

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Kmhmu' language has been studied extensively, particularly in relation to phonology and morphology by the Swedish group at the University of Lund, and in relation to overall grammatical structures (Smalley 1961; Suwilai 1987). There is very little written about the discourse grammar of Kmhmu' (Suwilai 1987), and no studies are published on the use of nominal constructions to refer to participants in narrative text. This study therefore seeks to further investigate nominal constructions and their use in Kmhmu' narrative discourse.

In a narrative text the participant identification system provides a means for establishing the identity of a referent and maintaining it without confusion to the hearers (Grimes 1975:47). Each language has its own participant identification system, which uses a range of grammatical forms, known as referring expressions, according to patterns and rules unique to that language. This thesis presents the inventory of referring expressions in Kmhmu', their structures, their functions at discourse level and their patterns of use in participant identification discovered in six narrative texts.

This first chapter provides background on the Kmhmu' people, where and how they live, and on their language as it fits into the surrounding linguistic setting. It outlines the research questions, objectives and scope of the study, introduces the texts under study and describes the theoretical approach used. In each successive chapter, the relevant literature is reviewed to give the theoretical basis for the methodology described in that chapter.

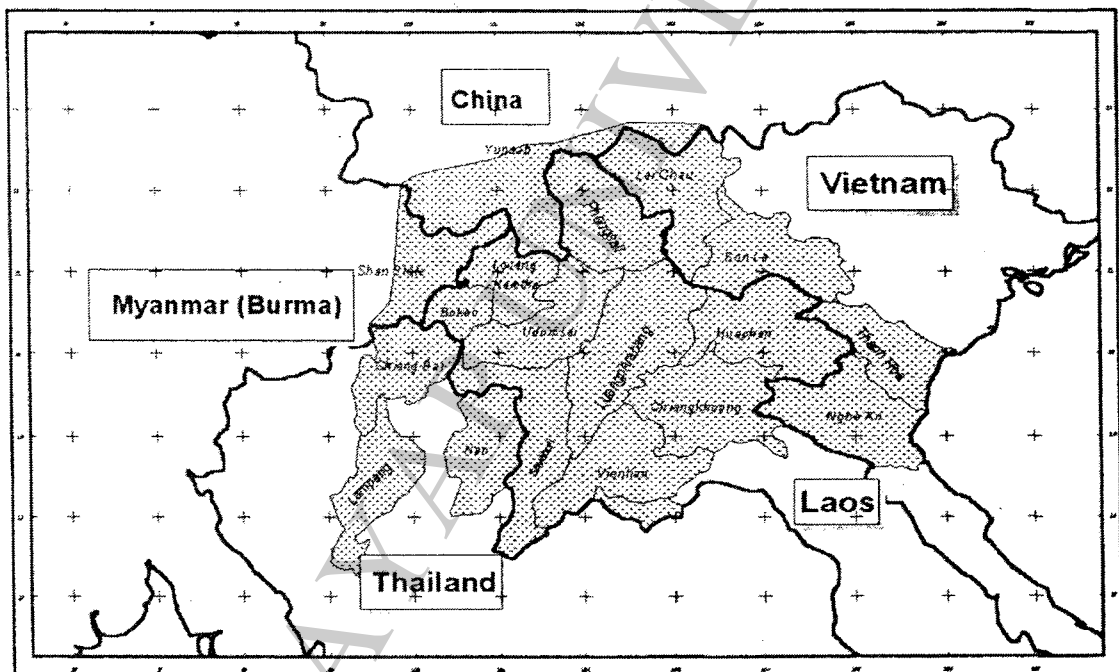
1.1 The Kmhmu' people

Kmhmu' means **human being** and is the name by which Kmhmu' people refer to themselves. There are various alternative spellings such as Khmu, Kammu and Khamou. According to the oral traditions of Lao Kmhmu', they were the original inhabitants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) before the Tai peoples

migrated south from China (about 1,000 years ago), occupying the lowland areas and forcing the Kmhmu' and other groups up into the hills and mountains.

