

On the count/mass distinction in Kaqchikel

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The literature on the count-mass distinction in Mayan languages has described languages that display numeral classifiers in constructions with count and mass nouns (Ch'ol [Bale and Coon 2014, Little et al. 2022]; Itzaj [Hofling 2000]; Yucatec [Lucy 1996]). In this paper we show that Kaqchikel, a Mayan language of the K'ichean branch, lacks numeral classifiers. We discuss the distribution of count and mass nouns in constructions with numerals and quantifiers while showing how this language differs from numeral classifier languages in the Mayan family, such as Itzaj.

Numerals: Count nouns can be directly combined with numerals (1), while mass nouns require a counting/measuring unit in constructions with numerals (2). There are no classifiers in Kaqchikel, while in Itzaj (Hofling 2000) numeral classifiers are required (3/4):

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| <p>(1) Wo'o' ixoq-(i')
 five woman(-PL)
 'Five women' (Kaqchikel)</p> | <p>(2) Jun xara ya'
 one cup water
 'One cup of water.' (Kaqchikel)</p> |
| <p>(3) ka'-tuul aj-winik-(oo')
 two-NCL MASC-man-PL
 'two men' (Itzaj)</p> | <p>(4) ka'-b'eel taab-(oo')
 two-NCL salt-PL
 'two portions of salt' (Itzaj)</p> |

Quantifiers: In Kaqchikel, the same quantifiers may occur with all nouns, but different interpretations are triggered. With count nouns, the quantifiers *k'iy* and *b'a'* trigger a count/cardinal interpretation ('many'/'few' (6)), while with mass nouns they trigger a mass/volume interpretation ('much'/'little'(7)).

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| <p>(6) E-k'o k'iy/b'a'
 3PL-EXST QUANT+/QUANT-
 'There are many/few children at the school.' (Kaqchikel)</p> | <p>ak'wal-a' pa tijob'al
 child-PL in school</p> |
| <p>(7) K'o k'iy/b'a'ok
 EXST QUANT+/QUANT-
 'There is a lot of/little water in the canoe.' (Kaqchikel)</p> | <p>ya' pa juku'
 water in canoe</p> |

We observed the same pattern in Itzaj. For example, *tz'eeek* 'few/little' allows a count interpretation with count nouns ('few') (8) and a volume interpretation with mass nouns ('little') (9). In such constructions, classifiers are not required (they are restricted to constructions with numerals):

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| <p>(8) Yan tz'eeek ix-aak ti alka ja'
 EXST little FEM-turtle in run water
 'There are few turtles in the river.' (Itzaj)</p> | |
| <p>(9) Yan tz'eeek ja' ich chem.
 EXST little water in canoe
 'There is a little water in the canoe.' (Itzaj)</p> | |

Typology of count/mass nouns: Chierchia (2021) describes three types of languages: languages where only count nouns can be directly combined with numerals (I); languages where all nouns required a classifier in constructions with numerals (II); languages where all nouns can be directly combined with numerals (III). While numeral classifier languages such as Itzaj are better analyzed as a language of Type II, Kaqchikel is better analyzed as a language of Type I. Despite being fundamentally different in constructions with numerals, we have seen that these languages share other features (e.g., distribution and interpretation of quantifiers). Therefore, this work contributes to an expanded description of the count/mass distinction in Kaqchikel, while at the same time expanding our understanding of how this phenomenon varies across Mayan languages from different branches.

References

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