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# NUMERAL CLASSIFIERS IN WESTERN SUBANON, A LANGUAGE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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Philippine languages, with the exception of Cebuano, are not thought to have classifier systems. However, Western Subanon, a Greater Central Philippine spoken on Mindanao Island, Philippines, appears to possess constructions which conform to the known typology of classifiers. This paper presents an overview of the types of classifiers found in Western Subanon, and tentatively suggests that they may have originated from direct and indirect borrowing due to contact with Brunei Malay.

**1. INTRODUCTION.** Despite being common in nearby Southeast Asia, classifiers are rare in languages of the Philippines (Jones 1970). While measurement terms are common in many languages, Cebuano has been considered to be the only Philippine language with true classifiers; and it only has one. However, Western Subanon<sup>1</sup> – a related Greater Central Philippine<sup>2</sup> language spoken by Christian Subanons settled near the Sula Sea on the Zamboanga Peninsula, Mindanao Island, Philippines – appears to possess a rich system of both true, semantically based classifiers, and non-semantically based measure terms. The presence of such a large system of classifiers in an otherwise classifier-free language family raises the question of how W. Subanon acquired them. This paper will briefly discuss the criteria for different types of classifiers and how these criteria support the analysis of W. Subanon classifiers (§2), classifiers in other Subanon languages (§3), and the likely source of classifiers in these languages (§4).

**2. CLASSIFIERS.** Languages have a tendency to categorize, or classify, nouns using certain semantic parameters that can either be inherent, or non-inherent to the referent. Inherent semantic distinctions would include categorization of lexemes into groups on the basis of alienability or gender. Conversely, non-inherent semantic parameters would include constructed distinctions such as number or definiteness (Aikhenvald 2000; Talmy 2002). However, only nouns are categorized in these ways as, according to Greenberg (1978), “nouns are continuing discourse subjects and are therefore in constant need of referential devices of identification” (78). Under this description, every language has a system of some sort to classify the world into discrete, property-based categories.

There are a variety of ways in which language users can group the word into discrete categories. Aikhenvald (2000), in her typology of all known classifier systems, identifies eight different general types of classifying strategies: noun class, or gender, which signals grammatical agreement based on semantic characteristics such as animacy or sex; noun classifiers, which categorize a single noun in some way; numeral classifiers, which appear next to numerals and signal some inherent property of the referent, such as shape or animacy; possessed classifier morphemes, which classify a noun in possessive constructions; relational classifiers, which describe the relationship between a possessed noun and its possessor; verbal classifiers, which appear on verbs, but classify the nominal arguments; locative classifiers, which occur in locative adpositions; and deictic classifiers, which are associated with deictics and articles (1–3). Of relevance here are numeral classifier systems, as W. Subanon appears to fall into this type of category. However, it should be noted that not all languages which provided additional information about the type of object being counted are considered classifier languages (see examples (1) and (2)).

It is well known that some Southeast Asian languages use numeral classifier systems based on the physical properties of objects. Language such as Japanese, Chinese and Thai are considered to be robust

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Sharon Estioca for sharing her language with me. Primary data on W. Subanon were collected from August-December 2015 at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Raw data files are available in the Kaipulaehone digital archive.

<sup>2</sup> Cebuano is a Bisayan language in the Central Philippine subgroup; Western Subanon is in the Subanon subgroup of Greater Central Philippine.

classifier languages. On the other hand, English is not considered a classifier language despite using classifier-like elements in some constructions. Examples (1) and (2) compare Japanese with English, which is generally not considered to be a classifier language. Japanese must always use a classifier when discussing quantities, whereas in English, some words such as *pen* do not take a classifier, but *paper* can occur with or without some sort of classificatory element, such as *sheets*.

(1a) Japanese:

*pen 2-hon*  
pen 2-CL(LONG, CYLINDRICAL)  
'two pens'

(1b) English:

Two pens

(2a) Japanese:

*kami 2-mai*  
paper 2-CL(THIN, FLAT)  
'two papers'

(2b) English:

Two papers

Two sheets of paper

These classifier-like elements can make it difficult to determine whether or not a language with classifiers is actually a classifier language. Allan (1977:285) gives two criteria that a language with classifier-like morphemes must meet in order to be considered a classifier language: "(a) they occur as morphemes in surface structures under specifiable conditions; (b) they have meaning, in the sense that a classifier denotes some salient perceived or imputed characteristic of the entity to which an associated noun refers (or may refer)". If these criteria are applied to W. Subanon (example 3), some morphemes can indeed be considered classifiers.

