HMONG CLASSIFIERS*

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The data presented in this problem set come from Hmong, a language spoken by minority hill-tribe people in southern China and Southeast Asia. Many of those living in Laos had to flee to Thailand following the fall of the Lao government in 1975 and were resettled in the Western world, so that there are now about 60,000 Hmong speakers in the United States. As to genetic affiliation, Hmong belongs to the Hmong-Mien (also known as Miao-Yao) language family; the wider relationship of the Hmong-Mien family, however, remains a controversial issue among linguists, with some affiliating it to Austro-Tai and others to Sino-Tibetan.

Hmong nouns appear in a single form: there are no suffixes, no grammatical genders, no case markings, no definite/indefinite articles. 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 spoken words (e.g. 'story', 'legend', 'song', 'prayer') are preceded by the classifier zal. While as many as 76 classifiers have been recorded for the language, we will look only at some of the most common ones in this problem set. In the first section of the exercise you will categorize nouns semantically depending on the classifier associated with them, and in the second section you will determine the syntactic functions of classifiers.

Transcription notes: the data are presented in the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA), which was developed in the early 1950's by missionaries. The RPA is like the IPA, except for the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RPA</th>
<th>IPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>/s/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>/tʃ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>/ʃ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>/t/</td>
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<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>/εŋ/</td>
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<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td>/ʒ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>/i/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oo</td>
<td>/ɔŋ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since Hmong words are primarily monosyllabic, and since the language does not have final consonants (except for /z/), the developers of the RPA chose 7 arbitrary consonant letters and attached them at the end of words to represent the 7 tones of the language. The consonants and their tonemic values are listed below:

Final "b" represents a high level tone (55).
Final "j" represents a high falling tone (52).
Final "v" represents a mid rising tone (24).
Final "ø" (i.e. no consonant) represents a mid level tone (33).

* Editor's Note: This problem set was prepared for a graduate seminar at Berkeley called "Analysis of Linguistics Problem Sets" [Ling. 302], a course intended to give students practice in constructing and debugging self-contained corpora of data for classroom use.

Hmong is rapidly becoming the object of classroom study in the U.S. This summer it will be offered for the third year in a row at the SEASSI Language Institute (this time at the University of Hawaii).
High school teachers in several California towns (e.g. Merced and Visalia) are beginning to receive training in the basics of Hmong phonetics and grammar to help them deal with the huge influx of Southeast Asian students to their classes.
Final "s" represents a low level tone (22).
Final "g" represents a breathy tone (4 ə).
Final "m" represents a short, slightly falling tone ending in a glottal stop (21ʔ).

SECTION I: SEMANTIC CATEGORIZATION

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

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

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

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

1. txhais:
2. tus:
3. txoj:
4. lub:

1. lub siab liver
2. tus nplaig tongue
3. lub cev body
4. txoj leeg nerves
5. lub plawv heart
6. tus qau pents
7. lub taub hau head
8. txhais caj npab arm
9. lub laub hau
10. txhais tev hand
11. txoj hnyuv intestines
12. tus tw tail
13. lub xub pwg shoulder
14. txhais tes hand
15. txoj hnyuv intestines
16. tus tw tail
17. lub xub pwg shoulder
18. txhais tes hand
19. lub hauv caug knee
20. txhais ceg leg
21. tus pob txha bone
9. lub mis  
10. txoj sawv  
11. txhais ncej puab  
12. lub pob ntseg  
13. txoj ntaws

breast  tendons  thigh  ear  umbilical cord

22. lub ntaws  
23. txhais ko taw  
24. lub qhov muag  
25. tus ntiv   
26. lub pim

navel  foot  eye  finger  vagina

**Part C:** Using your answers to Parts A and B determine which classifier is associated with the following words:

1. qhib ntsia  
2. plab  
3. ntawv sau  
4. xov hlau  
5. tav  
6. duab  
7. caj hlaub  
8. duav hlau  
9. hauv siab  
10. ntaub  
11. ntiv taw  
12. diav hmuv  
13. raum  
14. kab dab  
15. quav twm

screwdriver  stomach, abdomen  notebook  iron wire  rib  photograph, picture  lower leg  shovel  chest  (piece of) cloth  toe  fork  kidney  blackboard  cow-dung

**SECTION II: SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS OF HMONG CLASSIFIERS**

Carefully examine the data on pages 5-6 and determine in what type of noun phrases the classifier is obligatory. You should come up with 5 types of noun phrases; please list them below:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

**DATA** (CLF = classifier, Q = question marker, NEG = negation marker):

1. Tus tsov tshaib tshaib plab
   CLF tiger be hungry be hungry stomach
   *Tsov tshaib tshaib plab
   'The tiger was very hungry'

2. Muaj ib tus tsov
   be one CLF tiger
   *Muaj ib tsov
   'There was a (literally 'one') tiger'

3. Tus txiv neeb kho tau txhia tus mob
   CLF shaman cure can all CLF illness
   *Txiv neeb kho tau txhia mob
   'The shaman can cure all illnesses'

4. Lawv lub zos puas deb?
   their CLF village Q be far
   *Lawv zos puas deb?
   'Is their village far?'

5. Lub tsev no
   CLF house this
   *Tsev no
   'This house'

6. Ntau lub tsev
   many CLF house
   *Ntau tsev
   'Many houses'
7. Tus tswj lub tsev
   CLF chief CLF house
   *tswj tsev
   'The chief's house'
8. Lawv muaj pes tsawg tus me nyuam?
   they have how much CLF child
   *Lawv muaj pes tsawg me nyuam?
   'How many children do they have?'

9. Tus npua ntawd zoo siab
   CLF pig that be happy
   *Npua ntawd zoo siab
   'That pig is happy'
10. Tooj tus dev
    Tong CLF dog
    *Tooj dev
    'Tong's dog'

11. Lawv muaj rau tus me nyuam
    they have six CLF child
    *Lawv muaj rau me nyuam
    'They have six children'
12. Tshuav tsawg tus ntoo
    remain few CLF tree
    *Tshuav tsawg ntoo
    'Few trees are left'

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Now look at #13 and #14: with what type of noun phrases are classifiers not used?

13. Kuv ntshai tsov
    I fear tiger
    *Kuv ntshai tus tsov
    I fear CLF tiger
    'I'm afraid of tigers'
14. Mob tsis tu
    disease NEG go away
    *Tus mob tsis tu
    CLF disease NEG go away
    'Disease never disappears'

To summarize: What general statement can you make about the use of classifiers? Fill in the blank below with a single word:
Classifiers are used in ___________ noun phrases (cf. #1-12).
Classifiers are not used in ___________ noun phrases (cf. #13-14).