	'five propped up bottles'
-k'al	multipes of 20	uxk'al otyoty	'sixty houses'
-bajk'	multiples of 400	cha'bajk' k'iñ	'eight hundred days'

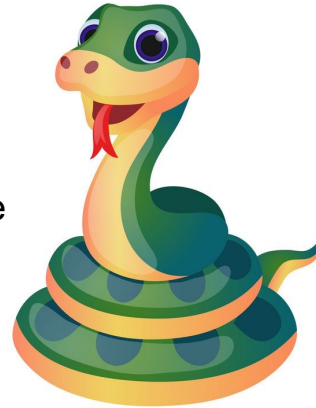# Nouns can be counted with more than one classifier

juñkojty lukum
one snake

juñjäjl lukum
one (stretched out) snake

juñxojty lukum
one (coiled up) snake

juñjijch' lukum
one (hanging) snake

Chuj numeral classifiers

Form	Used to count	Example	Translation
-e'	inanimate	oxe' ch'at	'three beds'
-wanh	animate	oxwanh mis	'three cats'
-setanh	circular objects	oxsetanh ch'anh	three comals'
-tek'anh	long thin lots of land	oxtek'anh ixim	three corn fields
-k'al	multiples of 20	junk'al tz'i'	'twenty dogs'

winak, the word for man, also means twenty

Chuj noun classifiers

Form	Used with	Example	Translation
ix	female	ix chichim	'the elder woman'
winh	male	winh ichan	'the elder man'
nok'	animals and derived products	nok' nholob'	'the egg'
atz'am	salt	atz'am atz'am	'the salt'

Ixwab' [oxwanh   nok'   tz'i'] .
I.heard three.CLF.NUM   CLF.N dog
'I heard three dogs.'

three *specific* dogs

Summary

Ch'ol

1. Tsa' kubi   [ux-kojty   ts'i'].
   PFV I.heard   three-CLF.NUM dog
   'I heard three dogs.'

Chuj

2. Ixwab' [ox-wanh   nok'   tz'i'] .
   I.heard three-CLF.NUM   CLF.N dog
   'I heard three dogs.'

- Ch'ol has numeral classifiers

- Chuj has numeral *and* noun classifiers

- Mayan languages have classifiers that track features of the nouns they count

- Mayan numeral classifiers do similar things as classifiers in other unrelated languages such as Mandarin, Japanese and Indonesian

More resources

Los clasificadores numerales y las clases nominales en ch'ol

Against a generalized quantifier analysis of certain quantity expressions in Ch'ol*

Carol Rose Little
University of Oklahoma

PRESENTA

Nicolás Arcos López

*Decomposing definiteness:
Evidence from Chuj*

JUSTIN ROYER
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

justin.royer@mail.mcgill.ca

Little, Carol Rose & Moroney, Mary & Royer, Justin. 2022. Classifiers can be for numerals or nouns: Two strategies for numeral modification. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 7(1). pp. 1–35. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/glossa.8437
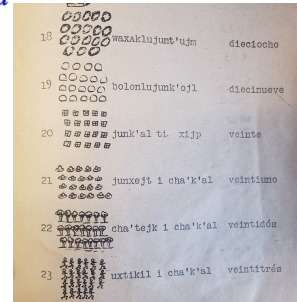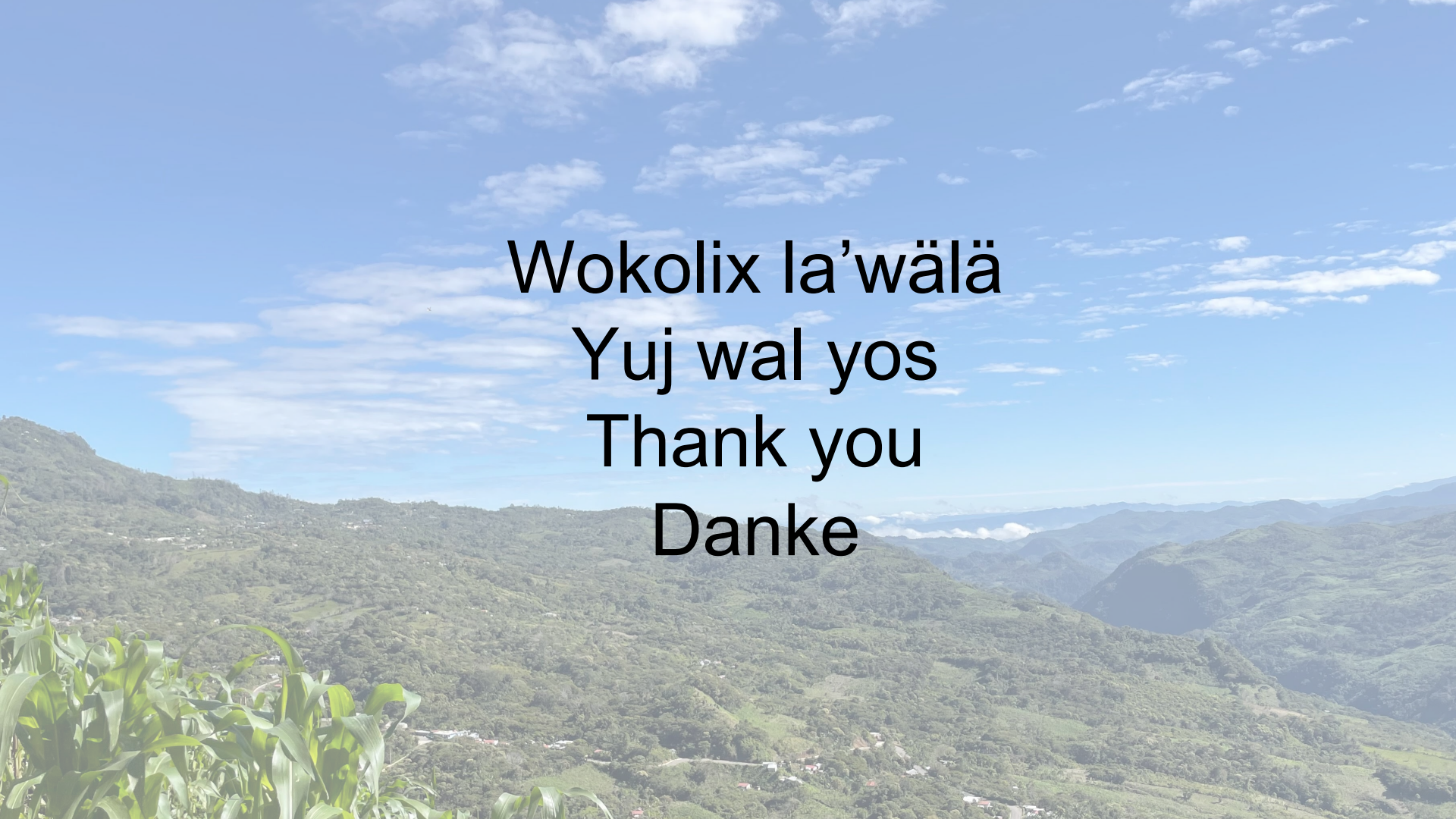
Open Library of Humanities

Classifiers can be for numerals *or* nouns: Two strategies for numeral modification

Carol Rose Little, University of Oklahoma, US, little@ou.edu
Mary Moroney, University of Rochester, US, mary.moroney@rochester.edu
Justin Royer, University of California, Berkeley, US, justinroyer@berkeley.edu

Ch'ol numerals and classifiers in an elementary school primer from the 1950s

Wokolix la'wälä
Yuj wal yos
Thank you
Danke