(3) W. Subanon

<i>dua'</i>	<i>balu'</i>	<i>kayukayu</i>
two	CL(LONG, THIN)	stick
'two sticks'		

Criterion (a) requires that the morpheme *balu'* occur in a predictable and specific position. In W. Subanon, classifier morphemes occur after the numeral element and before the item being counted. According to Oh (2014), the order of number + classifier + noun is typologically usual for classifier languages of Southeast Asia and Oceania, and for VO<sup>3</sup> languages. Criterion (b) requires that the morpheme is used only for a semantically unified class of words. *balu'* can only be used to count long, thin objects such as hair, sticks, walking sticks, sugarcane, etc. Thus, in line with Allan's criteria, W. Subanon possesses classifiers. Specifically, W. Subanon possesses a numeral classifier system, as classifiers are only used to categorize nouns when counting.

Aikhenvald (2000) gives several characterizing features of numeral classifiers: (i) they appear directly next to noun phrases and expressions of quantity; (ii) they do not refer to any feature outside of the numeral noun phrase; (iii) the choice of numeral classifier is primarily semantic; (iv) they can be an open lexical class; and (v) some languages do not have a classifier associated with every noun, meaning some may take none and others may take many (98).<sup>4</sup> W. Subanon has been shown to have features (i) and (iii).

<sup>3</sup> W. Subanon, like many languages of the Philippines, is a VO-type language.

<sup>4</sup> However, characteristic (v) is disputed.

However, I have not rigorously tested criterion (ii), but in all the data I have, the classifier never refers to or agrees with elements outside of the numeral noun phrase. Criterion (iv) is confirmed by heavy borrowing of non-Subanon words to describe measurements of items such as *sakuu* ‘sack’, likely from English *sack*. Finally, in W. Subanon, it appears that every noun in a counting construction must take a classifier, but I acknowledge that my data in this regard are limited to elicited utterances, and not from naturalistic dialog.

Grinevald (2000) describes a simplified measure for determining whether or not a language has numeral classifiers: “In a language with true classifiers, [numeral] classifiers and measure terms typically belong to the same syntactic category but are considered separately, as sortal and mensural classifiers” (58). Sortal classifiers, also called non-quantitative or true classifiers, categorize nominals based on an inherent feature of the referent, while mensural, or quantitative, classifiers count a temporary state of the object (i.e., quantity) and may apply in more semantic contexts than sortal classifiers. Under this analysis, English has mensural classifiers, such as in *two [SHEETS OF] paper*, but not sortal classifiers such as *\*two [FLAT] paper*. W. Subanon, however, has both sortal and mensural classifiers (see example (4)) making it a true classifier language like Cebuano. However, unlike Cebuano, which has only a single general-use classifier *buok* ‘CL(GENERAL)’, W. Subanon has roughly two dozen classifiers in total; with the number nearly evenly divided between mensural and sortal types. This terminology for numeral classifier distinctions will be used throughout the rest of this paper.

(4a) Sortal Classifier

*dua’ lad polatasu*  
 two CL(THIN, FLAT) paper  
 ‘two papers’

(4b) Mensural Classifier

*lima saku nog ma’is*  
 five sack DET corn  
 ‘five sacks of corn’

Some classifiers require the use of *nog* DET, which always appears before the noun in noun phrases. The exact semantics of its use in counting constructions and where it obligatorily appears are still unclear. However, there are some general observations that can be made. First, *nog* seems to be used only when there is some degree of specificity (see examples 5 and 6). The use of *nog* implies that the item being counted is out of a larger number, or has a part/whole relationship. Second, the lack of *nog* with mensural classifiers suggests that the amount is uncountable, as in mass nouns such as *masin* ‘salt’ (see example 7).

(5) *dua’ buk nog saging u*  
 two CL(GENERAL) DET banana 1.POSS  
 ‘I have two bananas (out of a larger number)’

(6) *dua’ buk saging u*  
 two CL(GENERAL) banana 1.POSS  
 ‘I have two bananas’

(7) *tolu pondut masin*  
 three pinch salt  
 ‘Three pinches of salt’

Some classifiers, like *poti* ‘CL(SHARD)’ or *bogbad* ‘CL(TIED)’ do not require an overt head noun (see examples 8 and 9). The intuition of my consultant as to why these two classifiers do not require an overt head noun like all other W. Subanon classifiers is that there is only one thing that they can count. In the instance of *poti*, the type of object broken isn’t necessarily important, only that it is in pieces. Contrastively, *bogbad* is only used to count sleeping mats, and no other object.

- (8) *lima poti*  
 five CL(SHARD)  
 ‘five shards’
- (9) *so bogbad*  
 one CL(TIED)  
 ‘one tied thing’

Finally, when counting a single object with a classifier in W. Subanon, the cardinal number *sa’a* ‘one’ becomes *so* when preceding a classifier. All other cardinal numbers remain unchanged.

