

A Comparison of Classifiers in Standard-Thai & Tai-Phake

Wilaisak Kingkham

1. Introduction

Tai-Phake is a minority language spoken in ten villages - Nam-Phake, Tipam-Phake, Bor-Phake, Muanglang, Ningkam, Phaneng, Manmo, Nonglai, Long and Lungkung – in Assam, India. The Indian Census Report of 1971 gives 1,800 as the number of speakers of this language. The main data for this analysis have been collected from the native speakers of both languages. The analysis of Tai-Phake presented here is based on the data collected in two field-trips – one in April 1990 and the other in October 1990 – in which I contacted twenty informants of different sex, age, and educational background in Nam-Phake and Tipam-Phake. After the first draft of my analysis I managed to bring two informants from Nam-Phake in March 1991 and had extensive interviews and talks with them .

Standard-Thai is the official or National language of Thailand, and spoken in the central region of Thailand including Bangkok, the capital, and the surrounding provinces.

Dr.Wilaisak Kingkham , Instructor, Dept. of the Thai Language
ดร.วีไลศักดิ์ กิ่งคำ อาจารย์ ภาควิชาภาษาไทย

LIST OF IMPORTANT SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

1. List of symbols

'	= Phonemic Transcription
()	= Optional
—→	= Rewritten as
-	= All compound words
< >	= Meaning components
↗	= Mid-to-rising tone
\	= Low tone
/	= High tone
^	= Falling tone
∨	= Rising tone
+	= Presence of the component
-	= Absence of the component

Note : Mid tone is unmarked

2. Abbreviations

Cl.	= Classifiers
ST	= Standard-Thai
TP	= Tai-Phake

2. Classifiers

A classifier is either preceded by a plural numeral or followed by a singular numeral or demonstrative in both varieties.

3. Classifier Types

The classifiers in both varieties are of two types as follows:

1. Semantically restricted classifiers
2. Lexically restricted classifiers

3.1 Semantically Restricted Classifiers for TP & ST

Semantically restricted classifiers are those where the nouns that can occur with them share some semantic features. Some features will be listed at the beginning of each classifier. These features sometimes look like primitive semantic markers ; sometimes, however, they look like semantic distinguishes (Katz 1972).

(i)	TP /ku᷑/	corresponding ST /khu᷑:/
	<+ pair><+ wearing>	<pair> <+wearing>

Comparison

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

(ii)	TP /khon/ or /k᷑/	corresponding ST /khon/
	<+ human>	<+ human>

Comparison

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

2) The TP classifiers /khon/ or /k᷑/ are synonymous.

3) The classifier is not used with the words /càwmun/(TP), /phrá᷑? phíksù/ (ST) **Buddhist monk** and /càwsá:n/(TP), /sa᷑:mmáne:n/(ST) **novice** as these words have special classifiers /pá:/ in TP, and /rú:p/ in ST.

(iii)	TP /t᷑n/	corresponding ST /t᷑n/
	<+vegetation>	<+vegetation>

Note:

1) This classifier does not go with /máy-sá:n/ (TP), /máy-phày/(ST) **bamboo tree** though the words indicate a tree. The words take a special classifier /lam/ in both varieties.

(iv)	TP /tó/	corresponding ST /tua/
	<+ animate>	<+animate><+furniture><+toys>

<+garments><+safety-pins>

Note:

1) In TP the letters in the writing system have names of animals. Example K is a letter for the sound /k/ and /k᷑/ means **hen** . Therefore by extension /tó/ is used for letters in the Tai-Phake script as well as the word /lìk/ which means a list of letters.

2) This classifier does not go with the noun /chá:n/ **elephant** in ST, which has

a special classifier /chuak/, whereas in TP, it occurs.

3) The ST classifier /tua/ has four different sets of features.