There are over 500,000 speakers of the Kmhmu' language located in the Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam, China and in migrant populations in France, the United States of America, Canada, and Australia. In the Lao PDR, where most of the Kmhmu' live, they are located mainly in the central and northern provinces of Xieng Khouang, Hua Phan, Bolikhamxay, Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Sayabuli, Phongsali, Udomsay, Luang Nam Tha, and Bokeo. Kmhmu' in Thailand live mainly in Nan and Chiang Rai provinces, with some smaller populations in Kanchanaburi, Uthaitхани, and Lampang. There are also Kmhmu' located in Sipsong Panna Prefecture of Yunnan province in China, and in northern Vietnam. See Figure 1 for a map of the main Kmhmu' population area.

Figure 1: Map of approximate areas of Kmhmu' settlement (Suwilai 2002:xv)



Traditionally, the Kmhmu' have practised swidden (slash and burn) agriculture, planting upland glutinous rice fields, as well as corn, tubers, fruit and other vegetables in the mountainous regions where they generally live. In Kmhmu' villages, pigs, chickens, ducks, cattle, goats and sometimes water buffalo are raised. They also fish, and hunt game and gather other edible foods from the forest (Suksavang and Preisig 1997). In the lowland areas Kmhmu' grow paddy rice. Kmhmu' generally build their own houses from forest materials, although in urban areas they live in dressed timber, brick and concrete housing as do the Lao. Unlike other minority groups, the Kmhmu' do not tend to dress in

distinctive clothing, but often adopt the dress styles of neighbouring Tai groups such as the Lao, Tai Leu or Tai Khao. In fact they do have their own traditional dress, but it is only worn on special ceremonial occasions.

Among the Kmhmu' today, many still hold to their traditional beliefs that there are spirits in the world around who have power to help and harm people. In order to appease the spirits of the house, village, fields, mountains, etc., ceremonies and sacrifices are performed. Other Kmhmu' have adopted Buddhist or Christian beliefs. Kmhmu' people still maintain their own poetical and musical traditions, their stone jar wine-making, and their folk-tales and story-telling.

1.2 Language background

Linguistically, Kmhmu' is in the Mon-Khmer family of the Austroasiatic language phylum. It fits into the Khmuic subgroup of the Northern Mon-Khmer languages, along with Mal-Prai-T'in, Mlabri, Bit, Khang, Khao, Khsing Mul-Puôc, Thai Then, Phong, and Lduh-Thai Hat (Sidwell 2004). See Figure 2.