The rest of this paper will be devoted to describing the identified noun classifiers in W. Subanon by sortal or mensural type.

**2.1 SORTAL CLASSIFIERS.** Table 1 lists all sortal classifiers in W. Subanon. Many of these classifiers have nominal counterparts, but this is not unexpected, since W. Subanon is able to nominalize and verbalize nearly any lexeme. This is a common feature of sortal classifiers as, according to Aikhenvald, “the development of noun categorization involves grammaticalization of members of open lexical classes (nouns and verbs ...)” (2000:374). As far as can be discerned, W. Subanon sortal classifiers, unlike mensural classifiers, are all indigenous words and appear to be a closed lexical class.

TABLE 1. Western Subanon classifiers

Sortal Classifier	Gloss	Classified objects
<i>lad</i>	‘CL(THIN, FLAT)’	paper; leaves; placemats
<i>balu’</i>	‘CL (LONG, THIN)’	sticks; hair; sugarcane; walking cane
<i>buk</i>	‘CL(GENERAL)’	general classifier for unsorted nouns
<i>kotow</i>	‘CL(HUMAN)’	people
<i>banoy</i>	‘CL(SEGMENT)’	segmented legs of crustaceans and insects; firewood; pieces of a long, thin object
<i>poti’</i>	‘CL(SHARD)’	broken shard of stone, ceramic or porcelain
<i>pun</i>	‘CL(NON BRANCHING TREE)’	banana tree; bamboo; papaya tree
<i>tumpuk</i>	‘CL(PILE)’	clouds; coconuts
<i>likid</i>	‘CL(COILED)’	rope; fishing line; thread; rolled paper
<i>bulus</i>	‘CL(LONG, ROLLED)’	bolt of cloth; roll of toilet paper or paper towel
<i>bungkus</i>	‘CL(BUNDLE)’	newspapers; produce such as lemongrass, tobacco, rice; firewood; clothes; tissue; thatch
<i>bogbad</i>	‘CL(TIED)’	sleeping mat

**2.1.1 *lad* ‘CL(THIN, FLAT)’.** This sortal classifier is used with thin, flat objects such as paper and leaves. However, it does not apply to larger thin, flat objects like bedsheets or maps.

- (10) *dua’ lad polatsu*  
 two CL(THIN, FLAT) paper  
 ‘two papers’

**2.1.2 *balu* ‘CL(LONG, THIN)’.** *balu* is used with long thin objects such as sticks and hair. There does not appear to be a size requirement as there is for *lad*, but pencils and pens are not counted with *balu*. This may be because they are introduced technologies.

- (11) *dua’ balu’ kayukayu*  
 two CL(LONG,THIN) stick  
 ‘two sticks’

**2.1.3 *buk* ‘CL(GENERAL)’.** *buk* is a general classifier used to count everything that does not fall under another sortal category in W. Subanon. Some constructions take *nog* while others do not. See discussion in section 2.0.

- (12) *dua’ buk niug*  
 two CL(GENERAL) coconut  
 ‘two coconuts’

**2.1.4 *kotow* ‘CL(HUMAN)’.** This classifier is used to count people regardless of age, gender, or status. *nog* is optional with no change in meaning. It is interesting to note that in example (15) ‘children’ is marked by a plural morpheme when there are no other examples of the noun agreeing in number in classifier constructions (examples (13), (14), and (15)).

- (13) *tolu kotow gotow*  
 three CL(HUMAN) man  
 ‘three men’
- (14) *tolu kotow nog gotow*  
 three CL(HUMAN) DET human  
 ‘three men’
- (15) *tolu kotow gombata’-anan*  
 three CL(HUMAN) child-PL  
 ‘three children’
- (16) *tolu kotow timoy*  
 three CL(HUMAN) tribal.elder  
 ‘three elders’

**2.1.5 *banoy* ‘CL(SEGMENT)’.** This classifier counts segmented pieces of a segmentable larger whole. Typically, this is a long, thin object, such as a branch or tree, as *banoy* is used mainly to count firewood. It can also be used to count the segmented legs of crustaceans such as crabs, or insects like scorpions and walking sticks. *banoy* was also used to count the bendable tripod legs used to prop up my flash recorder. No example sentence is available.

**2.1.6 *poti* ‘CL(SHARD)’.** This classifier is used to count small shards that are broken off of a larger whole, such as fragments of broken ceramic dishware, or when a stone is broken. *poti* must have a part/whole relationship with a larger object. However, the object which was broken does not need to be specified. Interestingly, *nog* DET is not required in this construction.

