

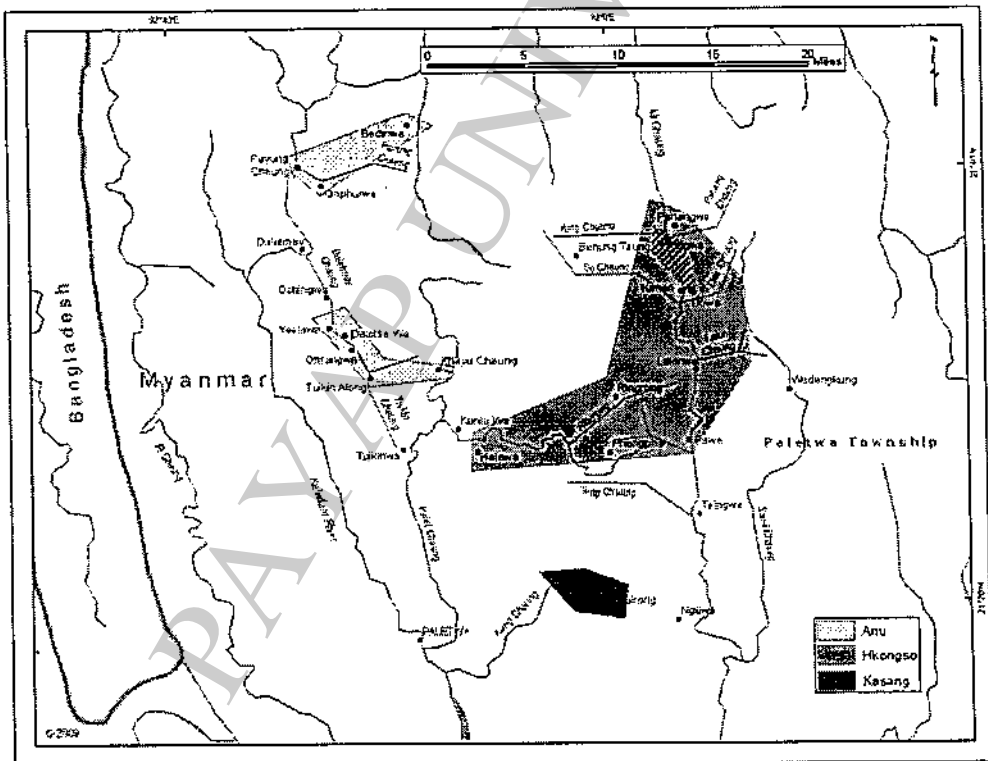
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Hkongso is an unclassified Tibeto-Burman language (Gordon 2005) of less than 5,000 speakers in Southern Chin State, Myanmar, and is spoken northeast of Paletwa along the Paletchaung and Michaung Rivers, as shown in figure 1 (map data by Eva Ujlakyova).

Figure 1: Hkongso geographical area



Hkongso grammar, as presented in my previous research (Wright 2009), immediately stands out as an anomaly in the area. Hkongso has no inflectional morphology, almost no derivational morphology, no verb stem alternation, and no classifier system. The most striking contrast though is Hkongso's SVO word order, shown in (1). The most common order in Tibeto-Burman languages is SOV, as is shown in (2), a Burmese example from Soe (1999: 258).

- (1) kəkʌŋ kiŋ rəmpaiŋ kəkʌŋ pɛʔŋ
 crow see duck white DECL
 'The crow saw the white duck.'

- (2) saya = ci: kou = tain than:htei: kou cein = loun: ne. yai' te
 teacher-big himself name OBJ cane with hit RLS
 'The Principal himself beat Than Htay with a cane.' (Soe 1999: 258)

The Tibeto-Burman family is almost exclusively SOV. As Dryer (2008: 11) states, "VO order is found in only two groups, namely Karen and Bai, and the remaining languages are all not only OV but generally fairly rigidly verb-final." Examples of Karen and Bai from Henderson (1997) and Xu and Zhao (1997) (as cited in Dryer 2008) are shown below.

