
The Morpho-Syntax of Numeral Systems in South-Asian Languages

Kumari Mamta

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

kumari_mamta@eva.mpg.de

This paper explores the linguistic questions regarding numeral systems and other quantifying numeral expressions in the South Asian region, via extensive fieldwork on the numeral and other quantifying systems of 77 major/minor South Asian languages belonging to six language families – Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic, Indo-Aryan, Tai-Kadai and Great Andamanese. The primary objective of this typological exercise is to develop a framework by which the core morphological and syntactic properties of numeral systems would be formally described, so that inferences about the role that membership of language families, sprachbunds, and language contact and cultural convergence in influencing the nature and form of numeral systems could be made. The paper identifies several pretty robust properties that cluster together to clearly demarcate some language families, as well as reliable traits that indicate different substrata of languages development. Table 1 below summarises the major parameters that this work has found in distinctive for language families in *SAND (South-Asian Numeral Database)*.

Parameter	Value	Drav.	AA	TB	IA	TK
Subtractive morphology		+	-	-	+	-
Subtractive morphology in atoms		-	+	-	+	-
Order in complex numerals	A-B	-	-	-	+	-
	B-A	+	+	+	-	+
	With CM	-	-	+	-	-
Switch in running numerals		+	+	+	-	+
Idiosyncratic formation		+	-	+	+	+
PL in HMN		-	-	-	+	-
Word order in NP	[Num N]	+	+	+	+	-
	[N Num]	-	-	+	-	+
	[Num CL N]	-	+	-	+	-
	[CL Num N]	-	-	+	-	-
Plurality on N	Marked	+	+	-	+	-
	Unmarked	+	-	+	-	+

Table 1: Prominent parameters typologising SAND language families

This paper also explores some rare morphological processes involved in numeral systems like subtractive morphology, plurality in higher multiplicative numerals, and overcounting. In conclusion, it would not be unfair to say that numeral systems encode many fine intricacies of linguistic information, but they are also extraordinarily given to socially expedited elaboration, via coinage and/or borrowing. This leads to a greater tendency for numeral systems to be mixed and/or irregular, as elaboration of an existing limited system can take place from using the resources provided by another (possibly dominant) system available to a language.