(v)	TP /ka:n/	corresponding ST /ka:n/
	<- animate><+ wooden>	<-animate><+wooden>
	<+ small> <+ short>	<+small> <+short>

Note:

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

(vi)	TP /kɔ:n/	corresponding ST /kɔ:n/
	<-animate><+soil><+shape>	<-animate><+soil><+shape>

Note:

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

(vii)	TP /mét/	corresponding ST /mét/
	<-animate><+small><+round>	<-animate><+small><+round>
	<+mass> <+detachable>	<+mass> <+ detachable>

Note:

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

(viii)	TP /kip/	corresponding ST /chin/
	<-vegetation><+eatable>	<-vegetation><+eatable><+part>
	<+ part>	<+ instrument>

Comparison

- 1) This classifier can be used for eatables such as /phönlámáy/ fruit /khàñömpaŋ/ bread in ST, but not in TP.
- 2) This classifier can be used for instruments such as /khrüan̪-mu:/ tool in ST only, whereas it takes other classifier in TP.
- 3) The ST classifier /chin/ has one different set of feature.

(ix)	TP /lán/	corresponding ST /lán/
	<+building><+abode,	<+building><+ abode, resting
	resting place for	place for human beings>
	human beings>	

Note:

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

(x)	TP /phǎn/	corresponding ST /phǎ:n/
	<+cloth>	<+cloth>

Comparison

1) This classifier can go with the noun /phǎn-lǐk/ **book** in TP, but not in ST, the word /phǎn-lǐk/ originally meant a piece of cloth on which sacred texts were written. Therefore the classifier /phǎn/ was used with it.

2) This classifier cannot go with nouns /ka:nk̥e:n/ **trousers** and /sǔa/ **coat** in ST which have a special classifier /tua/, whereas it can go with those nouns in TP.

(xi)	TP /kh᷑:/	corresponding ST /kh᷑:/
	<+ joint>	<+ joint>
	<+ set or sequence	<+ set or sequence of members>
	of members>	

Comparison

1) This classifier cannot go with the nouns /nítha:n/ **tale** and /phle:n/ **song** in ST

2) The classifier /kh᷑ / (TP), /kh᷑:/ (ST) is used for parts of body-parts that have joints – and also for a set of sentences, answers etc. It shows how these sets are perceived as a thing with joints.

(xii)	TP /s᷑n/	corresponding ST /s᷑n/
	<-animate><+length><+string>	<-animate><+length><+string>

Comparison

This classifier cannot go with the noun /thà?n᷑n/ **road** in ST, which has a special classifier /s᷑:y/ whereas it can do so in TP.

(xiii)	TP /s᷑:y/	corresponding ST /s᷑:y/
	<-animate><+flow>	<-animate><+direction>
	<+liquid><+direction>	<+extension><+length>

Comparison

1) In TP the nouns that go with /s᷑:y/ seem to be items that flow. In ST that is not the case. But a road goes on and like a river. Therefore the semantic features for /s᷑:y/ are different.

(xiv)	TP /law/ <+artifact><+hollow> <+round><+short>	corresponding ST /law/ <+artifact><+hollow> <+round> <+short>
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Comparison

1) This classifier does not go with the noun /pu:n/ **gun** in ST which has a special classifier /krà?bò:k/ whereas it can do so in TP.

(xv)	TP /lém/ <+artifact> <+sharp, pointed edge>	corresponding ST /lém/ <+artifact> <+ flat> <+ sharp, pointed edge>
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Comparison

1) The feature of this classifier /lém/ in ST, has one different set.

2) This classifier does not go with the nouns /lèññó/ **cart** in TP and /rua/ **boat** in ST.

(xvi)	TP /lam/ <-animate> <+ length> <+height><+vertical><+straight>	corresponding ST /lam/ <-animate><+ length>
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Comparison

1) The TP classifier /lam/ has three different sets of features.

(xvii)	TP /kót/ <+ threadlike><+wound>	corresponding ST /khò:t/ <+threadlike><+wound>
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Note:

1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.

