HMONG AND AREAL SOUTH-EAST ASIA

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1 Hmong language[1]

Hmong language (also known as Miao or Meo) belongs to the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) language family. Wider genetic relationships are undetermined. The Hmong live in southern China and in the mountainous areas of northwest Viet Nam, Laos, northern Thailand and a small area of northeast Burma, with the greatest concentration in Guizhou province in China (almost three million, 1982 census (Schein 1986:77)).

The two major dialects of Laos and Thailand, and of refugees in the US, Australia, France and elsewhere, are White Hmong and Green Hmong,[2] the two dialects being very close. The dialect used in this paper is primarily but not exclusively that of Xieng Khouang (Laos) White Hmong.

0.2 Phonology and orthography

Lao Hmong phonology shares many features of the area: a system of tones developed in relation to devoicing and loss of consonants, aspirated-unaspirated contrasts in stops, back unrounded vowels, to name some. Hmong is also basically monosyllabic. Some features which seem not to fit so well into the immediate areal pattern are loss of all final consonants – even nasals – except velar nasal after some vowels , and a complex initial consonant system which includes post-velar stops, prenasalised stops, voiceless nasals (Jarkey hN in the orthography), and a set of laterally released consonants. There is some tone sandhi in Hmong. (For detailed discussion of Hmong phonology see Smalley 1976:87-109)

In the 1950s a romanised orthography was developed by George Barney and William Smalley in cooperation with Yves Bertrais (Smalley 1976:87-88). Their orthography was in use in Laos prior to 1975, with some publications in the orthography, and is currently used in the US, France, Australia and probably other places for newsletters and other publications. This orthography uses VV for V ng or ŋ and final consonant symbols for tones, as follows (mainly from Smalley 1976:109):

[˥]		[˦]	[˧]	[˨]	[˩]	[˩]	[˩]	[˩]
-b		-j	-v		-s	-g	-m	-d
										(breathy)	

0.3 Language contacts

Hmong has had long intensive contact with Tai, Sino-Tibetan and Austroasiatic languages and shares many phonological and grammatical features of the area. Some of the areal phonological features are mentioned in the preceding section. I am going to discuss here some grammatical characteristics whose areal nature appears to be the result of such long intensive contact. I will also discuss three grammatical features in Hmong which have quite different characteristics from the general areal patterns: noun phrase animate possessors, source phrases, and a preverbal question word.

The phenomenon of linguistic areas – geographical areas whose languages share linguistic features through contact with each other – is well attested, most notably of course in Emeneau's 'India as a linguistic area' in 1956 and many others since. The validity of areal features in mainland South-East Asia can be seen when comparing the local Austroasiatic languages with the Munda Austroasiatic languages in India and the local Austronesian languages (not used in this paper) with the Pacific island Austronesian languages. The local languages are closer in grammatical structure to their neighbours than to their more geographically distant cousins.

Besides Hmong, I have used data from the following languages, as well as having looked at others. The abbreviations in brackets are those used for non-Hmong sentence examples.

Tai languages: Central (Bangkok) Thai, Black Tai [BlkT] (northeast Thailand up into southern China), Nung (the border of northeast Viet Nam and China) (and Lao in Section 7).

Sino-Tibetan: Standard (Mandarin) Chinese [Chi].

Austroasiatic: Vietnamese [Viet];

Mon-Khmer: Khmer [Khm] (and Mon in Section 7), Mountain Mon-Khmer of Viet Nam: Sre, Chrau [Chr], Sedang [Sdng] (and Jeh and Katu in Section 4 and Bahnar in Section 7).

Except for two Tibeto-Burman Yi (Lolo) languages used in Section 7, I have not dealt with the western Sino-Tibetan languages, with any of the western Tai languages, nor with the western or far southern Austroasiatic languages.

I have used standard *pinyin* for Chinese and standard Vietnamese orthography. For Thai and Lao, including cited sentences, I have used one of the standard romanisations throughout. The orthographies used for the other languages are those used in the references cited.

0.4 Theoretical framework of discussion

Just briefly, to explain some of the terminology used in this paper, I will say something about the framework within which I will compare Hmong with the other languages. In general I will follow the notions of lexicase grammar as set forth by Stanley Starosta, particularly in his 1978, 1979, 1984a and 1984b papers. Starosta states that lexicase 'can be characterised as a non-transformational lexicalist dependency approach to case grammar' (1984b:121), in which a single grammatical representation for each sentence is generated directly out of the lexicon with no distinction between deep and surface structure. It is essentially a grammar of words (1984a:5), each one of which is marked with contextual features specifying its dependencies and possible associations with other words. Within a given sentence

> every noun-centered constituent bears a single syntactic-semantic 'case relation' such as Agent, Patient, or Correspondent to the verb or other lexical item on which it depends (1984b:122).

This case relation is to be distinguished from the case form associated with every nominal constituent. There are simple case forms such as Nominative and Accusative and there are case forms represented as complex clusters of meaningful localistic features such as 'source', 'goal', etc.

> Thus in addition to the usual function of signalling the presence of particular case relations in a sentence, case forms make an independent contribution to the total meaning of the sentence (1984b: 123).

Such complex case forms in the languages under discussion are frequently marked by prepositions or relator nouns (see Section 2.3).

The following case relations are posited in Starosta 1984a (19ff). (For detailed definitions see that source.)

> Patient, Agent, Locus (inner and outer), Correspondent (inner and outer) and Means (inner and outer).

The inner-outer distinction relates to the Patient (Theme in some models) being the perceived central participant in a state or event, the inner case relation having only the Patient in its scope while the outer case relation has the entire state or action in its scope. An inner case relation theref   ￫ part of the matrix of the relevant class of verbs.

It is within this notion of case grammar that the following areal phenomena are discussed, i.e. a notion in which verbs are classified according to the case relations with which they may or must occur and every nominal constituent of a sentence has an associated case relation and a case

case form.   In this framework it is unnecessary to posit different levels with ad hoc transformations, equi-NP deletions, etc.

1. BASIC SENTENCES

The sentence level characteristics discussed here are primary Subject-Verb-Object sentence order, the use of stative verbs for description, and the use of sentence-final particles. All these characteristics are well known to be common in the mainland South-East Asia area. Tibeto-Burman languages on the western fringes of this area have S-O-V order; the one Tibeto-Burman language having S-V-O order, Karen, lies on the eastern edge of this group next to Tai and Austroasiatic languages.

1.1 Subject-Verb-Object order

The primary sentence order in Hmong, as in the other languages of the immediate area, is Subject-Verb-Object (-inner Locus), inner Locus being the indirect object or locative inherent in the verb. Words are uninflected and basically monosyllabic with compounding.

Following are Hmong sentences with intransitive (Patient-subject) verbs:

1.1   *Tus   me-nyuam   quaj.*
animate being   child   cry
The child is crying.

1.2   *Kuv tuaj   os.*
I   come   Final Particle: Emphatic
I've come (to visit you). (Said upon arriving at someone's house.)

1.3   *Yag-hmo nws   mus lawm.*
yesterday 3 Pers.Sg.   go   already
She went yesterday already.

transitive verbs with Agent subjects:

1.4   *Tus   dev tom tus   npua.*
anim. dog bite anim. pig
The dog bit the pig.

1.5   *Yaj Ntsuab yuav Lis Tswb yim hli   lawm.*
Yang Joua   get   Lee Chue eight month already
Joua Yang (girl) married Chue Lee eight months ago.

and transitive verbs with Correspondent subjects:

1.6   *Qhov-muag tsis pom kev.*
eye   not see way
My eyes can't see to work (sew).