

UC Berkeley

Recent Work

Title

Hmong For Beginners Part 5 Nouns

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9038q1pt>

Author

Annie Jaiser et al.

Publication Date

1995

NOUN PHRASE STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE OF THE NOUN PHRASE

Hmong noun phrases can include the following constituents (parentheses indicate optional elements):

(possessive) + (quantifier) + (classifier) + noun + (adjective) + (demonstrative)

Each of these constituents as well as rules governing the optionality or non-optionality of the various elements is discussed in detail in the appropriate sections below. To get started, though, some general comments about each constituent along with illustrative examples will be helpful.

I. NOUN PHRASE = NOUN

Minimally, a noun phrase is made up of a noun, common as in (1a) or proper as in (1b-c).

1. a. *tsev*
'house'
- b. *Nplias*
'Blia (girl's name—literally, "grasshopper")'
- c. *Txiv ntxawm Xyooj*
uncle Xiong
'Uncle Xiong (father's younger brother)'

II. NOUN PHRASE = CLASSIFIER + NOUN

Hmong nouns are invariable; they are not marked for gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter), number (singular vs. plural), or case (nominative, accusative, dative, etc.). What characterizes them is the fact that they have a classifier associated with them which points to certain properties of the noun—natural kind (e.g., human, animal, animate vs. non-animate), shape, function, etc. The classifier for 'house' is *lub*; it is one of the two most common classifiers in Hmong, comes before the noun, and should be learned at the same time as the noun. Noun phrases with classifiers often, but not always, translate as definite noun phrases in English since one of the grammatical functions of classifiers is to make definite reference (see "Discourse Functions of Classifiers" for details).

2. *lub tsev*
clf house
'(the) house'

NOTE: There can be only one classifier per noun phrase.

III. NOUN PHRASE = QUANTIFIER + CLASSIFIER + NOUN

Quantifiers come in two flavors: numeral quantifiers such as one, two, three, etc. as in (3a), and non-numeral quantifiers such as much/many, few, little, etc. as in (3b). Quantifiers come before the classifier + noun sequence (but see section on non-numeral quantifiers for other possibilities).

3. a. *tsib lub tsev*
 five clf house
 'five houses'

b. *ntau lub tsev*
 many clf house
 'many houses'

IV. NOUN PHRASE = POSSESSIVE + CLASSIFIER + NOUN

Possessives take the form of simple personal pronouns and come before the classifier + noun sequence.

4. *kuv lub tsev*
 I/my clf house
 'my house'

V. NOUN PHRASE = CLASSIFIER + NOUN + DEMONSTRATIVE

Demonstratives, on the other hand, come AFTER the classifier + noun sequence.

5. *lub tsev no*
 clf house this
 'this house'

VI. NOUN PHRASE = CLASSIFIER + NOUN + ADJECTIVE

There is no adjective class per se in Hmong, but stative verbs (e.g., to be big/white/old/full, etc.) can be used as adjectives. The great majority of them follow the noun they modify, as seen in (6).

6. *lub tsev loj*
 clf house big
 'the big house'

There are, however, a few common adjectives which occur before the noun, following the Chinese pattern. These include *niag* 1. 'large, great, major'; 2. 'old (denigrating)'; *me nyuam* 'little'; *tuam* 'great' (from the Chinese numeral "one"); and *qub* 'former, original.' *Qub* can also occur in the canonical adjective slot; it then means 'old, worn (of things).' This contrast is illustrated in (7).

7. a. *lub tsev qub*
 clf house old
 'the old house'
- b. *lub qub tsev*
 clf former house
 'the former/original house'

Finally, noun phrases can be made up of pronouns or classifiers standing in for nouns:

VII. NOUN PHRASE = PRONOUN

The same set of pronouns can be used in subject and object noun phrase position, and there is no gender distinction in the third person singular.

8. *Nag hmo kuv pom nws.*
 last night I see him/her/it
 'I saw him/her/it last night.'

VIII. NOUN PHRASE = CLASSIFIER USED PRONOMINALLY

When the referent of a noun can be understood from the spoken or written context, the noun is typically omitted, leaving its classifier standing in for it pronominally.

9. a. *Lub tsev no yog kuv lub tsev.*
 clf house this be my clf house
 'This house is my house.'
- b. *Lub no yog kuv lub.*
 clf this be my clf
 'This one is mine.'

NOUN CLASSIFIERS

I. INTRODUCTION

Languages have different ways of grouping nouns into categories; for instance, European languages such as French, Spanish, or German use gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) as an organizing principle. In many languages of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia, nouns fall into different classes on the basis of criteria other than gender. All the nouns fitting into a given category are used with a part of speech called a classifier.

There is a concept resembling classifiers in English: note that we talk of *a grain of salt* (not *a salt*), *a bar of soap* (not *a soap*), *an ear or a kernel of corn* (not *a corn*), *a drop, body, or glass of water* (not *a water*), etc. In other words, when we want to individuate and count mass nouns such as salt, soap, corn, water, we have to use special measure words such as grain, bar, ear, kernel, drop, body, glass, etc. These measure words are akin to classifiers. Their usage is limited to a fairly small number of nouns in English, but in Hmong and other classifier languages, *every* noun has a classifier associated with it. Hence, as it is best to learn the gender of a noun along with the noun itself in languages such as French, Spanish, or German, it is best to learn the classifier along with the noun when acquiring vocabulary in languages such as Hmong, Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, and Khmer.

In classifier system languages, nouns are divided into classes according to properties shared by the nouns in a given category. In Hmong, for example, nouns referring to *spoken* words (e.g., story, legend, song, prayer) are considered to fall into a natural category and thus occur with the classifier *zaj*. The classification criteria range from universally recognized noun attributes such as natural kind (human, animal, mineral), shape (long, flat, round), function (tool, vehicle), material (wood, cloth, bamboo), etc. to more language/culture specific ones. (Thai has a special classifier for monks, for instance.) Class membership is sometimes also motivated by more abstract principles such as metaphor, metonymy, or mythology.

By revealing how nouns are considered to be members of a natural class, and by exposing us to unfamiliar cognitive categories, classifiers give us insights not only into the Hmong world view, but also into the human mind. Discovering how nouns are grouped together is a great deal of fun, and the best strategy to familiarize yourself with classifiers is to get your hands dirty. Hence the section on classifiers starts out with two hands-on exercises which will help you figure out the principles underlying noun categorization. The first exercise introduces two common classifiers, *daim* and *lub*, via pictures. The second exercise is an exercise in semantic categorization: you will look at several common classifiers and determine with which classes of nouns they occur; using your findings you will also be asked to guess the classifier for certain nouns and to justify your choices.

Next comes a summary explanation of the most common classifiers in Hmong, followed by two exercises in which you are asked to fill in the correct classifier.

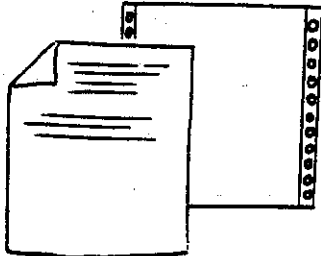
So far classifiers have been discussed with respect to the *meaning* of the nouns with which they occur. To complete the picture it is necessary to know *why* and *when* classifiers are used; the next section focuses on the discourse functions of classifiers as well as the grammatical constructions in which they occur.

The section concludes with the description of a game activity designed to provide oral practice in associating particular classifiers with particular nouns.

II. DAIM OR LUB?

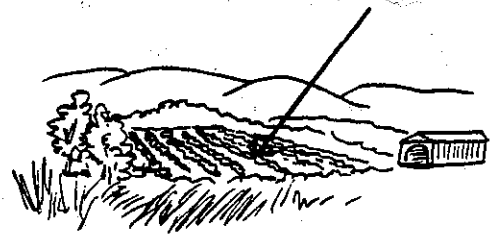
Daim and *lub* are two of the most common classifiers in Hmong. Look at the pictures in (1-8), and try to figure out why *daim* is used in (1-4) and *lub* in (5-8). Hint: concentrate on the *daim* examples first. What characteristic(s) do the nouns associated with *daim* share that the ones with *lub* do not? Test out your hypotheses by filling in *daim* or *lub* in (9-16).

1.



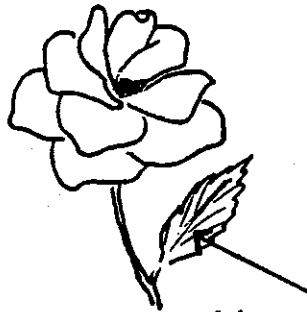
daim ntawv

2.



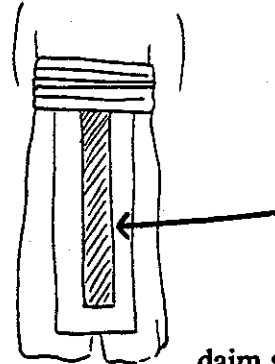
daim teb

3.



daim nplooj

4.



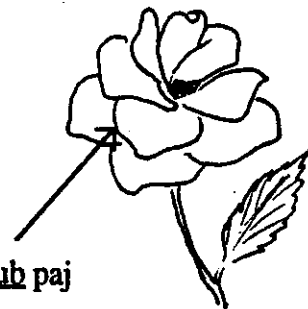
daim sev

5.



