

Chapter 3 Word classes

3.1 Introduction

Every language has a lexicon that can be divided into various categories or classes. In this thesis, these categories are called “word classes.” In linguistic literature they are also known as “parts of speech,” “grammatical categories,” and sometimes “lexical categories” (Payne 1997:32).

The basic classes “noun” and “verb” are recognized and attested in all languages, but the criteria used to define these and other classes are not universally agreed-upon. Various analyses have been used to identify word classes on the basis of morphology, syntax, and semantics (Bussmann 1996:351). For example, most mother-tongue English speakers are familiar with the semantic definitions of “noun” as “a person, place or thing,” and “verb” as “an action word.”

This thesis uses grammatical (not semantic) criteria to identify the word classes that are relevant to the Bisu noun phrase. This approach follows Schachter and Shopen (2007:1,2), who present a cross-linguistic survey of word classes based on grammatical properties, including “the word’s distribution, its range of syntactic functions, and the morphological or syntactic categories for which it is specifiable.”

3.1.1 Major classes

The four major word classes accepted by theorists are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, although not every language has all four distinct classes. Nouns (discussed in section 3.2) and verbs (discussed in section 3.4) may be regarded as universals; these classes are found in every language. Adjectives “may or may not appear in all languages as a distinct word-class” (Givon 2001a:49). The status of adjectives in Bisu will be discussed in section 3.3 below. Adverbs, “the least homogenous... [and]

the least universal cross-linguistically” (Givon 2001a:87), “may be identified grammatically as modifiers of constituents other than nouns” (Schachter 2003:51). Because adverbs are not part of the noun phrase, they will not be discussed in this thesis.

3.1.2 Minor classes

In addition to nouns, verbs, and adjectives, this chapter will discuss five minor classes found in the Bisu noun phrase: pronouns (section 3.5), deictic modifiers (section 3.6), quantifiers (section 3.7), classifiers (section 3.8), postpositions (section 3.9), and conjunctions (section 3.10).

3.1.3 Other noun phrase constituents

In addition to the word classes discussed in this chapter, the Bisu noun phrase contains other words whose classification requires in-depth analysis. This thesis will analyze these constituents and assign them to word classes in Chapter 5. For future reference, these words will be classified as number markers and case markers.

3.2 Nouns

Nouns function as the heads of noun phrases. In Bisu, noun phrases may function as subjects or objects of verbs in a clause, as objects of prepositions, and as predicates. Noun phrase functions are discussed in detail in section 4.2.

In example 4), the noun *ya ke* “child” functions as the head of the subject noun phrase *ya ke htui hkun* “one child”. The noun *ka pawng* “can” functions as the head of the object noun phrase *ka pawng 10 an* “10 cans”.

Example 4) P7,8.046

<i>Ya ke</i>	<i>htui</i>	<i>hkun</i>	<i>ka pawng</i>	<i>10 an</i>	<i>baw</i>	<i>chi</i>
child	one	CLF:person	can	10	CLF:thing	Play Prt
FT: One child is playing [with] 10 cans						

In Example 5), the localizer noun *hta* “on/above” is the head of the noun phrase *tang i hta* “on a chair,” that functions as the object of the postposition *veu* “at.” The classification of *hta* “on/above” as a localizer noun is discussed in Section 3.2.1.

Example 5) P7,8.032

<i>A hu´</i>	<i>tang i</i>	<i>hta</i>	<i>veu</i>	<i>duing</i>	<i>chi</i>
grandfather	<u>chair</u>	<u>on/above</u>	at	sit	PRT
	POSSESSOR	POSSESSED LOC. NOUN			

FT: grandfather is sitting on a chair

In Example 6), *ang-bong* “father” is the head of the predicate noun phrase *Pattanan ang-bong* “Pattanan’s father.”

Example 6) Mar.13 data

<i>Yawhka</i>	<i>ma´</i>	<i>Pattanan</i>	<i>ang-bong</i>
headman	FOC	<u>Pattanan</u>	<u>father</u>
		POSSESSOR	POSSESSED ITEM

FT: the headman is Pattanan’s father

3.2.1 Localizer nouns

A distinct sub-class of nouns can be found in some genitive constructions that occur within postposition phrases. In Bisu the genitive relation is signaled by juxtaposition; as in Example 7), the possessed noun *yum* “house” is the head of the possessive noun phrase *Chi Daeng yum* “Chi Daeng’s house.”