- (3) Bwe Karen
 ʃɛ ní dəkʰí tə-dó
 trap catch barking.deer one-CLSFR
 'the trap catches a barking deer' (Henderson 1997: 258)

(4) Bai

ŋɑ55 jw44 pē33

1PL eat dinner

'we eat dinner' (Xu and Zhao 1984: 76)

About Karen and Bai, Dryer also states,

The distribution of OV and VO order within Tibeto-Burman conforms loosely to an east west dimension that we will see is useful for understanding the distribution of a number of word order characteristics. Both of the groups exhibiting VO order, Karen and Bai, are towards the east. When we look at the distribution of word order outside Tibeto-Burman, we see that the languages to the east are VO, namely languages within Chinese, Tai-Kadai, Mon-Khmer, and Hmong-Mien, while those to the west and southwest are OV, namely Indic languages within Indo-European. (Dryer 2008: 11)

So, it is posited that Karen and Bai have become VO through contact. Hkongso, is located in Southern Chin State, which is in the southwest of the region Dryer discusses. Therefore, Hkongso's basic SVO word order, along with the related Mru, is unique among the languages of its geographical area.

Further anomalous word order features are evident when the basic SVO word order is compared with clausal and phrasal word order features. One striking feature here is Hkongso's prenominal relative clauses, namely RelN. Not long ago the possibility of an SVO language having RelN order was not considered possible. Payne (1997: 326) states, "Languages which are dominantly VO in main-clause constituent order always have postnominal relative clauses." More recently Dryer (2008: 22) states, "This RelN order is extremely unusual among VO languages." As shown in example (5), this feature exists in Hkongso.

- (5) kuimeŋt¹ maʔŋ mapʋ jokʋ miʔŋ² utŋ t^həkʋ
 cat SUBJ bite give LNK mouse die
 ‘The mouse that the cat bit died.’

RelN is exceedingly rare for SVO languages, but Hkongso exhibits an even rarer feature. This feature, which is the focus of this study, is the order of the clause and complementizer in complement clauses. As presented in Wright (2009: 145) and shown in example (6), in Hkongso the complementizer, when it is present, comes after the clause (SComp).

- (6) iŋt jaʋ həmŋ pe-ʋ miʔŋ aŋt juŋt
 1PL win IRR this LNK 1SG believe
 ‘I believe that we will win.’

This feature is already drawing attention due to its stark contrast with language patterns throughout the world. Dryer (2012: 76) presents data from over two hundred languages, revealing Hkongso’s obvious disparity. “The data in (the following table) provides clear evidence of a relationship between the order of object and verb and the order of complementizer and clause.

OV&CompS (37)

OV&SComp (32)

VO&CompS (162)

VO&SComp (1)³

¹ Unmarked initial syllables are always mid tone.

² I gloss this word as LNK (linker) because it is used as a general subordinator and can be found in relative, complement, adverbial, and nominalized clauses. It is the “complementizer” in this study.

³ This data shows the number of languages in Dryer’s database that have the corresponding order.

About this data, Dryer states, "The sole instance in my database of a VO language with final complementizer is Hkongso, a Tibeto-Burman language of Burma." This uniqueness calls for further data on the nature of complementation in Hkongso to provide information for cross-linguistic research and to increase the linguistic community's understanding of the conditions enabling language change leading to the emergence of distinct word order patterns such as the SVO + SComp order.

Here, a note needs to be made about the theoretical background underlying the elicitation and the identification of complementation in the elicited examples. Dryer's crosslinguistic study (2012) does not acknowledge the Mismatch Problem (Christofaro 2003: 20), which states, "Cross-linguistically, the same semantic and/or pragmatic relationships are not coded by the same construction types." Thus, Dryer's study leaves out those languages which do not employ complementizers. Therefore, there may be SVO languages with nearly identical complementation patterns as Hkongso, only they do not contain a complementizer.

Dryer also fails to take into account the range of subordination strategies employed by these languages. By focusing on morphosyntactic criteria such as the order of the complementizer and the complement clause, we can miss important data. Christofaro (2003: 13) states, "This shows that, if a cross-linguistic analysis is grounded on formal criteria, one may miss some important functional generalizations." These considerations underlie the methodology used in this study to determine what data is collected, how it is collected, and how complementation is identified in the data.

It is possible for a study to be grounded on formal, morphosyntactic criteria, such as the use of infinitives or a complementizer, but we can also ground a study on functional criteria, looking at the structures/forms used to encode a particular function. When we do this, we see that function is encoded by a range of structures (see Christofaro 2003: 10). The functional goal of exploring the full range of constructions in use by a language is also my personal goal for this research. I want to obtain a clearer understanding of the range of complement constructions Hkongso speakers employ.

Christofaro (2003: 10) says that subordination studies solely grounded in functional definitions are rare and that many studies use structural criteria or a mixture of functional and structural criteria. She admits that these studies can lead to significant results. This study collected data through a mixed functional-structural approach.

