NOUN CLASSIFIER CONSTRUCTIONS IN THAI: A CASE STUDY IN CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR

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Abstract

This paper is a study in the framework of Construction Grammar that seeks for how much information grammatical units like noun classifier constructions in Thai can reveal and why such information must be presented as distinctive grammatical properties. The findings show that noun classifiers, occurring in nominal phrases, have a large number of grammatical functions not restricted to syntax but encompassing semantics and pragmatics, as well. They function syntactically by constituting numeric phrases, standing for head nouns, substituting for nouns, acting as the heads of modifier constructions, acting as noun modifiers and disambiguating constructions. Semantically, they are divided into generic and perceptual main types, which evince different syntactic behaviors. Finally, they pragmatically function by unitizing nouns, referring to particular entities. individuating items, and indicating the numeral 'one'. It is these pragmatic functions that motivate their forms/structures. Therefore, information types such as semantic and/or pragmatic properties need to be included in the explanation and viewed as a cluster of information. rather than autonomous syntax.

Introduction

In this study, classifiers are dealt with in terms of grammatical constructions, whereas syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are viewed as direct associations in single rules or constructions rather than in separate modules. That is, not only the syntactic formation of these classifier constructions but also their semantics and pragmatics are implicated in formmeaning correspondences that operate in those constructions. This study differs from other works on the Thai grammar in that grammatical patterns are described using both "central" fine constructions, on the one hand. and "non-central" ambiguous constructions, on the other.

According to а new grammatical viewpoint called Construction Grammar developed within a functional approach (e.g., Fillmore 1985 and 1988, Lakoff 1987, and Goldberg 1995),² a grammatical pattern should be allowed to be as complex as necessary. That is to say, a grammatical unit may specify not only syntactical but also semantic and pragmatic information (which may include extralinguistic factors like social milieu, culture, and so on), since linguists using this approach argue that such classes can help provide fundamental insights in

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² Construction Grammar is a non-derivational generative framework that makes use of the notion of construction as a principle. While the framework also recognizes powerful generalizations of both language-specific and language-universal types, it aims at full coverage of the facts of any language, including elements peripheral to traditional grammars, and allows the study of grammatical patterns to be as complex as necessary. See Singnoi (2000) for further theoretical background and an analysis of the Thai language.

accounting for grammatical units that are traditional differently defined by approaches viewing structures as the only part of "core grammar."³ In this point of grammatical pattern view. anv is accounted for by simultaneously analyzing the grammatical structures, semantics, and pragmatics to which the rules of grammar are sensitive and which need to be registered in the lexical component, viewed in terms of the rules or constructions of an adequate grammar. This complex of information is then stated as form-meaning correspondences called grammatical constructions which are viewed as the basic units of grammar.

In Construction Grammar, the lexicon is not strictly divided from syntax, and lexical items may also be viewed as constructions in themselves, since both syntax and lexicon represent data structures in terms of form-meaning pairs. The only recognized difference concerns internal complexity. Lexical entries are treated as constructions with minimal constituent structures consisting of a tree with a single node. That is, they are considered the lowest level and least complex grammatical structures that constitute constructions. According to Koenig (1999), lexical knowledge may be divided into knowledge of individual words and knowledge of relations between words. In the present work, my concern is with the study of the latter. I will draw from these relations an overview of the classes of phenomena that can be mapped together to account for the correlations between form and meaning within words; that is, the correlations that are treated as plans or patterns for combining words into constructions. Viewed as a larger construction containing complex information itself, a classifier construction is supposed to include information about properties semantic syntactic and independently. properties Such constructions also need information about the uses or pragmatics that give them license to be employed in actual situations.⁴

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of classifier constructions in Thai and to demonstrate how the syntax (especially the forms) of these constructions is motivated or determined by the complex information of their constructions, and vice versa. To present the resulting classifier constructions, I will present various types of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information to which the rules of grammar are sensitive and which need to be independently posited since each of the types makes significant contributions to the grammar of Thai classifiers. In doing this, I first discuss syntactic properties such as external structures and syntactic functions. Next, I present a semantic description of classifiers in Thai, identify discrete contextual meanings diverging from the meaning proper as a different set of linguistic properties, and, thus, class these divergences under the scope of pragmatic information. Finally, I demonstrate the correlations among these three parts and show how they, rather than syntax alone, determine the forms of the classifier constructions. To represent the

³ Zwicky (1996) also points out that the possible connection between constructions and extragrammatical values is especially recognizable when alternative constructions express the same semantics.