Example 7) GN2:16

<i>Chi Daeng</i>	<i>yum</i>
Chi Daeng	house
FT: Chi Daeng’s house	

A genitive “localizing” relation occurs in some noun phrases that function as objects of postpositions. In these cases, a location (for example, “chair”) is more narrowly specified (for example “top”) by means of a genitive relation. In English, this is most naturally expressed with a construction such as “the top of the chair.” Bisu

juxtaposes the possessor and possessed; a similar (unnatural) juxtaposition in English might be “the chair’s top” or “the chair’s ‘above’.” Although some of these ‘localizers’ correspond most closely with prepositions in English, their behaviour as possessed heads identifies them as nouns in Bisu. Example 8) illustrates this.

Example 8) P7,8.032

A hu' tang i hta veu duing chi
 grandfather chair on/above at sit PRT

FT: grandfather is sitting on a chair (lit. grandfather sits at the chair’s above)

Sixteen localizer nouns have been observed in the texts and other data collected for this thesis.

Localizer Noun	Equivalent English preposition or noun
<i>awk₁</i>	under/below
<i>awk₂</i>	out/off (borrowed from Thai)
<i>dawng ka</i>	under (specific to under trees)
<i>duik</i>	end
<i>hklao</i>	in/inside
<i>hta</i>	on/above
<i>htae</i>	near
<i>kawng htang</i>	beside
<i>kawng nuing</i>	amid
<i>la ka</i>	front
<i>la ma</i>	right
<i>la sai</i>	left
<i>nawng nawng</i>	behind
<i>nge</i>	out/outside
<i>nuing nawng</i>	about face (180° turn)
<i>vui</i>	far

Table 7 Localizer nouns

3.3 Adjectives

The status of adjectives as an independent word class in all languages (that is, as a universal independent class) is controversial. Schachter and Shopen (2007) claim that “there are languages which lack a distinct adjective class altogether” (14); these are “languages in which adjectival meanings are expressed primarily by nouns,... and languages in which adjectival meanings are expressed primarily by verbs” (16). Linguists writing about such Asian languages as Mandarin, Lao and Qiang (which, like Bisu, is a Tibeto-Burman language) have noted the “verby” qualities of their adjectives, and some explicitly claim that adjectives in these languages, while distinct, are not an independent class but a sub-class of stative verbs (LaPolla and Huang 2004:307, Enfield 2004:323). On the other hand, Dixon (2004:12) claims that adjectives are a universal independent class: “in every instance, when the situation is investigated in depth, it transpires that there are some – often rather subtle – criteria to distinguish adjectives as a separate word class.”

Like other Southeast Asian languages, adjectives in Bisu are verb-like. Like verbs, Bisu adjectives may function as clause predicates and like verbs, Bisu adjectives may be negated (see section 3.3.3 for examples). Whether they are in fact a sub-class of verbs or an independent class depends on subtle verb and adjective behaviour in Bisu that requires further investigation. The data collected for this thesis is insufficient to provide an answer, but does provide some clues.

Sections 3.3.1 through 3.3.3 describe a Bisu adjective class using both semantic and syntactic criteria set out by Dixon (2004:14), namely “words from the prototypical adjective semantic types, and (a) functioning... as intransitive predicate...; and/or (b) modifying a noun in a NP.” In addition to these criteria, Dixon (2004:11) notes that in some languages adjectives “always function as the ‘parameter of comparison’.” Section 3.3.4 discusses this common but non-universal property of adjectives in comparative constructions. Dixon’s (2004:14) criteria also specify that adjectives

are “a word class distinct from noun and verb,” but I regard this as an unresolved issue for Bisu.

3.3.1 Semantic content and *ang-* words

Dixon (2004:3,4) identifies four core semantic types (DIMENSION, AGE, VALUE, and COLOUR) and several peripheral semantic types (including PHYSICAL PROPERTY, SPEED and DIFFICULTY) that are typically associated with adjective classes. There is some correlation between the prefix *ang-* and Bisu words which fit these semantic types. Table 8 following shows seven of Dixon’s semantic types and associated *ang-* words. Note that the DIFFICULTY terms are borrowed from the Thai words *jâak* “difficult” and *ɲaa* “easy,” which suggests that adding *ang-* conforms them to Bisu adjective forms. Note also that negative properties (e.g. “not good”) are formed by replacing *ang-* with the negator *ba*.