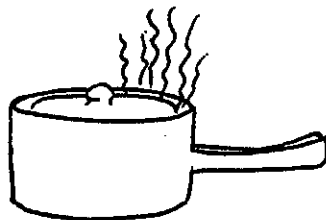
lub pob

6.



lub paj

7.



lub lauj kaub

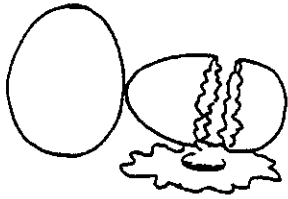
8.



lub kaus mom

Fill in the classifier using either *daim* or *lub*. Justify your choice with a short statement.

9.



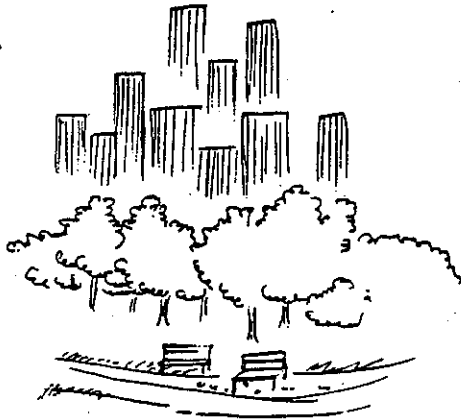
_____ qe
Why?

10.



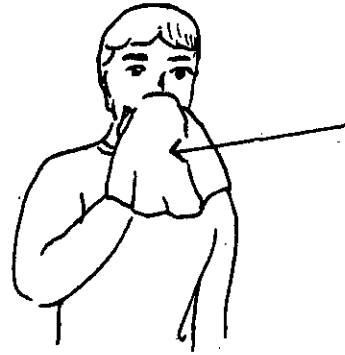
_____ duab
Why?

11.



_____ nroog
Why?

12.



_____ phuam so ntswg
Why?

13.



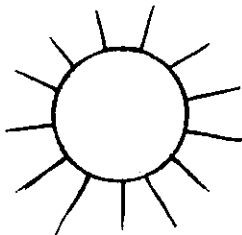
_____ liaj
Why?

14.



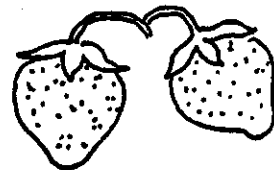
_____ tiab
Why?

15.



_____ hnuab
Why?

16.



_____ txiv pos liab
Why?

III. HMONG CLASSIFIER EXERCISE

As you have noticed, Hmong nouns appear in a *single* form: there are no plural suffixes, no grammatical genders, no definite/indefinite articles, etc. What characterizes them is that they have a classifier associated with them; the choice of which classifier goes with a particular noun is determined by what the noun refers to. For instance, all nouns referring to words traditionally considered *spoken*—i.e., shared and/or passed on via the long-standing oral tradition characteristic of Hmong culture—are preceded by the classifier *zaj*; this set of spoken words includes story, legend, song, prayer, saying, etc. While as many as seventy-five classifiers have been recorded for the language, we will look only at some of the most common ones in this exercise.

Part A: Carefully examine the data below and determine with which semantic categories of nouns the following classifiers are associated.

1. *rab*: _____
2. *daim*: _____
3. *txoj*: _____
4. *phau*: _____
5. *tawb*: _____
6. *tsab*: _____

1. <i>txoj hlua</i>	rope	17. <i>daim pam</i>	blanket
2. <i>daim txiag</i>	(wooden) board	18. <i>phau ntawv</i>	book
3. <i>rab rauj</i>	hammer	19. <i>rab ciaj</i>	pliers
4. <i>daim nplooj</i>	leaf of a tree	20. <i>rab diav</i>	spoon
5. <i>tawb qaub ncaug</i>	spit, spittle	21. <i>daim teb</i>	field
6. <i>rab phom</i>	rifle	22. <i>tsab ntawv</i>	letter (mail)
7. <i>daim tiab</i>	skirt	23. <i>txoj xov</i>	string, twine
8. <i>tsab xov</i>	(written) message	24. <i>tawb quav</i>	dung
9. <i>daim ntawv</i>	sheet of paper	25. <i>txoj hmoov</i>	destiny, fate
10. <i>rab hneev</i>	crossbow	26. <i>rab kaw</i>	saw
11. <i>phau nyiaj</i>	wad (of money)	27. <i>daim liaj</i>	rice paddy
12. <i>txoj hmab</i>	creeper (vine)	28. <i>rab hlau</i>	hoe
13. <i>rab koob</i>	needle	29. <i>daim sev</i>	apron
14. <i>txoj sia</i>	life	30. <i>rab txiab</i>	scissors
15. <i>tawb zis</i>	urine	31. <i>txoj kev</i>	road, path
16. <i>txoj hauj lwm</i>	work		

Part B: Classifiers and body parts. Carefully examine the data below and determine with which characteristics of body parts the following classifiers are associated.

1. *txhais*: _____

2. *tus*: _____

3. *txoj*: _____

4. *lub*: _____

1. <i>lub siab</i>	liver	14. <i>txhais tes</i>	hand
2. <i>tus nplaig</i>	tongue	15. <i>txoj hnyuv</i>	intestines
3. <i>lub cev</i>	body	16. <i>tus tw</i>	tail
4. <i>txoj leeg</i>	nerves	17. <i>lub xub pwg</i>	shoulder
5. <i>lub plawv</i>	heart	18. <i>txoj hlab ntsha</i>	veins
6. <i>tus qau</i>	penis	19. <i>lub hauv caug</i>	knee
7. <i>lub taub hau</i>	head	20. <i>txhais ceg</i>	leg
8. <i>txhais caj npab</i>	arm	21. <i>tus pob txha</i>	bone
9. <i>lub mis</i>	breast	22. <i>lub ntaws</i>	navel
10. <i>txoj sawv</i>	tendons	23. <i>txhais ko taw</i>	foot
11. <i>txhais ncej puab</i>	thigh	24. <i>lub qhov muag</i>	eye
12. <i>lub pob ntseg</i>	ear	25. <i>tus ntiv tes</i>	finger
13. <i>txoj hlab ntaws</i>	umbilical cord	26. <i>lub pim</i>	vagina

Part C: Using your answers to Parts A and B, determine which classifier is associated with the words listed below. *Briefly justify your choice of classifier.*

		Classifier	Why?
1. <i>qhib ntsia</i>	screwdriver	_____	_____
2. <i>plab</i>	stomach, abdomen	_____	_____
3. <i>ntawv sau</i>	notebook	_____	_____
4. <i>xov hlau</i>	iron wire	_____	_____
5. <i>tav</i>	rib	_____	_____
6. <i>duab</i>	photograph, picture	_____	_____

- | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|
| 7. <i>caj hlaub</i> | lower leg | _____ | _____ |
| 8. <i>duav hlau</i> | shovel | _____ | _____ |
| 9. <i>hauv siab</i> | chest (body part) | _____ | _____ |
| 10. <i>ntaub</i> | (piece of) cloth | _____ | _____ |
| 11. <i>ntiv taw</i> | toe | _____ | _____ |
| 12. <i>diav rawg</i> | fork | _____ | _____ |
| 13. <i>raum</i> | kidney | _____ | _____ |
| 14. <i>kab das</i> | blackboard | _____ | _____ |
| 15. <i>quav twm</i> | cow dung | _____ | _____ |

And what's your guess for #16?

- | | | | |
|----------------|-----|-------|-------|
| 16. <i>cai</i> | law | _____ | _____ |
|----------------|-----|-------|-------|

IV. SOME COMMON CLASSIFIERS*

<i>Daim</i>	Flat things such as fields, pages, etc.
<i>Lub</i>	Round or bulky objects, clothes (see also note below).
<i>Nkawm</i>	Things that come in pairs such as earrings, socks, etc.
<i>Phau</i>	Books or things that come in volumes.
<i>Rab</i>	Instruments, utensils.
<i>Tus</i>	People, animals, things that are long and cylindrical (see also note below).
<i>Tsob</i>	Plants, bushes, foliage.
<i>Txoj</i>	Things that come in length such as threads, wire, rope, roads, etc.
<i>Txhais</i>	Arms, hands, feet.

A. A NOTE ON THE CLASSIFIERS TUS AND LUB

Tus and *lub* are the most common classifiers in Hmong; *tus* is used with nouns referring to human beings, animals, things that closely affect people (such as illness), and things that come in "short" lengths (such as tree); *lub* is used with nouns referring not only to round and bulky things, but also to buildings (such as house), places (such as village), and means of transportation (such as car, boat, etc.), which all fall into the "container" category. To the best of our knowledge, *lub* is the most inclusive classifier in Hmong, and hence functions as a general purpose classifier; this is supported by the fact that new loanwords from English or French often (possibly exclusively, but this is not yet known for a fact) appear with this classifier. If you do not know the classifier for a noun, it is better to use the general purpose classifier *lub* than no classifier at all.

B. EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Match the following nouns with the appropriate classifier.

- | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| 1. _____ | <i>pam</i> | blanket | 11. _____ | <i>duab</i> | picture |
| 2. _____ | <i>tes</i> | hand | 12. _____ | <i>paj</i> | flower |
| 3. _____ | <i>diav</i> | spoon | 13. _____ | <i>paj</i> | plant |
| 4. _____ | <i>ntoo</i> | tree | 14. _____ | <i>tsev</i> | house |
| 5. _____ | <i>cwj mem</i> | pen | 15. _____ | <i>tsheb</i> | car |
| 6. _____ | <i>xov tooj</i> | telephone | 16. _____ | <i>hlua</i> | rope |
| 7. _____ | <i>ntawv</i> | page of paper | 17. _____ | <i>khau</i> | shoe |
| 8. _____ | <i>miv</i> | cat | 18. _____ | <i>duab</i> | shadow |
| 9. _____ | <i>teb</i> | farm field | 19. _____ | <i>khob</i> | cup |
| 10. _____ | <i>ntawv</i> | book | 20. _____ | <i>ceg</i> | leg |

* For a more comprehensive list of classifiers, see Heimbach (1969: Appendix 2, pp. 455-56).