⁴ In fact, the phonological information also has a right to be placed in constructions. However, in the present study, this will not be presented regarding to a personal limitation.

resulting constructions, I employ a formal model of grammatical construction similar to the box notation of Construction Grammar, which provides a simultaneous representation of a variety of properties.

Classifier categories

DeLancey (1986) states that the modern Tai languages are well-known for their elaborate classifier systems. And indeed, in Thai, a large number of words function as classifiers. Noun classifiers in Thai generally derive from nouns both diachronically and synchronically. And there is, in principle, no limit on the number of objects that can serve as measuring containers (e.g., 'cup', 'glass', 'box'). Additionally, 'spoon', а comparatively small number of classifiers are verbs, for example, cap 'to catch' for the noun khanom-ciin 'vermicelli rice noodles', and múan 'to roll over' for videos; however, these entities have been posited as a category distinct from regular nouns or verbs with respect to their significant syntactic functions (Singnoi 2000).

Syntactic properties

Syntactic forms

In Thai, noun classifiers are categorized as a separate grammatical class from nouns due to their external structures; that is, noun classifiers occur in different positions from nouns and thus have different functions in noun phrases. Consider example (1):

(1)	Ν	+	Num	+	Clf
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bâan	sžəŋ	lǎŋ		
house	two	Clf: roof		

In such a noun phrase, the noun occurs in the initial position and acts as the head. The classifier co-occurs with and appears after the numeral in the modifying phrase, Num + Clf, which tells us the number of the head noun, resulting in a particular pattern known as a numeric phrase.

In addition to the above pattern, a simple noun phrase may be composed of a noun as the first constituent with the second constituent being something capable of modifying⁵ that noun, as exemplified in (2):

(2) *bâan nán* house that 'that house'

The remainder of the noun phrase, if there is anything else, will consist of a classifier, resulting in another noun-phrase pattern, as shown in (3) below:

$$(3) N + Clf + Mod$$

bâan lăŋ nán house Clf: roof that 'that house'

Furthermore, if the modifier is the number 'one', it may either be demoted from the numeral position in (4) to a more peripheral position, as in (5), or disappear completely, as in (6):

- (4) *sín <u>kày nìŋ tua</u>* buy chicken one Clf: body 'One chicken, please.'
- (5) *sí*# <u>kày tua nìŋ</u> buy chicken Clf: body one 'A chicken, please.'

⁵ See Singnoi (2000) for details about modifiers in noun phrase constructions.

(6) sít <u>kày tua</u>
 buy chicken Clf: body
 'A chicken, please.'

The examples show that while the number 'one' is still in the typical position for a numeral in (4), it is not in (5). This can be accounted for in terms of a reduction process whereby the numeral is demoted from its prototypical position to the end of the noun phrase. The suppression eventually results in an absent element, as in (6).⁶ This evidence suggests another structure distinct from (3)—where the modifier is something else—as shown in (7):

(7) N + Clf + ('one')

Consequently, we have come up with three distinct structures for noun-phrase constructions associated with classifiers, which are, thus, considered the forms/ structures of classifier constructions in this article.

I.	Ν	+	Num	+	Clf
II.	Ν	+	Clf	+	Mod
III.	Ν	+	Clf	+	('one')

Syntactic functions

When they occur in the structures discussed above, classifiers perform quite a number of syntactic roles: they constitute numeric phrases, stand for head nouns, substitute for the head nouns of nominal phrases, act as the head of certain modifying constructions, act as noun modifiers and distinguish noun phrases from other constructions appearing in the same pattern.

