

Comparative Study between Japanese and Myanmar Numerical Classifiers Commonly Used in Daily Life

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to focus comparative study on numerical classifiers for nouns commonly used in daily life in the Japanese and Myanmar languages. By using comparative method, data are collected from Japanese and Myanmar grammar books, text books and websites in order to search similarities and differences between numerical classifiers in both languages. It is found that the appropriate classifier needs to be chosen based on the kind and shape of the noun such as living things like people, animals and non-living things items such as round and globular objects, long and thin objects and flat objects etc. For instance, it is mentioned as 子供四人 kodomoyo-nin (four children), 犬二匹 inuni-hiki (Two dogs), 鉛筆五本, enpitsu go-hon (five pencils), トランプ二枚 toranpuni-mai (two cards) respectively. Therefore, this study intends to point out awareness of identical and different uses of numerical classifiers for nouns which are commonly mistaken words used by Japanese language learners in order to improve the correct usage of counting units for nouns.

Key words: Numerical Classifiers, Japanese and Myanmar languages

I. Introduction

Background study

Numerical classifier (in linguistics) may refer to '*measure word*' especially in East Asian languages. Myanmar language also uses numerical classifiers or measure words when nouns are counted or quantified like its other languages such as Japanese, Chinese and Thai. However, it is found that when counting the nouns, not only identical counting units or numerical classifiers but also different counting words are used in both Japanese and Myanmar languages, based on the experiences of a Japanese language lecturer. Therefore, those counting units of classifiers sound confusing for Japanese language learners starting from beginner to advanced level. In addition, they are commonly used as basic measure words when counting the nouns and their proper usage is an important role in daily life.

In Yangon University of Foreign Languages, despite there have been some studies of numerical classifiers in Chinese versus Myanmar (Kay Khaing Myint, 2011) and Thai versus Myanmar (Tin Tin Win, et al. 2009), any comparative study of Japanese and Myanmar language numerical classifiers has not been done.

II. Aim and Objectives

The **Aim** of this study intends to understand the difference between the numerical classifiers of Japanese and Myanmar languages for the Japanese language learning students.

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In this study, the **Objectives** are as follows:

1. To highlight the comparison between the different and similar numerical classifiers of Japanese and Myanmar Languages
2. To understand the proper use of Japanese numerical classifiers in order to make less mistakes in the use of numerical classifiers in Japanese language learning students

III. Data and Method

The required data for this study are collected from Japanese grammar books, text books, dictionaries, Myanmar grammar book (2005) and 'Myanmar sar -myanmarsagar' (1993) written by department of Myanmar language commission and websites.

A comparative method is used to highlight similarities and differences in the usage of Japanese and Myanmar numerical classifiers in this research paper.

IV. Scope of Study

The scope of in this study is to highlight correct usage of numerical classifiers for nouns commonly used in daily life in Japanese and Myanmar Language.

V. Research Questions

The research questions formulated in this study are as follows:

1. Is it different or similar in the use of numerical classifiers for nouns in Japanese and Myanmar language?
2. Do the Japanese language learning students clearly understand the proper usage of numerical classifiers for nouns in both languages?

VI. Literature Review

An article about Burmese (Myanmar) and Japanese linguistics in Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (n.d) stated that a classifier (abbreviated CLFor CL),a word or affix that accompanies nouns, can be considered to "classify" a noun depending on the type of its referent. It is also sometimes called a measure word or counter word. Numerical classifiers play an important role in certain languages, especially East Asian languages, including Japanese and Myanmar. In languages that have classifiers, they are used with a numeral or countable unit when the noun is being counted. For example, in such languages, a phrase such as "three people" is often required to be expressed as "three X (of) people", where X is a classifier appropriate to the noun for "people".

Matsumoto, Yo. (1985, 1986 & 1987) studied about different view of Japanese numerical classifiers such as semantic analysis of classifiers and how to acquire those numerical classifiers for the child language development.

A research paper (Okano, Kenni. 2007) mentioned that as numerical classifiers are always related with nouns, it is important in correct use of the numerical classifiers for Japanese language learning students. Inappropriate use of those words may make misunderstanding and impolite to point at people.

VII. Findings and discussion

Generally, there are two categories of items (nouns) that are quantified by numerical classifiers. Those (two items) are living things and non-living things (objects) in this study. In addition, non-living things are divided, in turn as several different items according to kind and shape of the objects.

Table 1: Living things items

	Items	Numerical classifiers	
		Japanese	Myanmar
1.	People	人(nin) /名(me)	ယောက်၊ ဦး
2.	Sacred persons such as Buddhist monks and nuns	人(nin) /名(me)	ပါး
3.	Big animals such as lion, tiger	頭(too)	ကောင်
4.	Small animals such as cat, dog and fish	匹(hiki)	ကောင်
5.	Birds such as sparrow , pigeon , crow and chicken	羽(wa)	ကောင်

Numerical classifiers of living thing items commonly used in daily life are shown in Table 1. It is found that similar countable units are used for both people and sacred persons in Japanese language; however, different usage of numerical classifiers is found in Myanmar language. In contrast, depending on different kinds and various sizes of animals such as big, small animals and birds, different counting units in Japanese language and similar counting words in Myanmar.

In my opinion, regarding usage of the numerical classifiers of living thing items, Japanese language learning students need to understand correct usage of those numerical classifiers better by comparative study between Japanese and Myanmar language numerical classifiers of living things.

When mentioning quantity of non-living thing items, the numerical classifiers are displayed as following tables 2, 3 and 4 based on kind and shape of these items (nouns).