Exercise 2: Complete the following sentences by inserting the appropriate classifier.

1. Hnub no kuv noj ib ____ qe.
2. Maiv muaj ib ____ tsho me me.
3. Kab Npauj tsis nyiam ____ miv xim dub.
4. Kuv tsis muaj ib ____ diav noj mov.
5. Nyuj ____ taub hau loj loj.
6. ____ paj ntawd muaj cuaj ____ paj.
7. Nruas niaj hnub ntxuav nws ____ tes.
8. ____ hlua nyob qhov twg?
9. ____ pam ntawd loj heev.
10. Muaj xya ____ cwj mem nyob ntawm ____ rooj zaum.

V. DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF CLASSIFIERS

So far we have discussed classifiers from a semantic point of view, paying close attention to the meaning of the nouns with which they are associated. We saw that in this respect, the function of classifiers is to group nouns into categories according to certain semantic principles. To complete the picture we must now turn to the grammatical functions of classifiers in order to understand when to use them and when not. As with some other aspects of Hmong grammar (e.g., time reference), one must look beyond phrases and sentences in isolation and analyze classifier usage in natural spoken and written discourse to fully understand the functions of classifiers and the types of grammatical constructions in which they occur. While it is true that a noun accompanied by its classifier typically translates as a singular definite noun phrase (see Mottin 1978, p. 29: *lub tsev* 'the house' [translation mine]), this covers only part of the picture, and classifiers should not be systematically equated with definite articles. Doing so would fail to capture a broader generalization with respect to classifier usage and prevent you from grasping the motivations underlying classifier usage in connected speech and texts.

In natural discourse, a typical scenario may go as follows: a speaker or a writer introduces a topic of discussion—e.g., houses for sale; to make general reference to houses, the bare noun *tsev* 'houses' is used. The speaker may start with a general statement such as "Houses are expensive," and then move on to introduce the idea of one particular house, "I saw one/a house." This would be expressed with *ib* 'one' followed by the classifier and the noun: *ib lub tsev* 'one/a house.' From this we see that one of the functions of classifiers is to individuate—i.e., to single out one item, one instance from within a larger set. (Folk tales typically start out this way: *Puag thaum ub muaj ib tug zaj...* 'Long, long ago there was a dragon...')

After singling out a particular house, the speaker may make specific comments about it: "The house is nice and large; it has three bedrooms; ...the house is in a good neighborhood, etc." To refer to the specific house for the first time, the classifier followed by the noun is used: *lub tsev* 'the house.' From this we see that another function of classifiers is to make specific, definite reference after something has been singled out: from *ib lub tsev* 'one/a house' we move to *lub tsev* 'the house'; this is the area where classifier + noun typically translates as definite article + noun. As the speaker goes on to say more things about the house, the classifier no longer needs to be used because the house is now referentially salient—i.e., stands out from the speaker's point of view. S/he can make further comments about the house by simply using the bare noun *tsev*. In English though, "the house" would continue to be used as the speaker goes on talking about *tsev*.

After making several remarks about the house using *tsev*, the speaker may mention that a friend of his/hers also saw the house and liked it: "Tong liked the house too." Here *tsev*, even though it has already been specifically discussed and is given information, would appear with the classifier because we have shifted from the speaker's to the friend's point of view, and the noun phrase is referentially salient vis-à-vis Tong. Hence yet another function of classifiers is to bring a noun phrase to the forefront of attention when there has been a shift in point of view.

The speaker may continue by saying that s/he wants to buy *lub tsev no* 'this house' and conclude by referring to it as *kuv lub tsev* 'my house.' This establishes a new kind of relationship between the speaker and the house and draws attention to the noun phrase, so it comes as no surprise that the classifier is used with demonstratives and possessives.

To summarize, while bare nouns are used to make general initial reference as well as ongoing reference once a referent has been established, nouns accompanied by classifiers are used to make the referent stand out in some fashion. As pointed out by Riddle (1989a), classifiers function to increase precision of reference and are indicators of relative referential salience.

Nouns take on a more precise reference when modifying elements are added to them; this means that classifiers are used with nouns in the following grammatical constructions:

1. In noun phrases with numerals:

Lauj Pov muaj ib tug ntxhais.
Lopao have one clf daughter
'Lopao has one/a daughter.'

Muaj tsib phau ntawv liab nyob ntawd.
be five clf book red located there
'There are five red books over there.'

2. In noun phrases with demonstratives (pointing words):

Daim ntawv no yog kuv li.
clf paper this be mine
'This sheet of paper is mine.'

Lub tsev ntawd loj loj.
clf house that big big
'That house is very big.'

3. When specific, definite reference is being made after something has been singled out for discussion:

Tus me nyuam nyiam tus dev.
clf child like clf dog
'The child likes the dog.'

(We have been previously introduced to both the child and the dog.)

Tus tub puas nyiam rab hneev?
 clf boy Q like clf crossbow

'Does the boy like the crossbow?'

(We have been previously introduced to both the boy and the crossbow.)

4. In noun phrases with possessives:

Nws lub npe hu ua Lauj Pov.

his clf name is called Lopao

'His name is Lopao.'

Kuv nyiam kuv tus xib fwb.

I like my clf teacher

'I like my teacher.'

NOTE: when the possessive relationship is obvious from a Hmong perspective, the classifier can be omitted:

kuv tsev 'my house'

kuv tes 'my hand'

kuv poj niam 'my wife'

5. In possessive noun phrases before the possessor and before the possessed:

Tus me nyuam daim tiab liab.

clf child clf skirt red

'The child's skirt is red.'

Tus tsov tus hniav loj loj.

clf tiger clf teeth big big

'The tiger's teeth are very big.'

6. In noun phrases with non-numeral quantifiers:

Peb pom ntau lub tsev.

we see many clf houses

'We see many houses.'

Neb muaj pes tsawg tus menyuam?

you-two have how many clf child

'How many children do you(-two) have?'

Tshuav tsawg tus ntoo.

remain few clf tree

'Few trees are left.'

Tus txiv neeb kho tau txhia tus mob.

clf shaman cure can every clf illness

'The shaman can cure all illnesses.'

A. FUNCTIONS OF CLASSIFIERS IN WORD FORMATION

Classifiers not only play an important referential salience role in noun phrases, but also crucial functions at the word formation level by narrowing down the reference of certain nouns. In the classifier exercise, we saw that a noun with a general meaning such as *ntawv* 'paper' gets its specific meaning from the unit classifier (e.g., *phau ntawv* 'book,' *daim ntawv* 'sheet of paper,' etc). The unit classifier also narrows down the reference of *dej* 'water,'

<i>dej</i>	vs.	<i>tus dej</i>
'water'		'river'

serves to remove the reference ambiguity of the homophones *txiv* 'fruit' and *txiv* 'husband,'

<i>lub txiv</i>	vs.	<i>tus txiv</i>
clf fruit		clf husband
'fruit'		'husband'

allows nouns to be derived from verbs,

<i>tus sau</i>	<i>tus tsav</i>	<i>tsheb</i>	<i>tus saib</i>	<i>tus pab</i>
clf write	clf drive	car	clf look, observe	clf help
'author'	'driver'		'supervisor'	'assistant'

and serves to distinguish among key kinship terms:

<i>txiv</i>	'father'	vs.	<i>tus txiv</i>	'husband'
<i>niam</i>	'mother'	vs.	<i>tus niam</i>	'sister' (female speaking)
			<i>tus poj niam</i>	'wife'

B. CLASSIFIERS AS PRONOUNS

Classifiers can also function as pronouns, standing in for a noun that has been previously mentioned and hence does not need to be repeated. In most of the noun phrase examples given above, the classifiers can be used in this fashion, as seen below. In the left-hand column examples, the classifiers occur in full noun phrases. In their right-hand column counterparts, the head noun has been deleted to avoid repetition, thus illustrating the pronominal usage of classifiers. Note that the classifiers do not stand completely alone; they are still accompanied by some type of

modifier (numeral, demonstrative, possessive, quantifier, etc.), but the head noun is left out because it can be understood from the discourse context.

Lauj Pov muaj ib tug ntxhais.

'Lopao has one/a daughter.'

Lauj Pov muaj ib tug.

'Lopao has one.'

Lub tsev ntawd loj loj.

'That house is very big.'

Lub ntawd loj loj.

'That one is very big.'

Nws lub npe hu ua Lauj Pov.

'His name is Lopao.'

Nws lub hu ua Lauj Pov.

'His is Lopao.'

Lauj Pov lub tsev tsis liab.

'“Lopao's house is not red.'

Lauj Pov lub tsis liab.

'Lopao's is not red.'

Peb pom ntau lub tsev.

'We see many houses.'

Peb pom ntau lub.

'We see many.'

Neb muaj pes tsawg tus menyuam?

'How many children do you(-two) have?'

