SOME CLASSES OF CLASSIFIER IN IU MIEN (YAO)\(^1\)

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**Introduction.** A classifier (Clf) is a noun (N) of a special grammatical type in Iu Mien, and quite generally in languages of the East Asian and Southeast Asian area, that co-occurs with numerals (Num). Semantically, Clf's serve to specify in some way, either qualitatively or quantitatively, a N (overt or implicit) or a verb (V) (see Figs. 1-3 below). We shall refer to Clf's of N's as N-Clf's, and to Clf's of V's as V-Clf's. \(^2\) For many of the terms, and for the general plan of the exposition I am indebted to Matisoff (1973: Sec. 3.42). Syntactically, Clf's perform the function of enabling Num's to enter into constituency with N's and V's, while semantically, as specifiers, they individuate, instantiate, or otherwise make precise the reference of a N or V. Especially with N's characterized by homonymy or polysemy, Clf's perform a very important disambiguating function, as can be seen from the following examples: (1) homonymy: \(/i\) nôm diə / 'two pills' vs. /i tsêw diə/ 'two bolts of cloth' (/diə/ #1 'medicine' vs. /diə/ #2 'cloth'); (2) polysemy: \(/i\) nôm tseyên-hô/ 'two hours' vs. /i puên tseyên-hâ/ 'two minutes', /i liit uəm/ 'two liters of water' vs. /i tiw uəm/ 'two streams/rivers' vs. /i pəw uəm/ 'two crossings of a stream/river.' \(^3\) As the example /i pəw uəm/ shows, the Clf may not only *narrow* the sense of a N, but it may also add to the meaning of the NP as a whole -- in this case adding a deverbative meaning. It should also be noted that Clf's may fail to disambiguate: thus /i tiw cuy/ means either 'two dragons' or 'two rainbows', and /i tiw cây/ either 'two trails' or 'two methods' (cf. English *two ways*).

As a final general remark on Clf's, it should be noted that finer points of Clf usage are very likely to vary from one locality or subdialect to another.

\[^1\] The present paper is a somewhat reworked version of Court 1986, which is itself an abridgement and slight modification of materials in Court 1985. It has benefited from the input of Martha Ratliff, who was kind enough to read Court 1986 during the Conference at which it was presented, and to make helpful comments. The debt to Matisoff 1973 will be obvious. A great debt is also owed to Lombard 1968, and its editor, Herbert C. Purnell. Finally, a debt is owed to my informants, principally Fou-One Saephan and Moung-Yoon Chow. Data has been gathered in Berkeley, California, from September 1979 down to the present. The name "Iu Mien," applied to both the language and the people, is commonly shortened to "Mien" by the people themselves, and, following them, by English-speaking people who are familiar with them. They are referred to as "Yao" by the ethnic Thais and Laos, but most linguists now follow Chinese usage in reserving that name, used alone, for a broader ethnic grouping, most of whose languages (or dialects) belong to a common stock, which linguists collectively Yao, and which forms the Yao branch of the Miao-Yao language family. The subdialect of Iu Mien described in the present paper is substantially the same as that described in Downer 1961 and 1973. Purnell 1965, 1968a and b, and 1970 (s.v. Yao of Chiangrai, or 'YCR'), as well as in Mao and Zhou 1962 (s.v. Mian), or the translation of the latter, Mao and Chou 1972 (s.v. Mien).

\[^2\] The idea that Clf's may occur not only in expressions modifying N's but in those modifying V's as well goes back at least as far as Noss 1964:106 s.v. metric classifier.

\[^3\] Transcription of Iu Mien follows Downer 1961 (which is a form of IPA), except that the palatal series is here transcribed "j, c, ch, n, hp", glottal stop is here "^", and the tones (in Downer's and the Chinese linguists' conventional order of listing) (1) unmarked, (2) "^", (3) "^", (4) "^", (5) "^", (6) "^".
The combination of Num + Clf I shall refer to, following Matisoff op. cit., as a quantity-expression (Q): a Q can quantify a N, as with the N's in the above examples: viz. /diw/ #1, /diw/ #2, /tsyan-hö/, /um/ and /caw/. The resultant expression is an NP of which the N is the head, and the head N (Nh) is, of course, a quantified Nh (Nqh). In Figs. 1-3 below are shown the constituent structures of the following sentences respectively: (1) /yiə buə pue taw (mien) miŋ/ 'We three go,' (2) /yiə buə miŋ pue taw (mien)/ 'We go as a threesome/There are three of us going,' and (3) /niŋ diŋ /duən/pun/ 'He/She/It kicks the tree two times/on two sides'.

**FIGURE 1. Structure of yiə buə pue taw (mien) miŋ 'We three go'.** NP₂ and NP₃ are in apposition to one another.

![Tree Diagram 1](image)

**FIGURE 2. Syntactic Structure of yiə-buə miŋ pue-taw (mien) 'We go as a threesome (à trois').**

![Tree Diagram 2](image)

'He/She/It kicks the tree two times.' (Clf1)
'He/She/It kicks the tree on two sides.' (Clf2)

Etymologically, several Clfs have been traced back to Chinese, and it is very likely that further investigation would reveal a Chinese origin for quite a few more.