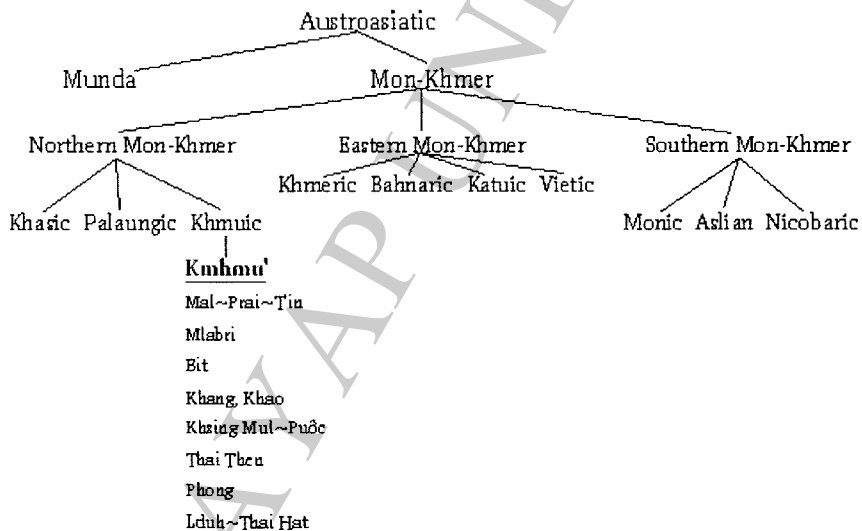


Figure 2: Kmhmu' Linguistic Family Tree

The subgroup of Northern Mon-Khmer, where Kmhmu' fits, is well accepted among linguists. The other non-northern groupings within the Mon-Khmer family are not clearly established (Sidwell 2005), although there is some lexical evidence for a Vietic-Katuic group, a Bahnaric-Khmeric group and a Monic-Aslian group (Diffloth 2005; Alves 2005).

Across northern Laos, Kmhmu' villages are scattered amongst several other ethnic groups, such as Lao, Hmong, Tai Leu, Tai Daeng, Lamet, and others. Because Lao is the national language and all education is done in Lao, many Kmhmu' speakers are bilingual to some extent. After centuries of interaction through trade, business, education and social mixing, including intermarriage, there are many words common to both Lao and Kmhmu'. Some are claimed by Lao speakers to be borrowings from Lao into Kmhmu' and some are claimed by Kmhmu' speakers to have come originally from Kmhmu' and been incorporated into Lao.

There are several distinctive dialects of Kmhmu', falling into three main clusters, often referred to as Northern, Western, and Southern (Svantesson 1998). The main variation between dialects consists of vocabulary changes and some significant phonological differences. The northern dialect cluster, characterised by a phonological register contrast, is spoken in Luang Nam Tha, Bokeo and Udomsay provinces in Lao PDR (Suksavang et al. 1994, Svantesson 1998), and in Chiangrai province in Thailand (Suwilai 2002). The western dialect cluster, characterised by a phonological tone contrast, is spoken in western Udomsay province in Lao PDR, Nan province in Thailand and in some villages in the region known as Sip Song Panna (Svantesson 1998, Suwilai 2002). The southern dialect cluster, characterised by a stop and sonorant voicing contrast, is spoken in Phongsali, eastern Udomsay, Luang Prabang, Hua Phan, Xieng Khouang, Sayabuli, Vientiane and Bolikhamsay provinces in Lao PDR (Suksavang et al. 1994, Svantesson 1998), in Diên Biên Phủ, Sơn La and Nghệ An provinces in North Vietnam and some villages of Sip Song Panna in China (Suwilai 2002). Some dialects within each cluster have been studied in some detail, but there has been no comprehensive study to create a map of the location and boundaries of all the dialects.

Studies have been done on the influence of Tai languages on Kmhmu' in relation to tonogenesis in some dialects (Svantesson 1989; Suwilai 1997, 1999, 2001). It is thought that the voicing contrast in consonants was lost as tone/register systems developed. Dialects are often named after either the place where they are spoken, such as a river, e.g. Kmhmu' Rook named after the Rook River in Udomsay province in Lao, and/or after the negative particle distinctive to the dialect, such as Kmhmu' Pe or Kmhmu' Am. This thesis describes one of the southern varieties of Kmhmu' spoken in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang and Bolikhamsay provinces in Laos, sometimes known as Kmhmu' Am,

or Kmhmu' Ou, and hereafter referred to as Kmhmu'. By far the largest of the dialects (perhaps as many as two thirds of the 500,000 plus Kmhmu' speakers), it is also the most widely understood across the dialects.

Kmhmu' has a rich phoneme inventory consisting of 36 consonants and 10 distinct vowel qualities, 9 of which exist with contrastive length to make 19 vowels in total. Kmhmu' consonants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Kmhmu' Consonants

	bilabial	alveolar	palatal	velar	glottal
Oral stops	p ^h p b	t ^h t d	tɕ ^h tɕ dʒ	k ^h k g	ʔ
Nasal stops	m̚ ʔm m	n̚ ʔn n	ɲ̚ ʔɲ	ŋ̚ ʔŋ ŋ	
Approximants	w̚ ʔw w		j̚ ʔj j		
Fricatives		s			h
Laterals		l̥ l			
Trills		r̥ r			

Kmhmu' vowels are shown in Table 2. All vowels are marked for length except the near-open central vowel which is only seen long (Suksavang Simana' et al. 1994). All three close vowels can form diphthongs with the open central vowel as a target vowel: /ia/, /iə/, and /ua/, for example *riah* 'root', *pi'siam* 'night', and *sruat* 'morning'.

