

Topicalized NPs with Expansion Pronouns in Hmong¹

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1. Introduction.

In White Hmong, a Hmong-Mien language of southern China and northern Southeast Asia, the unmarked word order is SVO and the possessor precedes the noun possessed. At issue in this paper is a problematic construction consisting of a noun (usually a proper noun) followed by a pronoun, which, in one manifestation of the construction, may serve as the possessor of a noun which follows it. In each case, the first noun is singular and the pronoun following it is dual or plural. The pronoun is not a *resumptive* pronoun; rather it is an *expansion* of the referent of the first noun. Examples of some of the possible combinations appear below:

--Singular noun followed by dual pronoun which includes the referent of the noun:

- (1) *Nplias nkawd tab tom tawm plaws hauv school bus los*
N 3pd PROG emerge suddenly inside bus come
... **Nplias and her sister** were just stepping out of the
school bus. (Chang 9)

--Singular noun followed by plural pronoun which includes the referent of the noun:

- (2) *hmo ntawd nws niam lawv twb mus pw tas lawm,*²
evening that 3ps mother 3pp already go lie down PERF
... that evening **her mother and the rest of the family**
had already gone to bed, ... (Chang 6)

--Singular noun followed by plural pronoun which includes the referent of the noun, followed by a noun which is possessed by the non-singular referent of the pronoun:

- (3) *John lawv tsey*
 J 3pp house

John's family's house

(SEASSI '88 notes)

The Hmong noun phrases discussed in this paper represent a small, language-specific problem. I will suggest, however, that their existence may have areal and typological significance.

2. The problem.

The construction is an oddity: is the pronoun possessed, which would involve reinterpretation of the pronoun as a noun, or is the first noun a topic within the noun phrase? Native speaker translations don't help; all three translation strategies below occur:

- a--translation without pronoun
- b--possessed (pro)noun translation
- c--topicalized noun phrase translation

For example, for the following clause

- (4) *Thaum Nplooj los txog ntawm Nplias lawv tsey, . . .*
 time when N come arrive at N 3pp house
 (Chang 9)

I was given the following three translations in quick succession:

- a--When Nplooj arrived at Nplias's house, . . .
- b--When Nplooj arrived at Nplias's family's house, . . .
- c--When Nplooj arrived at Nplias -- their house, . . .

Since English does not have a construction like this, different strategies are used to translate Hmong into English. But of the two attempts, b and c, which more closely captures the structural reality of the Hmong construction? Is there any evidence that will allow us to make a choice?

3. The possessed (pro)noun analysis.

If pronouns cannot be possessed, this analysis will involve reanalysis of the pronouns in these constructions as nouns.

3.1 In support of this analysis are the following facts:

3.1.1. Interpretations of *lawv* as 'family', 'household' and *nkawd* as 'couple' are especially likely when the pronoun is not serving as a possessive itself:

(5) . . . *luag tau tuaj puav tua Vam Choj lawv*, . . .
 others get come some attack VC 3pp

. . . some others came and attacked **Vam Choj's group**, . . .
 (Vang, et al. 66)

Even when it is serving as a possessive itself (as in the third example of section 1 above), this reading is possible.

3.1.2. This example illustrates the secondary "gathering" function of what appears to be the possessive construction in Hmong. The referent becomes clear as one goes along: first the person named, then his/her group, then that bunch taken all together. The parallelism between the construction under consideration and what appears to be a regular possessive construction with a group noun in the position of the pronoun is obvious. Compare:

(5) . . . *luag tau tuaj puav tua Vam Choj lawv*, . . .
 others get come some attack VC 3pp

. . . some others came and attacked **Vam Choj's group**, . . .
 (Vang, et al. 66)

(6) . . . *Nyiaj Xauv Hawj tau coj Soob Lwj tsey neeg khiav tawm*
 NXH get lead SL household run emerge
tuaj rau Vaj Pov tog . . .
 come at VP side

. . . Nyiaj Xauv Hawj had taken **Soob Lwj and his family** off
 to join with Vaj Pov's side . . . (Vang, et al. 62)

3.1.3. Comparative evidence shows that two of the pronouns involved in these constructions have recently been grammaticalized from nouns:

lawm 'to leave' > *lawm* 'place there' [> *lawd* 'those gone over there'] > *lawv* 3-plural pronoun

nkawm 'a pair; classifier for pairs' > *nkawd* 3-dual pronoun
[> *nkawv* 3-dual pronoun]

(Ratliff 1992, Chapter 3)

3.2. But there are problems with this analysis as well:

3.2.1. Against the analysis of these pronouns as nouns which have recently undergone grammaticalization, *peb* and *wb*, the first-person plural and dual pronouns, do not have a recoverable source in common nouns, yet can also be found in these constructions. For example,

(7) *Teb chaws ntawd mas teb pob kws zoo zoo*
country that TOP land corn good-good

qoob mas kuv niam thiab kuv txiv peb yug tau
crop TOP I mother and I father we raise get

qaib tau npua coob coob.
chicken get pig many-many

The land in that country was very fruitful; **our family** was able to raise livestock easily there. (Muas 8)

(8). . *.koj txiv wb mus ua teb lawm; . . .*
you father we-2 go make field PERF

. . .(when) **your father and I** have gone to the fields; . .
(Johnson 449.5)

3.2.2. More persuasive is the fact that there are few embedded constructions in Hmong (see Riddle, this volume). Furthermore, in the unmarked case, the possessor precedes the noun *and* its classifier.³ For example,

John lub tsev
J CLF house

John's house

But it is impossible to place a classifier between the first noun and the pronoun, which one would expect if *lawv* were functioning as a noun in this construction: