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Notes on 'Numeral Classifiers'

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Abstract At least some of the properties that we associate with 'numeral classifiers' are just spinoffs from the interaction of singular nouns with quantity-related determiners.

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1 Some Basic Facts

In certain classifier languages such as Japanese,[1] classifiers are restricted to cooccurring with numerals. I will use the term 'numeral classifier' for such classifiers and only for those. Somewhat surprisingly, this restriction has a counterpart in French, in the case of *an* ('year'), which is readily found with numerals, as in:

(1) Ils ont passé un an/trois ans à Paris.
('they have spent one year/three years in P')

1 As discussed by Watanabe (2006, 244, 253, 258, 267, 273, 280, 284), and as opposed to the much wider distribution of classifiers in Cantonese, as discussed by Cheng and Sybesma (1999), who, however (p. 530), do take overt classifiers in Mandarin to require a possibly silent numeral. For relevant discussion of classifiers in Bulgarian, see Cinque, Krapova 2007.

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but not with other quantity-related determiners:

(2) *Ils ont passé des/quelques/plusieurs ans à Paris.
('they have spent some/a few/several years in P')

The restriction illustrated in (2) is also found with quantity-related determiners that are followed by *de* ('of'), e.g.:

(3) *Ils ont passé peu/pas mal/beaucoup d'ans à Paris.
('…few/quite a few/a great deal of years…')

In all of (2)-(3), French can achieve an acceptable sentence by replacing *ans* with *années*, which is also translatable as *years*:

(4) Ils ont passé des/quelques/plusieurs années à Paris.
(5) Ils ont passé peu/pas mal/beaucoup d'années à Paris.

2 The Silent Noun TIME (Capitals Will Indicate Silence)

Taking *an* (but evidently not *année*) to be, in the light of (1)-(5), a numeral classifier might at first glance seem odd, insofar as numeral classifiers (as in Japanese) usually go with an additional noun, which is apparently not the case in (1). The natural proposal, then, is that in (1) there is a noun present beyond *an(s)* itself,[2] although that additional noun is silent, and more specifically is a silent counterpart of *time*, as shown in:

(6) un an TIME
(7) trois ans TIME

Of interest is the fact that silent TIME is called for elsewhere. For example, English has both of the following:

(8) We'll be there in a week.
(9) We'll be there in a week's time.

2 In the spirit of Kayne (2008), classifiers must themselves be a subtype of noun (assuming there is little plausibility to taking them to be a subtype of verb).

which suggests that (8), too, contains an instance of TIME,[3] with the presence of TIME arguably forced in all of (6)-(8) by Decompositionality,[4] essentially the idea that a single morpheme cannot be more than minimally complex, interpretively speaking.

What that idea amounts to in this case is the specific claim that no single morpheme could simultaneously introduce the notion of time and specify the length of a time interval. Thus in (6)-(8) *week* and *an* specify the length of the interval, but the interpretive content of time itself must be introduced separately, either by TIME as in (6)-(8) or by overt *time* as in (9).

A second case in English that calls for TIME arises from consideration of:

(10) C'mon, that'll take you all *(of) two minutes.

with *of* surprisingly obligatory, in all likelihood because there's an antecedentless silent noun TIME present, as in:

(11) all TIME of two minutes

with this TIME forcing *of* to appear.

A third rests on the very close relation between *twice* and *two times*, especially striking in:

(12) That box is at least twice as heavy as this one.
(13) That box is at least two times as heavy as this one.

with the natural conclusion being that *twice* must be accompanied by TIME.[5] A fourth can be seen in the following pair:

(14) You haven't been waiting long.
(15) You haven't been waiting a long time.

with TIME not only present in (14), but in addition arguably responsible for the polarity behavior of *long* there (as opposed to the non-polarity behavior of *a long time*).[6]

3 As Zamparelli (2004) had in fact suggested for *every two days*; cf. Tsoulas 2013 on *before* being followed by TIME.

4 See Kayne 2005a, Appendix. The formulation there was: "UG imposes a maximum of one interpretable syntactic feature per lexical item".

