

A Note on Numerals and Classifiers in Rongga

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This paper presents a preliminary report on the syntax and semantics of the numeral phrase (NUMP) in Rongga (an Austronesian language of Central-Malayo Polynesian, Flores, Indonesia, around 4000 speakers). A NUMP is part of a noun phrase (NP) which consists of a NUM expression and a classifier (CLASS):

- (1) a. NP → NUMP, N
b. NUMP → {sa CLASS
CLASS NUM}

Classifiers in Rongga have sortal and mensural functions: to individuate things in terms of their kind and quantity (cf. the classification in Lyons 1986:460-466). At the broadest level, sortal classifiers in Rongga encapsulate the natural classifications of human vs. non-human and 'living/animate' vs. 'inanimate'. Classifiers for 'living/alive' thing are *mori/ata* for god/human, *eko* or *esa* for animals and *pu'u* for living plants. (*Fata* is used for a dead plant.) Inanimate things are classified in terms of their physical attributes: *li'e* for round-like or cube-like objects, *toko* for round and long objects, *mbi'i* for flat strong (not easily bent) objects, *nolo* for flat but easily bent and flexible objects. A classifier almost always appears with a numeral, and therefore gets its mensural function from its combination with the numeral, e.g. *sa-mori* 'one-person'.

The paper also discusses the current state of Rongga as an endangered language: how the native numeral system in Rongga has been replaced by an Indonesian-like system and how young speakers of Rongga no longer have good command of the numeral and classifier systems.

REFERENCES

Lyons, John. 1986. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.