



Structure of Hmong-Mien Languages
Session #4 Morphology

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Session overview

- Morphology in an isolating language
- Compounds
- Reduplication
- Tonal morphology
- The reciprocal
- Nominal prefixes (with discussion of Shi Defu article)
- Traces of old morphology
 - Prenasalization
 - Tone C as a derivation tone
 - Active or causative vs. stative

Most notable . . .

. . . is how little morphology there is in Hmong-Mien languages. Whatever morphology you might expect based on your knowledge of other languages simply isn't there:

number, possessive, case, gender affixes

tense, aspect, voice, mood affixes

agreement affixes

comparative, superlative affixes

bound derivational morphemes

Compounds

I lexicalized phrases

V + N

- *noj mov* (eat-rice) 'eat'
- *pom kev* (see-path/way) 'see'
- *poob-zoo* (drop-jungle) 'get lost'

N + N

- *txiv neej* (male-person) 'a male person'
- *paj ntaub* (flower-cloth) 'embroidery'

Opaque

- *sawvdaws* 'everyone'
- *dabtsi* 'what'

Compounds

II “sum of parts” (dvandva compounds)

- *vaj tsev* (enclosed garden-house) ‘home’
- *liaj teb* (wet field-dry field) ‘farm’
- *huab cua* (cloud-wind) ‘weather’
- *ris tsho* (pants-jacket) ‘clothes’
- *riam phom* (knife-gun) ‘weapons’
- *ntsej muag* (ear-eye) ‘face’
- *nab qa* (snake-frog) ‘lizard’
- *niam txiv* (mother-father) ‘parents’
- *kwvtij* (younger bro-older bro) ‘brothers’ (> clan mates)
- *nyiaj kub* (silver-gold) ‘wealth’
- *tub ntxhais* (son-daughter) ‘children’
- *hluavtaws* (embers-fire) ‘fire’

Compounds

III synonym pairs

- *qoob loo* (próduce-crops) ‘crops’
- *tebchaws* (land-place) ‘country’
- *pojniam* (woman-wife) ‘woman’
- *caij nyoog* (time-time) ‘time’
- *nom tswv* (official-lord) ‘leader’
- *cuab yim* (household-household) ‘household’
- *ncauj lu* (mouth-mouth) ‘mouth’
- *quaj nyav* (cry-mourn) ‘lament’
- *kab kev* (path-way) ‘ceremony, ritual’
- *tuj taug* (poison-poison) ‘poison’
- *thov caw* (beg-invite) ‘entreat’
- *menyuam* (small-little) ‘child’

Phonological constraints on compounds

Mortensen 2003

“It is also noteworthy that the the Hmong compounds of this type are both obligatorily binary and are fixed in their order. While English ... has both fixed binary expressions (‘law and order’, ‘up and down’, ‘cat and mouse’) and has many binary coordinate compounds, English coordinate compounds are not typically fixed in order and can contain any number of members. One can as easily say ‘activist-singer-songwriter’, ‘singer-songwriter-activist’, or ‘songwriter-activist-singer’ as ‘singer-songwriter’.

In contrast, in Hmong, the equivalent structures would not be grammatical. *Qab-npua* ‘chicken-pig’ (‘small livestock’) cannot be reversed as **npua-qab* ‘pig-chicken’, nor can a third member be added to the compound as in **qab-npua-nyuj* ‘chicken-pig-cow’.”

Expanded compounds

muaj _____ *muaj* _____ (*muaj* ‘have’)
 ↑ ↑
 vaj *tsev*
 garden house

muaj vaj muaj tsev ‘to have a home’

muaj vaj muaj tsev, muaj _____ *muaj* _____
 ↑ ↑
 liaj *teb*
 paddy field dry field

muaj vaj muaj tsev, muaj liaj muaj teb ‘to have property’

More examples of expanded compounds

ntsej muag ‘ear-eye’ = face

> *cim ntsej cim muag* ‘remember-ear-remember-eye’ (remember someone)

caj ceg ‘ridge-branch’ = lineage; ancestry

> *yus caj yus ceg* ‘one-ridge-one-branch’ (one’s ancestry)

huab cua ‘cloud-wind’ = weather

> *lus huab lus cua* ‘word-cloud-word-wind’ (fighting words)

riam phom ‘knife-gun’ = weapons

hauv riam hauv phom ‘under-knife-under-gun’ (in danger)

More on 4-word coordinative constructions in Session #7.

Reduplication

Formally and semantically, reduplication in HM languages is simple compared to, for example, reduplication in Austronesian languages where it may have functions as varied as delimitation, concession, distributivity, and resemblance.

