

A Comparative Study of Classifier Expression in Assamese and Bengali Languages

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Abstract: Classifiers are affixes that are used in various languages to indicate the grammatical or semantic classification of words. "Classifiers are generally defined as morphemes that classify and quantify nouns according to semantic criteria. Classifiers classify a noun inherently. They designate and specify semantic features inherent to the nominal denotatum and divide the set of nouns of a certain language into disjunct classes" (Senft 2000: 21). Classifiers system are found in the languages of Asia, Oceania, Australia, Africa and America. Among the New Indo Aryan languages Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Maithili and Marathi and among Munda family Santhali, Kurka and Malto made limited use of classifiers. Assamese although an Indo Aryan, like other Tibeto Burman languages - Boro, Garo, Rabha, Dimasa, Kokborok makes use of large number of classifiers for almost everything or for every shape. The present paper makes an attempt to compare and contrast the occurrences and the use of classifiers among the sister language- Assamese and Bengali. Although, both Assamese and Bengali have SOV word order but they share some common and uncommon facts about classifiers. The study is confined to standard Bengali and standard Assamese.

Keywords: Numeral classifiers, Sortal classifiers and Mensural classifiers

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I. INTRODUCTION

Both Assamese and Bengali belongs to the Eastern group of Indo Aryan language family. Both are directly descended from Magadhi Apabramsa and Magadhi Prakrit which have been originated from Sanskrit. Assamese is the official language of Assam and is spoken in its neighbouring states such as Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. Bengali is the official language of West Bengal, Tripura and national language of Bangladesh. The variety that is spoken in Kolkata is taken to the standard form. In Bengali there are two standard forms- one is shadhu bhasa also known as suddho bhasa and colti bhasa also called colito bhasa or the colloquial form. Suddho bhasa is spoken in formal context. Here in this paper I shall concentrate on standard colloquial form.

II. METHODOLOGY

The researcher have collected the datas from the primary and secondary sources. The primary datas was collected in the form of conversation and questionnaire with the informants of the language. Telephonic conversation was also made to obtain the valuable information from speakers of the language. The secondary datas was gathered from the libraries in the form of books, articles research papers etc.

III. CLASSIFIERS AND ITS TYPES:

Both Assamese and Bengali are classifier language. In comparison to Bengali, Assamese is very rich in classifiers. Classifiers in Assamese and Bengali can be categorised into (a) Numeral classifiers (b) Sortal classifiers and (c) Mensural classifiers.

3.1 Numeral classifier: They are the most common type of classifiers. They appear in context of quantification and are always sound to the number or quantifier. Assamese and Bengali allows the following construction.

Numeral + classifiers+ Noun

Assamese

1. a) du- zɔn manuh
two- CL man
'two men'

Bengali

- b) du-ɔʒon manuʃ
two -CL man

'two men'

Assamese

- c) du-goraki mohila
two- CL woman
'two women'

Bengali

- d) du- dʒon mohila
two CL woman
'two women'

Assamese

- e) du-ta kolom
two -CL pen
'two pens'

Bengali

- f) du to kolom
two - CLpen
'two pens'

Noun + Numeral + Classifiers

Assamese

2. a) p^hul e-pah
flower one-CL
'one flower'
b) kitap tini- k^hon
book three-CL
'three books'

Bengali

- c) boi tin -te
book three CL
'three books'
d) botam pac-ta
button five CL
'three buttons'

It is to be noted that a noun with a numeral classifier is always singular in form in both the languages unlike English. This can be supported by the following illustration from both the languages.

Bengali

- h) tini -zoni suwali
three- CL girl
'three girls'
i) tin- dʒon meye
three- CL girl
'three girls'

Thus the construction Noun+Num+CL and Num +CL+Noun construction in both the languages convey the similar meaning.

Demonstrative pronoun +Noun+Numeral+Classifier

Assamese

3. a) ei kitab du k^hon
DEM book NUM CL
'This two books'

Bengali

- b) ei boi du to
DEM book NUM CL
'This two books'

Demonstrative pronoun+ Noun + classifier

Assamese

4. a) ei kitab -k^hon
DEM book CL
'this book'

Bengali

- b) ei boi ta
DEM book CL
'this book'

Demonstrative pronoun+ numeral+ classifier+Noun

Demonstrative pronoun precedes numeral classifiers in both Assamese and Bengali. This can be shown through the following illustration.