5 Cf. Kayne 2014; also the pair *often*, *oftentimes*, as well as the pair *noon*, *noontime*.

6 For discussion, see Kayne 2021.

Additionally we can quickly note the plausibility of taking *a while ago* to be as in:[7]

(16) a while OF TIME ago

and of taking *next* in:

(17) When will you next be in town?

to be as in:

(18) …next TIME…

as well, finally, as the notable case of:

(19) We'll be home at three o'clock or thereabouts.

to be analyzed as:

(20) …or there TIME abouts

in which TIME cooccurs with (non-locative)[8] *there*.

3 Classifiers are Monomorphemic

The contrast between (1)-(3) with *an(s)* and (4)-(5) with *années*, i.e. between *an* as a numeral classifier and *année* not as one, calls for further discussion. In particular, we can and must ask why it is *an* that is, of the two, the numeral classifier. Why is it not the reverse, i.e. why did French not choose *année* to play the numeral classifier role?

Part of the answer must have to do with the fact that *année* contains a suffix that *an* does not. *Année* is decomposable as *an(n)+ée*, with the suffix *-ée* that is also seen in:

(21) soirée ('evening+-ée'); matinée ('morning+-ée'); journée ('day+-ée')

7 In the context of the game of baseball, we have:
i) In his last at bat he hit a triple. with the analysis:
ii) …TIME at bat…
One might also consider taking *oversleep* to be:
iii) overTIME sleep

8 On the non-locative status of *there*, cf. Kayne 2019.

which are related to *soir*, *matin* and *jour*, respectively.[9] The other part of the answer may come from the following conjecture:

(22) Classifiers are necessarily monomorphemic.

Possibly, this conjecture should be limited to numeral classifiers. In either case, one would want an account of this restriction to monomorphemicity. Possibly, it is that the interpretive contribution of a (numeral) classifier is, assuming there to be no true interpretively invisible expletives,[10] too minimal[11] to be expressed by more than one morpheme.

4 Years are Special Lengths of Time

A second kind of question raised by the numeral classifier status of French *an* concerns the contrast between *an* and other elements that pick out lengths of time in French, such as *minute* ('minute'), *heure* ('hour'), *jour* ('day'), *semaine* ('week'), *mois* ('month'), *décennie* ('decade') and *siècle* ('century'). The fact is that none of these show the numeral classifier behavior of *an*, as can be seen from their cooccurring with non-numeral quantity-related determiners, e.g.:

(23) Ils ont passé quelques minutes/heures/semaines/décennies/siècles à Paris.

Why is it *an* ('year') of all these that alone has the status of a numeral classifier?

An initial answer might be that we're looking at the same fact that Kayne (2003) discussed for English,[12] not primarily for overt *year*, but for silent YEAR, in well-formed sentences like:

(24) At the age of six, Mary could already speak three languages.
(25) Their daughter is now six.

In each of these, YEAR is present. (The second of these may well also contain AGE, in a way that's not relevant to what follows. Important to what follows, on the other hand, is the fact that this YEAR is singular.)

9 The root for 'day' in French may well be *journ-*, given *journalier* ('daily'); cf. also *ajourner* ('to-postpone'), *séjourner* ('to-stay').

10 For relevant discussion, cf. Kayne 2023.

11 It's not clear that all the classifiers discussed by Matthews and Yip (1994, 124) are interpretively minimal; on the other hand, Cantonese classifiers are not numeral classifiers.

12 Cf. Simpson 2005 on Thai; also Cinque 2006 and references cited there.

Of direct relevance to (23) is the deviance of (24)-(25) when (24)-(25) are taken to contain DAY, WEEK, MONTH…, as can be seen by considering the interpretively anomalous status of:

(26) *At the age of six, their infant daughter could already…
(27) *Their infant daughter is now six.