In Hmong:

Formally: reduplicant on the left, with vowel reduction and tone neutralization optional

[lɔ⁵² lɔ⁵²] ‘big big’, optionally [lə-lɔ⁵²]

Semantically: only augmentation

Stylistically informal; extremely common in everyday speech

An infix?

White Hmong speakers have told me that reduplication can be strengthened by inserting the morpheme [tʃi²²] between the reduplicant and the base (“infix” strengthening attested in other HM languages, too):

lɔ ⁵²	‘big’
lɔ ⁵² lɔ ⁵²	‘very big’ (optionally [lɔ-lɔ ⁵²])
lɔ ⁵² tʃi ²² lɔ ⁵²	‘extremely big’

The most common meaning of [tʃi²²] is ‘not’ (the verbal negator). Could it be that word here?

Expressives (ideophones): a type of reduplication

The reduplicant in a disyllabic expressive is not a copy of the base, reduced or otherwise, but is rather a form of the base that has been altered in certain rule-governed ways, e.g.:

nplhib nplhob of a fish writhing on a hook
(manner of writhing)

Much more on expressives in Session #7.

Word classes defined by tone

Tonal morphology in Hmong-Mien languages (apart from tone sandhi compound formation) is restricted to a few, small, tonally defined word classes. In the Southeast Asian tone type, tone does not play a major role in the grammar (unlike African tone languages), presumably since tone has so much lexical discrimination work to do.

An old class: numerals 1-5

i ⁵⁵	1	<	PHM *ʔi
o ⁵⁵	2	<	PHM *ʔui
pe ⁵⁵	3	<	PHM *pjou
plau ⁵⁵	4	<	PHM *plei
tʃi ⁵⁵	5	<	PHM *pra

female and male in White Hmong

ntsau^{21?} youngest daughter

ntsau^{4?} youngest son

ntɕua^{21?} widow

ntɕua^{4?} widower

ja^{21?} maternal grandfather

ja^{4?} paternal grandfather

mua^{21?} npau²² female first cousin, different clan

npau^{4?} male first cousin, different clan

Cf. the very common nouns [nia^{21?}] ‘mother’ and [ntɕua^{4?}] ‘male orphan’ (the worthy orphan is the subject of countless folk tales).

A newish class: dual pronouns

	dual	plural
Hmong	ne ⁵⁵ ‘you-two’	ne ⁵² ‘you-all’
Mong	me ⁵⁵ ‘you-two’	me ⁵² ‘you-all’
Meizhu (Bunu)	mi ³³ ‘you two’ mu ³³ ‘they-two’	mi ¹² ‘you-all’ mu ¹² ‘they’
Yanghao (Hmu)	maŋ ³³ ‘you-two’	maŋ ⁵⁵ ‘you-all’

The dual is a reflex of tone category A1 in each case, and the plural is a reflex of category A2 in each case. The key is that the word ‘two’ also has tone A1. I think the duals are newish innovations based on a coalescence of the plural pronoun and the word for ‘two’, which often appear side-by-side in an analytic dual: ‘you-all [two person]’ > ‘[you-all two] person’ > ‘you-two’.

A brand-new class: locatives in White Hmong

Grammaticalization plus analogical tone change: In WH, 21[?] (the D2 tone) is the “locative tone”. Cognates in very closely related languages come from place nouns and have different tones:

nra ^{21?}	down	Cf. tone B2 elsewhere on the cognate noun ‘plain’
ndau ^{21?}	out	Cf. tone C1 elsewhere on the cognate noun ‘place beyond’
pe ^{21?}	up	Cf. tone B2 elsewhere on the cognate noun ‘mountain’

Also ndau^{21?} (<C2) ‘nearby’, fau^{21?} (<C1) ‘above’, ti^{21?} (<C2) ‘opposite’, txhai^{21?} (<D1) ‘far’. The only locative that has D2 in all languages is the very common word to^{21?} ‘there’: it may have served as the model for all the others.

The mutually intelligible Green Mong does not have this tonally-defined class.

An example of morphological tone from Shi Defu's paper

Pp. 587-588:

“... *zaid* displays a synchronic cline of senses: (a) ‘house’ > (b) ‘home’ > (c) ‘family’ > (d) family possessive marker.”

“This family possessive marker *zaid* is often unstressed, with its initial and final lost; only the tone value is left and attached to the preceding host:

vi²² tse³⁵ me¹³ > vi²²⁻³⁵ me¹³ ‘my mother’”

The Hmongic reciprocal

Unlike other words, no tone can be reconstructed for the reciprocal. Across Hmongic, tones come from every one of the four tone categories, A-D. Even within one language, White Hmong, the reciprocal can have either the 55 tone (A1) or the 22 tone (D1). The choice is not phonologically conditioned; it appears to involve different local variants which speakers are aware of and feel free to use (Heimbach 1979).