Adjective type	Ex. 1	Gloss	Ex. 2	Gloss
DIMENSION	<i>ang-hui</i>	“big”	<i>ang-i</i>	“little”
VALUE	<i>ang-maen</i>	“good”	<i>ba maen</i>	“not good”
COLOUR	<i>ang-plang</i>	“black”	<i>ang-pawn</i>	“white”
PHYSICAL PROPERTY	<i>ang-kaen</i>	“hard”	<i>ang-daw</i>	“soft”
SPEED	<i>ang-vai</i>	“fast, quick”	<i>ang-klam</i>	“slow”
DIFFICULTY	<i>ang-yak</i>	“difficult” (borr)	<i>ang-ngai</i>	“easy” (borr)
SIMILARITY	<i>ang-tu</i>	“same”	<i>ba tu</i>	“not same”

Table 8 Semantic adjective types (per Dixon 2004)

Despite this correlation, *ang-* is not a foolproof clue for identifying Bisu adjectives. At least three confounding factors exist. First, there are a few cases where adjectives occur without the *ang-* prefix. Second, *ang-* occurs in some clauses where it apparently has no adjective-related function. Third, Dixon’s core semantic adjective type AGE does not fit the *ang-* prefix pattern.

3.3.1.1 Adjectives without *ang-*

The adjective “chubby, fat” is given as *ang-tung* in out-of-context elicitation and in some example sentences. However, in the following text example, the prefix *ang-* does not occur.

Example 9) P7,8.041

A hu' la ka' veu ya ke tung tung htui mang ca ngaе
grandfather in front of at child **chubby** one 1spec exist PRT

FT: In front of grandfather there is a chubby child

3.3.1.2 *Ang-* with non-adjectives

Sometimes *ang-* prefixes verbs and classifiers, and in these cases it is clearly not functioning as an adjective marker or adjectivizer. Rather, it is functioning as a nominalizer, such as in example 10) below. Here *ang-* nominalizes the verb *ca* “eat” resulting in the noun *ang-ca* “food.” (See section 4.3.2.2 for more examples of *ang-* functioning as a nominalizer.)

Example 10) GN1:43

ya ang-nae' ang-i ang-ca ca ngaе
chicken red little **food** eat PRT

FT: a little red chicken eats food

This inconsistency may be discounted by regarding the nominalizer *ang-* as a different morpheme, but I believe this form of *ang-* remains pertinent until *ang-* is more fully explained.

3.3.1.3 Adjectives without *ang-*: AGE words

According to Dixon, AGE is a core semantic adjective type. Some age-related terms follow the usual *ang-* pattern, such as the Bisu words for ripeness: *ang-lin* “unripe,” *ang-ming* “ripe,” and *ang-pu* “overripe.” However, several key AGE words do not.

Bisu distinguishes between AGE as a developmental process and AGE as length of existence. Inanimate objects can be modified by the adjectives *ang-shui* “new” and

ang-an “old.” In contrast, the AGE terms “young” and “old” that apply to living things do not fit the Bisu *ang-* adjective pattern. Instead, AGE terms relating to developmental process seem to correlate with the prefix *ya-* (variable tone) and these AGE words seem to function as nouns rather than adjectives.

During language learning, I initially glossed the words *ya ke* and *yamang* as the adjectives “young” and “old.” However, in context these words appear to be the nouns “child” and “elder.” In the texts collected for this thesis, *ya ke* functions as the noun “child/children.” In Example 11), *ya ke* “child” is the head of the subject noun phrase *ya ka ang-i htui mang* “one little child.”

Example 11) P7,8.010

A hu' laka' veu ya ke angi htui mang ca ngae
 grandfather in front of at child little one 1spec exist PRT
 FT: In front of the grandfather there is one little child

In Example 12), *ya ke* “children” is the head of the noun phrase *ya ke 6 khun ui* “six children,” which is part of a postposition phrase.

Example 12) P7,8.022a and 024

Hka baya 2 hkunya ke 6 hkun ui laka'
 female 2 CLF:person... ...child 6 CLF:person 3+ in front of

veu la tui htam cung chi
 at rope hold stand PRT
 FT: Two females... holding a rope [are] standing in front of six children

This data suggests that age words in Bisu are nouns rather than adjectives. This supposition is further supported by the behaviour of age words in comparative constructions, which will be discussed in section 3.3.4 below.

3.3.2 Modifying nouns in NPs

In simple constructions, the adjective follows the noun, regardless of whether it is a predicate or a noun phrase modifier. The adjective is modifying the noun, but its

syntactic role is ambiguous (either NP modifier or predicate). For example, in the absence of contextual clues, *Suphaap yum ang-i* can be translated as the clause “Suphaap’s house is little” or as the noun phrase “Suphaap’s little house.”

Example 13) GN2:17

Suphaap yum ang-i

Suphaap house little

FT: Suphaap’s house is little -or- Suphaap’s little house

In more complex clauses, the role of adjectives as modifiers within a noun phrase becomes clear. In Example 14), the adjectives *ang-hkiyo* “green” and *ang-heu* “big” occur within the object noun phrase (which is bounded by the object marker *na*).