- (17) *lima poti’*  
 five CL(SHARD)  
 ‘five shards’

**2.1.7 *pun* ‘CL(NON BRANCHING TREE)’.** *pun* refers specifically to non-branching trees like banana, bamboo, and papaya plants. As a nominal, *pun* means ‘beginning; origin; base’. Branching trees, on the other hand, are not counted using *pun*. Instead, they are counted by using the specific name of the tree.

- (18) *so pun nog kopaya*  
 one CL(NON-BRANCHING TREE) DET papaya

‘one papaya tree’

**2.1.8 *tumpuk* ‘CL(PILE)’.** This classifier is used to count masses. A pile can either be a formless mass, such as a cloud, or a collection of at least three or more objects. Items, such as rope, which can be counted using other classifiers, even when multiple coiled ropes are piled, are not counted using *tumpuk*. *nog* is optional with a change of meaning.

- (19) *dua’ tumpuk nog gabun*  
 two CL(PILE) DET cloud  
 ‘two clouds’
- (20) *tolu tumpuk nog niug*  
 three CL(PILE) DET coconut  
 ‘three piles of coconuts’

**2.1.9 *likid* ‘CL(COIL)’.** *likid* classifies objects which can be coiled or wound up, such as rope, wire, cord, etc. It can also refer to rolled sheets of paper.

- (21) *dua’ likid nog kolatas*  
 two CL(COIL) DET paper  
 ‘two rolled papers’

**2.1.10 *bulus* ‘CL(LONG, ROLLED)’.** This classifier is used to count rolled objects that have some length, such as bolts of fabric and rolls of paper towel or toilet paper.

- (22) *tolu bulus nog ponopoton*  
 three CL(LONG, ROLLED) DET fabric  
 ‘three rolls (bolts) of fabric’

**2.1.11 *bungkus* ‘CL(BUNDLE)’.** This classifier is used to count objects which can be tied up in a bundle. This includes papers, clothes, tissue, thatch, and leafy or grassy produce such as tobacco, rice, and lemongrass.

- (23) *so bungkus nog kolatas*  
 one CL(BUNDLE) DET paper  
 ‘one bundle of paper’

**2.1.12 *bogbad* ‘CL(TIED)’.** *bogbad* is used to refer to an object which can be tied, such as a sleeping mat. The noun that is being classified does not need to be present.

- (24) *so bogbad*  
 one CL(TIED)  
 ‘one tied thing’

**2.2 MENSURAL CLASSIFIERS.** Nearly all W. Subanon mensural classifiers represent measurements used in barter, except for the few used to count mass nouns; this fits with Aikhenvald’s (2000) description of the use of this type of numeral classifier. Mensural classifiers primarily differ from sortal classifiers in that they tend to be semantically opaque and “since the choice of the mensural classifier is often determined by the temporary state of an object (its quantity, or the arrangement it occurs in) there may be more freedom in choosing a mensural classifier than in choosing a sortal one” (Aikhenvald 2000:115). Due to mensural classifiers being less semantically motivated, I have chosen to represent their glosses in terms of quantity rather than as a category driven by the perceived properties of the object being counted.

Also, unlike W. Subanon sortal classifiers, some mensural classifiers are derived from non-indigenous borrowings. Some, such as *sopi* ‘hand of bananas’, *dopa* ‘distance from fingertips to opposite shoulder’, and *bulig* ‘banana bunch’, are undoubtedly inherited from Proto-Subanen as reconstructed by Lobel (2013). While others, such as *sakuu* ‘sack’ and *baso* ‘cup’, are loanwords from English and Spanish

respectively. This class of classifiers is more open than sortal classifiers. Table 2 lays out all mensural classifiers in W. Subanon that I have documented.

TABLE 2. Western Subanon Classifiers

Mensural Classifier	Gloss	Classified objects
<i>saguk</i>	‘cup’	liquids
<i>basu</i>	‘cup’	liquids
<i>pondut</i>	‘pinch’	salt; pepper; sugar; sand; fine grained substances
<i>pilak</i>	‘peso’	coins which add to a certain value
<i>gantang</i>	‘quart’	rice (uncooked); corn (for planting); beans (for eating)
<i>sakuu</i>	‘sack’	corn (uncooked)
<i>dopa</i>	‘distance from fingertips to opposite shoulder’	fabric; fishing line; rope; cord; wire
<i>linas</i>	‘hanger’	fish; pork
<i>bulig</i>	‘banana bunch’	full bunches of bananas
<i>sopi</i>	‘hand of bananas’	a hand, or layer, of a banana bunch
<i>bul</i>	‘piece of meat’	pork
<i>panun</i>	‘group’	pigs

**2.2.1.1 *saguk* ‘CUP’.** This classifier is interchangeable with *basu* ‘cup’ and is used to measure liquids, particularly when cooking. The difference, however, is that *saguk* also refers to a type of tin dipper that was introduced by the Chinese.