To collect data, I created an elicitation schedule (see Appendix A) composed of desiderative, cognition, causative, permissive/achievement modality, obligation/epistemic modality, and utterance predicates. The predicates I chose were events (state of affairs or SoAs: see Christofaro 2003: 38) known to entail that another event was referred to. In more traditional, morphosyntactic terms, the predicates produced sentences where one clause is within the scope of the other (Haiman and Thompson 1984: 511). More precisely, the predicates produced clauses that function as arguments of some other clause (Noonan 1985: 42).

On the elicitation schedule I also included the structures *həmʔ miʔʔ* and *miʔ paʔʔ miʔʔ*, which are used in previous data in subordination constructions.

To elicit data, my research assistant and I presented the participants with the predicates and subordination constructions by telling them the word and an example to make sure they understood the meaning of the word. Then we asked them to think of some other example sentences that contained these predicates/constructions. For the predicates at least, it allowed the participants to create sentences with a single event or with multiple events. Sentences with multiple events could be produced with or without a complementizer (see Section 3.4 for more detail). I believe this approach achieved the goal of exploring a larger possible range of complementation constructions than previous data showed.

After collecting the data, I found both functional and more traditional morphosyntactic criteria beneficial in identifying complementation among other forms of subordination. Christofaro (2003: 38) presents the following functional relations among events (henceforth SoAs):

- (i) The semantics of one of the linked SoAs entails that another SoA is referred to. This is the situation type underlying complement constructions.
- (ii) One of the linked SoAs corresponds to the circumstances under which the other one takes place. This is the situation type underlying adverbial constructions.
- (iii) A participant of the main SoA is identified within a set of possible referents by mentioning some other SoA in which s/he takes part. This is the situation type underlying relative constructions.

Thompson and Longacre (1985: 172) present the following morphosyntactic relations among clauses:

- (i) Those which function as noun phrases (called complements).
- (ii) Those which function as modifiers of nouns (called relative clauses)

- (iii) Those which function as modifiers of verb phrases or entire propositions (called adverbial clauses).

In the work of descriptive linguistics I do not feel that these approaches are contradictory, but rather complementary. Christofaro concedes this but says the morphosyntactic criteria becomes untenable in cross-linguistic studies.

Using these criteria I am able to distinguish between complements, adverbials, and relative clauses. In Section 3.4 I present the number of elicited sentences that contain complementation. These sentences exclude relative clauses such as those in (7) and (8).

- (7) aŋt no- kəkɔl vai- miʔl plo- aŋt kəkruml
 1sg NEG think never LNK thing 1sg meet
 'I came across a thing that I had never seen before.'

- (8) kai- kələ- miʔl pri- pək- jok- pe- ɲaʋ
 go forest LNK tiger make give happen PRT
 '(I) was scared by the tiger that was roaming the forest.'

These statements contain relative relations that involve two SoAs, "one of which (the dependent one) provides some kind of specification about a participant of the other (the main one)" (Christofaro 2003: 195). In Hkongso it is easy to distinguish relative clauses from other types of subordination, but it is important to note that the subordinator *miʔ* is used for all types of subordination.

Adverbials in Hkongso are not clear. Christofaro distinguishes purpose, temporal, conditional and concessive, reason and manner, and result relations as adverbials (2003: 155), saying that they include one clause which is the circumstance under which another clause takes place and that one clause does not entail that

another clause is referred to. However, these areas overlap in Hkongso. Typical complement taking verbs do not have to entail that another clause is referred to, as in (9), where the verb *paʔ jokʔ* does not produce a complement.

- (9) *noʔ kaiʔ ciʔ mikʰaʔ təluiʔ maʔ paʔ jokʔ pɛʔ*
 NEG go some.time when squirrel SUBJ tell give DECL
 ‘Before going Squirrel said (to Bear).’

Also, how do we know that “purpose adverbials” that include verbs such as *ɽuaʔ* in (10) do not entail the subordinated clause?

- (10) *kəpaʔ maʔ ranʔ moʔ həmʔ miʔ ɽuaʔ jokʔ*
 father SUBJ buy meat IRR LNK send give
 ‘Father sent (him) to buy meat.’

Furthermore, what if they are morphosyntactically marked in the same way as typical complements, such as the one in (11)?

- (11) *aŋʔ pəʔ həmʔ miʔ aŋʔ tukʔ*
 1sg do IRR LNK 1sg know
 ‘I know how to do it.’