A way to understand these English facts is to say that the silent element following the numeral *six* in (24)-(27) must be a numeral classifier and that, of the various time interval elements, only silent YEAR can have that status.

A similar point can be made for YEAR vs. DECADE:

(28) Mary's grandparents are planning a party for her sixth birthday.
(29) Mary's grandchildren are planning a party for her sixth birthday.

While (28), with YEAR following *sixth*, is perfectly ordinary, (29) with YEAR following *sixth* is anomalous, since a six-year-old child cannot have grandchildren. But in addition (29) tells us something more important for the present discussion, namely that DECADE following *sixth* is not available at all since if it were (29) would be able to have the ordinary status of (28).

The next question is, why should YEAR in English and *an* in French be singled out in this way, as numeral classifiers? An informal answer might be that *year* and *an* (and similarly for other (similar) languages) correspond to the 'least marked' time interval element, and that therefore only they can be taken, at least in English and in French, to be numeral classifiers.

Before proceeding further, let us note quickly that, unlike French *an*, English overt *year* can in some cases readily not have numeral classifier status and in that way can act like French *année*, as indicated by the well-formed English counterparts of sentences like (3), e.g.:

(30) They've spent many/a few/several years in Paris.

Although arguably a necessary condition for numeral classifier status, 'least marked' is clearly not a sufficient condition.

Returning to the main point, the informal notion of 'least marked' here could be made more precise if we recast it in terms of syntactic simplicity by associating *year* with less syntactic structure. For example, *decade* might itself necessarily be accompanied by YEAR, i.e. a sentence like:

(31) The past decade has been a difficult one.

might be as in:

(32) the past TEN YEAR decade…

and similarly for *century*:

(33) the past HUNDRED YEAR century…

while *month* might be as in:[13]

(34) the past month YEAR PART…

If so, then the interpretive properties of (24)-(27) might (with further work) be traceable back to the licensability in that context of the silence of YEAR vs. the non-licensability of the silence of the more complex 'TEN YEAR DECADE', 'MONTH YEAR PART', etc.

5 Definite Articles and Silent UN ('one')

Though incompatible with the various quantity-related elements seen in (2)-(3), French *an* is compatible with the definite article in:

(35) Ils y vont tous les trois ans.
('they there go all the three years' = 'they go there every three years')

That numeral classifier *an* is possible in (35) is not surprising, given the presence of the numeral *trois*. Somewhat surprising, though, is the closely related:

(36) Ils y vont tous les ans. ('…every year')

given the absence in (36) of any overt numeral.

Taking into account the interpretation of (36), as indicated in the English translation, a proposal that comes to mind is:[14]

13 Possibly, this proposal could be extended to *day*.

14 The unacceptability of:
i) *Ils y vont tous les quelques ans. ('they there go all the few years') indicates that, in this context involving *quelques…*, silent UN is not available, as opposed to overt *un(s)* with indefinites as in:
ii) J'ai vu quelqu'un. ('I have seen someone')
iii) J'en ai vu quelques-uns. ('I of-them have seen some-ones') And in part similarly for:
iv) *Ils y vont chaque an'. ('they there go each year') with UN not available, despite: Ils ont mis chacun dans un tiroir différent. ('they have put each-one in a drawer different') needs 'v'

(37) …tous les UN ans

with UN a silent counterpart of the numeral *un* ('one'). While satisfying the numeral requirement of *an*, this proposal leads directly to a question concerning the discrepancy in number in (37) between singular UN and plural *les…ans*.

Thinking of the fact that the *-s* of *ans* is not pronounced, and in particular of Bernstein's (1991) interpretation of that fact, an initial step toward understanding (37) is to take it to actually be:

(38) …tous les UN an

with singular *an*, in which case the number discrepancy in question reduces to that between *les* and 'UN an', which in turn recalls French allowing:[15]

(39) vers les une heure ('toward the one hour' = 'around one o'clock')

in which plural *les* is followed by singular *une heure*, in a way that increases the plausibility of (38).