(25) *dua’ saguk tubig*  
 two cup water  
 ‘two cups of water’

**2.2.1.2 *basu* ‘CUP’.** This classifier is borrowed from Spanish *vaso* ‘glass’ and is interchangeable with *saguk*. Like *saguk*, it is also used to measure liquids while cooking. This classifier also has a homophonous nominal form *basu* ‘cup’.

(26) *dua’ basu tubig*  
 two cup water  
 ‘two cups of water’

**2.2.1.3 *pondut* ‘PINCH’.** This classifier is used to measure small quantities of fine grained substances which cannot be counted as a collection of discrete units. In particular, it is used with spices used to season food such as salt, sugar, and pepper. It can also be used with sand.

(27) *tolu pondut masin*  
 three pinch salt  
 ‘three pinches of salt’

**2.2.1.4 *pilak* ‘PESO’.** This classifier is used to quantify a monetary value amount rather than a discrete number of physical objects. It refers specifically to *peso* amounts, which is the currency used in

Mindanao. Its use is similar to how in American English, when counting to a dollar, 10 dimes or four quarters are both one dollar. When used as a nominal, *pilak* means ‘silver’.

- (28) *dua’ pilak oil*  
 two peso oil  
 ‘two pesos worth of oil’

**2.2.1.5 *gantang* ‘QUART’.** *gantang* is equal to roughly one quart. Specifically, this unit of measurement is equal to five cans of Liberty brand condensed milk. It is used to measure out quantities of uncooked rice (any variety), seed corn, and uncooked beans. *nog* is optional and does not increase or decrease specificity by its presence. Despite referring to an exact quantity, as is expected from quantifiers, I have chosen to instead group *gantang* with mensural classifiers due to the highly specific nature of what it is used to measure.

- (29) *dua’ gantang nog pulut*  
 two quart DET uncooked.sticky.rice  
 ‘two quarts of uncooked sticky rice’

- (30) *dua’ gantang pulut*  
 two quarts uncooked.sticky.rice  
 ‘two quarts of uncooked sticky rice’

**2.2.1.6 *sakuu* ‘SACK’.** This classifier is borrowed from English *sack*. It is used with almost exclusively for corn, but may be used with other agricultural products as well.

- (31) *lima sakuu nog ma’is*  
 five sack DET corn  
 ‘five sacks of corn’

**2.2.7 *dopa* ‘DISTANCE FROM FINGERTIPS TO OPPOSITE SHOULDER’.** *dopa* is a unit of measurement roughly equivalent to one meter. It is the distance from the fingertips on one hand to the opposite shoulder. It is used to measure items which are bought by length such as fabric, fishing line, rope, cord, and wire. As it measures a part of a whole, it takes *nog*.

- (32) *tolu dopa nog ponopoton*  
 three dopa DET cloth  
 ‘three *dopa*’s of cloth’

**2.2.1.8 *linas* ‘HANGER’.** This classifier refers to a hanger in the shape of a ring or loop from which one suspends fish or pork. It is not a specific measurement and there can be any amount of meat hung from the ring. It cannot be used with other animal products.

- (33) *tolu linas nog soda’*  
 three hanger DET fish  
 ‘three hangers of fish’

**2.2.1.9 *bulig* ‘BANANA BUNCH’.** This classifier specifically counts whole bunches of bananas before they have been divided.

- (34) *dua’ bulig nog saging*  
 two banana.bunch DET banana  
 ‘two bunches of banana’

**2.2.1.10 *sopi* ‘HAND OF BANANAS’.** This classifier counts a single layer, or hand, of a banana bunch.

- (35) *dua’ sopi’ nog saging*  
 two hand.of.banana DET banana  
 ‘two hands of bananas’

**2.2.1.11 *bul* ‘PIECE OF MEAT’.** *bul* is a classifier that counts pieces of meat, regardless of size. However, it only is used for pork. This may be because pigs are a culturally important domesticated animal for Subanons.

(36) *tolu bul nog babuy*  
 three piece.of.meat DET pig  
 ‘three pieces of pork’

**2.2.1.12 *panun* ‘GROUP’.** This classifier is used to refer to groups or herds of pigs which number 10–100. It is unknown if it is able to refer to herds of animals other than pigs.