Table 2: Kmhmu' Vowels

	front	central	back
	unrounded	unrounded	rounded
close	i i:	ɨ ɨ:	u u:
mid	e e:	ə ə:	o o:
near-open	ɛ ɛ:	ɐ	ɔ ɔ:
open		ɑ ɑ:	

The near-open central unrounded vowel, ɐ is observed as an allophone of ɑ when it occurs in diphthongs and in minor syllables. Nevertheless it does occur as a single vowel in major syllables and is contrasted with ə: and ɑ: as seen in the following examples, ʔnəəm 'retribution', ʔnəəm imperative particle, and ʔnaam 'amount'.

The Kmhmu' word is generally mono- or sesquisyllabic (Matisoff 1978). In sesquisyllabic words the first syllable is unstressed and has several phonological constraints. It is known as a minor syllable or pre-syllable. The strong contrast between unstressed minor and stressed major syllables results in a characteristic rhythmic pattern of speech.

Like other Southeast Asian languages, Kmhmu' is an isolating language with no inflectional morphology. There is some derivational morphology with nominalising prefixes, a causative prefix, and an instrumental infix. Kmhmu' has elaborate expressions, which typically consist of paired words, or sets of words, that are phonologically similar and combine to give a rich descriptive impact.

Kmhmu' has SVO word order and follows the typological pattern for SVO languages in that noun heads precede modifiers. It also has prepositions. Question words occur *in situ* within the clause, and question particles occur in final position.

Due to proximity with Tai languages for over 1,000 years, Kmhmu' shares many lexical, grammatical and semantic characteristics with Lao, and with other languages in Southeast Asia (Downer 1992). These include a nominal classifier system, serial verb constructions, and several clause/sentence final particles indicating speaker attitude or other speech act information. Adjectives in Kmhmu' are a subclass of verbs. They may act as predicate in a stative clause and as modifiers in a noun phrase.

1.2.1 Previous research on Kmhmu'

There is already a significant amount of linguistic research published on the Kmhmu' language. According to Svantesson (1983), linguistic research on Kmhmu' began in the nineteenth century with wordlists collected in Luang Prabang (de Lagrée and Garnier, 1873) and other early wordlists (Lefèvre-Pontalis 1896; Davies 1909; Roux and Trân Văn Chu 1927). In the 1950s and 1960s linguistic studies of a more systematic nature were undertaken by Henri Maspero (1955); William Smalley (1961), who wrote a largely phonological and morphological description, with some syntax, of a Luang Prabang (southern) dialect; William Gedney (1965), who wrote on Tai loan words in Kmhmu'; and Henri Delcros and P. Subra (1966), who compiled an extensive wordlist of a Xieng Khouang (southern) dialect.

In the 1970s Michel Ferlus produced studies of Kmhmu' phonology, morphology, and text studies, with particular focus on historical and comparative linguistics (Ferlus 1977a, 1977b, 1979a, 1979b, 1980). The Swedish group at the University of Lund has published research on a dialect of Kmhmu' from Luang Nam Tha (northern), including vocabulary lists (Lindell 1974), extensive phonological studies (Lindell et al. 1976; Gårding and Lindell 1977; Gandour et al. 1978; Lindell et al. 1981; Svantesson 1983, 1989, 2001, 2004; Svantesson and House 1996, 1998, 2006; Uneson 2001; Svantesson and Karlsson 2004; Karlsson et al. 2007, 2008), verbal mood and aspect studies (Svantesson 1994), and a serial verb construction study (Holmer 2005). Other studies include work on play languages (Proschan 1994) and vocal genres (Lundström 2002).