Table 2: Non-living things items with use of identical numerical classifiers

Items	Numerical classifiers	
	Japanese	Myanmar
1. Cylindrical objects E.g. a. Bottle b. Battery	本(hon) 本(hon)	လုံး လုံး
2. Long and thin objects E.g. a. Umbrella	本(hon)	ချောင်း(လက်)

b.Chopstick	本(hon)	ချောင်း
3. Round and globular objects E.g. a. Fruits: apple, orange (banana , grapes)* b. Eggs	つ(tsu) (ふさ:fusa)* つ(tsu)	လုံး (ခိုင် ၊ ဖီး)* လုံး
4. Furniture E.g. a. Table b. Chair	つ(tsu) つ(tsu)	လုံး လုံး

Firstly, the identical numerical classifiers are used when counting non-living thing items such as cylindrical objects (for example :bottle and battery), long and thin objects (e.g. umbrella and chopstick), round and globular objects (e.g. fruits and eggs) and furniture(e.g. table and chair) in both Japanese and Myanmar languages (Table 2). As an exception for different kind of fruits like banana and grapes*, (i.e.つ (tsu) (ふさ:fusa)* and လုံး (ခိုင် ၊ ဖီး)*) different counting words can be used.

Table 3: Non-living thing items with use of different numerical classifiers

Items	Numerical classifiers	
	Japanese	Myanmar
1. Kitchen utensils E.g. a. Plates b. Pot*, Spoon , Fork & Knife	枚(mai) 本(hon)	ချပ် လုံး*၊ ချောင်း
2. Musical instrument E.g. a. Piano b. Guitar	台(dai) 本(hon)	လုံး လက်
3.Stationary E.g. a. Book b. Pencil , Pen, ruler, scissor* c. Easier	札(satsu) 本(hon) , 丁(tyoo)* 個(ko)	အုပ် ချောင်း(လက် *) ခု
4. Clothing E.g. a. Blouse , Skirt, Trousers,	枚(mai)	ထည်

Handkerchief b. Western suit , coat c. Necktie d. Hat	着(tyaku) 本(hon) 個(ko)	စုံ ခု လုံး
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* To count scissor, use both numerical classifiers: 本 (hon), 丁 (tyoo) in Japanese

Then, significant differences in classifier system also occur in both languages (Table 3). There are different counting words for kitchen utensils such as plates, pot, spoon, fork and knife. The musical instruments like piano and guitar have different counting units, as well. Even each item of stationary (i.e. books, pencil, pen, ruler, and eraser) and each kind of clothing are expressed as different counting words in Japanese and Myanmar languages.

Table 4: Non-living thing items with complex use of numerical classifiers

Items	Numerical classifiers	
	Japanese	Myanmar
1.Currency (Money) E.g. a. Banknotes b. Coin	円 円	ကျပ် ပြား
2. Paired objects E.g. a. Slipper b. Sock	足(soku) 足(soku)	ရံ စုံ
3. Flat objects E.g. a. playing card, Mat * b. Paper sheets c. Napkin d. Newspaper e. Letters, Mail	枚(mai) / 畳(jyoo)* 枚(mai) 枚(mai) 枚(mai) 枚(mai)	ချပ် ရွက် ထည် စောင် စောင်
4. Mechanical objects E.g. a. Television, Radio b. Car, Bicycle, Motorcycle c. Boat, Ship	台(dai) 台(dai) 艘(soo), 隻(seki)	လုံး စီး / စင်း စီး / စင်း

* To count Mat, use both numerical classifiers: 枚 (mai)/畳(jyoo) in Japanese

After that, complex use of numerical classifiers for some of non-living thing items are shown in table 4. For instance, to say counting the currency (i.e. banknotes and coins), paired objects (i.e. Slippers and socks, and flat objects such as paper sheets, newspaper, letter, and napkin etc., identical counting word is used in Japanese language; however different units are applied in Myanmar. Regarding mechanical objects, although same counting numerical word is mentioned for television, radio, car, bicycle, and motor cycle (item a. and b) except for boat and ship (item c.) in Japanese language. However, in Myanmar language, same counting word is used for remaining things (item b. and c.) except television and radio (item a.)

Finally, the numerical classifiers or counting words in linguistic suffix the number either before or after the numbers when counting the nouns in general. In Japanese language, when counting any items including living or non-living things (nouns), the counting units always appear after the numbers (i.e. to say for three people: 三人 san nin and for thirty people: 三十人 sanjyuunin). However, Myanmar numerical numbers are not like in Japanese language when measuring nouns according to cardinal numbers such as one (1), three (3), fifteen (15) and three hundred and forty-two (342) and whole or round numbers ending with zero digits like twenty (20), 30 (thirty), 100 (hundred).

For example, to say for cardinal numbers, counting unit is put after the numbers (i.e. ၃ ယောက်, ၃၄၂ စီး). **In contrast, for whole** or round numbers ending with zero digits, counting unit is placed before the numbers (i.e. အယောက် ၃၀ **for thirty people and**, အစီး ၃၀ for thirty cars) except for number ten (10) as mentioned ၁၀ ယောက် , ၁၀ စီး).

In table 2, 3, and 4, it is found that similar, different and complex use of numerical classifiers for non living things commonly used in daily life. Therefore, I believe that Japanese language learners need to be aware of similar and different usage of those words.

VIII. Conclusion

This research paper studied the comparison between the usage of Japanese and Myanmar language numerical classifiers. It was found that there was a distinction between Japanese and Myanmar numerical classifier. In addition, usages of some counting units or numerical classifiers are identical and some are different in both languages. For that reason, it is expected for better understanding of the proper use of numerical classifiers when counting the nouns in order to support Japanese language learning for students. Furthermore, there is still a need to study regarding comparison between grammar, and word usage in Japanese and Myanmar in literature and Japanese kanji in future research.

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