

## 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 *zaj*. 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:

RPA	IPA	RPA	IPA	RPA	IPA	RPA	IPA
x	/ s /	s	= / ʃ /	r	= / ʈ /	ee	= / eŋ /
c	= / tʃ /	z	= / ʒ /	w	= / ɨ /	oo	= / ɔŋ /

Since Hmong words are primarily monosyllabic, and since the language does not have final consonants (except for /ʒ/), 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).

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\* 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 2).

Final "m" represents a short, slightly falling tone ending in a glottal stop (21?).

### 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1. txoj hlua       | <i>rope</i>              | 18. rab cial   | <i>pliers</i>          |
| 2. daim txiag      | <i>(wooden) board</i>    | 19. phau ntawv | <i>book</i>            |
| 3. rab rauj        | <i>hammer</i>            | 20. txoj cai   | <i>law</i>             |
| 4. daim nplooj     | <i>leaf of a tree</i>    | 21. rab diav   | <i>spoon</i>           |
| 5. tawb qaub ncauj | <i>spit, spittle</i>     | 22. daim teb   | <i>field</i>           |
| 6. rab phom        | <i>rifle</i>             | 23. rab taus   | <i>axe</i>             |
| 7. daim tiab       | <i>skirt</i>             | 24. txoj xov   | <i>string, twine</i>   |
| 8. tsab xov        | <i>(written) message</i> | 25. rab liag   | <i>sickle</i>          |
| 9. daim ntawv      | <i>sheet of paper</i>    | 26. txoj hmoov | <i>destiny, fate</i>   |
| 10. rab hneev      | <i>crossbow</i>          | 27. rab kaw    | <i>saw</i>             |
| 11. phau nyiaj     | <i>wad (of money)</i>    | 28. daim liaj  | <i>rice paddy</i>      |
| 12. txoj hmab      | <i>creeper (vine)</i>    | 29. rab hlau   | <i>hoe</i>             |
| 13. rab koob       | <i>needle</i>            | 30. daim sev   | <i>apron</i>           |
| 14. txoj sia       | <i>life</i>              | 31. rab riam   | <i>knife</i>           |
| 15. tawb zis       | <i>urine</i>             | 32. txoj kev   | <i>road, path</i>      |
| 16. rab txiab      | <i>scissors</i>          | 33. tawb quav  | <i>dung</i>            |
| 17. daim pam       | <i>blanket</i>           | 34. tsab ntawv | <i>letter (mail)</i>   |
| 18. txoj hauj lwj  | <i>work</i>              | 36. phau khaub | <i>pile of clothes</i> |

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

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|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. lub siab        | <i>liver</i>  | 14. txhais tes      | <i>hand</i>       |
| 2. tus nplaig      | <i>tongue</i> | 15. txoj hnyuv      | <i>intestines</i> |
| 3. lub cev         | <i>body</i>   | 16. tus tw          | <i>tail</i>       |
| 4. txoj leeg       | <i>nerves</i> | 17. lub xub pwg     | <i>shoulder</i>   |
| 5. lub plawv       | <i>heart</i>  | 18. txoj hlab ntsha | <i>veins</i>      |
| 6. tus qau         | <i>penis</i>  | 19. lub hauv caug   | <i>knee</i>       |
| 7. lub taub hau    | <i>head</i>   | 20. txhais ceg      | <i>leg</i>        |
| 8. txhais caj npab | <i>arm</i>    | 21. tus pob txha    | <i>bone</i>       |

9. lub mis	<i>breast</i>	22. lub ntaws	<i>navel</i>
10. txoj sawv	<i>tendons</i>	23. txhais ko taw	<i>foot</i>
11. txhais ncej puab	<i>thigh</i>	24. lub qhov muag	<i>eye</i>
12. lub pob ntseg	<i>ear</i>	25. tus ntiv	<i>finger</i>
13. txoj ntaws	<i>umbilical cord</i>	26. lub pim	<i>vagina</i>

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

1. qhib ntsia	<i>screwdriver</i>	-----
2. plab	<i>stomach, abdomen</i>	-----
3. ntawv sau	<i>notebook</i>	-----
4. xov hlau	<i>iron wire</i>	-----
5. tav	<i>rib</i>	-----
6. duab	<i>photograph, picture</i>	-----
7. caj hlaub	<i>lower leg</i>	-----
8. duav hlau	<i>shovel</i>	-----
9. hauv siab	<i>chest</i>	-----
10. ntaub	<i>(piece of) cloth</i>	-----
11. ntiv taw	<i>toe</i>	-----
12. diav hmuov	<i>fork</i>	-----
13. raum	<i>kidney</i>	-----
14. kab dab	<i>blackboard</i>	-----
15. quav twm	<i>cow-dung</i>	-----

## 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:

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

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|--|---|
| <p>1. Tus tsov tshaib tshaib plab<br/>CLF tiger be hungry be hungry stomach<br/>*Tsov tshaib tshaib plab<br/>'The tiger was very hungry'</p>                   | <p>2. Muaj ib tus tsov<br/>be one CLF tiger<br/>*Muaj ib tsov<br/>'There was a (literally 'one') tiger'</p>         |
| <p>3. Tus txiv neeb kho tau txhia tus mob<br/>CLF shaman cure can all CLF illness<br/>*Txiv neeb kho tau txhia mob<br/>'The shaman can cure all illnesses'</p> | <p>4. Lawv lub zos puas deb?<br/>their CLF village Q be far<br/>*Lawv zos puas deb?<br/>'Is their village far?'</p> |
| <p>5. Lub tsev no<br/>CLF house this<br/>*Tsev no<br/>'This house'</p>   | <p>6. Ntau lub tsev<br/>many CLF house<br/>*Ntau tsev<br/>'Many houses'</p>   |

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|--|---|
| <p>7. Tus tswj lub tsev<br/>CLF chief CLF house<br/>*tswj tsev<br/>'The chief's house'</p>                                 | <p>8. Lawv muaj pes tsawg tus me nyuam?<br/>they have how much CLF child<br/>*Lawv muaj pes tsawg me nyuam?<br/>'How many children do they have?'</p> |
| <p>9. Tus npua ntawd zoo siab<br/>CLF pig that be happy<br/>*Npua ntawd zoo siab<br/>'That pig is happy'</p>               | <p>10. Tooj tus dev<br/>Tong CLF dog<br/>*Tooj dev<br/>'Tong's dog'</p>   |
| <p>11. Lawv muaj rau tus me nyuam<br/>they have six CLF child<br/>*Lawv muaj rau me nyuam<br/>'They have six children'</p> | <p>12. Tshuav tsawg tus ntoo<br/>remain few CLF tree<br/>*Tshuav tsawg ntoo<br/>'Few trees are left'</p>  |

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

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>13. Kuv ntshai tsov<br/>I fear tiger<br/>*Kuv ntshai tus tsov<br/>I fear CLF tiger<br/>'I'm afraid of tigers'</p> | <p>14. Mob tsis tu<br/>disease NEG go away<br/>*Tus mob tsis tu<br/>CLF disease NEG go away<br/>'Disease never disappears'</p> |
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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).