Example 14) GN1:43

ga tasae ang-hkiyo ang-heu na myang ngae

I mountain green big OBJ see PRT

FT: I see the big green mountain

3.3.3 Intransitive predicate

Evidence of adjectives functioning as intransitive predicates is clearest when looking at negated clauses. In Example 15), the adjective *ang-heu* “big” is part of the predicate “*ba heu*” “not big.” Whenever *ang-* modifiers are negated, the negation takes the place of *ang-*. *Ang-* and *ba* “NEG” never co-occur.

Example 15) E&T.062a

ang-to ba heu

body NEG big

FT: [its] body is not big

3.3.4 Comparative constructions

Dixon (2004:21) notes that “in some languages only adjectives may be compared, and this furnishes a criterion for distinguishing between adjective and verb classes; such a property applies to... Qiang and Lao.” This appears to be the crux of

Dixon's disagreement with Enfield and others: Dixon asserts that in Southeast Asian languages this criterion is sufficient to distinguish adjectives as an independent class, while Enfield asserts (regarding Lao) that this criterion distinguishes adjectives uniquely, but only as a distinct sub-class of verbs. Enfield's inclusion of adjectives under verbs is supported by several other subtle, language-specific criteria.

In Bisu, *ang-* adjectives function as the parameter of comparison in comparative constructions, but they drop *ang-* in this context. For example, in the following construction, the DIMENSION adjective *ang-heu* "big" (minus *ang-*) functions as the parameter of comparison for the nouns *canbaen* "dish" and *lawhkaw* "bowl."

Example 16) L1:45

Canbaen lawhkaw law ba pa' heu ngae
 dish bowl more.than big PRT
 FT: the dish is bigger than the bowl

In Example 17), the DIMENSION adjective *ang-mawng* "tall" (minus *ang-*) functions as the parameter of comparison.

Example 17) GN1:25

abong aba law ba pa' mawng ngae
 father mother more.than tall PRT
 FT: father is taller than mother

It was noted above that basic AGE words appear to be nouns rather than adjectives. This supposition is further supported by the observation that AGE words may not function as parameters of comparison in comparative constructions. "Younger than" and "older than" are expressed as follows:

Example 18) L2:35a

A B law ba pa' anyu i ngae
 A B more.than age little PRT
 LitT: A's age is littler than B's -or- FT: A is younger than B

Example 19) L2:35b

A B law ba.pa' anyu bya ngae

A B more.than age lots/large.amount PRT

LitT: The amount of A's age is more than B -or- FT: A is older than B

3.3.5 Classifying adjectives

A great deal of further research can be done on adjectives. Some basic questions are

1) what is the function of *ang-*, or the relationship between *ang-* and adjectives? 2) what is the function of *ya-* and are AGE words nouns (not adjectives) in Bisu? 3) are adjectives the only words that can function as the parameter of comparison in Bisu? Answers to these questions should help resolve the question of whether the adjective class is independent.

Based on the foregoing, I conclude that there is strong evidence for a distinct adjective class in Bisu, and that contrary to most languages AGE words are not part of this class. At present there is insufficient evidence to draw a conclusion about whether the adjective class is independent or a sub-class of verbs.

3.4 Verbs

Cross-linguistically, predication is “the characteristic function of verbs” (Schachter and Shopen 2007:9). “A verb always has primary function as head of a predicate” (Dixon 2004:8). While other Bisu word classes may sometimes function as predicates, Bisu is consistent with all languages with regard to the function of verbs. For example, in Example 20) below the verb *vui* “buy” functions as the predicate.

Example 20) P7,8.031

yet hkanum' vui chi

3D candy buy PRT

FT: They (the two of them) are buying candy

In some languages, verbs may also function as subjects or objects in a clause (Schachter and Shopen 2007:9, Dixon 2004:8). There is one case of a verb phrase functioning as a subject in the data collected for this thesis, as shown in Example 21) following.

Example 21) E&T.008

Ce ka yang laeng meu yet ma lang-ka
 argue each other SUBJ go (up, N) time.when 3D tell each other

chi

PRT

FT: when the arguing had continued [for a while], they told each other...

Typically, verbs may be specified by categories such as tense, aspect, mood, voice, and polarity (Schachter and Shopen 2007:9). In Bisu, as in many Burmese-Engwi languages, many of these properties are marked by clause- and sentence-final particles. For more detail, see Person's Sentence-final particles in Bisu narrative (2000).