Constituting numeric phrases

Classifiers principally co-occur with numerals or quantifying morphemes to form numeric or quantified phrases, as already shown in Form I: N + Num + Clf, where, in use, they serve as measure units. This function is exemplified in (8) and (9):

- (8) bâan săaŋ <u>lăŋ</u>
 house two Clf: roof
 'two houses'
- (9) náam sŏoŋ <u>kæ̂æw</u> water two Clf: glass 'two glasses of water'

Standing for head nouns

In Form II: N + Clf + Mod, the head nouns can be absent if, of course, the contexts are understood and thus leave the classifier to stand for it. For example, in (10B) the classifier *lûuk* 'small round object such as fruit, balls, and the like' stands for the absent head noun, *tææŋmoo*, referring to the same item previously denoted by the head noun, in (10A):

- (10) A: cà? síł <u>tææŋmoo lûuk năy</u> will buy watermelon Clf which 'Which watermelon would you like to buy?'
 B: síł <u>- lûuk nîi</u>
 - buy Clf this 'I'll take this one.'

In fact, certain classifiers, such as *khon* 'person', can even stand for their head noun regardless of context. (This will be later discussed in the section on semantic properties.)

⁶ See Singnoi (2000) for more details.

Substituting for nouns

This function differs from the preceding case. In the previous case, the head noun needs not be stated when the context is clear and thus leaves the classifier to stand for it syntactically. But, in the present case, a classifier is used as a subsequent reference to an already introduced referent. In conversation and writing, we normally have to keep track of who or what we are talking about for more than one sentence at a time. After the initial introduction of some entities, speakers will use various anaphoric expressions such as pronouns, noun phrases, or proper nouns to make references. Like those regular expressions, classifiers can be used to refer to or to substitute for nouns. Thus, consider example (11):

- (11) A: *sín tææŋmoo nòy* buy watermelon FPart 'A watermelon, please.'
 - B: *cà? ?aw <u>lûuk</u> năy* will take Clf which 'Which one would you like?'

In the example above, after the initial introduction of the entity taxanoo 'watermelon', the speaker uses the corresponding classifier *lûuk*, which did not appear together with the noun in the preceding noun phrase and thus is not simply a remnant, as a pronoun substituting for the noun.

Acting as the heads of modifying constructions

Classifiers also behave like regular nouns in the sense that a classifier can occur as the head of a nominal construction called a "classifier construction" (Singnoi 2000). That is, when a classifier is required to play a pragmatic role in a noun phrase, it may form a smaller construction with a modifier and, thus, structurally heads the construction, as shown in (12):



In the noun phrase model above, the demonstrative $n \dot{a} n$ does not directly modify the head of the entire phrase, $s \dot{a} a$. Instead, it directly modifies the classifier *tua* and the entire classifier phrase *tua nán*, in turn, modifies the head noun. The classifier *tua* is thus the head of the classifier phrase syntactically.

Acting as noun modifiers

A classifier itself can even directly modify the head of a noun phrase when its modifier in the modifying phrase is the absent numeral 'one' as shown in (13):

(13) khšo <u>kaafææ kâæw</u>
beg for coffee Clf
'May I have a cup of coffee, please?'

Here, the classifier $k\hat{x}w$ modifies the head noun *kaaf*xx in the noun phrase

kaafææ kæ̂æw, maintaining the meaning 'a cup of coffee'. In this case, it is obvious that the classifier functions like a noun modifier, and thus it may not be surprising that it is posited as a different function from that discussed in the previous point.

Disambiguating constructions

Lastly, classifiers can also function as a syntactic device to disambiguate structurally similar constructions. In particular, despite a clear context, a sequence of words such as noun + verb can occasionally have more than one interpretation: as a noun phrase, compound noun, or clause, as shown in (14):

(14) bâan lék

house small →noun phrase: 'a small house' →compound noun: 'a secret wife' →clause: 'The house is small'.

In this case, the occurrence of a classifier between the two constituents can distinguish the noun-phrase structure from the others, since it forces the form to be interpreted as a noun phrase, as shown in (15):

(15) bâan <u>lăŋ</u> lék
 house Clf small
 → noun phrase: 'a small house' ⁷

The correlation between the three forms of classifier constructions previously shown and their syntactic functions is summarized in the following table:

Syntactic Functions	Syntactic Forms			
	Ι	II	III	
Constituting NumPs	\checkmark			
Standing for HNs		\checkmark		
Substituting Ns		\checkmark		
Acting as Hs		\checkmark		
Acting as NMods			\checkmark	
Disambiguating Cons		\checkmark		

The table shows that, in Form I, classifiers constitute numeric phrases. In Form II, they can stand for head nouns, substitute for nouns, head modifier phrases, and disambiguate constructions. Finally, in Form III, they act as noun modifiers, meaning 'one'.