(37) *tolu panun babuy u*  
 three group pig 1.POSS  
 ‘My three groups of pigs’

**2.2.2 QUANTIFIERS.** W. Subanon has a large number of what appear to be mensural classifiers that constitute a more open class of lexemes than sortal classifiers. However, it should be noted that because mensural classifiers are used to count quantities of objects, they are often confused with quantifiers. Aikhenvald (2000) gives two criteria for distinguishing classifiers from quantifiers: semantic and pragmatic; and grammatical. Semantically, classifiers “categorize nouns in terms of their shape, size, and animacy; they provide no information as to a quantitative ‘quantity’, while quantifiers “have fewer restrictions than classifiers on the type of noun they can co-occur with” (117). While W. Subanon does not classify counted objects in terms of animacy, it does refer to their size, shape, and use. For example, *dopa* ‘distance from fingertips to opposite shoulder’ is not just a unit of distance, it varies from person to person and is used only to count things that can be rolled, coiled, or wound, such as fishing line, rope, or fabric. Additionally, all of the classifiers listed in table 2 can be used only with a very narrow range of referents.

Grammatically, classifiers and quantifiers differ in terms of the environment they are able to appear in, and what elements of the noun phrase they agree with. Classifiers do not show any agreement with the head noun and can be substituted for the head itself. Quantifiers, on the other hand, are less strongly connected to the head noun than classifiers are, and elements may be able to be inserted between the classifier and the head noun (Aikhenvald 2000:118–120). However, I do not have enough data to investigate this issue, so the distinctions I make between mensural classifier and quantifier are based purely on semantic evidence.

Therefore, with these semantic criteria in mind, W. Subanon *saguk* ‘cup’, *basu* ‘cup’, and *pilak* ‘peso’ are more likely quantifiers than mensural classifiers. This is because they have fewer restrictions on them than other classifiers in the language. For example, *saguk* and *basu* can count amounts of any kind of liquid, whereas other units of measurement, such as *sakuu* ‘sack’, can refer only to measurements of corn. Additionally, *pilak* ‘peso’ can refer to any number of coins totaling a peso and thus is less restricted in use than would be expected from a true mensural classifier.

**3. CLASSIFIERS IN OTHER PHILIPPINE LANGUAGES.** There are only two described Philippine languages which demonstrate the use of classifiers: Cebuano and Northern Subanen. Cebuano has only a single general use sortal classifier, while Northern Subanen has a 13-classifier system which uses both sortal and mensural types. It is possible that other Subanen languages also possess classifier systems, but there are no formal descriptions available for these languages. However, a number of printed materials in other Subanen languages are available in the Summer Institute of Linguistics archives.

**3.1 CEBUANO.** Cebuano is a Bisayan language spoken on the northwestern coast of Mindanao outside of the Zamboanga Peninsula and is an immediate neighbor to the Subanens. In the existing literature, Cebuano has been considered to be the only Philippine language with classifiers. This is due in large part to the long time lack of knowledge about other languages spoken in the Philippines, and Mindanao in particular, until recently.

Jones (1970) asserts that Cebuano’s single classifier is “an innovation” (2); however, cognate data from W. Subanon and N. Subanon (see §3.2) suggests that Cebuano’s single classifier was not a unique innovation. Jones also describes *buok* as a subclass of measure words since both *buok* and Cebuano’s various measure words occur in the same slot after the numeral. It should be noted that the distinction between *buok* and other measure words in Cebuano is extremely fine-grained, but under close scrutiny, it subtly behaves more like a classifier than it does as a measure word.<sup>5</sup> Semantically, *buok* appears to be a classifier, but grammatically, it behaves more like a measure word.

**3.2 NORTHERN SUBANEN** Northern Subanen, a closely related Subanen language spoken in the northern part of the Zamboanga Peninsula northeast of where W. Subanon is spoken, also appears to have classifiers. Daguman (2013:87–88) describes N. Subanen as having three sortal classifiers and 10 mensural classifiers (see table 3). Like W. Subanon, all of the sortal classifiers are indigenous, whereas the mensural classifiers are a mix of indigenous and borrowed lexemes.

**3.3 COMPARISON WITH W. SUBANON** W. Subanon, N. Subanen, and Cebuano all share what appears to be a cognate of the general classifier. The use is similar in these three languages, as it acts as a catchall for nouns that do not fall in the domain of other sortal classifiers. However, in Cebuano and N. Subanen, using the general classifier is non-obligatory. Daguman (2013) notes that sortal classifiers, in general, are optional but tend to be retained in traditional stories, but not everyday speech (155). She also comments that in these traditional stories, the classifier sometimes occurs with an ellipsed noun phrase head<sup>6</sup> and serves to signal what the ellipsed item’s semantic category was (156). This contrasts with W. Subanon; classifiers, both sortal and mensural, are obligatory and cannot be dropped, regardless of the context.<sup>7</sup>

Comparing these three languages side by side (see table 4) also serves to highlight the extreme differences in number of sortal classifiers. As one moves east across Mindanao, the number of classifiers drops. W. Subanon, the westernmost language represented here, has by far the most sortal classifiers with a total of 13. Moving east, we find that N. Subanen has only three non-obligatory sortal classifiers and Cebuano, the easternmost language surveyed here, has just one relatively weak non-obligatory classifier.