Assamese

5. a) ei du k^hon kitab
DEM NUM CL book
'This two books'

Bengali

- b) ei du to boi
DEM NUM CL book
'This two books'

Assamese

- c) hei tini -zoni tirata
DEM NUM CL women
'those three women''
d) ei du-zoni suwali
DEM NUM CL girl
'this two girls''

Bengali

- e) J^hei tin-ti meye
DEM NUM CL girl
'that three girls'
f) ei p^hac-dzon manu^h
DEM NUM CL man
'this five girls'

Possessive pronoun and Classifiers

Assamese

7. a) mur du-k^hon kitab
my two CL book
'my two books'
b) tumar cari-k^hon bohi
your four-CL copy
'your two copies''

Bengali

- c) amar du k^hana boi
my two CL book
'my two books'
d) tomar du to boi ko^hae
your two CL book where
'where are your two books'

Genitive case and classifiers

Assamese

8. a) skul-or tini-zon hik^hok
school gen three CL teacher
'three teachers of the school'

Bengali

- b) \int kul-er tin-dzon \int ik^hok
school gen three CL teacher
'three teachers of the school''

Relative Pronoun and classifiers

Classifiers can also occur with relative and interrogative pronoun. This is exemplified in the examples given below.

Assamese

9. a) kun tini-zon manuh ahisil
which three CL man come PST

'which three men came'

Bengali

- b) kon tin-d̥ʒon manuʃ eʃe-chilen
which three CL man come PST
'which three men came'

IV. SORTAL CLASSIFIERS

'Sortal classifier is one which individuates whatever it refers to in terms of the kind of entity that it is. (Semantics: Johns Lyons 1977). Thus sortal classifiers in Assamese and Bengali can be used with the nouns to indicate the notion like shape(long or round),size(large or small) dimension(flat thick thin or wide or broad).While Assamese makes use of a large number of sortal classifiers, Bengali has only a few.This can be shown through the following illustration.

z̥on,zona z̥oni - are used in **Assamese** to indicate human beings.Whereas -z̥on is used against masculine and -z̥oni for feminine.Some examples are cited below .

10. a) manuh-z̥on ahile (Mas)

man - CL came

'The man came'

- b) lora-z̥on kot ? (Mas)

boy-CL where

'where is the boy'

The extension of z̥on is zona

- c) guru-z̥ona amar g̥h̥or̥ot ahise (Mas/Fem)

superior CL our house come PST

"Respectable and superior person came to our house"

z̥oni is used both for human and animals in Assamese

- d) manuh-z̥oni g̥h̥or̥ot ase

woman-CL home be

'the woman is at home'

- e) mekuri-z̥oni p̥olal

cat -CL ran

'the cat ran away'

Assamese - **z̥on is similar to -d̥ʒon** in Bengali. Thus

Bengali

- f) rastae lok-d̥ʒon nei

street people-CL NEG

'there is no people in the street'

-z̥on\d̥ʒon in both Assamese and Bengali can be suffixed to numerals,ostensives, question element and quantifiers.The following are some of the examples from both the languages.

Assamese

- g) ei-z̥on manuh kali ah-isil

this-CL man yesterday came TNS

'this man came yesterday'

- h) kun-z̥oni suwali g̥h̥or̥ot gol

which-CL girl home go PST

'which girl went home'

- i) protek-z̥oni suwali zabo

each -CL girl go TNS

'each girl will go'

- j) keiba-z̥oni tirata goisil

few-CL women go TNS

'few women went'

Bengali

- k) ei-d̥ʒon manuʃ kalke eʃech-chilo

this-CL man yesterday come TNS

'this man came yesterday'

- l) k̥æek-d̥ʒon meye eʃeche

some CL girl come PST

'some girls came'

- m) protek-d̥ʒon ʃ̥hele

each-CL boyTNS

'each and every boy will come'

-tu in Assamese can be suffixed to both humans , non human and ostensives.

Assamese

11. a) lora-tu kot gol

boy CL where go

'where did the boy go'

b) mur kolom-tu heral

my pen CL lost

'I lost my pen'

c) prot^hom-tu muk nalage

First CL I Acc NEG want

'The first one I do not want'

d) ei-tu muk lag-isil

DEM CL I ACC want TNS

'This one I do not need'

e) hei-k^hon mur kitap

DEM-CL I Acc book

'That one is my book'

The classifier -ta can be used with cardinals,quantifiers in Assamese. All numerals in Assamese takes the- ta for example,

Assamese

12. a) e-ta

one-CL

'one'

b) du-ta 'two

two CL

'two'

c) tini- ta

three-CL

'three'

d) cari-ta

four-CL

'four'

e) pas-ta

five-CL

'five'

-ta in Bengali has three variations [ta, tɛ,tɔ as seen in the following combinations with numerals.

Bengali

a). ek-ta

one-CL

'one'

b). du-tɔ

two-CL

'two'

c). tin-tɛ

three-CL

'three'

d). fɔr-tɛ

four-CL

'four'

e). pañ-ta

five-CL

'five'

In contrast to that,Assamese lexicon does not specify such features in relation to numeral -ta combination.