Semantic properties (meaning proper): classifying

Many attempts have been made to account for the semantic function of noun classifiers in Thai (e.g., Noss 1964, Placzek 1978, 1984, and 1992). Most of them have focused on the semantic regulation of the co-occurrence between nouns and corresponding classifiers, with less attention being paid to the association between their semantic and syntactic roles. Here, classifiers are examined in terms of their relevance to or association with the within syntactic structures complex nominal constructions.

In principle, the semantic function of noun classifiers is to classify nouns into groups depending on properties such as kind, shape, and function. Placzek (1978), for instance, accounts for classifier semantic

⁷ It is also possible that *lǎŋ lék* is interpreted as a nominal predicate, but this interpretation would require a more specific structure, for example, if there were a demonstrative pronoun *nán* defining the periphery of the noun

phrase, as in the sentence *bâan nán lǎŋ lék* 'That house is small.'

properties in terms of two distinctive categories based on their application to nouns: generic classifiers and perceptual classifiers. Generic classifiers are based on the mixed grouping of factors that depend on a notion of "kind" or "essence," such as function and material. In the vast majority of cases, perceptual classifiers are based on shape, as discussed below.

Generic classifiers

A prototype of generic classifiers, as exemplified in Placzek (1978), is *khon* 'person', which applies to ordinary people in all classes, as opposed to the honorific type of people, such as royal families (*?oŋ*) or monks (*rûup*). The classifier *khon* is applied on the basis of someone 'being a person,' not because of shape or other perceptual features that might be present.

Associated with the syntax of the constructions in which they occur, generic classifiers can independently occur in noun phrases without requiring a context. This is not surprising since, according to Placzek, they are synchronically borrowed into the classifier lexicon from the noun lexicon and thus are sufficiently meaningful to stand by themselves. Consider examples (16) and (17) showing that the head noun khon 'people' can be leaving corresponding omitted. its classifier khon to stand alone:

- (16)*bâan nîi mii <u>(khon) hâa khon</u>* house this have person five Clf 'There are five people in this house.'
- (17) <u>(khon) khon nii</u> mây dii person Clf this not good 'This person is not good.'

Here, the classifier can stand alone in the absence of any special pragmatic factors because it can only be interpreted as 'person'.

Perceptual classifiers

Good examples of perceptual classifiers include *sên* 'line' and *phæn* 'plank, plate.' Used in the context of shape, *sên* applies to a wide range of nouns that are long and flexible, such as blood vessels, nerves, noodles, necklaces, strings, and so on. It also applies to routes and paths. Similarly, *phæn* is used for flat rigid things, such as 'paper', 'plank', and the like.

In contrast to generic classifiers, perceptual classifiers cannot stand alone without a proper context. They require additional nouns referring to materials or to some generic concepts. Example (18) shows that the perceptual classifier $s \hat{e} n$ cannot be used in the same syntactic frame in which the generic classifier *khon* occurs:

(18) ?bâan nîi mii <u>hâa sên</u> house this have five Clf
'There are five <u>?</u> in the house.'

This proposition requires a presupposition such as 'There are two strings of rope in that house,' where 'rope' indicates what the classifier *sên* refers to.

However, the semantic boundary between generic and perceptual classifiers is somewhat fuzzy as there are certain classifiers that seem to act as generic in some cases and perceptual in others. Take *tua* 'body' for example, as presented by Placzek. This classifier generically applies to 'animals', but it also extends to 'pieces of furniture' that have legs and to clothes because they have 'body shapes' that are limbed. Thus consider examples (19), (20), and (21):

- (19) bâan nîi mii <u>mææw sǒoŋ tua</u> house this have cat two Clf 'There are two cats in this house.'
- (20) *bâan nîi mii <u>tó? sǎoŋ tua</u>* house this have desk two Clf 'There are two desks in this house.'
- (21) *chǎn mii <u>sĩa sǒoŋ tua</u>* I have shirt two Clf 'I have two shirts.'