1. Kinds of Clfs. On formal or semantic grounds it is convenient to distinguish at least the following sub-types of Clfs.

1.1. Auto-Clfs. (a-Clfs).

1.1.1. Noun auto-Clfs (N-a-Clfs). Some N's may be their own Clfs. This is often the case in SE Asian languages, but Mien seems to contain remarkably few such. In fact, the present investigator has found only a handful, of which several refer to units of time, e.g. /hm5y/ 'day' and /hm3a:n/ 'year'. Furthermore, they seem to have the syntactic peculiarity that the homophonous Nh must be obligatorily deleted: thus one says, for instance, /1 hm3y/ and not */1 hm3y hm3y/ for 'two days'. This contrasts with analogous expressions in, for instance, Thai, such as /khon s5c2n khon/ ⁴ (Nh Num Clf 'two people,' where homophony between Clf and Nh is not only permitted, but quite common. Possible reasons for the non-occurrence of expressions with homophonous Clf and Nh in Mien are (a) the two elements are not, as in Thai, separated by the intervention of the Num, so that the result might sound awkward, and (b) Mien, unlike Thai, has the grammatical feature of reduplicated Clfs in the meaning of 'every' (see Sec. 2. below), albeit with tone-sandhi, and homophonous Clf + Nh expressions might be avoided because of their similarity to these reduplicated Clf expressions. From a transformational perspective it is possible that what is going on here is the deletion not of the homophonous Nh but of the Clf, but we

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⁴ Transcription of Thai follows IPA usage, except that the tones are marked as in Haas 1964.
will not attempt to settle this question here. Some other N-a-Clf's are /pûŋ/ 'direction; side', and /pûŋ/ 'kind; manner; way'.

1.1.1. Familial N-a-Clf's of concerted involvement. These are an interesting kind of N-a-Clf, also found in other languages in the area. As human beings, kinsmen normally take the specific Clf's for human beings (see Sec. 1.1.3. below), but when certain combinations of kinsmen are living or acting together as a group certain kinship terms may be used as a-Clf's.

Thus one says /1 mûŋ/ 'the two siblings (together)' [cf. Thai /sûŋ phêː-nûŋ/ '(id.)', literally "two elder sibling-younger sibling'", /1 tɔn-mâː/ 'mother and son (together)' [literally "two son-mother": cf. Thai /sûŋ mûːlûːk/ 'mother and child (together)', literally "two mother-child", and its analogue /sûŋ phêː-lûːk/ 'father and child (together)']. But in order to say in Mien 'father, mother, and child together' one resorts to the prototypical familial a-Clf of concerted involvement, /hmûŋ/. This can be glossed for convenience as 'family', but in order to understand its behavior as an a-Clf, it is better translated as 'family co-members, comprising at least the nucleus of husband and wife': thus, /1 hmûŋ/ ('two hmûŋ's') means 'married couple; husband and wife (together)'.

This then brings us to the way in which one says 'father, mother, and child (together)', viz. /pû ē hûn/ ('three hmûŋ's'), though one can also say, periphrastically, /1 hmûŋ tshâv tâv tɔn/ (literally "two hmûŋ's and [one] Clf son").

1.1.2. Verb-Autoclassifiers (V-a-Clfs): homophoneous cognate objects. In some cases, evidence suggests that a V may be its own Clf. Thus, the V 'to kick' is /dî?/, and as in Fig. 3. above, in order to say 'He kicks the tree two times/He gives the tree two kicks', one may say /nîn dî? dîŋ i dzûn/ ('He kicks tree two times'); using the Clf /dzûn/ 'time(s)/occasion(s)', one may, on the other hand, also say /nîn dî? dîŋ i tshâv-dî?/ ('He kicks tree two foot-kicks') in order to convey the same meaning. In these two sentences, the word /dzûn/ in the first, and /tshâv-dî/? in the second, have the function of enabling the V /dî?/ to be numerically specified, and hence are V-Clf's (see Sec. 1.2. below). Now in the second sentence, the syllable /dî?/ of the V-Clf is an exact echo of the V, but it is used not alone, but in composition with the morpheme /tshâv/. If it did occur alone, i.e., in the sentence of the same meaning */nîn dî? dîŋ i dî?/, it would be an example of a V-a-Clf. The only cases found by the investigator in which the Clf occurs alone and is a replica of V are cases where it is functioning as a measure Clf (see Sec. 1.5. below).

1.2. Verb-Classifiers (V-Clfs). A diagram of the syntactic structure in which V-Clfs occur is given in Fig. 3. above. What is happening is that they are occurring in NP's dominated by adverbial phrases (AdvP), i.e., in NP's that are functioning adverbially. They are in fact what are traditionally known as cognate objects, and Chao (1968:312ff) uses this latter term with reference to Chinese. As Chao notes, cognate objects may occur as structures indicating the number of instances of an action, its duration, extent, direction or destination (see also Court 1985: Chap. IV). But we can go beyond cognate objects and argue that the Clf's in Fig. 2. above, which indicate the number of participating subjects, might also be viewed as V-Clf's (the possible presence of a Nh is a problem for that view, and we shall not dwell on it here). A few V-Clf's that are