As for the number discrepancy itself, a clue is provided by Italian, which has:

(40) Sono le una. ('are the one' = 'it's one o'clock')

with a discrepancy between the plural definite article *le* and singular numeral *una*, combined with the fact that Italian also allows:

(41) Sono le ore una. ('are the hours one')

in which a plural noun *ore* occurs, to which plural *le* is transparently related, in such a way as to suggest that French (39) contains a comparable, though silent, plural noun:

(42) vers les HEURES une heure ('toward the hours one hour')

By extension, we can now take (38) to contain a silent plural noun, too:[16]

15 As noted by Martinon (1927, 200).

16 If PERIODES is the correct silent noun, following a suggestion by Isabelle Haïk (p.c.), there is a discrepancy in grammatical gender between it (feminine gender) and the masculine gender of tous. For differing relevant views on French, see Gouet 1976 and Morin 1977.

(43) …tous les PERIODES (DE) UN an

with (43) now a more complete answer, with silent UN still the central piece, to why (36) is compatible with numeral classifier *an*.

6 Silent ONE

The silent UN that played a key role in the preceding section has a counterpart in English in more than one context, in a way that indirectly supports the postulation of UN itself, in French. Perlmutter (1970) noted in essence the following contrast (which is very sharp if the demonstrative is given primary stress):

(44) These two books are interesting, at least.
(45) *This one book is interesting, at least.

for which he proposed deletion of unstressed *one*, with the possibility then arising that the following (again with a stressed demonstrative):

(46) This book is interesting, at least.

is now to be understood as

(47) this ONE book is…

Some other cases in English that come similarly to the fore are (again with *one* unstressed):[17]

(48) Why are you reading the same two books/*one book again?
(49) We'd like another two books/*one book, please.
(50) The most interesting two books/*one book on the list should be read first.

which lead to the following series of proposals

(51) the same ONE book
(52) another ONE book
(53) the most interesting ONE book

Further indirect support for UN is provided by:

17 For discussion of the fact that unstressed one becomes possible if the following noun is deleted/silent, as in, e.g.:
i) the only one; the same one; another one; the most interesting one
see Kayne 2017.

(54) *Mary is the first most interesting student in the class.
(55) John is the second/third… most interesting student in the class.

suggesting that superlative sentences such as:

(56) Mary is the most interesting student in the class.

must be understood as in:

(57) …the FIRST most interesting…

Comparable indirect support for silent UN in French comes from:

(58) John's height is twice/*once that of his brother.
(59) John can run twice/*once as fast as his brother.

which leads to the following proposals:

(60) …is (exactly) ONCE that of…
(61) …run ONCE as fast as his brother…

with FIRST and ONCE both clearly related to ONE.[18]

7 Singular *year*

Although English plural *years* does not, as shown by (30), repeated here:

(62) They've spent many/a few/several years in Paris.

exhibit numeral classifier behavior, singular *year* does, in the specific case of:

(63) They have a seven-year-old to take care of

which contrasts with the non-numeral examples given in:

(64) *They have a several-year-old to take care of.
(65) *They have a (quite a) few-year-old to take care of.
(66) *?They have a many-year-old to take care of.
(67) *They have a small large/number of-year-old to take care of.

18 On *once*, cf. Kayne 2014; on *first*, cf. Kayne 2024.

We can note immediately that, although silent YEAR differs from silent DAY, WEEK… in that only (singular) YEAR, of all these, showed numeral classifier behavior in (24)-(29), all those other time interval nouns do show numeral classifier behavior in the environment of (63), as can be seen in the following, with *day*:

(68) They now have a three-day-old to take care of.
(69) *They now have a several-day-old to take care of.
(70) *?They now have a many-day-old to take care of.
(71) *They now have a small number of-day-old to take care of.

and similarly for *week* and *month*.