Like generic classifiers, the classifier *tua* 'body' represents that mææw 'cat' in (19) is an animal, *tó?* 'desk' in (20) has a body shape with a raised flat surface and four legs, and *sîa* 'shirt' in (21) has two arms. However, syntactically, such classifiers act like perceptual classifiers since they cannot stand alone; i.e., one cannot say sentences like * *bâan nîi mii kìi tua* when talking about animals in the generic sense unless the context has already made it clear. Instead, the presence of the head noun as *bâan nîi mii mææw* (cat) *kìi tua* is required.

Another problematic classifier is *lêm*, whose synchronic application appears to be arbitrary. That is, the semantic function of this classifier is far from clear. It applies to objects such as 'book', 'cart', and 'knife', which evince no similarity or association that could be a criterion for classification (Placzek 1992).

Moreover, there is another classifier, *2an* 'item', which is the most widely extended

of all classifiers and can alternatively apply to certain concrete nouns that refer to small objects. This is another classifier whose criteria for classification are most semantically puzzling (Placzek 1992). Examples (22) and (23) show the application of *?an* to certain nouns outside its traditional application:

- (22) *chóon sǒoŋ khan<u>/ʔan</u> spoon two Clf: long/item 'two spoons'*
- (23) *khěm sšoŋ lêm<u>/?an</u>* needle two Clf: volume/item 'two needles'

As has been discussed above, classifiers generally classify nouns into two main groups according to their type: generic classifiers classify human beings, whereas perceptual classifiers classify nonhumans. In the latter type, animals and things are classified into a huge number of perceptual groups, resulting in various classifiers known in the Thai language. However, it is not worth discussing the semantics of classifiers exhaustively since a number of previous studies have elaborated on this subject (e.g., Placzek 1978 and 1992) and a list of classifiers and their corresponding nouns has also been standardized by Royal Institute of Thailand (2003).

Pragmatic properties (meanings in context)

So far, much less attention has been paid to the distinction between the semantic and pragmatic roles and either their association between themselves or their association with the forms in communication. As proposed by Yule (1996), what is said is not necessarily what is communicated. This means that the meaning proper, or semantic meaning, which refers to what is said, is not the whole of what one intends to communicate. A communicative meaning, thus, includes not only the semantic side of an utterance but also its pragmatic information, i.e., how its use in a particular context helps a listener interpret what is said. For example, if one says Could you open the door? to someone, one does not mean to ask him or her a question; rather one is telling/asking him or her to open the door since the situation or context is that one needs help.

The fact that communicative functions necessarily involve pragmatic information in the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context also suggests that communicated meaning has more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than with what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. As Yule (1996: 3) succinctly put it, "pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning." Therefore, in order to arrive at an interpretation of a speaker's intended meaning, it is crucial to explore what is unsaid (invisible meaning) as part of what is communicated.

In this section, I discuss a number of pragmatic roles played by classifiers that illustrate such a notion. These pragmatic functions include, at least, unitizing nouns, referring to particular entities, individuating items, and indicating the numeral 'one', as discussed in more detail below.

Unitizing nouns

To serve the speaker's purpose in counting, classifiers are used as units for their modified nouns. Particularly speaking, they help to unitize the items identified by nouns so that the nouns can be counted. In fact, Croft (1993) provides as a reason for the occurrence of classifiers in classifier languages the idea that nouns in those languages are not countable by themselves. Even "count" nouns, like *dog*, are not countable. They just refer to individual items, and thus classifiers like *tua* are required to designate units when these nouns are being counted. This distinctive pragmatic role can be seen in a particular syntactic structure, numeric noun phrases (Form I: N+Num+Clf). Examples are given below:

- (24) *khâaw sŏɔŋ <u>caan</u>* rice two Clf: plate 'two plates of rice'
- (25) pàakkaa sǎɔŋ <u>dâam</u> pen two Clf: long object 'two pens'

Here, the classifiers *caan* and *dâam* identify the units of the nouns *pàakkaa* and *khâaw* in numeral phrases as such. The classifier *caan* provides a unit for counting the uncountable noun *khâaw*, denoting 'two units of rice represented by plates.' One can also see that, even though *pàakkaa* is classified as a count noun, it still needs the corresponding classifier *dâam* to unitize it when it occurs with a numeral or when the noun *pàakkaa* is counted, as follows:

(26) pàakkaa nɨŋ <u>dâam</u> 1
 pàakkaa söoŋ <u>dâam</u> 2...