Neb muaj pes tsawg tus?

'How many do you(-two) have?'

Tshuav tsawg tus ntoo.

'Few trees are left.'

Tshuav tsawg tus.

'Few are left.'

VI. A TECHNIQUE FOR TEACHING/LEARNING NOUN CLASSIFIERS IN HMONG*

Elizabeth M. Riddle

The "scavenger hunt" described here is an activity for Hmong language students to practice the use of noun classifiers. This activity is simple to do in a class, but requires fairly careful preparation on the part of the instructor beforehand (but see note at end).

A. TEACHING GOAL. To give students practice in associating particular classifiers with particular nouns in the context of oral communication. It is important to clearly explain this goal to the students in advance.

B. OBJECT OF THE GAME. To "scavenge" all the items on one's list from other students, who have the items hidden in paper bags, by asking them questions using the appropriate classifiers.

C. PREPARATION. Gather objects representing common nouns (at the appropriate vocabulary level for your students) which take different classifiers. For example, in Hmong the nouns translated as 'pencil' and 'cat' take the classifier *tus*; 'spoon' and 'scissors' take *rab*; 'chair,' 'car,' and 'shirt' take *lub*; 'paper' and 'skirt' take *daim*, and so on. Use toys, miniatures, and pictures of items as needed, and put together sets of four to six for each student, representing a mixture of classifiers.

Make up a different list of items for each student to gather by drawing pictures on numbered index cards, each with a different set of the four to six of the objects you have collected and representing a variety of classifiers as well. It is better to draw pictures rather than write out the words because this gives the students practice in recalling noun vocabulary as well as classifiers, making the activity more challenging and more interesting.

Now put each set of objects you have gathered into a large, numbered paper bag, one for each student. Since the students will be seeking the objects on their lists and handing out objects to other students from their bags, it is important to make sure that they do not have anything in their own bags that is on their own lists. Giving each student a card and bag with the same number will help you to keep track of this. Also make sure that no one bag has all of the items for one list, and inform the students of this in advance.

* This is adapted from Riddle (1989/90).

D. PLAY. The game is played as follows. Each student is given a list of objects to find and a bag with a different set of objects to give out. Instruct the students not to show their lists to each other. The students then walk around the room asking each other questions such as "Do you have a book?," "Do you have a pen?," "Do you have a spoon?," according to their lists in order to "scavenge" the items on their lists. In Hmong, the question calls for the use of the number one plus a classifier, thus providing the desired practice. For example, one student would ask another,

Koj puas muaj ib lub tsheb?

you Q have 1 clf car

'Do you have a car?'

The student asked monitors the choice of classifier. If it is correct, that student answers the question, handing over any item requested which he or she has. If the classifier is incorrect, the monitoring student says *Nug dua* 'Ask again' to give the requester a second chance to use the correct form. The total number of chances to be given should be stated in advance by the instructor. If a student cannot come up with the correct classifier after several chances, s/he should look it up before proceeding further. Once the correct form has been used, if the student asked does not have the item requested, he or she says so. The instructor can circulate around the room to give assistance as needed, or else can play along with the students.

To increase interest and encourage concentration, the game can be played as a race, with the first student gathering all the items on his or her list the winner, but it is important that all students be allowed to complete the game. It takes about 10-20 minutes to play, depending on the number of objects to be collected and the number of participants.

This game forces students to think repeatedly about which classifier goes with which noun and to practice using them in the speech context of seeking information that they genuinely lack. It is thus more effective than a rote activity such as a pattern practice because there are real consequences to using the correct classifiers.

E. NOTE. Preparation for this activity can be done collectively. For instance, the instructor can ask the students to bring objects representing nouns they have learned, collecting the objects after students state what they brought (*Kuv muaj ib tug miv* 'I have a cat'). The instructor can also enroll the help of students who are good at drawing to draw the objects on index cards; alternately, everybody can participate in the drawing activity via a Total Physical Response exercise ("Draw a car," "Draw a pencil," etc.), and the instructor can select the best drawings for the scavenger hunt.

THE GENERAL PLURAL MARKER *COV*

Compare the noun phrases in (1) with the noun phrases in (2):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. a. <i>ib lub tsev</i>
one clf house
'one/a house'</p> <p>b. <i>lub tsev</i>
clf house
'the house'</p> | <p>d. <i>cov mov</i>
group rice
'cooked rice'</p> <p>e. <i>cov dej</i>
group water
'water'</p> <p>f. <i>cov nyiaj</i>
group silver
'silver'</p> |
| <p>2. a. <i>cov tsev</i>
group house
'the houses'</p> <p>b. <i>cov menyuaam</i>
group child
'the children'</p> <p>c. <i>cov ntoo</i>
group tree
'the trees, the forest'</p> | |

The noun phrases in (1) appear in the singular and are characterized by the presence of the unit classifier (*lub*) associated with the given noun (*tsev*). As we saw in the section on "When Must a Classifier Be Used?," the function of unit classifiers is to individuate—i.e., to mark a noun as singular—and to make definite reference.

The noun phrases in (2), on the other hand, emphasize the plurality or collectivity of the noun and are characterized by the presence of a group classifier, *cov*. Using *cov* before a noun is a common way of marking the noun as plural. *Cov* can be used to pluralize any noun—human or non-human, animate or inanimate, concrete or abstract, count (2 a-c) or mass (2 d-f)—and thus functions as a general plural marker in Hmong. Note that when *cov* is used to pluralize a noun, the unit classifier found in singular noun phrases is no longer used: while *lub* occurs in singular noun phrases such as *ib lub tsev* and *lub tsev*, *cov *lub tsev* is ungrammatical, as indicated by the asterisk. This is because of the historical origin of *cov*: *cov* is derived from a classifier meaning "bunches or clusters of fruit," and while its meaning has broadened to a general group classifier used as a plural marker, grammatically it still fits into the classifier slot in the structure of the noun phrase.[†] Since Hmong does not allow more than one classifier per noun phrase, the unit classifier found in singular noun phrases gives way to the group classifier *cov* in the plural. The only

[†] For details on this, see Ratliff (1991).

exception to this rule occurs with the nouns *ntawv* 'paper, with reference to writing' and *lus* 'speech, words'; these nouns, being general and vague in reference, appear with more than one unit classifier and get their precise meaning from the unit classifier with which they are paired (see answer sheet to Hmong classifier exercise for nouns that can select more than one classifier). Since it is the unit classifiers with which *ntawv* and *lus* appear that give these underspecified nouns their exact meaning, these unit classifiers are retained in plural noun phrases with *cov*, as seen below:

3. a. *ib daig ntawv* *daim* = clf for flat things (note t.c. in *ib daig*)
 one clf paper
 'one/a sheet of paper'
 Plural: *cov daim ntawv*
 'the sheets of paper'
- b. *ib phau ntawv* *phau* = clf for piles of things
 one clf paper
 'one/a book'
 Plural: *cov phau ntawv*
 'the books'
- c. *ib tsab ntawv* *tsab* = clf for written messages
 one clf paper
 'one/a letter (piece of mail)'
 Plural: *cov tsab ntawv*
 'the letters (pieces of mail)'
4. a. *ib lo lus* *lo* = clf for mouthfuls
 one clf speech
 'one/a word'
 Plural: *cov lo lus*
 'the words'
- b. *ib kab lus* *kab* = 'line'
 one clf speech
 'one/a line of writing'
 Plural: *cov kab lus*
 'the lines of writing'
- c. *ib zag lus* *zag* = clf for spoken words such as sayings, songs, stories
 one clf speech (note t.c. in *ib zag*)
 'one/a sentence'
 Plural: *cov zag lus*
 'the sentences'

Cov also frequently occurs preceded by the numeral *ib* 'one'; the collocation *ib co* (note t.c.) is used for small indefinite quantities; it typically translates as 'a little, some' with mass nouns as in (5a-b), and as 'a group of, a few, some' with count nouns as in (5c-d):

5. a. *ib co dej*
 one group water
 'a little/some water'
- b. *ib co txhuv*
 one group hulled rice
 'a little/some hulled rice'
- c. *ib co liab*
 one group monkey
 'a group of/a few/some monkeys.'
- d. *ib co me nyaum*
 one group child
 'a group of/a few/some children.'

As one would expect, plural noun phrases with *cov* also occur with demonstratives and possessives, as seen in (6a-c):

6. a. *cov ntoo no*
 group tree this
 'these trees'
- b. *cov neeg ntawd*
 group man that
 'those men'
- c. *koj cov me nyuam mloog lus, kuv cov tsis mloog lus*
 your group child listen speech my group neg listen speech
 'Your children obey, mine don't.'