The classifier **goraki** in Assamese is used for respectable person irrespective of sex.For example,

Assamese

13 a) manuh goraki bhal

man CL good

'The man is good'

b) mohila goraki g^harort nai

woman CL home NEG

'The woman is not at home'

The classifier- **k^hon,k^honi** in Assamese are used with nouns which are flat and broad in size

14. a) kitap-k^hon dia

book CL give

'give me the book'

The classifier **k^hana ,k^hani** (similar to k^hon,k^honi in Assamese) in Bengali are also used with a noun denoting broad ,flat objects as exemplified in the following examples.

Bengali

15. a) tomar j^hit^hi-k^hana phele diyechi

your letter CL drop pst

'I have dropped your letter'

b) notun gamj^ha-k^hana amake dao

new towel CL I ACC give

'give me the new towel'

sota,sola,soli in Assamese are used with inanimate objects which are solid, broad and flat,for example,

16. kat^hsota muk diya

wood CL I give

'Give me the plank of wood'

dal used with inanimate objects which are long round and solid

17. a) bāh-dal muk lagisil

bamboo-CL I want TNS

'I want a piece of bamboo'

b) cək-dal kot t^hola

chalk CL where keep

'I want a piece of chalk'

The classifier- **tukura** is usually used before with the pieces of an uncountable objects in Assamese whereas in Bengali it is **-tukro**.

Assamese

18.a) mas-tukura dia

fish CL give

'give me the piece of fish'

Bengali

b) ek tukro ma^h dao

num CL fish give

'give me one piece of fish'

The classifier - **k^hila** in Assamese used with thin,light broad and leaf like solid inanimate objects,as for example,

19) pan - k^hila diya

betel leaf-CL give

'give me the betel leaf'

gos, gosi in Assamese is used with the nouns which are long ,round and flexible,as for example,

20) caki -gosi ana

earthen lamp-CL bring

'bring the earthen lamp '

gat^ha,gat^hi in Bengali is used with nouns denoting long and thin objects like,

21) j^hori-gat^ha amake de

stick CF I ACC bring

'bring the stick'

kon,koni in Assamese is usually used with human beings with the notion of love and affection like,

22. a) pona-kon tuponi gol

little boy CL sleep PST

'the little boy slept'

V. MENSURAL CLASSIFIERS

'A mensural classifiers is one which individuates in terms of quantity'(Lyons 1977).In other words mensural classifiers are those which categorise nouns in terms of measuring units. Both Assamese and Bengali have mensural classifiers. This can be shown through the following examples.

The classifier- **dol** is used with human referents indicating group or team and is common to both the languages.

Assamese

23. a) hena dol ahise
soldier-CL come PST
'a group of soldiers came'

Bengali

- b) ek-dol fēle eṣe-tṣe
num-CL boy come PST
'a group of boys came'

zak/dʒʰāk, pal is common to both Assamese and Bengali and is used with animals referring to herd/flock or group.

Assamese

- 24.a) sorai zak uri gol
birds CL fly PST away
'a group of birds flew away'
b) e-zak bogoli uri gol
num CL white crane fly PST
'a group of white cranes flew away'

Bengali

- c) ek dʒʰāk pakʰi uṛe gælo
Num CL birds flew
'a group of birds flew away'

The classifier-**brindo** refers to a group or association in both the languages like,

Assamese

- 25.a) satro brindo ahise
students CL come TNS
'A group of students came'

Bengali

- b) ṣātro brindo aṣṣṣe
students CL come TNS
'A group of students came'

tʰupa/tʰupi denotes in Assamese denotes bunch.

- 26.a) mæ pʰul tʰupa anilu
I flower CL bring TNS
'I brought the bunch of flower'

In Bengali it is **goṣṣa** which refers to bunch.

Bengali

- b)ami pʰul-er goṣṣa eneṣṣi
I flower GEN CL bring TNS
'I brought the bunch of flower'
c) ek goṣṣa pʰul eneṣṣi
NUM CL flower bring TNS
'I brought the bunch of flower'

The classifier **kap** refers to 'a cup full of' in Assamese language.

Assamese

27. sah kap kai bhal lagil
tea CL drink like TNS
'(I)liked the cup of tea'

The classifier- **kahi** refers to plateful

- 28.a)bhat kahi dia
rice CL give
'Give me a plate of rice'

-kaji in Bengali also refers to plateful.