2) This classifier is used with threadlike substance that is rolled up. When it is not rolled up the noun takes another classifier. For example, /máy/ (TP,ST) **thread** takes the classifier /sèn/ (TP), and /sén/ (ST) when it is not rolled up, /máy/ with /kót/ (TP) or /khò:t/ (ST) indicates the rolled up state of /máy/. The features listed above are not the features of nouns; they are assigned by the classifier.

(xviii)	TP /hò:/ <+packet><+bundle>	corresponding ST /hò:/ <+packet><+bundle>
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Note:

- 1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.
- 2) Any nouns indicating items that can be put into a bundle or packet—big or small—can go with this classifier.
- 3) The classifier indicates a bundle.

(xix) TP /phɛ̄n/	corresponding ST /phɛ̄:n/
<-animate><+ plank>	<-animate><+plank>

Note:

- 1) Any nouns that indicate substance which can be in the form of a plank can occur with this classifier.
- 2) This classifier is used also as a noun in compounds such as /phɛ̄n-máy/ (TP) /phɛ̄:n-máy/ (ST) **wooden plank** etc.
- 3) This classifier does not go with the nouns /cê/ **paper** and /há:n/ **picture** in TP, which have special classifiers /má:n/ for /cê/ and /?án/ for /há:n/

(xx) TP /kɔ̄/	corresponding ST /kɔ:/
<+vegetation>	<+vegetation>
<+cluster, group>	<+ cluster,group>

Note:

- 1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.
- 2) The classifier can go with any plants that grow in a bunch. The classifier indicates a bunch.

(xxi) TP /hɔ̄y/	corresponding ST /phuani/
<+ chain>	<+ chain>

Note:

- 1) Nouns indicating items that can be put into a chain occur with this classifier. This classifier indicates the state of items in a chain. In shops one can find fish or meat-balls put into a string making a chain.
- 2) This classifier does not occur with the noun /sɔ/ **key** in TP, which has a special classifier /yǔm/.

(xxii) TP /muk̄/	corresponding ST /klum/
<+ human><+ group>	<+human><+group>

Note:

This classifier is the same in both varieties.

xxiii) TP /phan/	corresponding ST /phà:w/
<+ community>	<+ community>

Note:

- 1) This classifier is the same in both varieties.
- 2) The community may be identified by race, religion, or geographical area.

(xxiv) TP /phók/	corresponding ST /fú:n/
<+ animate><+ group>	<+ animate><+ group>

Note:

- 1) This classifier indicates the group of animals.
- 2) This classifier cannot go with the noun /chá:n/ **elephant** in ST, which has a special classifier /khló:n/ whereas it can do so in TP.

(xxv) TP /lú/	corresponding ST /dɔ:k/
<-animate><+ flower>	<- animate><+ flower>

Note:

- 1) The features are the same in both varieties.
- 2) Mushroom is seen as a flower.
- 3) This classifier cannot go with the noun /da:w/ **star** in ST, which has a special classifier /duan'/.

(xxvi) TP /pâ:/	corresponding ST /khâ:n/
<+ parts of body>	<+ parts of body>
<+ occurring in pairs>	<+ occurring in pairs>

Note:

- 1) The features are the same in both varieties.
- 2) The corner is perceived as a pair of wall.

(xxvii) TP /thúp/	corresponding ST /klɔ:n/
<+ container><+ big size>	<+ container><+ big size>

Note:

- 1) The features are the same in both varieties.
- 2) Any items that can be wrapped in a cover or can go into a box take this classifier.

The number of nouns therefore is not restricted.

3) /thúp/ or /klɔ̄n/ also means **box**.

(xxviii) TP /t̄i/	corresponding ST /th̄i:/
<+ plane surface>	<+ plane surface>
<+ ground>	<+ ground>

Note:

This classifier is the same in both varieties.