QUANTIFIERS

I. NUMERAL QUANTIFIERS

A. BASIC NUMERALS

1	<i>ib</i>
2	<i>ob</i>
3	<i>peb</i>
4	<i>plaub</i>
5	<i>tsib</i>
6	<i>rau</i>
7	<i>xya</i>
8	<i>yim</i>
9	<i>cuaj</i>
10	<i>kaum</i>
11	<i>kaum ib</i>
12	<i>kaum ob</i>
13	<i>kaum peb</i>
14	<i>kaum plaub</i>
15	<i>kaum tsib</i>
16	<i>kaum rau</i>
17	<i>kaum xya</i>
18	<i>kaum yim</i>
19	<i>kaum cuaj</i>
20	<i>nees nkaum</i>

For "10's," 30 and above, *caum* is used (watch for tone change)

30	<i>peb caug</i>
40	<i>plaub caug</i>
50	<i>tsib caug</i>
60	<i>rau caum</i>
70	<i>xya caum</i>
80	<i>yim caum</i>
90	<i>cuaj caum</i>

For "100's," *pua* is used (watch for tone change)

100	<i>ib puas</i>
200	<i>ob puas</i>
300	<i>peb puas</i>
400	<i>plaub puas</i>
500	<i>tsib puas</i>
600	<i>rau pua</i>
700	<i>xya pua</i>
800	<i>yim pua</i>
900	<i>cuaj puas</i>
1,000	<i>ib txhiab</i>
2,000	<i>ob txhiab, etc.</i>
10,000	<i>ib vam</i>
20,000	<i>ob vam, etc.</i>
1,000,000	<i>ib plhom, ib lab</i>

1994 *ib txhiab cuaj puas cuaj caum plaub*
1 1,000 9 100 9 10 4

B. SPECIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE NUMERAL *IB* 'ONE'

The numeral *ib* 'one' serves as the equivalent of the indefinite article "a," as seen in (1):

1. *Nplias muaj ib lub tsheb*
 Bliā have one clf car
 'Nplias has a car.'

When *ib* is followed by a noun without an intervening classifier, the collocation expresses the entirety of the noun (2a-c), or points to the fact that the noun is used as a measure word (3a-d):

2. a. *ib tse* (t.c. from *tsev* 'house')
 one house
 'a household—i.e., all the people who can live in the house'
- b. *ib ce* (t.c. from *cev* 'body')
 one body
 'the entire body'
- c. *ib zog* (t.c. from *zos* 'village')
 one village
 'the whole village'
3. a. *ib dav hlau*
 one plane
 'one planeful (of goods)'
- b. *ib rooj*
 one table
 'one tableful'
- c. *ib vog* (t.c. from *voj* 'circle')
 one moment
 'one circle, a circular slice or flat section'
- d. *ib teg* (t.c. from *tes* 'hand')
 one hand
 'one blow of the hand'

Recall also the common collocation is *ib co* 'a little, a few, some, a group of' used for small indefinite quantities. (See "The General Plural Marker *cov*" for details.)

II. NON-NUMERAL QUANTIFIERS

The most common non-numeral quantifiers—i.e., words such as much/many, some, few, every, etc.—are listed and illustrated below.

A. NTAU 'MUCH, MANY, A LOT OF'; COOB 'MANY, A LOT OF'

Ntau and *coob* both refer to large quantities, but while *ntau* can be used with animate as well as inanimate nouns, *coob* can be used only with nouns referring to animate beings. *Ntau* and *coob* fit into either of the following slots in noun phrases:

ntau/coob 'much, many' + classifier + noun

or

classifier + noun + *ntau/coob* 'much, many'

1. *Koj yuav ntsib ntau tus neeg.*
you fut meet many clf people
'You'll meet a lot of people.'
2. *Lawv kawm ntau phau ntawv.*
they study many clf book
'They studied many books.'
3. *Peb tsis muaj nplej ntau.*
we neg have rice much
'We don't have a lot of/much rice.'
4. *Coob tus neeg mus ua teb.*
many clf people go work in the fields
'Many people went to work in the fields.'
5. *Muaj npua tuag coob.*
be pig dead many
'Many pigs died.'

When *ntau* and *coob* come after the noun, they can be reduplicated for emphasis:

6. *Lawv muaj nyiaj muaj kub ntau ntau.*
they have silver have gold much much
'They are very rich.'
7. *tib neeg coob coob.*
individual many many
'a multitude, a crowd'

Ntau and *coob* can also function as adverbs, like “a lot” can in English:

8. *Nws ua hauj lwm ntau ntau.*
 s/he work a lot a lot
 ‘S/he works a lot/very hard.’
9. *Lawv tuaj coob.*
 they come many
 ‘They came in great numbers.’

B. TSAWG ‘LITTLE, FEW’

Tsawg refers to small quantities, and like *ntau* and *coob*, it can fit into either of the following slots in noun phrases:

tsawg ‘little, few’ + classifier + noun
 or
 classifier + noun + *tsawg* ‘little, few’

10. *Tshuav tsawg tus ntoo.*
 remain few clf tree
 ‘Few trees are left.’
11. *Muaj tsawg lub tsev yug npua.*
 be few clf house raise pig
 ‘There are few families who raise pigs.’
12. *Muaj nqaij tsawg.*
 be meat little
 ‘There is little meat.’

Like *ntau* and *coob*, *tsawg* can both be reduplicated for emphasis when it follows the noun (13), and function as an adverb, like “little” can in English (14):

13. *Muaj nqaij tsawg tsawg.*
 be meat little little
 ‘There is very little meat.’
14. *Npis noj tsawg.*
 Bee eat little
 ‘Bee eats little/Bee doesn’t eat much.’

C. SAWV DAWS 'ALL, EVERY'

Sawv daws refers to all the members in a group and is used with nouns referring to human beings only.* This quantifier is typically used in subject position and comes after the noun or pronoun in the noun phrase, which can begin with an optional *tas* 'all':†

(*tas* 'all') + noun/pronoun + *sawv daws* 'all, every'

15. *Peb sawv daws ua teb.*
 we all work in the fields
 'We all work in the fields/All of us work in the fields.'

16. *Nej me nyuam sawv daws tuaj ntawm no!*
 you-pl child all come here
 'You children all come here!'

Sawv daws can also be used by itself as a pronoun meaning 'everybody, everyone'

17. *Sawv daws mus tsev lawm.*
 everybody go house perf
 'Everybody has gone home.'

D. TXHIA/TXHUA 'ALL, EVERY'

Contrary to *sawv daws*, *txhia/txhua* can be used with any noun, and comes before the classifier and the noun in a noun phrase (which, again, can start with an optional *tas* 'all'):

(*tas* 'all') + *txhia/txhua* 'all, every' + classifier + noun

18. (*Tas*) *txhia tus me nyuam mus.*
 all every clf child go
 'All the children went.'
19. *Tus txiv neeb kho tau txhia tus mob.*
 clf shaman cure able every clf illness
 'The shaman can cure all illnesses.'

* It can also be used with reference to animals when they are personified, as in folk tales and storytelling.

† In natural spoken and written discourse, *sawv daws* and *txhia/txhua* 'all, every' (see section D) typically appear in conjunction with *tas*, *huv*, *tib si*, and/or *puav leej*, which all mean 'all, altogether,' as seen below:

Tas cov txiv neeb sawv daws puav leej tuaj tas huv tib si.
 all group shaman every all, altogether come all all all, altogether
 'All the shamans came, each and every one of them.'

(See section on parataxis for details.)

20. *Xyoo no mob txhua lub tsev.*
 year this be ill every clf house

'All the households are sick this year/There is illness in every household this year.'

At the present stage of research it is not clear what the difference between *txhia* and *txhua* is, if there is any. In terms of usage though, the two often occur together sequentially as in (21), or appear as the "A's" in the ABAC four-word phrases so frequently used in Hmong (see section on four-word phrases), as in (22-23):

21. *Peb nyob zoo txhua txhia tus.*
 we be well every every clf

'We are all well.'

22. *Peb nco txog nej txhia leej txhia tus.*
 we remember reach you every clf every clf

'We think about all of you (literally, each and every one of you).'

23. *Txhia hnuv txhua hmo nws kawm ntawv.*
 every day every night s/he study

'S/he studies every day and every night.'

E. NIAJ/NEJ 'EACH, EVERY'

Niaj and *nej* are variants which can be used interchangeably; they point to single instantiations of the noun they modify, rather than entirety (cf. *niaj hnuv* 'each day' vs. *tas hnuv* 'all day [long]'):

24. *niaj tus neeg*
 each clf person
 'each person'

25. *niaj xyoo, hlis, hnuv*
 each year, month, day
 'each year, month, day'

26. *niaj zaus*
 each time
 'each time, occasion'

F. TEJ 'A FEW, SOME, CERTAIN (PEOPLE, THINGS)'

Tej is a quantifier which can be used to pluralize noun phrases (27-28); in this respect it is similar to the pluralizer *cov*, but used less frequently. As is the case with *cov*, *tej* can appear only

before the noun and cannot be reduplicated for emphasis (i.e., noun + *tej* and noun + *tej tej* are ungrammatical). But contrary to *cov*, it can be followed by a classifier in a noun phrase (29); hence it fits into the quantifier slot (rather than the classifier slot like *cov*) in the structure of the noun phrase. It can also be followed by a classifier used pronominally and by a demonstrative (30-31). In terms of meaning, it refers to an indefinite quantity and can translate as 'a few, some, a group, certain (people, things).' Used by itself, it refers to "people", "things" in general (32-33). Finally, recall from the section on pronouns that *tej* also appears in the pronominal phrases *lawv tej* and *luag tej* 'others; other people; they/them.' (See section on pronouns for details.)