Bengali

b) ek kaʃi bhat dao

Num CL rice give

'Give me a plate of rice'

The classifier **gal in Assamese** refers to 'mouthful' for example,

29.a) bhat-gal k^hai lua

rice CL eat 2 take

'Have one mouthfull of rice'

In **Bengali** it is,

b) ek -gal b^hat k^ha-o

Num CL rice eat 2

'Have one mouthful of rice'

VI. CLASSIFIERS IN TIBETO BURMAN LANGUAGES AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ASSAMESE LANGUAGE.

Assamese although an Indo Aryan language shows a very close affinity with the Tibeto Burman languages and this can be supported through the following datas collected from the various TB languages like-Boro, Rabha,Garo,Liangmei,Rongmei, Dimasa,kokborok.

Classifiers of Boro language

phang-used for tree, herb and climbers.

gong- used for things, house, musical instruments, furniture, household articles, fishing

thai -used for fruits and vegetables.

pong- used for human speech, biting, kicking hands and beating with sticks.

duṅg- used for long and flexible things like –hair, rope, necklace, tail, string and electrical

thong- used in Bodo language for cutting bamboo, and tree for posts.

dung- is used in Bodo language for hole of insects.

ghor- used for small and round things like – seeds, stones.

muṛzuṃ- used for handful of things like – rice, paddy seed, sugar, sand, soil and seeds.

haldinga- used for a string of meat, insects and fishes. Sometimes for fruits, vegetables.

Classifiers of Rabha Language

sak- is used for human being in Rabha language.

ma- used for all kinds of animal, birds, insects, water animals and creature.

phaN- used for tree, herb and climbers.

khon-used for leaves, pieces of cloths, wings, books and papers, all

thuka- used for the human speech.

tṅg- used for long and flexible things like – rope, hair, necklaces, tail, string and so on.

thok- used for drops of liquids.

bada- used for bunch of fruits like – areca nut, grapes, coconut and litchi.

pal- used for case of flock of birds, herd of cows, cattle etc.

zor- used for pair of peoples and birds.

Classifiers of Kokborok language

ma- used for all kinds of animals, insects, birds and creatures.

phang- used for all kinds of tree, herb and climbers.

khung- used for house, weapons, all kinds of household things, furniture, musical instruments, agricultural tools, hunting and fishing tools, utensils and any kind of things.

thai- used for fruits and vegetables.

pung-used for human speech and beating by hands, kicking by legs and with other things like stick.

tung- used for long and flexible things like rope, hair, tail and string.

kok- used for small round things like seed.

lam- used for hole of insects.

bar used for flower.

lai- used for leaves.

lap- used for small pieces of skin.

Classifiers of Garo language

sak- used for people of all sorts
may-used for animals
ge- used for objects of daily use
kiŋ-used for thin flat things
pat-used for paper
miŋ-used for words ,stories and songs
roŋ- used for round objects
poŋ- used for hollow cylindrical objects
diŋ-for rope like things
goŋ -for bank notes
paŋ-for plants and trees
gar-for bunches of things

Classifiers of Dimasa

deb- for branches and twigs
do-for log
goŋ-for bamboo like objects
graŋ-for flat things like books,cloth,that is anything that is rectangular or square in shape
kro- for round objects
paŋ-for trees
sao-for man
soŋ-for group of trees or plants

VII. POINTS OF SIMILARITY

- Common classifiers used in both the languages are - ta/ta ,kʰɔn /kʰana,zɔn/dʒon,zak/dʒhak
- The following are some common construction operating in both the languages
NUM+ CL+N
N + NUM + CL
DEM+NUM+CL+N
DEM+ N+NUM+CL
DEM+N+CL
- Moreover classifier can precede demonstrative pronoun, Possessive pronoun , genitive case and relative pronoun in both the languages as in the example 5,6,7,8and 9.

VIII. POINTS OF DISSIMILARITY

- Gender distinction is there in Assamese in the use of this particular classifier- zon (Mas) zoni (Fem).
- The classifier -ta shows variation in the use of it with numerals whereas in Assamese it is not so.
- In case of Assamese the mensural classifier such as zak,kap,kahi ,gal and sortal classifier such -tukura permits a change in the word order that is they can precede noun which Bengali counterpart does not permit.
- Assamese allows the combination of demonstrative pronoun + classifier+noun (ei kʰɔn kitab)which Bengali does not allow.

IX. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it can thus be concluded that though Assamese and Bengali are classifier language, the use of classifiers in Assamese language is more frequent in comparison to Bengali language. Since this is the unique features of Assamese it should be preserved and thus be passed to the future generation. There is often a tendency of less use of these classifiers among the present generation due to the influence of non classifier language like English.

Abbreviation

AS –Assamese
ACC-Accusative case
ADJ-Adjective
BG-Bengali
CL-Classifier
DEM-Demonstrative Pronoun
EGS-Examples
Fem- Feminine
GEN-Genitive Case

Mas-Masculine
NUM- Numeral
PST-Past tense
PRON-Pronoun
1- FirstPerson
2-Second person
3-Third person

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