A Note on Numerals and Classifiers in Rongga

I Wayan Arka
Australian National University

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also discusses the current state of Rongga as an endangered language: how the native numeral system in Rongga has been replaced by an Indonesian-like system and how young speakers of Rongga no longer have good command of the numeral and classifier systems.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