27. *Peb Hmoob nyiam nyob pem tej roob.*
 we Hmong like live up quant mountain
 'We Hmong like to live up in the mountains.'
28. *Nws mus xyuas tej kwv tij.*
 s/he go visit quant relatives
 'S/he went to visit (her) relatives.'
29. *Kuv pom tej tus me nyuam.*
 I see quant clf child
 'I saw a few children.'
30. a. *tej tus* 'some people, certain people'
 b. *tej yam* 'some things, certain kinds of things'
 c. *tej no* 'these'
31. *Tej tus ua zoo, tej tus ua phem.*
 quant clf do good quant clf do evil
 'Some people do good, some people do evil.'
32. a. *nyob tom tej*
 be loc quant
 'at their place'
- b. *mus tom tej*
 go loc quant
 'go to their place'
33. a. *zoo dua tej*
 good comp quant
 'better than those or them'
- b. *zoo tshaj tej*
 good superl quant
 'the best of all/better than everything else'

PRONOUNS

I. SUBJECT, OBJECT, AND POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

One area of the Hmong language which is relatively easy to acquire is the pronoun system. The same set of pronouns is used in subject, object, and possessive positions; this means that you have only one pronoun to learn for English "I," "me," and "my" for the first person singular pronoun. As you can see in (1-3) below, the grammatical function of the pronoun is clear from its position in the sentence: subject pronouns occur before the verb, object pronouns after the verb, and possessive ones before the classifier + noun sequences in possessive noun phrases.

A further simplification in the system is the fact that there is no gender distinction in the third person singular as there is in English, meaning that you have only one pronoun to learn for "he," "she," and "it."

However, there is one area where the Hmong system is richer than the English system: when referring to **two** people in the first, second, and third person plural—"we (two)," "you (two)," "they (two)"—special **dual** pronouns are used. The other plural pronouns are used for three or more.

The full set of pronouns is given below, with illustrative examples following.

	Singular		Dual		Plural	
1st person	<i>kuv</i>	I me my	<i>wb</i>	we (two) us (two) our (two)	<i>peb</i>	we us our
2nd person	<i>koj</i>	you you your	<i>neb</i>	you (two) you (two) your (two)	<i>nej</i>	you (all) you (all) your
3rd person	<i>nws</i>	he/she/it him/her/it his/hers/its	<i>nkawd*</i> (<i>nkawv</i>)	they (two) them (two) their (two)	<i>lawv</i>	they them their

1. *Kuv mus lawm.*

I go perf
'I went.'

* This pronoun is derived from *nkawm* 'pair; couple,' and many Hmong speakers have regularized the marginal low rising *-d* tone to the more common mid rising *-v* tone.

2. *Npis pom kuv.*
Bee see me
'Bee saw me.'
3. *kuv lub tsev*
my clf house
'my house'
4. *Nag hmo peb pom neb.*
last night I see you (two)
'We saw you (two) last night.'
5. *Nws daim tiab zoo nkauj kawg.*
her clf skirt beautiful very
'Her skirt is very beautiful.'

II. REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

The pronouns given above also serve as reflexive pronouns, as seen in (6) and (7):

6. *Kuv yuav ua kuv.*
I fut do myself
'I'll do it myself.'
7. *Koj puas pom koj?*
you Q see yourself
'Did you see it yourself?'

III. OTHER PRONOUNS

In addition to the pronouns given above, there are a few other pronouns which are used frequently:

A. THE INDEFINITE PRONOUN YUS

Yus is a pronoun with an indefinite meaning—equivalent to the English indefinite pronouns "one" or "you," as in "One/you can't do that here." This usage is illustrated in (8):

8. *Yus tsis paub yus tsis txhob hais.*
one neg know one neg neg imp say
'When one doesn't know, one doesn't say anything.'

As pointed out by Heimbach (p.430), *yus* can also be used “in place of the first person pronoun *kuv* when politely speaking of one’s self (similar to the English use of ‘one’).” This is illustrated in (9):

9. *Nej hnuv yus ua hauj lwm tas zog.*
 each day one do work all strength
 ‘Every day I work as hard as I can.’

NOTE: *Yus* also appears in the phrase *yus tua yus* ‘suicide (literally, one kill oneself).’

B. THE PRONOUNS LAWV TEJ, LUAG, LUAG TEJ ‘OTHERS, OTHER PEOPLE; THEY/THEM’

In the third person plural, *lawv tej*, *luag*, or *luag tej* ‘others, other people; they/them’ are often used as alternatives to *lawv* ‘they.’ This is especially the case when the referent is vague and does not include oneself and one’s own group—i.e., when one is talking about “them,” “the others.” This is illustrated in (10):

10. *Luag hais li.*
 they speak like that
 ‘They say that.’
11. *Yuav tsum pab luag tej.*
 must help others
 ‘One must help others.’

NOTE: The usage of the pronouns discussed in sections (A) and (B) above is difficult to illustrate in isolated sentences. The best strategy to develop a feel for them is to make a note of their usage in real conversations and texts.

IV. PRONOUN USAGE

In natural spoken and written discourse (rather than in isolated sentences as in the examples given above for illustrative purposes), pronouns are typically omitted when their referent can be understood from the context. Once who or what is being talked about has been established, it is redundant from the Hmong point of view to keep repeating the same referent.* Hence, (12b) below is not only a perfectly grammatical Hmong sentence, but also the most idiomatic way to answer the question in (12a); it is clear from the question that the subject in the answer is “I” and the object “him [Bee],” so there is no need to express the pronouns overtly:

* The same is true of time reference: once the time frame of an event (e.g., yesterday, a long time ago, etc.) has been established, there is no need to repeat it by marking the verb also (see section on tense).

12a. *Koj puas pom Npis?*

you Q see Bee

'Did you see Bee?'

b. *Pom xwb.*

see indeed

'I did./Yes, I saw him.'

It is difficult to illustrate this phenomenon out of context with isolated sentences; the best way to familiarize yourself with it is to pay attention when listening to Hmong speakers and when reading stories, and to notice that pronouns are not repeated as long as the referent is clear and recoverable from the context.

DEMONSTRATIVES

I. DEMONSTRATIVES IN NOUN PHRASES

Demonstratives (pointing words) come AFTER the noun in Hmong, and since they give a noun definite reference, the noun must be preceded by its classifier. Hence the sequence is:

CLASSIFIER + NOUN + DEMONSTRATIVE

lub tsev no
clf house this
'this house'

The most common demonstratives are listed and illustrated in the table below.

Demonstrative	Translation	Example
<i>no</i>	'this' (near me, the speaker)	<i>Lub tsev no loj loj</i> clf house this big big 'This house (near me) is very big.'
<i>ko</i>	'that' (near you, the hearer)	<i>Lub tsev ko loj loj</i> clf house that big big 'That house (near you) is very big.'
<i>ntawd</i>	'that' (nearby)	<i>Lub tsev ntawd loj loj</i> clf house that big big 'That house (nearby) is very big.'

Notice that English does not have an equivalent for the second demonstrative, *ko* 'that (near the hearer).' Hence, you will have to make a conscious effort to remember using *ko* instead of *ntawd* when referring to something close to your interlocutor.

II. THE PRONOMINAL USAGE OF DEMONSTRATIVES

The demonstratives listed above can be used as pronouns—i.e., without the noun—when the referent of this noun is clear from the context. When used pronominally, the demonstratives still occur with the classifier of the noun referred to, as illustrated in the (b) versions of the sentences below:

1. a. *Lub tsev no lojloj*
 clf house this big big
 'This house is very big.'
- b. *Lub no lojloj*
 clf this big big
 'This one is very big.'
2. a. *Tus menyuam ko me me*
 clf child that small small
 'That child (near you) is very small.'
- b. *Tus ko me me*
 clf that small small
 'That one (near you) is very small.'
3. a. *Peb pom ob lub tsev ntawd*
 we see two clf house that
 'We saw those two houses.'
- b. *Peb pom ob lub ntawd*
 we see two clf that
 'We saw those two.'

When the referent is vague, *qhov* is used in lieu of the classifier:

qhov no 'this'
qhov ko 'that near you'
qhov ntawd 'that nearby'

NOTE: *qhov no*, *qhov ko*, and *qhov ntawd* can also mean 'here,' 'there (near you),' and 'there (nearby),' respectively.

FUNCTIONS OF THE MARGINAL *-D* TONE

In addition to the seven basic tones of Hmong there is an eighth, more marginal tone which is characterized by a low fall-rise contour (213 on a five-point pitch scale) and a slightly longer duration than the basic tones, and which is represented by a final *-d* in the RPA. As pointed out in the section on pronouns, the *-d* tone occurs in the third-person plural dual pronoun *nkawd* 'they (two),' which developed out of the corresponding *-m* tone noun *nkawm* 'pair, couple.' As you will see below, *-d* tone words are related to *-m* tone words in the majority of cases.

I. THE *-D* TONE IN DEMONSTRATIVE NOUNS

Consider these examples from Bertrais's dictionary, paying close attention to the *-m* and *-d* tone words:

1. *nam / nrad* 'down'

a. *nyob nam teb*
be down field

'down below in the field'

b. *nyob nrad*

be down there

'down there'

2. *nraum / nraud* 'outside'

a. *nyob nraum zoov*
be outside forest

'outside'

b. *nyob sab nraud*

be side outside

'outside, on the other side'

3. *ntawm / ntawd* 'here, there (nearby)'

a. *nyob ntawm kev*
be here trail

'on the trail'

b. *nyob ntawd*

be there

'there (a small distance away)'

4. *pem / ped* 'up'

a. *nyob pem roob*
be up mountain

'up on the mountain'

b. *nyob ped*

be up there

'up there'

5. *saum / saud* 'above'

a. *nyob saum nthab*
be above platform

'on the storage platform'

b. *nyob saud*

be above there

'above there'

6. *tim / tid* 'opposite'

a. *nyob tim nej*
be opposite you

'at your place'

b. *nyob tid*

be over there

'over there'

7. *tom / tod* 'there'

a. *mus tom khw*
 go there market
 'go to the market'

b. *mus lawm tod*
 go distance there
 'go over there'

8. *thaum / thaud* 'time when'

a. *thaum ntawd*
 time there
 'at that time'

b. *puag txheej thaud*
 many generation time
 'in the old days'

The *-m* tone words in the (a) sentences are high-frequency space and time reference words which function as the first element of a prepositional phrase. As you can see, they have *-d* tone counterparts in the (b) sentences. These *-d* tone words point to a place or time familiar to the speakers involved, either because they have talked about it before, or because it is clear from the speech context. Notice that the *-d* tone words behave differently from the *-m* tone words in terms of their grammatical function: they are not followed by a noun; instead they occur as independent elements at the end of a phrase. Because of their pointing function and because they occur as independent elements, a good way of referring to them is to call them "demonstrative nouns."