TABLE 3. Northern Subanen Classifiers

<u>Sortal Classifier</u> <sup>8</sup>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Classified objects</u>
<i>buuk</i>	‘CL(NON-FLAT)’	general objects not covered by other classifiers
	‘CL(FLAT)’	–
<i>tawan</i>	‘CL(HUMAN)’	people
<u>Indigenous Classifier</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	
<i>dipa</i>	‘arm span’	
<i>daṅaw</i>	‘hand span’	
<i>ktimpa?</i>	‘a small sized basket’	
<i>ginambuṅ</i>	‘a medium sized basket’	
<i>gbābaan</i>	‘basket backpack’	

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to A. Blake for pointing this out to me.

<sup>6</sup> This is not typologically unusual; ellipsing head nouns is a very common discourse strategy.

<sup>7</sup> With the exception of *so bogbad* one CL(tied) ‘one tied thing’ in reference to a sleeping mat, which may be a codified expression rather than an example of grammatically acceptable ellipsis.

<sup>8</sup> Sortal classifier glosses have been minimally adapted from Daguman’s so as to conform with the CL(category) template utilized throughout the rest of this paper.

<u>Non-Indigenous Mensural Classifier</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Source Language</u>
<i>dusinas</i>	‘dozen’	Spanish via Cebuano
<i>miteru</i>	‘metre’	English via Cebuano
<i>kilu</i>	‘kilo’	English via Cebuano
<i>ksakubag</i>	‘sack bag’	Cebuano
<i>ksaku</i>	‘sack’	Cebuano

TABLE 4. Sortal Classifiers in Selected Languages of Mindanao (From East to West)

<u>Cebuano</u>	<u>N. Subanen</u>	<u>W. Subanon</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<i>buok</i>	<i>buuk</i>	<i>buk</i>	‘CL(GENERAL)’
---	<i>laad</i>	<i>lad</i>	‘CL(FLAT)’
---	<i>tawan</i>	<i>kotow</i>	‘CL(HUMAN)’
---	---	<i>balu’</i>	‘CL(LONG, THIN)’
---	---	<i>buk</i>	‘CL(GENERAL)’
---	---	<i>banoy</i>	‘CL(SEGMENT)’
---	---	<i>poti’</i>	‘CL(SHARD)’
---	---	<i>pun</i>	‘CL(NON BRANCHING TREE)’
---	---	<i>tumpuk</i>	‘CL(PILE)’
---	---	<i>likid</i>	‘CL(COILED)’
---	---	<i>bulus</i>	‘CL(LONG, ROLLED)’
---	---	<i>bungkus</i>	‘CL(BUNDLE)’
---	---	<i>bogbad</i>	‘CL(TIED)’

**3.4 OTHER SUBANEN LANGUAGES.** While other Philippine languages are well known to not have classifiers, it is wholly possible that there are yet underdescribed languages that possess some form of classifier system. Central Subanen, another Subanen language of Zamboanga Peninsula, may also possess a classifier system of some sort, as evidenced from native language texts (Anulay and Brichoux 2002).

**4. ORIGIN OF PHILIPPINE CLASSIFIERS.** It is possible that Subanen languages developed classifiers via internal evolution whereby some nouns were grammaticalized and became noun class markers. This would account for the difference in form of the classifier used for humans between W. Subanon and N. Subanen. However, this does not account for the similarities in form of the general classifier across Subanen languages and Cebuano. This leads to the hypothesis that the motivations for the development of classifiers in these languages was external. Aikhenvald points out that “the creation and restructuring of noun categorization often results from language contact” (382), and that this can take the form of direct borrowing or indirect diffusion. Sortal classifiers are more telling than mensural classifiers in this puzzle, as they constitute a less open class of lexemes.

**4.1 INHERITANCE OR BORROWING?** *buok/buuk/buk* ‘CL(GENERAL)’ is the only cognate across all languages surveyed here. This raises the question of whether or not this similarity is the result of shared inheritance, areal contact or borrowing from a non-Philippine language. Subanen languages are closely related, making inheritance a possible source for *buk*, but its presence in neighboring Cebuano and no other known languages of Mindanao suggests that the single classifier in Cebuano may have been the result of areal diffusion from innovative Proto-Subanens.

