

“Rethinking the semantics of classifiers”

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Description

Most studies on classifiers focus on how to use formal criteria to distinguish between different morphosyntactic subtypes based on the contexts in which classifiers appear. Commonly distinguished types include numeral classifiers, as well as noun classifiers, possessive classifiers, verbal classifiers, deictic classifiers and locative classifiers (Aikhenvald 2000). In contrast, relatively little attention has been devoted to the nature of semantic categorization. Examples of such fundamental issues include the cross-linguistic distribution of semantic values in relation to perception and cognition (Allan 1977; Kemmerer 2019); implicational relations among semantic values (Croft 1994); preferred semantics in classifier types (Aikhenvald 2000; Grinevald 2000); semantic and discourse functions of classifiers (Contini-Morava and Kilarski 2013); as well the relative contribution of nouns vs. classifiers to reference (Lucy 2000; Senft 2000). However, the nature of these preferences or uses has never been demonstrated quantitatively, thus limiting their explanatory value.

This workshop thus aims to explore two related topics:

- 1) Given a particular noun, how does the grammar determine which classifier to assign to it? In other words, what are the semantic underpinnings of noun-classifier collocations?
- 2) How can we determine the semantic commonalities of nouns that collocate with the same classifier, such that these can be used as a semantic label for a given classifier?

Questions to be addressed include but are not limited to:

- What are the best methodologies to describe and determine classifier semantics?
- Currently used semantic labels for classifiers usually rely on a few randomly sampled nouns that commonly occur with that classifier. How can we use corpus data to verify, refine or challenge these labels?
- How do classifiers specify the characteristics of nouns with which they combine? What are the strengths and weaknesses of previously suggested analyses which hold that classifiers introduce an assertion, a presupposition, or a conventional implicature to restrict the range of nouns they combine with?
- Do classifiers reflect, bring to focus or foreground semantic characteristics already inherent in nouns, or do they add or impose meaning components which are not necessarily part of the noun's meaning?
- What can we learn from cases where the semantic constraints normally placed on nouns by classifiers are violated? Under what circumstances do these violations occur, and how do they contribute to expressions of attitudes, honorification, etc.?
- Are there any correlations between morphosyntactic classifier type and classifier semantics?

Improving our present state of knowledge regarding theoretical and methodological aspects of classifier semantics is important because it can form a basis of cross-linguistic comparative studies, it is a prerequisite for the construction of databases of classifier languages, and it is also critical for the study of cognitive correlates of nominal classification and linguistic categorization in general.

Submission guidelines: https://wa.amu.edu.pl/plm/2025/Abstract_submission

Deadline: 30 March 2025

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