Moreover, a classifier can also express an instance of a countable noun in a

collectivity of individuals, as shown in example (27):

(27) *dinsžo sžon <u>klón</u>* pencil two Clf: box 'two boxes of pencils'

Here the countable noun *dinsõo* is reunitized as a group expressed by *klõŋ* instead of as an individual item like *dâam*.

Referring to particular entities

When classifiers occur in noun phrases Form II: N+Clf+Mod, they serve to refer to particular entities. This contrasts with plain nouns, whose function is to describe or denote objects. As pointed out by Denny (1986), a noun (e.g., dog) only expresses the property of 'dog', it does not refer to any kind of individual. The individual reference to the dogs themselves is achieved by developing a noun phrase from the noun with the help of modifying elements, including classifiers. Therefore, it is classifiers, rather than the nouns, that are used to refer to particular individuals, thus marking the noun phrases as definite when the reference needs reinforcing. Consider examples (28) and (29):

- (28) <u>dèk nán</u> son child that naughty 'Any children/child are/is naughty.'
- (29) <u>dèk khon nán</u> son child Clf that naughty 'The child is naughty.'

In example (28), the noun $d\hat{e}k$ does not refer to anyone in particular: it applies the property of 'child' to the item (and is therefore non-referential and indefinite). The demonstrative *nán* does not indicate any particular child.⁸ By contrast, in example (29), the classifier *khon* 'person' is used to give the noun phrase a definite referent, making it clearly referential.

Individuating items

In the same syntactic form, classifiers also help disambiguate the number of associated nouns by individuating those nouns. Count nouns in Thai are not marked for number. Classifiers are thus used to indicate singularity. Consider example (30):

(30) <u>kày nîi</u> kin dii chicken this eat good 'This/these chicken/s is/are good to Eat.'

In this case, the noun $k \dot{a} y$ 'chicken' has no numeral construction to indicate the number and, therefore, allows for two readings: singular or plural. A particular classifier is needed to express singularity by providing a picture of the noun as a single substance, as shown in (31):

(31) <u>kay tua nîi</u> kin dii chicken Clf/ 'body' this eat good 'This chicken is good to eat.'

Indicating the numeral 'one'

In Form III: N+Clf+('one'), where the numeral 'one' functioning as a modifier in the classifier phrase is absent, the classifier

⁸ Here, the demonstrative *nán* has a discourse function among the functions such as drawing attention to, switching attention, tracking entities, controlling the flow of information, and reintroducing a topic (Singnoi 2001).

alone carries the meaning 'one'. Consider example (32):

(32) *khŏo <u>kaafææ-yen kæ̂æw</u>* ask for ice coffee glass 'One ice coffee, please.'

Example (32) shows that, in the absence of the numeral expression, the classifier must be interpreted as 'one (ice coffee)'. Some other familiar sentences where such is the case are given in examples (33) and (34):

- (33) khăw maa mii sia phiin he come have mat Clf <u>mšon bay</u> thâw nán pillow Clf only 'He came here with only a mat and a pillow.'
- (34) chăn mii <u>bâan lăŋ</u> rót khan
 I have house Clf car Clf *kôɔ phɔɔcay lâæw*so satisfied Asp.
 'It's okay for me that I merely have a house and a car.'

As shown in (33) and (34), all the classifiers (*phǐ+n*, *bay*, *lǎŋ* and *khan*) indicate the number 'one' when no numeral is present.

As has been discussed in this section, I have tried to emphasize, via the case of classifiers in Thai, that the semantic information, or meaning proper, does not provide enough information by itself to allow for successful interpretation when people communicate. One also needs pragmatic information, or contextual meaning, when using language in particular circumstances. In fact, the meaning proper merely provides a basic idea of what is being communicated. It is the pragmatic information which crucially limits and thus enables the interpretation of what people mean.