(xxix) TP /?án/	corresponding ST /?an/
<-animate><+furniture>	<-animate><+small devices>
<+ instrument><+ major parts of a construction>	<+ better result>

Note:

- 1) The TP classifier /?án/ has three different sets of features.
- 2) This classifier has a wide range of nouns that occur with it in TP whereas it occurs a few nouns in ST.

3.1.1 Additional Semantically Restricted Classifier in TP

(xxx) TP /h̄óy/
<-animate> <+ container> <+ horizontal>
<+round> <+ moveable>

Note:

- 1) This classifier does not occur in ST.
- 2) This classifier has a wide range of nouns that occur with it.
- 3) The features listed therefore need not be present in all nouns. They, however, help in distinguishing nouns from nouns that do not take /h̄óy/.
- 4) /h̄óy/ occurs with all sorts of fruit. It seems that both /t̄á:/ eye and /kháy/ egg are perceived as fruits.

3.1.2 Additional Semantically Restricted Classifiers in ST

(xxxii)	ST /khan/
	<-animate><+ holder><+ shape, moveable>
(xxxiii)	ST /duan̄/

		<-animate><+ brightness>
(xxxiii)	ST /pà:k/	
		<-animate><+ catcher><+ spreading>
(xxxiv)	ST /ba:n/	
		<- animate><+ frame>
(xxxv)	ST /bay/	
		<-animate><+ container>
(xxxvi)	ST /húa/	
		<+ vegetation><+ food stem><+ underground>
(xxxvii)	ST /ton/	
		<+ supernatural powers><+ supernatural>
(xxxviii)	ST /chà?bàp/	
		<+ document><± printed>
(xxxix)	ST /khráan/	
		<+ gadget>
(xxxx)	ST /muán/	
		<+ threadlike>
		<+ wound>

Note:

This classifier is used with threadlike substance that is rolled up.

(xxxxi)	ST /ruān/	
		<+ verbal art-form>
(xxxxii)	ST /?on/	
		<+ sacred><+ belonging to Buddha or king>

4. Lexically Restricted Classifiers for TP & ST

Lexically restricted classifiers occur with a limited number of nouns in both the varieties. The nouns form closed systems.

(i)	TP	ST
	/kám/	/kham/

This classifier occurs only with /kha:m/ (TP) - /kham/ (ST) word.

(ii)	TP /cūn/	ST /tray/
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This classifier occurs only with the noun /sāñka:n/ (TP) /phā:tray/ (ST) **monk's dresses** when one wants to indicate a set of monk's dresses.

The ST classifier /tray/ can become a qualifying noun + noun. That is, /tray/ can function both as a classifier as well as the first noun of a compound noun phrase whereas the TP classifier/cun/ does not occur.

(iii)	TP /pā:/	ST /rū:p/
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This classifier occurs with two nouns only /cāwmun/ (TP)/phra phiksù/ (ST) **Buddhist monk** and /cāwsā:n/ (TP), /sā:mmáne:n/ (ST) **Buddhist novice**.

(iv)	TP /mák/	ST /khān/
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This classifier occurs only with the noun /hōklāy/ (TP),/banday/ (ST) **staricase-steps**.

(v)	TP /niw/	ST /niw/
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This classifier occurs only with the nouns /niw-mu/ (TP),/niw-mu:/ (ST) **finger** and /niw-tín/ (TP),/niw-tháw/ (ST) **toe**.

(vi)	TP /nòn/	ST /dūn/
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This classifier occurs only with the noun /phun/ (TP), /fu:n/ (ST) **fire-wood**.

(vii)	TP /wí/	ST /wí:/
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This classifier occurs only with the noun /kōy/ (TP),/kluay/ (ST) **banana** when one wants to indicate a bunch of banana.

(viii)	TP /lúk/	ST /lú:k/
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This classifier occurs only with the nouns /nɔy/ (TP),/phu:kháw/ (ST) **mountain**, /fútbɔ:n/ (ST) **ball** and /phönlámáy/ **fruit**.