ʃi⁵⁵ pa⁵⁵ ‘to help one another’
ʃi²² pa⁵⁵ ‘to help one another’

My assumption is that the reciprocal took its tone from the following verb, and then got lexicalized in different ways in different languages. For it to have taken its tone from the following verb it must have been dependent upon it, i.e. a bound morpheme.

Source: Chinese 厮 *sī* ‘with each other’

Hmong-Mien prefixes

Especially in West and North Hmongic languages and Pa Hng, prefixes are not uncommon. So there is morphology! From White Hmong:

ko < ‘handle’ (of tool)

ko-taw ‘foot’

not a classifier: *txhais ko-taw*

ko-tw ‘tail’

not a classifier: *tus ko-tw*

ko-kaus ‘bamboo shoot’

pob < ‘ball’ (from Chinese 包 *bāo* ‘to wrap; bundle, lump’)

pob-taws ‘anklebone’

not a classifier: *lub pob-taw*

pob-tw ‘buttock’

not a classifier: *lub pob-tw*

pob-xyoob ‘bamboo joint’

Nouns may take more than one prefix or no prefixes, so they are both (usually) optional and variable:

ntsej ‘ear’

(lub) pob-ntsej ‘outer ear’

(lub) qhov-ntsej ‘ear canal’

(lub) taub-ntsej ‘earlobe’

Variability across the family

‘tail’ (White Hmong *ko-tw* [kɔ³³ tu³³])

Yanghao (Hmu)	qa 1-ta 3
Jiwei (Qo Xiong)	pi 3-tɣ 3
Meizhu (Bunu)	ku 1-tau 3
Baiyun (Pa-hng)	tɛ 2-tɛ 3

‘stone, rock’ (White Hmong *pob-zeb* [pɔ⁵⁵ zɛ⁵⁵])

Yanghao (Hmu)	po 3-yi 1
Jiwei (Qo Xiong)	qo 1-zu 1
Shimen (A-Hmao)	a 1-və 1
Meizhu (Bunu)	fa 3-ye 1
Baiyun (Pa-hng)	?æ ³³ -jo 1

Variability across two dialects of Pa Hng

data from Niederer 1997

	<u>Baiyun (Guangxi, China)</u>	<u>Tan Trinh (North Vietnam)</u>
‘thigh’	tɣ ³³ -pe 1	ko ^{31?} -pe 1
‘tooth’	?æ ³⁵ -mi 3	tɣ ³³ -mi 3
‘finger’	ka ³⁵ -wa 3	tɣ ³³ -to ³³ -ŋgwa 3
‘pig’	ŋ ^{21?} -me 5	ta ³³ -mbe 5
‘fish’	ŋ ^{21?} -mjo 4	ta ³³ -mbjo 4
‘hawk’	ŋ ^{21?} -kwɣ 3	ta ³³ -kwɣ 3
‘insect’	ŋ ^{21?} -kɛ 1	ta ³³ -kɣ 1
‘bedbug’	ŋ ^{21?} -pi 5	ta ³³ -pi 5
‘ant’	ka ^{21?} -mje 3	ta ³³ -ka ^{31?} -phe 3
‘tree’	tɛ ³³ -pja 1	?a ³³ -pa 1
‘flower’	?æ ³⁵ -pɛ 2	tɕo ^{31?} -pɣ 2
‘chisel’	tɛ ³³ -tɕi 4	pa ^{31?} -tɕi 4
‘steelyard’	tɛ ³³ -ŋo 5	pa ^{31?} -ŋo 5
‘crossbow’	ka ^{21?} -ŋe 3	pa ³³ -ŋi 3

Prefix pre-emption and reconstruction

‘hawk’ (White Hmong *dav* [ʔda²⁴])

Yanghao (Hmu)	laŋ 3	Jiangdi (Mien)	tɕaŋ 3
Jiwei (Qo Xiong)	qwei 3	Liangzi (Mun)	tlaŋ 3
Xianjin (Hmong)	tlaŋ 3	Dongshan (Biao Min)	klaŋ 3
Gaopo (Hmong)	plon 3		

‘hand’ (White Hmong *tes* [te²²])