There are a few more tonal doublets such as the ones in (1-8):

9. *qaum / qaud* 'back, top part of'

a. *qaum tes*
 back hand
 'the back of the hand'

b. *nyob nraum kuv sab nraub qaud*
 be outside my side middle back
 'behind my back'

10. *sim / sid* 'time'

a. *tam sim no*
 time this
 'right away'

b. *tam sid*
 'right away'

11. *chim / chid* 'moment'

a. *ib chim kuv tuaj*
 one moment I come
 'I'm coming in a minute.'

b. *thawj chid*
 first moment
 'at the beginning'

12. *npaum / npaud* 'measure'

a. *Koj yuav npaum li cas?*
 you take measure like how
 'How much are you taking?'

b. *Kuv yuav tsis tas npaud*
 I take not all measure
 'I'm not taking as much as that.'

II. OTHER FUNCTIONS AND MEANINGS OF THE *-d* TONE

In addition to the demonstrative noun function of the *-d* tone discussed above, there are at least three other areas where the *-d* tone is used.

A. THE DEFINITE REFERENCE FUNCTION

The *-d* tone can be substituted for the *-m* tone to make definite reference to an animate *-m* tone noun which has just been introduced. This usage of the *-d* tone as a definite reference marker is illustrated with *me nyuam* 'child' in (13):

13. *Nws muaj ob tug me nyuam. Ces ob tug me nyuad chis chis.*
 s/he have two clf child then two clf child angry angry
 'She had two children. Then those two children were very angry.'

B. THE VOCATIVE FUNCTION

The *-d* tone can also be used with animate *-m* tone words as a vocative marker, meaning that it can be used to call out to someone, as seen in (14):

14. *Me nyuad!*
 'Children!'

C. THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC FUNCTION

Finally, the *-d* tone can be used as a variant of the *-m* tone in certain words for sociolinguistic and stylistic reasons. This is an area of the language which needs further investigation to be better understood. Pending further refinements, we can say that using the *-d* tone instead of the *-m* tone either reveals something about the speaker's attitude toward what s/he is saying (this is similar to different nuances being conveyed via intonation in English), or that the *-d* tone is a marker for a more literary or formal level of language use:

15. a. *niam* mother
 b. *niad!* mother!
16. a. *tej zaum* maybe (60% likely according to some speakers)
 b. *tej zaud* maybe (40% likely according to the same speakers)
17. a. *muam* sister (man speaking)
 b. *leej muad* Miss
 person sister

According to Dr. Yang Dao, (15b) is rude, and "one would not call one's own mother that way"; this judgment is conveyed via the *-d* tone. In (17b), however, the *-d* tone is considered to be a marker of polite and respectful language as used in courtship or in folk tales.

III. CONCLUSION

As you can see from the above, the *-d* tone is not an independent tone which serves to differentiate words like the seven other tones. It is clearly related to the *-m* tone, and its functions are limited to the areas discussed above.

TONE CHANGE*

As if eight tones were not hard enough to master, there are also some instances when the basic tone of a word changes, as you may have noticed. For the basic tone of a word to change, there are some necessary preconditions:

- (1) The affected word must be preceded by a “trigger” word with a *j* tone or a *b* tone;
- (2) The “trigger” word and the affected word must have a close grammatical relationship (numeral-classifier sequences and compounds are two examples; see “Tone Change Environments” below); and
- (3) The affected word must have a *j* tone, a *v* tone, an *s* tone, a \emptyset tone, or an *m* tone (note: not a *b* tone, a *g* tone, or a *d* tone).

I. EXAMPLES OF THE FIVE POSSIBLE TONE CHANGES

s changes to *g*:

tus me nyuam
clf child
'the child'

ib tug me nyuam
one clf child
'a child'

tus npua
clf pig
'the pig'

peb tug npua
three clf pig
'three pigs'

(Note: *peb tus npua* would be 'our pigs' instead of 'three pigs')

m changes to *g*:

daim ntawv
clf paper
'the sheet of paper'

cuajdaig ntawv
nine clf paper
'nine sheets of paper'

rau caum
six tens
'sixty'

peb caug
three tens
'thirty'

j changes to *g*:

lub ntuj
clf sky
'the sky'

nrab ntug
midle sky
'in the heavens'

dej
'water'

pajdeg
flower water
'bubbles'

* For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Ratliff (1992).

ntsej muag
ear face
'face'

lub pob ntseg
clf clump ear
'the ear'

\emptyset changes to *s*:

ib tsob ntoo
one clf tree
'a tree'

pob ntoos
clump tree
'stump'

rau pua
6 100
'six hundred'

cuaj puas
9 100
'nine hundred'

tus npua
clf pig
'the pig'

zaub npuas
vegetable pig
'pig-food'

v changes to \emptyset :

tus qav
clf frog
'the frog'

tus nab qa
clf snake frog
'the lizard'

lub qhov
clf hole
'the hole'

poob qho
to fall hole
'of the sun setting'

lub tsev
clf house
'the house'

ib tse neeg
one house people
'a household'

Remember, though, that these changes are not automatic. Even if the right preconditions exist, the change may not occur. Historically speaking, there was a time when the tone changes described above occurred like clockwork and could be considered rules. Now, however, the tone change system of the language is in the process of disappearing, so that the changes may or may not occur. Thus, they can no longer be considered as rules, and you will find a great deal of variation not only from speaker to speaker, but also within a single speaker. Like all languages, Hmong changes over time, and the gradual loss of the tone change system is one manifestation of this.

II. TONE CHANGE ENVIRONMENTS

The most common grammatical constructions in which the tone changes discussed above can occur are the following :

A. CONSTRUCTIONS INVOLVING NUMERALS

Since the numerals 1-5 and 9 are words with tones which can trigger tone change (i.e., -b and -j), and since they are frequently used in everyday language, you will find numerous examples of the type of constructions given below.

a. Numeral-classifier:

ib tug (< *tus*) *me nyuam*
one clf child
'one/a child'

ib co (< *cov*) *me nyuam*
one group/pl clf child
'(a group of) children'

tsib daig (< *daim*) *ntawv*
five clf paper
'five sheets of paper'

cuaj nkawg (< *nkawm*) *khau*
nine clf shoe
'nine pairs of shoes'

b. Numeral-numeral constructions:

- Numerals 3-5 + *caum* '10's' (30 and above)

peb caug (< *caum*)
3 10's
'thirty'

plaub caug (< *caum*)
4 10's
'forty'

tsib caug (< *caum*)
5 10's
'fifty'

Note: In *cuajcaum* (9 + 10's, 'ninety') *caum* does not undergo the expected tone change.

- Numeral 1-5 or 9 + *pua* '100'

ib puas (< *pua*)
1 100
'one hundred'

ob puas (< *pua*)
2 100
'two hundred'

cuaj puas (< *pua*)
9 100
'nine hundred'

ib txhiab cuaj puas cuaj caum ib
1 1,000 9 100 9 10's 1
'1991'

Note: *vam* '10,000,' a fairly recent loanword from Chinese, does not undergo tone change after the numerals 1-5 and 9, as exemplified below.

ib vam '10,000'
plaub vam '40,000'
cuaj vam '90,000'

c. *Ib* 'one' + nouns used as measure words, or nouns the entirety of which is being expressed:

ib hmos (< *hmo*)
one night
'one night'

ib zaug (< *zaus*)
one time, occasion, turn
'once, one occasion'

ib xyoos (< *xyoo*)
one year
'one year'

ib ce (< *cev*)
one body
'the entire body'

ib zog (< *zos*)
one village
'the whole village'

B. CONSTRUCTIONS WITH SIB 'EACH OTHER' + VERB WITH A L, V, S, Ø, OR M TONE

sib ceg (< *cem*)
e.o. scold
'to scold each other'

sib tog (< *tom*)
e.o. bite
'to bite each other'

sib tuas (< *tua*)
e.o. kill
'to kill each other'

sib zeg (< *zes*)
e.o. tease
'to tease each other'

sib tw (< *twv*)
e.o. compete
'to compete with each other'

sib qawg (< *qawm*)
e.o. show affection
'to show affection for each other'

Again, remember that tone change does not have to occur after *sib*, and that you will come across the phrases listed above with no tone change about as often as with tone change. Also, as far as we know, the *sib* + verb constructions with tone change do not exhibit any differences in meaning from their counterparts with no tone change.*

C. CERTAIN COMPOUNDS

nab qa (< *qav*)
snake frog
'lizard'

nqaij npuas (< *npua*)
meat pig
'pig meat'

nqaij nyug (< *nyuj*)
meat cow
'cow meat'

teb chaws (< *chaw*)
land place
'country'

nyiaj txiag (< *txiag*)
silver money
'(silver) money'

ciab mu (< *muv*)
wax bee
'bee wax'

(*dab*) *noj hlis* (< *hli*)
spirit eat moon
'an eclipse of the moon'

kaj ntug (< *ntuj*)
bright sky
'morning'

poob phlus (< *phlu*)
fall cheek
'lose face'†

D. TIPS TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH TONE CHANGE CONSTRUCTIONS

- 1) Since there is a great deal of variation in this area of the language, the best strategy is to follow the practices of the native speaker(s) with whom you are in contact. Listen carefully to the way they speak and imitate them.
- 2) A good way to learn the compounds listed in section C above is to make a list of them as you progress in your Hmong studies.
- 3) As a learning strategy, you may consider putting a hyphen between the two words involved in a tone change construction to remind yourself of the change.