(ix)	TP /s̪i/	ST /s̪i:/
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This classifier occurs with the noun /kh̪èw/ in TP, whereas in ST with the two nouns as /fan/ **tooth** and /liwrot-càkkàya:n/ **bicycle's spoke**.

(x)	TP /n̪út/	ST /muān/
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This classifier occurs with the noun /silik/(TP),/buri:/ (ST) **cigarette**.

(xi)	TP /h̪a:p/	ST /h̪a:p/
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This classifier is used with /muān/ **pitcher, basket** only when pitchers are tied to the two ends of a bamboo in order to carry them on one's shoulder in TP.

Note:

This classifier is homonimous with a verb in both varieties.

4.1 Additional Lexically Restricted Classifiers in TP

(xii)	TP /t̪ɛ n̪/
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This classifier occurs only with the noun /s̪aw/ **post, pillar** and takes place only in TP, whereas in ST takes another classifier which is a semantically restricted classifier /t̪on/.

(xiii)	TP /má:n̪/
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This classifier occurs only with two words /c̪é/ **paper** and /mɔ-máy/ **leaf** in TP, in ST the classifier for /bay-máy/ **leaf** is a semantically restricted classifier/bay/.

(xiv)	TP /mɔ/
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This classifier occurs only with the noun /ph̪á:/ **big knife** in TP and it corresponds with the /lém/ which is a semantically restricted classifier in ST.

(xv)	TP /s̪ú/
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This classifier occurs only with two nouns /tha:t/ **pagoda** and /càw-phláʔ/ **Buddha-statue**.

(xvi) TP
/lǎ:n/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /còn/ **umbrella**.

(xvii) TP
/yǚm/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /sɔ/ **key** when one wants to indicate a bundle of keys, whereas in ST it takes another classifier that is /phuan/.

4.2 Additional Lexically Restricted Classifiers in ST

(xviii) ST
/chák/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /chá:n/ **elephant** and compares /tō/ (TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with /chák/.

(xix) ST
/rean/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /na:liʔka/ **watch**. Compare /hóy/ (TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xx) ST
/pá:n/

This classifier occurs with the two nouns only /lúay/ **saw** and /tɔ:k/ **strip of bamboo for wearing**. Compare /ʔán/ (TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxi) ST
/khàʔbuan/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /rotfay/ **train**. Compare /ʔán/ (TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxii) /thɛ̄n/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /dinsɔ:/ **pencil**. Compare /?án/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxiii) /khlɔ:ñ/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /chá:ñ/ **elephant** when one wants to indicate a group of elephants. Compare /phók/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxiv) /fɔ:ñ/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /khà:/ **egg**. Compare /hóy/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxv) /dâ:m/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /pà:kka:/ **pen**. Compare /?án/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxvi) /wɔ:n/

This classifier occurs only with the nouns /wɔ:n/ **ring** and /kamlay/ **bangle**. Compare /hóy/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxvii) /krà?bɔ:k/

This classifier occurs only with the nouns /khâ:włá:m/ **bamboo rice** and /pu:n/ **gun**. Compare /law/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxviii) /kîn/

This classifier occurs only with the nouns /nâ:chá:ñ/ **ivory** and /kîn-máy/ **a branch of tree**. Compare /?án/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier and this classifier shows the branches or twigs of tree and ivory which divides from tusk.

(xxix) /khɔ:ñ/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /sán/ **conch**.

(xxx) /fɔ:n/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /mát-yâ:/ **bunch of grass**. Compare /phók/(TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxxi) /klàk/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /klò n̥-máy-khí:t-fay/ **match-box**. Compare /phák/ (TP) which is semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

(xxxii) /tháw/

This classifier occurs only with the noun /pínto:/ **tiffin**. Compare /hóy/ (TP) which is a semantically restricted classifier with this classifier.