However, not all the classifiers in common between N. Subanen and W. Subanon are cognate. W. Subanon. *lad* and N. Subanen. *laad* ‘CL(FLAT)’ are cognate, but the perhaps more salient classifier, ‘CL(HUMAN)’, is conspicuously different between the two languages. N. Subanen *dawan* and W. Subanon *gotow*, while sharing function, do not share form. If this was the result of grammatical innovation from a semantic element in the proto-language, it would be expected that these terms would be cognate. Lobel’s (2013) reconstruction of Proto-Subanen reconstructs ‘human’ as *\*g-ətaw*, which is reflected in W. Subanon as *gotow*, the same form as the classifier, but in N. Subanen as *gətaw*. This difference is telling, and points away from positing that Proto-Subanen had developed a classifier system. This suggests instead that classifiers were the result of either later, independent innovations that spread through the peninsula, or originated from a language outside the Philippines.

**4.1.1 CONTACT WITH MALAY MUSLIMS.** Illuminating evidence here comes from W. Subanon which contains a large number of borrowed non-basic vocabulary from Malay; W. Subanon days of the week and some discourse markers appear to be borrowed from Malay (see table 5) suggesting that there was a period of intense contact between the two languages. Hardly any basic vocabulary was borrowed from Malay. Further evidence of contact with Malay is the presence of the Muslim cousins of the W. Subanons, the Kalibugan Subanons. Presumably they had had contact with the Brunei Malays, a people practicing Sunni Islam in northern Borneo who once controlled territory that included the Sulu Archipelago. This archipelago creates a bridge between the northeastern part of Borneo and the Zamboanga Peninsula that allowed Malays to move into the Philippines, possibly in the 15th century when the Muslim Sultanate of Sulu controlled much of the territory in the region (McAmis 2002). Islam was well received in the Philippines and “its rapid success there, more sweeping than in Borneo itself, is attested in Spanish history, and is still evident to this day” (Harrison 1956:44).

TABLE 5. Malay borrowings in W. Subanon

<u>W. Subanon</u>	<u>Malay</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<i>dzhahad</i>	<i>ahad</i>	‘Sunday’
<i>gisnin</i>	<i>isnin</i>	‘Monday’

<u>W. Subanon</u>	<u>Malay</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
<i>solasa</i>	<i>selasa</i>	'Tuesday'
<i>goloba'a</i>	<i>rabu</i>	'Wednesday'
<i>hamis</i>	<i>khamis</i>	'Thursday'
<i>dzhoma'at</i>	<i>jumaat</i>	'Friday'
<i>sabtu'</i>	<i>sabtu</i>	'Saturday'
<i>bila</i>	<i>bila</i>	'if'
<i>dadi</i>	<i>jadi</i>	'so, therefore'

Some Philippine classifiers appear to be the result of direct borrowing, while others seem to be the result of indirect diffusion. *buok/buuk/buk* 'CL(GENERAL)' appears to be the only directly borrowed Malay classifier, while the rest are the result of indirect diffusion which results in similar classifier categories, but different lexical bases. Malay *buah* 'CL(GENERAL)' has undergone lenition of \*/q/ > h (Adelaar 1993), but the stop is maintained in Subanen languages and Cebuano.

Interestingly, as one moves further east through the Zamboanga Peninsula and into Cebuano-speaking country, classifiers become scarcer and less obligatory. This aligns with what is known about contact with the Brunei Malay, and less intense contact in the eastern part of Mindanao resulted, unsurprisingly, in increasingly less established and robust classifier systems.

**5. CONCLUSION.** Using Aikhenvald's (2000) and Allan's (1977) criteria for what makes a language a classifier language, it has been shown that Western Subanon has a rich system of both sortal and mensural classifiers. Characteristics of classifiers in W. Subanon are also what is typologically expected from languages of this part of the world (Oh 2014). This finding is significant, as previously Philippine languages, with the exception of a single example in Cebuano, were thought to not have true classifier systems like many other related languages in mainland Southeast Asia and Oceania.

Furthermore, it appears as though Philippine classifiers may not be the result of genetic inheritance and are instead the product of diffusion and borrowing from Islamic Brunei Malay now spoken in Brunei on the island of Borneo. This appears to result in a general pattern across Mindanao of classifier systems becoming less robust as one moves east into regions and language groups which had less prolonged or less intense contact with Brunei Malay. This also raises additional questions as to the presence of classifiers in those still underdescribed languages of Mindanao, particularly other Subanen languages spoken in Zamboanga Peninsula, that are not represented in this survey. However, the origin of Subanon classifiers needs further research, and investigation into the existence of other classifier systems in Mindanao will likely illuminate whether or not the data presented here are borrowings or inheritance.

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