8 Singular *an*

The fact that singular *year*, *day* in (63)-(71) show numeral classifier behavior in a way that plural *years* (and similarly for *days*) does not in (62) appears to conflict with the fact that French *an*, in its numeral classifier behavior, appears to be compatible with plural *ans*, as for example in:

(72) Ils ont passé trois ans à Paris. ('…three years…')

Thinking back, though, to the discussion starting with (36), and to the proposal that *tous les ans* ('all the years') is actually better understood as in (38), also repeated:

(73) …tous les UN an

in which *an* is singular despite the orthography, we now arrive at the proposal that the same holds of (72), i.e. that the key part of (72) is, again despite the orthography, to be understood as containing, not plural *ans*, but rather singular *an*:

(74) …trois an…

That French numeral classifier *an* is systematically singular despite orthographic *ans* (as in (72)) is in part to be tied to the basic fact that the *-s* of orthographic *ans* is not pronounced. There is in addition a consideration that goes beyond French, namely that classifiers are in general not pluralizable,[19] a generalization into which (74) now fits naturally.

19 For some apparent exceptions, see Aikhenvald 2000, 249n.

A second cross-linguistic generalization that supports taking French *an* to be a classifier lies in a restriction to the effect that classifiers (as opposed to 'massifiers' in the sense of Cheng and Sybesma (1999, 515)), are by and large not modifiable, as discussed by Cinque (2006, 120), Cinque and Krapova (2007, 3) and Watanabe (2006, 265).

That French *an* is in this respect similar to classifiers was in effect already noted in Littré's 19th century dictionary.[20] In writing about French *an* and *année*, Littré observed that "…quand on veut qualifier l'année à l'aide d'une épithète, on se sert non de *an, mais d'année*. On ne dira pas *un bon an, un an abondant, un an heureux, mais une bonne année, une année abondante, une année heureuse*" (when one wants to modify 'year', one uses not *an*, but *année*. One doesn't say 'a good *an*', 'a *an* abundant', 'a *an* happy', but rather 'a good *année*', 'a *année* abundant', 'a *année* happy').

Although Littré's observation appears to be readily testable and to carry over to contemporary French, there is another notable observation about an earlier stage of ('popular') French that is less readily testable. I have in mind Bauche (1928, 97), who gives, on the topic of combining a numeral with an/*année*, the following facts. The French in question has, with no plural *z*:[21]

(75) huitt ans ('eight years'), centt ans ('hundred years')

whereas with *année* it has:

(76) hui z années, cen z années

with a plural *z* that recalls Bernstein (1991) on French and Walloon. It may be the case that the absence of this plural *z* with *ans* in (75) reflects an incompatibility in that French between overt number, in the form of plural *z*, and an overt classifier.

9 Other Romance

The French distinction between *an* and *année* has at first glance a counterpart in Italian between *anno* and *annata*,[22] though *annata*

20 See https://www.littre.org/definition/an.

21 Though Isabelle Haïk (p.c.) does have differential judgments that go in the direction of Bauche's, insofar as she finds that *?(?)après huiz années de pourparlers* is not as bad as it would be with *ans* in place of *années*. As a reviewer suggests, looking into further intra-French variation is called for.

22 Spanish and Catalan lack a counterpart of *année* (Carolina Fraga and Núria Bosch, respectively (p.c.)), for reasons that need to be looked into

is less widely used than *année* and *anno* more widely used than *an*. Important to the present discussion is the more specific fact that Italian *anno* is compatible with non-numerals in a way that distinguishes it from French *an*. An example is:

(77) *plusieurs ans (French 'several years')
(78) parecchi anni (Italian – same)

French disallows *an(s)* with non-numeral *plusieurs* because (singular) *an* is a numeral classifier. The well-formedness of (78), in which *anni* has the pronounced plural suffix *-i*, clearly shows that Italian *ann-* is not a numeral classifier.[23]

A question that now comes to mind is this. Could there be a variety of Italian in which (singular) *anno* would display numeral classifier behavior in the way that French *an* does? If there could be, that variety of Italian would have singular *anno* combining with numerals, as in:

(79) *tre anno

If no variety of Italian could possibly allow (79), we need to ask why. (Possibly, it's due to the presence of the pronounced suffix *-o* – cf. (22) above.)

