# Nominal classification in Assamese
# An analysis of function

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The main purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the numeral classifier (sortal classifier) system in Assamese (Indo-Aryan) via the framework of functional typology (Contini-Morava and Kilarski, 2013), answering the call of the workshop in two approaches: First of all, it fills the gap of nominal classification studies in Asian languages, since numeral classifiers have been attested in Assamese from the first half of the fourteenth century but the existing literature only provides a general description and a limited amount of recent data (Kakati, 1941; Goswani, 1968; Barz and Diller, 1985). Second, being located at the border of Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan groups, which are typically associated with grammatical genders and numeral classifiers, Assamese represents an insightful example of exceptional case as an Indo-European language relying on numeral classifiers rather than grammatical genders to fulfill the functions of nominal classification.

Within this paper, we first provide a full description of the numeral classifier system in Assamese, which categorizes nouns according to the following features: human nouns apply different classifiers following their biological gender, e.g. *sari- n manuh* 'four-CL(male human) human' meaning *four men*, and *sari- ni manuh* 'four-CL(female human) human' meaning *four women*. Moreover, honorific classifiers are also used to differentiate between various social status, e.g. the classifier - *na* is used with respectable members of the society, as in *sari- na puruhit* 'four-CL(male honorific) priest' meaning *four priests*. On the other hand, non-human nouns (including non-human animates) are classified via their shape, size, mass and collectivity, e.g. *sari-dal hap* 'four-CL(long and round) snake' or *sari-kh n tebul* 'four-CL(flat) table', among others.

Second, we apply functional typology and explain how the numeral classifier system in Assamese fulfills various lexical and discourse functions, such as differentiating referents, ascribing properties, anaphora, deixis, among others. As a sample for differentiating referents, different numeral classifiers on the same noun may point to different referent, e.g. *s* 'tree' takes two different classifiers *-dal* 'CL(long and round) and - *upa* 'CL(bushy plant)'. *s-dal* and *s- upa* both mean 'the tree' but the first implies that the tree being referred to is a tall one without any branches, such as an areca-nut tree, whereas the second refers to a tree with numerous branches and lots of leaves. Another example for ascribing properties would be the fact that humans normally take humans classifier, as in *sari- n manuh* 'four-CL(male human) human'. However, the general classifier *-tu* normally restricted to non-human animates and inanimate nouns may be used on male humans if the referent is not of a certain social status, e.g. *pogola sari-ta* 'madman four-CL (general)' meaning *the four madmen*.

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