* *Sib* can also be pronounced *sis*. This variant is frequently used by Hmong from Laos, and does not trigger tone change in the following verb since it bears a low tone.

† As you know, *poob* is typically used as an intransitive verb meaning 'to fall,' but it can also be used metaphorically as a transitive verb meaning 'to lose'—e.g., *poob-nyiaj* (fall-money) = 'to lose money' or *poob-phlus* (fall-cheek) = 'to lose face.'

COMPOUNDS

I. (NON-)TRANSPARENT COMPOUNDS

One mechanism on which languages rely to form new words is compounding—i.e., creating words which have at least two component parts. A type of compounding shared by many of the world's languages involves the juxtaposition of two clearly recognizable elements and results in a compound whose meaning is transparent if you consider the meaning of its components—e.g., English houseboat, coffee cake, teapot, or blackboard. As is to be expected, compounds of this type are also common in Hmong, except that the modifier follows its head:

<u>Compound</u>	<u>Meaning of Head + Modifier</u>	<u>Meaning of Compound</u>
<i>chaw pw</i>	'place, region' + 'to lie down'	'sleeping place, bed(room)'
<i>chaw noj mov</i>	'place, region' + 'to eat rice'	'eating room, kitchen'
<i>roj npua</i>	'oil, fat' + 'pig'	'pig fat'
<i>roj av</i>	'oil, fat' + 'earth'	'gas, oil'
<i>paj kws</i>	'flower' + 'corn'	'popcorn'
<i>paj ntaub</i>	'flower' + 'cloth'	'embroidery'

In a few compounds one of the components does not have an independent meaning in modern Hmong (cf. English "cranberry"); there are also a few cases where neither element has an independent meaning:

<i>nim no</i>	(no meaning) + 'this'	'now'
<i>tag kis</i>	'finish(ed)' + (no meaning)	'tomorrow'
<i>twj ywm</i>	(no meaning) + (no meaning)	'(be) quiet'

In the compounds described above the component parts are not related in meaning. Hmong is also characterized by a type of compounding not found in English in which the two component words are closely related in meaning. These compounds constitute yet another hallmark of Hmong style and fall into two categories: synonym compounds and "two-halves" compounds (see the following two sections below). Finally, there are two-syllable compounds in which the first syllable is a shape prefix which picks out an aspect of the physical shape of the head noun (see the third section below).

II. SYNONYM COMPOUNDS

Synonym compounds are made up of two words which are identical or very close in meaning (note that the effect is one of amplitude rather than redundancy):

<i>me nyuam</i>	'small' + 'small'	'child, small'
<i>poj niam</i>	'female' + 'female'	'woman, wife'
<i>nyiaj txiag</i>	'silver' + 'coins' (note tone change)	'money'

<i>teb chaws</i>	'land' + 'place' (note tone change)	'country'
<i>kwj ha</i>	'gully' + 'valley' (note tone change)	'valley'
<i>tes taw</i>	'hand' + 'foot'	'animal limbs'
<i>kab ntsaum</i>	'bug' + 'ant'	'bugs'
<i>toj roob</i>	'hill' + 'mountain'	'hills, mountains'
<i>txhij txhua</i>	'complete' + 'all'	'all, every'
<i>nruabnrab</i>	'middle' + 'middle'	'middle'

III. "TWO-HALVES" COMPOUNDS

"Two-halves" compounds are made up of two words with complementary meanings.

<i>kwv tij</i>	'younger brother' + 'older brother'	'kin, brothers'
<i>viv ncaus</i>	'younger sister' + 'older sister'*	'sister(s)'
<i>niam txiv</i>	'mother' + 'father'	'parents'
<i>nkauj nraug†</i>	'girl' + 'boy' (note tone change)	'young couple'
<i>ris tsho</i>	'pants' + 'shirt'	'suit (of clothing)'
<i>ntsej muag</i>	'ears' + 'eyes'	'face'

IV. SHAPE PREFIX COMPOUNDS

Shape prefix compounds are two-syllable compounds in which the first syllable is a shape noun, which can be thought of as a shape prefix. A good way to illustrate what a shape prefix is is to take the noun *tes*, which is typically translated as 'hand.' This noun should actually be understood as "the protuberance at the end of the forearm" since it includes the wrist, which we do not include in our notion of "hand." Hence, *tes* is found in two-syllable compounds where the first part is a shape prefix which picks out an aspect of the shape of the head noun *tes* and describes a component of "the protuberance at the end of the forearm." Consider the following examples (for the tone change in the head noun *tes*, see next paragraph):

<u>Compound</u>	<u>Translation</u>	=	<u>Shape Prefix</u>	+	<u>Head Noun</u>
<i>dab teg</i>	'wrist'	=	<i>dab</i> 'narrowing'	+	<i>tes</i> 'hand'
<i>pob teg</i>	'wrist bone'	=	<i>pob</i> 'round object'	+	<i>tes</i> 'hand'
<i>taub teg</i>	'fingertip'	=	<i>taub</i> 'gourd-shaped'	+	<i>tes</i> 'hand'

Shape prefixes are not classifiers because the whole compound (shape prefix-head noun) can be preceded by a classifier—e.g., *lub dab-teg* 'wrist.' In addition, given the proper conditions

* This compound is no longer separable.

† Poetic.

(see section on tone change), shape prefixes can induce tone change in the following noun while classifiers as a rule do not have the power to do that.*

Shape prefix compounds represent a resource of the language for expanding its lexicon; additional, high-frequency examples (arranged by shape prefix) are given below. Where it occurs, tone change (t.c.) is indicated in parentheses.

<u>Shape Prefix</u>	<u>Compound</u>	<u>Translation</u>
<u>pob</u> 'round object, clump, blob'	<i>lub pob ntoos</i> (t.c.)	'tree stump'
	<i>lub pob ntseg</i> (t.c.)	'ear' (the whole thing)
	<i>lub pob zeb</i>	'rock'
	<i>lub pob a</i> (t.c.)	'clod of earth'
	<i>lub pob taws</i> (t.c.)	'ankle bone'
<u>taub</u> 'gourd-shaped object'	<i>lub taub hau</i>	'head'
	<i>lub taub teg</i> (t.c.)	'fingertip'
	<i>lub taub ntseg</i> (t.c.)	'ear lobe'
	<i>lub taub nkawg</i> (t.c.)	'mass of hornets' (nest or swarm)
<u>qhov</u> 'hole'	<i>lub qhov rooj</i>	'door'
	<i>lub qhov rais</i>	'window'
	<i>lub qhov muag</i>	'eye'
	<i>lub qhov ncauj</i>	'mouth'
<u>ko</u> 'handle'	<i>txhais ko taw</i>	'foot'
	<i>tus ko tw</i>	'tail'
<u>caj</u> 'ridge'	<i>tus caj dab</i>	'neck'
	<i>tus caj ntswm</i>	'nose ridge'

With regard to meaning, shape prefixes do the same job as some classifiers do: they indicate the shape (or an aspect of the shape) of the noun under consideration; classifiers such as *daim* (flat), *lub* (round, bulky), *tus* (short length), and *txoj* (long length) also pick out the shape (or one aspect of the shape) of the noun with which they are paired. With regard to grammatical structure, however, shape prefixes occur in two-syllable compounds which are learned as a single vocabulary item, while classifiers occur only in the grammatical constructions described in the "When Must a Classifier Be Used?" section.

* For the few exceptions to this rule, see Ratliff (1992: Chapter II, Section 4.2).

POSSESSIVE NOUN PHRASES

In English possessive noun phrases such as the teacher's house, the boy's crossbow, and the pig's tail, the possessor comes first and the item possessed comes second. The same is true in Hmong, with both possessor and possessed preceded by their respective classifier (except with proper nouns as well as *txiv* 'father' and *niam* 'mother,' which do not take a classifier):

classifier + possessor + classifier + possessed

Possessive noun phrases are illustrated below.

1. *tus xib fwb lub tsev*
 clf teacher clf house
 'the teacher's house'
2. *tus tub rab hneev*
 clf boy clf crossbow
 'the boy's crossbow'
3. *tus npua tus tw*
 clf pig clf tail
 'the pig's tail'
4. *tus qaib lub qe*
 clf chicken clf egg
 'the chicken's egg'
5. *Neeb lub tsev*
 Neng clf house
 'Neng's house'
6. *tus me nyuam niam*
 clf child mother
 'the child's mother'