Suwilai Premsrirat produced a study on inter-clausal relations in Kmhmu' (1986), and an extensive grammar of a Kmhmu' dialect spoken in Chiang Rai province, Thailand (Suwilai 1987a), including phonology, morphology, syntax, and some discourse structure description. She has also written phonological studies of the Kmhmu' dialects of northern Thailand (Suwilai 1997), including a study on tonogenesis (Suwilai 2001), semantic studies on cutting verbs in Kmhmu' and the colour system (Suwilai 1987b; Suwilai 1992), and an extensive thesaurus of seven Kmhmu' dialects spoken in Southeast Asia (Suwilai 2002).

From within Laos, Elisabeth Preisig has done phonological studies of the southern group of dialects and developed an orthography using Lao script (Preisig 1990). Suksavang Simana', Somseng Sayavong and Preisig have made a major contribution in producing a Kmhmu' - Lao - French - English dictionary of this dialect (Suksavang Simana' et al. 1994). Other linguistic studies include causative formation in Kmhmu' (Takeda 1998), and work on minor syllables (Van der Holst and Ritter 1998).

1.3 Research questions

The following questions are addressed in this thesis:

1. What is the inventory of referring expressions available for identification in Kmhmu' narrative discourse?
2. How are these referring expressions structured and how do they function at phrase, clause, sentence, and discourse level?
3. What strategies are used in the participant identification system in Kmhmu' narrative discourse?

4. What are the default patterns for participant identification?
5. What are possible motivations for non-default encodings of participant identification?

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives in this study are to collect and examine some Kmhmu' narrative texts in order to:

1. Describe the structure of nominal expressions such as noun phrases, pronouns, classifier phrases and demonstratives, and their functions on phrase, clause and sentence levels.
2. Compile an inventory of referring expressions and describe their functions on the discourse level, with respect to specificity/individuation, thematic salience, identifiability, and activation status of referents.
3. Identify the strategies used in the participant identification system.
4. Describe the default patterns for participant identification.
5. Identify non-default occurrences of participant identification and suggest possible motivations for them.

1.5 Limitations and scope

This study is based on a limited text collection. Only one main type of text is studied, namely narrative texts, that is, those that recount a chronologically ordered series of events in the past and are participant-oriented (Longacre 1996: 11). These stories were told unrehearsed, and because of limited time and access to the speakers, retellings were not possible. Except for Tan's Hospital Story, only minor editing has been done with other speakers to remove interjections, hesitation fillers, and obvious mistakes where the speakers corrected themselves. The main limitation with texts like this is that they can be much more irregular and thus they are more difficult to analyse than rehearsed and heavily edited stories. Nevertheless other Kmhmu' speakers readily follow who is doing what to whom in these stories, and it is therefore expected that the use of nominal structures and patterns of participant reference that emerge will be clear and valid, though not necessarily complete.

Analysis, interlinearisation, and translation of the texts is limited by the fact that I am not a native speaker of Kmhmu' and have relied on a series of Kmhmu' speakers to help me understand the data accurately.

1.6 The text corpus

There are six narrative texts in this study. In this section, I give an outline of the data collection methodology, the typology of the texts collected, a summary of the plot of each narrative and a guide to the format of the data presented in this thesis. The methodology used in grammatical and discourse analysis of the texts is described in the relevant chapters; e.g. the grammatical analysis methodology is outlined in the Methodology section of the Nominal Structures chapter.

1.6.1 Data collection

All of the texts in this study were collected orally in the Lao PDR.

The Man-eating Tiger (Man-eater) was told by Mr Siang Man and recorded and transcribed by Ajarn Suksavang Simana' in Vientiane, and then translated by myself.