10 *De* and *of*

Although the following does not constitute a perfectly minimal pair:

(80) cent ans ('hundred years')
(81) des centaines d'années/*ans ('some hundreds of years')

we can see illustrated here an exceptionless fact about French, namely that *an(s)* is incompatible with any determiner that calls for the preposition *d(e)*, even when, as in (81), the determiner, here *centaines*, is related to a numeral (*cent*). Another example with *d(e)* is:

(82) *peu d'ans ('few of year(s)')

23 At least not here. Cinque (2006) takes *ann-* to be a classifier in certain cases where it's not modifiable (despite its being plural); the question is whether or not the non-modifiability in question is related to that seen (in French) in:
i) Elle a agi avec courage (*extraordinaire) ('she has acted with courage extraordinary') with non-classifier courage – cf. Gross (1986, 24).

and exactly the same holds with **combien d'ans* ('how many…'), **suffisamment d'ans* ('sufficiently…'), **un grand nombre d'ans* ('a large number…'). And the same holds even for the quasi-minimal pair:

(83) mille ans ('thousand…')
(84) *un million d'ans ('a million…')

in which the *d(e)* that follows *million* makes *an(s)* impossible, in contrast to *mille*, as well as for the even more minimal pair:

(85) cinq cents mille ans ('five hundred thousand…')
(86) *un demi-million d'ans ('a half-million…')

with the same numerical value, yet with differential behavior keyed to *d(e)*.

That *de* plays an important role is also suggested by dislocation facts. Even with a simple numeral, the introduction of *de* via right-dislocation leads to ill-formedness:

(87) les trois ans qu'on a passés à Paris ('the three years that we have spent in P')
(88) *les trois, d'ans, qu'on a passés à Paris[24]

In English, one can find facts indicating the parallel importance of *of*:

(89) That's a many-sided argument/polygon.
(90) *That's a large number of sided argument/polygon.

with singular *side* here being classifier-like in combination with normally plural-taking *many*:

(91) That argument has many side*(s) to it.

As for the question why (*de* and) *of* would interact in this way with classifier-like elements, let me bring into the picture the proposal made in Kayne (1993; 1994, chap. 8) for phrases like:

(92) two pictures of John's

according to which *two pictures* reaches Spec,*of* via internal merge. Extending this to phrases like:[25]

24 It may be that dislocated 'de-NP' is preceded by TANT ('much'). On this kind of right-dislocation, cf. Vinet 1977.

25 Following a suggestion of Juan Uriagereka's (p.c.). For recent discussion of partitives and pseudo-partitives, see Kayne 2026.

(93) a large number of sides

we would have *a large number* in Spec,*of*. Now in (92), *John* is in a possessor/subject-like position with respect to (the trace/silent copy of) *two pictures*, and so now must *sides* be in (93) relative to *a large number*, i.e. prior to the raising of *a large number* to Spec,*of*, we have:

(94) of [sides [H [a large number]]]

Whereas in (90) this would lead, at a comparably early stage of the derivation, to:

(95) of [side [H [a large number]]]

with singular *side*, rather than plural *sides*, now in possessor/subject-like position. This allows us to relate (93) vs. (90) to the more general property of English according to which bare plurals (and mass nouns) are possible as subjects, but bare singulars are not. Put another way, the deviance of (90) is related to the following contrast:

(96) Sides are something that every polygon has.
(97) *Side is something that every polygon has.

Furthermore, just as bare singulars in English are not possible subjects, it may be that they cannot be modified (cf. the discussion above of Littré's observation). If so, we have an account of the following contrast:

(98) ?John Smith is sixty painful years old.
(99) John Smith is a sixty (*painful) year-old man.