Yanghao (Hmu)	pi 4	Zhongdi (Mang)	ʂe 4
Jiwei (Qo Xiong)	tu 4	Fuyuan (Hmjo)	wei 4
Xianjin (Hmong)	te 4	Fengxiang (Hmong)	pi 4
Shimen (A-Hmao)	di 4	Baiyun (Pa-hng)	tɛ-pu 4
Qingyan (Hmong)	tɕa 4	Duozhu (Ho Ne)	khwa 4
Gaopo (Hmong)	kæ 4		

Prefix function

- The function of prefixes is to classify, primarily (in White Hmong) by shape: ‘round’ (*pob*), ‘short length’ (*ko*), ‘hole’ (*qhov*), ‘gourd-shaped’ (*taub*). There is also a human prefix from *tub* ‘boy, son’.
- What about classifiers? They exist, too, with many of the same functions, and are much more robust than prefixes. Why are there two classification systems and how do they interact? You’ll have to wait for “contact day”, Session #8.

Prefix origin

- The origin of classifying prefixes is clearly in class nouns that occupy the first position in a compound. In the case of the human prefix from *tub* ('son, boy') the class has expanded to take in men and people in general (as in *tub nkeeg* 'lazy person', not 'lazy boy/man').
- These could be considered class nouns still, since there is no phonological reduction. But semantic extension has resulted in less transparency, and fairly high productivity suggests that they have become derivational morphemes.

Distribution of prefixes in HM

- In general, Hmongic languages have many more prefixes than Mienic languages. Dzao Min, the most isolated Mienic language, uses the prefix ?a- in many words; Mien/Mun and Biao Min show almost none.
- In Hmongic languages, West Hmongic, North Hmongic and Pa Hng seem to have the most prefixes. As we have seen in the reading for today, East Hmongic seems to have only ?a¹, qa¹ and qa³.

The functions of proclitic *ab* and *ghab* in Hmub

Shi Defu 2016

- $ab = \text{ʔ}a^1$; $ghab = qa^1$
- Functions of *ab* (= animate)
 - Definite marker for person or kin
 - Nominalizer with adjective (?)
 - Subsequent reference to person in discourse
- Functions of *ghab* (= inanimate)
 - Toponym
 - Definite marker for places
 - Marker for part of a whole (the pig's leg example)
 - Marker of subcategories (clans, groups, genders)
 - Nominalizer with classifier or numeral (?)

Proclitics or prefixes?

- Shi's criteria—why clitics:
 - Low degree of selection/relatively few arbitrary gaps
 - No phonological deformation
 - No semantic aberrations
 - MR generalization: *ab/ghab* have “integrity”
- Yet prefix-like in some ways:
 - Some have been lexicalized as part of their hosts (esp. toponyms, subcategory labels for people and languages)
 - Shi reports that *ab* and *ghab* tend to be unstressed (iambic rhythm) (p. 607)
 - Shi records, but does not discuss, striking vowel harmony between host and prefix in Jiading Hmong (p. 610)
 - Unlike clitics, they do not appear at a phrase boundary, but only before N (or something that can be construed as a N)
 - When a classifier is present, *ab* and *ghab* always occur between the classifier and the noun.

Other thoughts, reactions

- Distribution across family, not just in Hmongic
- Common origin of *ab* and *ghab* in *qa¹
- Ultimate origin of *qa¹ a mystery:
 - Southern varieties of Chinese “address proclitic” a = ?
 - Native noun meaning ‘place’?
 - Austronesian locative particle *qa?
- Cave-dwellers? Not likely! Hmu *khangd* [qhaŋ³] ‘cave, hole’ is from Chinese *kǒng* < MC *khuwng*^B < OC *k^{hf}oŋʔ ‘hollow, empty, hole’.

Traces of old morphology

- Prenasalization: is the N- in NC-s a fossilized prefix?
- Tone C as a derivation tone (or from a suffix -s)
- An active/causative vs. stative contrast that can be traced to at least one prefix

Prenasalization

The most likely source of prenasalized consonants in HM is an original *N_vCVC or *CVNCVC word structure. The question is whether or not the nasal can be interpreted as the remnant of a separate morpheme.

It does not look possible to interpret nasals this way: no grammatical features correspond to the appearance of the nasal element in either of the two major patterns for which an initial nasal element has been reconstructed:

Hmongic NC-	Mienic C _[+voice]	<	*NC-
Hmongic C _[-voice]	Mienic C _[+voice]	<	*N-C

However . . .

There are some pairs of Chinese loanwords that require the reconstruction of an initial nasal prefix:

清 HM *tshjiəŋ ‘new’ vs. HM *ntshjiəŋ ‘clear’

下 HM *GaX ‘low/short’ vs.