For this study, to remain true to the main goal of the functional approach, I will include purpose clauses in this study. Purpose clauses are also marked by *miʔ parʔ* *miʔ* as in (12).⁴

⁴ I think there is a clear semantic overlap between the concepts of result, reason, and purpose in Hkongso. I think the morphosyntactic features help us understand how Hkongso speakers conceptualize SoAs, which feels more beneficial to me as a descriptive linguist than trying to analyze the data based on preconceived semantic notions.

- (12) aŋt̪ cəɫ kətəm̪ɪ ŋɪŋt̪ nuɪl miɫpaɾɫmiʔl̪ aŋt̪ piɾt̪
 1sg TOP arrive mountain on so.that 1sg climb
 'I climbed until I got to the top of the mountain.'

The semantic relation between clauses in reason and result constructions, marked by *milukʋ*, as shown in (13) and (14), is looser. They will not be included in this study.

- (13) paɫ maʔl̪ cɪnɪ aŋt̪ miɫukʋ aŋt̪ kaiɪ vit̪
 father SUBJ send 1sg since 1sg go field
 'I'm going to the field because father sent me (there).'

- (14) aŋt̪ pəkɫ miɫukʋ rəcaɫ eɪ
 1sg make since child cry
 'The baby is crying because I made (it cry).'

Temporal, conditional, and manner relations also function differently in sentences, as shown in (15), (16), and (17), and are excluded in this study.

- (15) Temporal

tam̪ mət̪ kətəm̪ɪ əɪ miʔl̪ namt̪ kəcət̪
 soon at arrive there LNK village when
 'Later, when we get to the other village,

paɫ raɫ kət̪ paɫ raɫ kət̪ peɪ miʔl̪ pət̪ veɪ həm̪ɪ
 father come PERF father come PERF happen LNK also COP IRR
 "Father has come," "Father has come," (some) will (say).'

- (16) Conditional

noɫ hʲaɫ kəcət̪ boŋt̪ paɫ caɪ
 NEG want if don't do eat
 'If you don't like it, don't eat it.'

(17) Manner

noʔ tʰaŋʔ miʔʔ ʔəʋ maʔʔ roiʋ ʔəʋ kəkrumʔ
NEG think LNK with SUBJ friend with meet
'Without thinking I would, I met my friend.'

Complement clauses counted in this study are based on relations that "link two SoAs such that one of them (the main one) entails that another one (the dependent one) is referred to" (Christofaro 2003: 89). The motivating goal behind this definition is to free the linguist from traditional morphosyntactic requirements and include complement constructions which would be seen as non-traditional. This is beneficial for this study as I seek to explore the range of constructions used for complementation in Hkongso. Therefore, complement constructions clearly marked with the subordinator *miʔʔ*, such as those in (18) and (19) are counted as well as the constructions without a subordinator, as in (20).

(18) aŋʔ plauʔ tamədaʔ həmʔ miʔʔ noʔ tʰaŋʔʋ əʔ
1sg achieve president IRR LNK NEG think really
'I really don't think that I will become president.'

(19) pəʔ ʔpaiʋ həmʔ miʔʔ aŋʔ tukʋ
do basket IRR LNK 1sg know
'I know how to make baskets.'

(20) aŋʔ caʔ leŋʋ uiʔ həmʔ h'aʋ
1sg eat banana fruit OBJ want
'I want to eat a banana.'

Traditionally direct report is included in complementation, but under the functional definition, we cannot include it, since there is no semantic relation

between the speech act and the utterance (Christofaro 2003: 108). However, in Hkongso this distinction is not clear. Like English, most of the time direct report in Hkongso does not take a subordinator, as in (21).

- (21) ɲaɪ̯ kʰaɪ̯ təlui̯ cəɪ̯ abəle̯
 over TEMP squirrel TOP Aww
 iɪ̯ hai̯ nam̯ pə̯ vaɪ̯ maʔɪ̯
 1pl POSS house also PL SUBJ
 tuɪ̯ raɪ̯ veɪ̯ he̯ paɪ̯ jok̯ pəʔɪ̯
 cut come COP PRT tell give DECL
 'And then Squirrel said, "Oh my God. Someone came and also attacked our village".'

However, at times direct report in Hkongso can take the subordinator *miʔɪ̯*, as shown in (22).