Occurrence

The position of the classifier in noun-phrases in both varieties is the same and the restrictions on the occurrence of classifiers are also almost the same. The comparison shows that Standard-Thai has a larger number of classifiers than Tai-Phake. The correspondences and the erosion of subtle distinction marking classifiers in Tai-Phake are striking. Many additional classifiers in Standard-Thai that do not occur in Tai-Phake and both have similar functions. That is the base language perception in both varieties is the same.

Table 1

Classifier type	TP	ST
Semantically restricted classifiers	/kū/	/kū:/
	/k᷑/	/k᷑:/
	/k᷑t/	/kh᷑:t/
	/k᷑:n/	/k᷑:n/
	/khon/	/khon/
	/k᷑n/	/k᷑:n/
	/kh᷑/	/kh᷑:/
	/ton/	/tōn/
	/tó/	/tua/
	/t᷑/	/th᷑:/
	/phan/	/ph᷑w/
	/ph᷑n/	/ph᷑:n/
	/ph᷑n/	/ph᷑:n/
	/l᷑m/	/l᷑m/
	/lam/	/lam/
	/law/	/law/
	/l᷑n/	/l᷑n/
	/s᷑n/	/s᷑n/
	/s᷑:y/	/s᷑:y/
	/m᷑t/	/m᷑t/
	/h᷑/	/h᷑:/
	/?an/	/?an/
Total	22	22

Table 2

Classifier type	TP	ST
Lexically restricted classifiers	/sí/ /ví/ /níw/ /nòn/ /kam/ /lúk/ /há:p/	/sí:/ /ví:/ /níw/ /nòn/ /kham/ /lú:k/ /há:p/
Total	7	7

Formally different but functionally similar classifier in TP & ST

Table 3

Classifier type	TP	ST
Semantically restricted classifiers	/lú/ /kip/ /hóy/ /múk/ /phók/ /pá: /thúp/	/dó:k/ /chin/ /phuani/ /klùm/ /fú:n/ /khá:n/ /klò:n/
Lexically restricted classifiers	/cun/ /pá: /mák/ /nút/	/tray/ /rú:p/ /khán/ /muan/
Total	11	11

Table 4

Classifiers type	TP	ST
Semantically restricted classifiers	/hōy/ /pà:k/ /ba:n/ /bay/ /húa/ /ton/ /chà?bàp/ /khrüān/ /ruān/ /?on/ /muān/	/khan/ /duan/ /ba:n/ /bay/ /húa/ /ton/ /chà?bàp/ /khrüān/ /ruān/ /?on/ /muān/
Lexically restricted classifiers	/tεn̩/ /má:n̩/ /mə/ /lā:n̩/ /yüm/ /sū/	/thɛ:n̩/ /klàk/ /chüak/ /pū:n/ /krà?buan/ /dā:m/ /won/ /kiñ/ /khɔ:n/ /fɔ:n/ /fɔ:n̩/ /thaw/ /ruan/ /khlo:n/
Total	7	26

Table 5

TP	NOUNS		ST
/hōy/ Semantically restricted classifier	/na:li/	clock	/ruan/
	/tā:/	eye	/duan/
	/lēm-phay/	lamp	
	/mák-t̄s/	ball	/lu:k/
	/lēnłom/	car	
	/lēn?ñ/	scooter	/khan/
	/lēnñthip/	cycle	
	/kháy/	egg	/fɔ:n/
	/thūn/	bag	
	/m̄/	pot	/bay/
	/ph̄/	dish	
	/mák-m̄ay/	fruit	
	/thúp/	box	
Lexically restricted classifier	/saw/	post	/t̄n/
	/cē/	paper	/ph̄c:n/
	/m̄ -m̄ay/	leaf	/bay/
	/pha:/	big knife	/lēm/
	/càw-phlá?/	Buddha	/?on/
	/thá:t/	pagoda	
	/c̄n/	umbrella	/khan/
	/sɔ/	key	

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