Taking this tack about bare singulars requires saying that (89), with *many-sided*, is not associated with a structure parallel to (95). What the exact structure of (89) is needs to be discovered, but the following:

(100) That's a beautiful many/*?few-sided polygon you've drawn there.

suggests a link to:

(101) You've drawn many/*few a polygon in your time, haven't you?

perhaps via the presence in (89) of a silent indefinite article:

(102) a many A sided polygon

11 Back to *several*

The following English and French pairs highlight a sharp difference between numerals and *several*:

(103) They have a seven/*several-year old to take care of.
(104) Elle a sept/*plusieurs ans. ('she has seven/several years')

The term 'numeral classifier behavior' can readily characterize these facts, but one wonders why numerals should be so privileged.

What I'd like to suggest is that such facts reflect the relative simplicity of syntactic structure associated with numerals, as compared with elements like *several/plusieurs*. Thinking of the discussion of the previous section, consider the following way of executing the idea of simplicity of structure:

(105) Elements like *several/plusieurs* are necessarily associated with (a silent counterpart of) *of/de*.

If (105) holds, then we would necessarily have:

(106) a several OF year old
(107) plusieurs DE ans

in which case the unacceptability of (103) with *several* (and now also with OF, as in (106)), reduces to that of (90), with *a large number* (and *of*), repeated here:

(108) *That's a large number of sided argument/polygon.

Similarly, the unacceptability of (104) with *plusieurs* (and now also with DE, as in (107)) reduces to that of (84), with *un million* (and *d(e)*), also repeated:

(109) *un million d'ans ('a million…')

(To be noted is that numerals such as *seven/sept*, from this perspective, can, and in (103)/(104), must fail to cooccur with *of*/OF/*de*/DE; on the other hand, some numerals, in some languages, need *of*/OF/*de*/DE, as is true of *million* in French in (109).)

As for why *several*, *few*, *many* should differ from numerals in this way (apart from the special case of (102)), the first step toward a solution is to see that the obligatory cooccurrence of *several*, *few*, *many* with OF is essentially akin to the obligatory cooccurrence with *of* seen in English in:

(110) a small/large number *(of) years/books/people

This similarity between (106) and (110) can be sharpened if, following Kayne (2005a; 2007), we take *several*, *few*, *many* to each be associated with NUMBER, as in, e.g.:

(111) few NUMBER books

This will be so even though NUMBER and *number* differ in English with respect to the pronunciation of *of*/OF, if we compare (110) with:

(112) a few (*of) years/books/people

In essence, then, the existence of numeral classifiers is a side effect of numerals, unlike *several*, *few*, *many*, not having to cooccur with NUMBER.[26]

12 Two Sides of 'Numeral Classifiers'

We can readily state that the contrast seen in:

(113) Now the school has even more three/*few-year olds to take care of.

is due to *year* in this context being a numeral classifier. But there is a bit more to it. Like (113) to my ear is:

(114) There are even more three/*few-teacher schoolhouses over in the next county

Yet to call *teacher*, even in just this context, a numeral classifier would seem bizarre (and would go against the restriction to monomorphemic numeral classifiers discussed at (22)).

In addition, there is a discrepancy between (113) and (114) seen in:

(115) How many (one) day-old babies can that nurse take care of?
(116) How many *?(one) teacher schoolhouses are there in the next county?

Although both *day* and *teacher* are incompatible with *few* in this context, *day* in (115) can have ONE in place of *one* (as in the earlier discussion starting at (44)); that does not seem possible in (116).

26 Numerals can (but needn't) themselves cooccur with number, in a very different way:
i) You're number two on the list.
Further consideration of (i) falls outside the scope of this paper.

13 Conclusion

What all this suggests is not that we should abandon the convenient informal term 'numeral classifier', but rather that we should recognize that at least some of the properties that we associate with 'numeral classifiers' are just spinoffs from the interaction of singular nouns with quantity-related determiners in the ways discussed.

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