Tan's Hospital Story (Tan) was told by Mrs Tan Ounpachanh from Hin Tit village, Hin Heup district, Vientiane province. The text was initially recorded by Mr Bounpheng Thammavong in Vientiane in 2005. I transcribed it, Mrs Tan edited it to what she felt was an appropriate written style, and then I translated the written text.

The Bear (Bear) and The Thief (Thief) were told by Mrs Ceeng Vilay of Tav Thaan village, Hin Heup district, Vientiane province. The Two Thieves (2 Thieves) was told by Mrs Man Ounpachanh (Tan's mother) from Hin Tit village, Hin Heup district, Vientiane province. I recorded these stories in Vientiane in August 2006, and then transcribed and translated them.

The Orphan and the Monkey (Orphan) was told by Ajarn Sosavanh Silaphet in Samkhoun village, Hom District, in Vientiane Province in October 2006. I recorded this story and later transcribed and translated it.

All transcription and translation was done with the help of Kmhmu' speakers, Mrs Ceeng Vilay, Mrs Tan Ounpachanh, Mr Buavanh Phengpaseuth and Miss Pang Vilay, from Vientiane Province; and Mr Khamleey Loytisith from Luang Prabang Province.

1.6.2 Typology of texts

The texts in this study were selected with a view to studying participant reference patterns. They are all monologue narrative texts. That is, they exhibit a pattern of chronological progression in the past, and are agent oriented with a system of tracking participants in the story (Longacre 1996). Third person narratives with at least three participants generally give a clearer picture of the participant tracking system of a language (Grimes 1975:34; Dooley and Levinsohn 2001:44), so each text selected for this study has at least three participants, and four of the six are third person reported stories. A first person narrative was studied to provide further insight into pronoun reference patterns, and a folk-tale was included to check for the use of special linguistic devices in tracking mythical or supernatural characters. As individual speech styles may vary, a total of five speakers was involved, three women and two men, aged from 24 to 52 years, with varying levels of education, in order to find general rather than individual usage patterns for the language.

Greninger (2009) outlines further textual features such as textual form, textual content, context and rhetorical goals of the texts under study, which are used here to further describe the typology of the texts collected.

In terms of textual form, all texts were originally collected in oral form, and one, Tan, was then edited into a written form. There is some variation in openings, with Tan and 2 Thieves opening with a sentence title, Orphan and Man-eater with an introductory paragraph, and Bear and Thief with no formal opening. The length varies with the shorter and structurally simpler texts, Thief (20 lines) and 2 Thieves (27 lines), the medium length texts, Bear (53 lines) and Man-eater (56 lines), and the longer and structurally more complex texts, Tan (135 lines) and Orphan (181 lines). All texts are told in the third person except Tan, which is a first person eyewitness account, and the Bear story, where the storyteller is a backgrounded or peripheral participant. The literary units employed in the texts include reported events in The Bear, Thief and 2 Thieves, along with physical description and dialogue. Tan includes a eye-witness accounts of events, description, dialogue and personal comments. Man-eater includes reported events and details of historical, geographical and character identification. The Orphan is a folk-tale, and includes dialogue, description, and a final moral and hortatory speech.

Textual content in all these narratives is concerned with rural life among the Kmhmu' people of northern Laos, their struggles with health issues, forest animals, thieves and the desire to escape poverty and become wealthy and prosperous. In terms of context, The Bear, Thief, 2 Thieves and Tan were all told to a group of family and friends, some of whom had heard the stories before and were familiar with the people and places mentioned. They were told in Vientiane, away from the original village setting of the stories. The Orphan was told in a rice-field hut and this setting seemed to help the storyteller to move into the reminiscent mood needed to recall his childhood when he heard this folk-tale from his grandfather.

The main rhetorical goal of most of these stories was to entertain the audience. An exception to that is the Man-eater, which is a gruesome historical record of the havoc caused by a man-eating tiger in the late 1940's, although some may see entertainment value even in this story. A secondary goal of The Bear, Thief and Orphan is to show how good character traits, such as courage, skill and kindness are rewarded and bad character traits, such as greed, deceit, violence and oppression are punished.