H *NGa^B & M *ya^C (< *NGaX) ‘to descend’

拆 Mien /tshɛʔ⁷/ ‘to pull down, pull apart’ vs. /dzeʔ⁷/ ‘to be cracked’

開 Mien /khɔi¹/ ‘to open (TR)’ vs. /gɔi¹/ ‘to open (INTR)’

And however again . . .

A suspiciously high number of body part words are prenasalized:

ɲcau ⁵²	mouth
ntʃe ⁵²	ear
ntʃu ⁴²	nose
mplai ⁴²	tongue
ntɯ ³³	uvula
mpa ⁵⁵	arm
nti ²⁴	digit (finger or toe)
ntʃu ²²	lung
ntʃha ²⁴	blood
ntʃa ⁴²	buttocks

Tonal evidence for ancient affixes

Apart from the nominal prefixes and perhaps prenasalization, traces of old affixal morphology in Hmong-Mien are not realized as affixes in the modern day, nor are they usually realized as onset consonants. Instead, they are deeply embedded, and are realized as tones on the nucleus of the word.

T

free morpheme → prefix → (C)C(C)V(C) ← suffix ← free morpheme

As grammatical elements coalesce, they first cause the outer layer to morph, the consonants of the coda and onset. Since properties of these consonants play a role in tonogenesis and tone split, these consonant feature contrasts may transfer to the nucleus as tonal contrasts during the process of tone development. The oldest morphological contrasts are therefore to be discovered in the first instance by identifying pairs of words that share both core meaning and segmental phonology, but differ in tone. By undoing the effects of tonogenesis, one can theoretically take the tonal contrasts back to their segmental origins.

Minimal requirements for reconstruction of ancient bound morphemes from tonal evidence

- (1) a good number of examples;
- (2) consistent form/meaning relationships;
- (3) evidence from both sides of family.

We're not there yet.

Tone C as a derivation tone

The C tone (<-h < *-s) has been described as a “derivation tone” for Chinese and Tai (Downer 1959, Li 1970, Manomaivibool 1980), based on pairs of related words, one with either a A or B tone, and the other with a C tone. As members of the Sinosphere, it is not surprising to find a few pairs like this in HM languages, too. If the words belonging to tone category C were derived through a morphological process before tones developed, however, this would not have been the work of a derivation *tone*, but rather of an ancient *-s *suffix*—the only example of a suffix in the family, either present-day or ancient.

N > V

*dou-ʔ ‘fire’ & *dou-**h** ‘explode’

*pjiəu-ʔ ‘fruit’ & *pji^C (< *pjiəu-**h**) ‘bear fruit’

*grəŋ^A (< *grəun) ‘animal fat/oil’ & *grəun-**h** ‘be fat’

N > N

*klæŋ ‘insect/worm’ & *klaŋ^C (< *klæŋ-**h**) ‘maggot’

Odd/even tonal doublets

There are a few pairs of words that share the same root, and the same original tone category (A, B, C, D), where one has the upper register tone from an ancient voiceless initial (e.g., A1) while the other has the lower register tone from an ancient voiced initial (e.g., A2). Since the contrast between the two was not originally tone but rather initial consonant voicing, it is reasonable to think, pushing back even further in time, that an ancient prefix either devoiced one initial or voiced the other.

Pairs with different meanings today

Native words:

*təjH ‘to kill’ vs. *dəjH ‘to die’ (cf. AN *pa-aCay/*ma-aCay)

*ʔ-mɛj (> *ʔmɤε^A) ‘to grasp’ vs. *n-mɛj ‘to have’

*cæw^B ‘body/trunk’ vs. *jæw^B ‘leg/branch’

Chinese loanwords:

炙 *ci^C ‘to bake/toast’ vs. *ji^C ‘to burn/be alight’

著 *tro^C ‘to put on/wear (shoes)’ vs. *dro^C ‘to hit target’

Also within White Hmong

hlɔ̌^{A1} ‘to become big (to grow)’

vs. lɔ̌^{A2} ‘to be big’ (< HM *hljo ‘big’)

nca^{A1} ‘to straighten’

vs. nca^{A2} ‘to be straight’ (< H *ɲc̣iaŋ ‘straight’,
from Chinese 正 *zhèng* < MC *tsyengH*)

Pairs with the same meaning today
which may reflect the same contrast (Chang 1972)

HM *hnaŋX & naŋX ‘to put on/wear (clothes)’
< ‘to dress’ vs. ‘to wear’?

H *pɕŋ^A & *bɕŋ^A ‘to fall’
< ‘to fell’ vs. ‘to fall’?

M *hmɾɯəŋ^C & H *mɾəŋ^C ‘to listen’
< ‘to listen’ vs. ‘to hear’?

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