- (22) rəcaɪ̯ sʰi̯ həm̯ boɲɪ̯ kəŋakɪ̯ vaɪ̯ ne̯ peɪ̯ miʔɪ̯ aɲɪ̯ tir̯ jok̯
 child PL IRR don't quarrel PL just this LNK 1sg tell give
 'I told the children, "Do not quarrel".'

Likewise, indirect report can be marked with or without the subordinator leaving the sentence ambiguous, as in (23).

- (23) kai̯ pin̯ həm̯ paɪ̯ jok̯
 go trip IRR tell give
 '(He) told (her) to go on a trip.' or '(He) told (her), "Go on a trip".'

The functional approach looks for a semantic relation between the speech act and the utterance to make the distinction rather than morphosyntactic features. However

the semantic relation is not always clear. The translation in (23) shows that the semantic relation can be ambiguous. Therefore, in this study I only count direct report in examples where there is clearly no possible semantic relation between the speech act and the utterance. Example (24) provides a beneficial example of this, as it contains examples of both types. The first clause, *ən-ʔ ku-ʔ*, is an indirect utterance with a clear semantic relationship to *tir-ʔ*. This, in turn, is a direct report that has no semantic relationship to the predicate *pa-ʔ*. In this analysis, only the indirect report is considered a complement.

- (24) *ən-ʔ ku-ʔ mi-ʔʔl aŋ-ʔ tir-ʔ sut-ʔ həm-ʔ pa-ʔ jok-ʔ*
 2sg steal LNK 1sg tell PRT IRR tell give
 '(The wife) said, "I will just tell (everyone) that you steal."'

Therefore instances of complementation, where there is a direct semantic relationship, like in (25) are included, but the direct report in (26) is excluded. However, since direct report is often included in studies on complementation, I include the number of instances separately, as a reference.

- (25) *ca-ʔ cak-ʔ həm-ʔ kə-ʔ pa-ʔ jok-ʔ*
 eat rice OBJ PERF tell give
 '(Father) told (the children) to eat.'

- (26) *ŋa-ʔ kʰa-ʔ ju-ʔ maŋ-ʔ ma-ʔʔ kai-ʔ jok-ʔ pe-ʔ nə-ʔ*
 over TEMP monkey king SUBJ go give happen having
 'And then the monkey king, having gone to them,
ən-ʔ ciŋ-ʔ kæk-ʔ na-ʔ hai-ʔ va-ʔ pa-ʔ jok-ʔ pe-ʔʔ
 2sg each.other argue what CONT Q tell give DECL
 said, "What are you two arguing about?"'

Christofaro (2003: 99), like other syntacticians, also accepts the practicality of identifying the semantics of the complement-taking predicate. In this study I also used semantics to identify predicates that typically take complements. This helped me form the research instrument in Appendix A. Besides that, the semantics of the predicates in the resulting data are not significant in this evaluation. However, future work on the semantics of complement-taking predicates in Hkongso could benefit from the data in this study.

1.2 Problems or Research Questions

The following research questions were presented in the project proposal:

1. Does naturally occurring Hkongso speech verify the word order characteristics described in previous research? If there are variations to these features, are they marked?
2. When Hkongso speakers are presented with unmarked variations of these features⁵, will they declare them to be ungrammatical?

The research process led the author to expand on the first question by asking the following research question:

3. In producing sentences with complementation, will Hkongso speakers always produce preverbal SComp clauses or are there other possibilities?

Furthermore, after interviewing the initial 9 participants, it became apparent that further research was needed, since the nine interviewees' ages ranged from 18

⁵ If the main word order is not SVO the subject and/or object must be marked. So, the question looks at comprehension/grammatical acceptance when the arguments appear unmarked in SOV or OSV order.

to 41. Would an older generation of Hkongso speakers use different syntactic patterns? The following research questions led the researcher to carry out further interviews among participants aged 60 to 70.

4. Would word order patterns, particularly complementation patterns differ among generations of Hkongso speakers?
5. What does this data reveal about the nature of Hkongso's anomalous word order? Does this provide evidence of language change?

1.3 Objectives of the Research Project

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Use Hkongso speakers' intuitive knowledge to test the grammaticality of Hkongso word order, primarily focused on SVO and SComp and looking at NegV, NAdj, DemN, NNum, and AdjDeg.
2. Show how Hkongso word order compares to other Chin languages, Tibeto-Burman languages, and languages throughout the world.

1.4 Hypothesis of the Research Project

The hypotheses of this study are as follows.