1.6.3 Plot summaries

In these plot summaries I will not give a formal macrostructure of the texts, but an outline of the main events to help the reader to follow the analysis and examples given in this paper.

Man-eater is told about a period after World War II when a wild tiger made a series of attacks on a total of about 200 people, killing many. Specific incidents are described in each episode giving names and places, and the details of the attacks, culminating in the death of the tiger when it is caught in a trap.

Tan is an autobiographical story of a life-threatening attack of malaria that occurred when the speaker was a young child, in which she and her father travel from their village to Vientiane for hospital treatment. The climax of the story occurs as her condition deteriorates and she goes into intensive care. She recovers after receiving further treatment including a blood transfusion. In order to pay the medical costs, the family goes into debt and this causes them hardship for years to come.

In *The Bear*, the narrator's family are troubled by an animal, which they believe to be a bear, raiding their fields. An uncle sets a grenade in the field to kill the bear. When the grenade goes off, the hunting party goes in pursuit. The party separates into two groups. One group, comprising the uncle and the narrator's husband, encounter the bear. It attacks the uncle and the husband frightens it off, but not before the uncle is badly injured. The husband carries him back to the village where the villagers berate them for not catching it. They warn the family that they will have to pay compensation if it attacks anyone else, because their grenade has injured it and made it savage. The other group then returns after finding the injured animal, a civet, not the bear after all.

Thief is about a teenage boy who is known as a bad character and a thief. There is an old blind man in the village whose son has been killed in a road accident and the old man has received some money in compensation, which he has hidden in his house. The young thief steals it. When the old man discovers this he pronounces a curse on the thief that he should die in the same way as the son whose compensation money he has stolen. And that is just what happens.

2 Thieves tells about two young men who spy on an old man to see where he hides his money. They follow him to the rice field and trick him into giving them his bush knife. With this they cut a big stick and use this and the knife to attack and kill the old man. They then steal his money, but are not caught.

In *Orphan*, a poor orphan boy runs away from his aunt who is mistreating him and wanders in the forest until he meets a beautiful girl who helps him. She turns out to be a princess, but when she takes him home the King rejects them both and they run for their lives. They meet a magic monkey who uses his powers to make them into a King and Queen with a beautiful palace of their own. They invite the old King and his retinue to visit. When they arrive, their elephants are dazzled by the beauty of the palace and stampede, killing the old King, the Queen and their attendants. A moral is given that we should not look down on others but live in harmony and mutual respect with one another.

The complete texts are included in Appendices I – VI.

1.6.4 Format of data presented in this study

Each text is given in three lines. The first line is a phonemic representation of Kmhmu' in IPA script, the second is a word-by-word gloss in English, and the last

line is an English translation. Examples in the paper are referenced with the name and line number of the text as shown in (1).

(1)

	Tan.068
IPA	<i>joŋ ʔoʔ goʔ jɔh sɔk wɛt maam giːniʔ</i>
English gloss	father 1sg so_then DIR seek buy blood that_one
English translation	So then my father went to look for (and) buy that blood.

1.7 Theoretical approach

This study follows a functional grammar approach (e.g. Halliday 1985; Dik 1997) where linguistic structures are described in terms of their function in expressing meaning. In examining a text, Halliday (1985:xvii) sees grammar and discourse as mutually interdependent. The text provides a context for grammatical analysis, while grammatical analysis contributes insights into the meaning and structure of the discourse as a whole. Cumming and Ono (1997:112) call this a "discourse-functional approach" to studying grammatical patterns in a language. It looks at the motivations that prompt a speaker to choose one rather than another form in expressing what they want to communicate. Explanations can include cognitive processing considerations and social or cultural factors. Thus in this study, both grammatical analysis and discourse analysis are kept in focus and inform each other in the process of fully understanding the text.