Correlation between forms and meanings

I have shown that classifier constructions contain a variety of information such as syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties, rather than being restricted to an autonomous syntax, which need to be differentiated and separately presented. This paper also differentiates their syntactic forms from their syntactic functions since it is obvious that the forms vary according the functions. to Furthermore, I have demonstrated that, the meaning (semantic and pragmatic properties), also determines or motivates the forms. In fact, it is the pragmatic information, rather than the semantic properties which determines the forms. As already shown, classifiers of both semantic types can occur in any form. The only difference is that generic classifiers need no context to appear with their nouns, while the perceptual ones do. This section attempts to illustrate the association among the relevant grammatical properties in terms of form-meaning mappings, focusing on how the structures/forms of the classifier constructions are motivated or determined by the meaning, especially the pragmatic information, and vice versa.

As mentioned earlier, one can see that classifiers occur in three different syntactic structures or forms. In Form I, where classifiers syntactically form numeric phrases, they serve to unitize nouns, thus making a classifier construction, or formmeaning pairing as shown below.

Construction 1



This has already been illustrated in (24), which is repeated below:

(24) *khâaw sǒoŋ caan* rice two Clf: plate 'two plates of rice'

In Form II, where classifiers syntactically stand for head nouns, substitute for nouns, act as heads of nominal constructions, and disambiguate constructions, they have at least two different meanings or interpretations: 1) referring to particular entities and 2) individuating items. The mapping of one form and two meanings results in two different constructions, as shown in Construction 2 and Construction 3:

Construction 2



Construction 2 has already been illustrated in example (29), repeated below:

(29) <u>dèk khon nán</u> son child Clf that naughty 'That child is naughty.' Construction 3



Construction 3 has already been illustrated in example (31), repeated below:

(31) <u>kay tua nîi</u> kin dii chicken Clf this eat good 'This chicken is good to eat.'

Lastly, in Form III, where classifiers syntactically modify head nouns directly, they are interpreted as the numeral 'one', resulting in another construction, as shown in Construction 4:

Construction 4



This has already been illustrated in (32), which appears again below:

(32) *kh55 <u>kaafææ-yen kææw</u>* ask for ice coffee glass 'One ice coffee, please.'

Meanings: Pragmatic functions	Syntactic forms			
	Ι	II	III	
unitizing nouns	~			
referring to particular entities		\checkmark		
individuating items		\checkmark		
indicating the numeral 'one'			✓	

These form-meaning mappings are summarized in the following table:

The above table shows that classifiers are employed in Form I when they are used to unitize nouns. They are employed in Form II when they are used to refer to particular entities and to individuate items. And, finally, they appear in Form III when they are used to indicate the numeral 'one'.

Construction presentation

Classifier constructions in Thai and the associations among their properties are better formally presented using the boxmodel device of Construction Grammar since it is able to provide for the simultaneous presentation of an array of information. Consider the box model below:



In this device form, a lexical item shown as [lex +] is categorized as a classifier, thus containing the attribute value [cat Structurally, Clf]. can stand it independently, like a regular noun, thus [max +]. It is given a function attribute (e.g., standing for head nouns, substituting for nouns, etc.) to fill the unspecified attribute-value [func ...]. Regarding the semantic properties, its proper meaning may be shown literally, thus '...'. Along with the meaning, its type would appear, which represents its semantic property, thus [type ...]. A pragmatic function is alongside registered separately the semantic.

An example of such a presentation form is provided for the classifier *phæn* 'flat-like,' which can occur in a nominal construction like *kradàat phæn* in the context:

The presentation of *ph*æn is given below:



In the figure, *phàn* is a lexical item, thus [lex +]. It is categorized as a classifier, thus [cat Clf], which cannot stand

independently, thus [max -]. It has the syntactic function in such a noun phrase as a noun modifier, thus [func noun modifier]. For its semantic properties, it means 'flat-like feature' and is thus grouped in the perceptual category, thus [type perceptual]. In this particular structure, the classifier performs the pragmatic function of indicating the numeral 'one'.

Concluding remark

In this paper, I have suggested an explanation based а functional on framework which, among other advantages, allows grammatical categories include complex bundles to of information, rather than simple atomic categories. I believe that classifier constructions in Thai, as well as other constructions, are better viewed as informative constructions with their own syntactic, particular semantic, and pragmatic constraints. Here, it has been made clear that not only syntactic and semantic information but also pragmatic information is a significant factor since it serves determine to the possible interpretations and even the allowable structures and thus should be considered as an obligatory factor, or at least nonignorable information, of a grammatical construction.

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