Khasi in the typology of classifier languages

Ushasi Banerjee (Yale University)

ushasi.banerjee@yale.edu

(in)definiteness & genericity across languages

SALT 33 Yale

- Mon-Khmer language spoken in Meghalaya, India
- Linguistically understudied
- Documentation using Dayal's (to appear) questionnaire on (in)definiteness w Bianca Tara Faith Nongkynrih

Background

•Khasi is typologically rare in having both number marking and a numeral classifier system (1).

• Plural marking in classifier languages is not uncommon. However, ki is unique: it is obligatory in classifier constructions.

(1)
a. ka Molly ka thied ar *(tylli)*(ki) kot
FEM Molly FEM buy two CL PL book
'Molly bought two books.'

b. ka Molly ka thied lai *(tylli)*(ki) tiew kulap
FEM Molly FEM buy three CL PL flower rose
'Molly bought three roses.'

- ***ki*** also marks definiteness (2).

(2)
a. **ki kot** ki don halor ka miej
PL book PL BE on FEM table
'The books are on the table.'

b. ka Molly ka thied **ki kali**
FEM Molly FEM buy PL car
'Molly bought the cars.'

- Classifier constructions shed light on the mechanism of marking definiteness in Khasi (3).

(3)
a. *ar ngut ki kynthei ki ieng*
two CL PL girl PL stand
'Two girls were standing.'

b. *ki kynthei ar ngut ki ieng*
PL girl two CL PL stand
'The two girls were standing.'

Plan:

- Discuss the distribution and use of the morpheme ***ki.***
- A note on the classifier system.
- Provide an account of the co-occurrence.
- Show that definite constructions require NP to DP movement.

ki in nominal constructions

- It forms the bare plural noun since the unmarked noun cannot exist as an argument by itself.

(4) *masi la bam phlang
cow PAST eat grass
`Cows/ The cows ate grass.'

- It is replaced by a gender morpheme (***ka*** or ***u***) for singular reference

(5)
a. **ka kot** ka don halor ka miej
FEM book FEM is on FEM table
'The book is on the table.'

b. ka Molly ka thied **u kali**
FEM Molly FEM buy MASC car
'Molly bought the car.'

- ***ki*** is **NOT** an associative plural.

(6) *ki Molly ki thied ki kot
PL Molly PL buy PL book
Intended: 'Molly and her associates bought books.'

- ***ki*** is **NOT** a group plural.

(7) *lai ngut ki kynthei bad phra ngut ki shynrang ki rung*
three CL PL girl and ten CL PL boy PL enter
*sha ka kamra. **ki kynthei** ki phong shirt ba blue bad*
into FEM room. PL girl PL wear shirt that blue and
***ki shynrang** ki phong shirt ba saw*
PL boy PL wear shirt that red
'Three girls and ten boys walked into the room. The girls were wearing blue shirts, the boys were wearing red shirts.'

Classifiers in Khasi

- *Obligatory* with numbers and other quantifiers

(8) *ka Molly ka thied **khyndiat** tylli ki kot*
FEM Molly FEM buy some CL PL book
'Molly bought some books.'

- Mark noun class distinction (***tylli** vs. **ngut**).*

- Different kinds:
  *~ **ar jur** `two pairs'*
  *~ **ar synduk** `two boxes',*
  *~ **ar kynkhun** `two groups'*

Co-occurrence: the *why* and *how*

- *Split-plural analysis* (Kramer 2016): Khasi encodes plurality twice : the *classifier* and the *plural marker.*

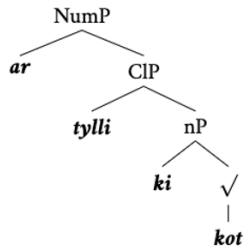
- Unmarked nouns in Khasi are roots.

- The plural feature and gender feature are in the ***n***-node (Ferrari 2005, Lowenstamm 2008, Aquaviva 2009).

- ***ki*** turns Khasi roots into bare plurals and denotes a set of individuals that are closed under sums (*cumulative predicates* in the sense of Krifka 1989).

- For simplicity, I assume that the type of the bare noun is <e,t> and that of the classifier is <et,et> (Trinh 2011).

(9)



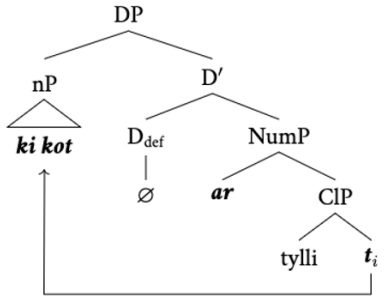
a. $[\![\text{ki kot}]\!]^{g,w}$ = book $\langle e,t \rangle$
b. $[\![\text{tylli}]\!]^{g,w} = \lambda P.\lambda x[AT(P)(x)]$ $\langle et,et \rangle$
c. $[\![\text{tylli ki kot}]\!]^{g,w} = \lambda x[AT(book)(x)]$ $\langle e,t \rangle$
d. $[\![\text{ar tylli ki kot}]\!]^{g,w} = \lambda x[2(x) \wedge AT(book)(x)]$ $\langle e,t \rangle$

- Maintains ***complementarity*** classifiers and true plurals (Chierchia 1998, Borer 2005)

Movement for definiteness

- Overt NP to DP movement in definite classifier constructions (3).

(10)



a. $[\![D]\!]^{g,w} = \lambda P : |P(w)| = 1 .\iota x\,[P(w)(x)]$
b. $[\![\text{ki kot ar tylli}]\!]^{g,w} = \iota x[2(x) \wedge AT(book)(x)]$ $\langle e \rangle$

- Definite readings in non-counting constructions are also derived by NP to DP movement.

Circling back...

- Typologically interesting (even within its language family).
- The nominal system parallels various unrelated languages.
- Bringing non-canonical classifier languages into the typology to examine what it informs about plurality.
- A new kind of plural!