1. Previous research on Hkongso will be verified through constituent analysis, in that Hkongso will be proven to have the following word order features: SVO, SComp, NegV, NAdj, DemN, NNum, and AdjDeg.
2. The word order features above will reveal Hkongso as an anomaly among Chin languages, Tibeto-Burman languages, and languages throughout the world.

1.5 Scope of the Research Project

1. The collection of data is limited due to the government restrictions placed upon foreigners. I was not able to travel to Southern Chin State, so I had to rely on Hkongso individuals traveling to Yangon and on my research assistant to do further testing in the Hkongso area.
2. My information is limited to word lists, elicited conversations, elicited example sentences, cultural speeches (i.e. funeral), and stories (historical, whimsical, mythical, and ethical).
3. Some elicitations come from people in the village via recording devices.
4. There is a limitation in choice of participants. I was not be able to take a scientific sampling. I had to work with available participants.
5. Follow up questions were limited due to time constraints.⁶

1.6 Conceptual Framework

This research falls under the category of descriptive linguistics. Chelliah and de Reuse (2010: 7) define descriptive linguistic fieldwork as “the investigation of the structure of a language through the collection of primary language data gathered through interaction with native-speaking consultants.” Descriptive linguists seek to describe the basic language structures in use in the language and the possible

⁶ I had four days to meet with participants. Therefore, in-depth questions arising later in the analysis were not possible to address with the participants.

variations of these language structures. Descriptive linguists also seek to find reasons explaining the variations found in the language data.

The first step is to collect linguistic data. This research was based on three natural texts as told by a Hkongso speaker and 193 elicited sentences from 14 Hkongso speakers. These examples were elicited according to the two main types of elicitation, schedule-controlled elicitation and analysis-controlled elicitation, as described in Chelliah and de Reuse (2010: 361).⁷

1.7 Expected Benefits

This study makes a significant contribution to Tibeto-Burman linguistics by further documenting and describing a Southern Chin language. Southern Chin State, Myanmar has been a linguistic area of little documentation. Further documentation in the area is vital. This research is also significant to the linguistic community around the world as being one of the only languages to exhibit SVO basic word order with the SComp feature. Documentation of this feature enables typological linguists to perform more accurate cross-linguistic analyses, providing the linguistic community with a greater understanding of languages, language change, and language migration.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it verifies documentation previously presented on Hkongso. Second, it provides a vital foundation that allows other linguists to study cross-linguistic typology in the Tibeto-Burman area and throughout the world. Third, it increases the level of education at Payap University as the study becomes assimilated into the linguistic curriculum.

⁷ See Section 3.2 for further explanation.

1.8 Definition of Terms

AdjDeg: referring to the elements in the noun phrase in which the degree word follows the adjective.

Constituency test: grammatical tests to determine if a word or group of words in a sentence functions as a unit.

Constituent: a word or group of words in a sentence that functions as a unit.

Cross-linguistic typology: a comparative study of the linguistic structure of languages in a certain area or throughout the world to classify languages based on similarities, explain linguistic differences, and establish linguistic universals.

DemN: referring to the elements in the noun phrase in which the demonstrative precedes the noun.

Descriptive linguistics: the field of linguistics concerned with the description and documentation of linguistic features found in languages throughout the world.

Hkongso (language): a Tibeto-Burman language of less than 5,000 speakers in Southern Chin State, Myanmar, and is spoken northeast of Paletwa along the Paletchaung and Michaung rivers.

Linguistic documentation: describing the linguistic (phonetic, phonological, morphological, grammatical, etc.) features of a language.

LRP: referring to the participants in the research, meaning "language resource person".

LWC: referring to the language of wider communication in a geographical area.

NAdj: referring to the elements in the noun phrase in which the adjective follows the noun.

NegV: referring to the elements in the verb phrase in which the negation precedes the verb.

NNum: referring to the elements in the noun phrase in which the numeral follows the noun.

SComp: referring to the order of the complement clause in a language in which the clause precedes the complementizer.

SoAs: referring to state of affairs. In the functional approach SoA is used in place of the traditional idea of an event in subordinate constructions as it offers a wider range of possible semantic relations.

Southern Chin: a grouping of languages based on their geographical position in Southern Chin State, Myanmar.

SVO: referring to the order of the elements of a basic sentence in a language in which the subject precedes the verb, and the object follows the verb.

Tibeto-Burman (TB): a family of languages spoken throughout an area reaching from Tibet down through Myanmar.