3.5 Pronouns

Pronouns constitute one type of noun phrase. Like other noun phrases, they function as subjects and objects in clauses. Pronouns function as phrases rather than as "heads" in the sense that they never occur with modifiers. Four kinds of pronouns are attested in the data collected for this thesis: personal, deictic, interrogative and indefinite.

3.5.1 Personal pronouns

Bisu has nine personal pronouns, distinguished by a three-way contrast of person (first, second, third) and of number (singular, dual, plural). These are given in the following table:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	<i>ga</i>	<i>gai</i>	<i>gu</i>
2nd person	<i>na(ng)</i>	<i>nai</i>	<i>nawng</i>
3rd person	<i>ya(ng)</i>	<i>yet</i>	<i>yawng</i>

Table 9 Personal pronouns

In Example 22), the pronoun *ga* ‘1S’ is the subject and the pronoun *nang* ‘2S’ is the object of the clause.

Example 22) E&T.019

ni kam ga nang na ga chae ca lang pe
 this time 1S 2S OBJ able bite eat *** insist
 FT: "Now I can devour you."

3.5.2 Deictic pronouns

The data collected for this thesis includes four deictic expressions. Typically these occur as deictic modifiers of nouns, classifiers or number markers (see section 3.6). But there are a few examples where deictic expressions function as pronouns (i.e., where they function as complete noun phrases).

In Example 23) the deictic pronoun *ning* “this” substitutes for the object noun phrase, a food dish prepared as part of a meal.

Example 23) Mar.14 data

Ning ga taeng bu ae
 this 1S make EMPH PRT
 FT: I made this myself

Example 24) was elicited during a language-learning session, when a picture of two houses was on the table. *Nu* “here” functions as a deictic pronoun, pointing to an extralinguistic location within the speech situation.

Example 24) GN1:5

Nu veu yum 2 lang ca ngae

Here at house 2 CLF:building exist PRT

FT: There are 2 houses here (LitT: at here 2 houses exist)

3.5.3 Interrogative pronouns

Bisu has three interrogative pronouns, two meaning “who” and one meaning “what.” The following table presents these pronouns.

Interrogative Pronoun	Gloss
<i>asang</i>	who
<i>baceu sang</i>	who
<i>baceu</i>	what

Table 10 Interrogative pronouns

In the following example the pronoun *baceu sang* “who” functions as the subject of the clause.

Example 25) L1:13

baceu sang kat ae ngae

who market go(down,S) PRT

FT: Who goes (southward) to the market?

As a side note, one may observe that the word *baceu* “what” occurs both in “what” and in one form of “who,” and also in the adverb *baceu ha* “why.” *Sang*, however, does not appear to have a meaning by itself.

3.5.4 Indefinite pronouns

The indefinite pronoun *asang* “anyone, whoever” is identical to its corresponding interrogative pronoun, and the indefinite pronoun *ceun ceu* “anything” is formed by reduplicating one segment of its interrogative counterpart. These indefinite pronouns are shown in Table 11 following:

Indefinite Pronoun	Gloss
<i>asang</i>	anyone, whoever
<i>ceun ceu</i>	anything

Table 11 Indefinite pronouns I

In Example 26), the indefinite pronoun *asang* “whoever” functions as the subject of a clause.

Example 26) E&T.010

<i>Asang</i>	<i>ang-seng</i>	<i>buing</i>	<i>meu</i>	<i>anyam anyik</i>	<i>ui</i>
Whoever	makes noise	animal cry	time when	noisy bugs	3+
<i>kyap</i>	<i>yao</i>	<i>hae</i>	<i>mang ga</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>ngae</i>
quiet	then	that	1spec able	eat	PRT

FT: Whoever, when he roars, silences the noisy forest bugs, (then) that one can eat [the other].

Other indefinite pronouns are formed by combining the quantifiers *ku* “all, every” and *ka* “some” with the person-classifier *hkun* and the lexeme *ceu* “thing.”

Although *ceu* by itself is not attested in the data, its occurrence in *baceu* “what” and *ceun ceu* “anything” suggests that it is a generic “thing” noun or possibly a classifier.

Indefinite Pronoun	Gloss
<i>ku hkun</i>	everyone
<i>ku ceu</i>	everything
<i>ka hkun</i>	someone
<i>ka ceu</i>	something

Table 12 Indefinite pronouns II

3.6 Deictic expressions

Deictic expressions are defined as “expressions whose reference or extension is systematically determined by aspects of the speech situation” (Levinson 2003:423) and as “linguistic expressions that refer to the personal, temporal, or spatial aspect of any given utterance act... [such as] personal pronouns (*I, you*, etc.), adverbial

expressions (*here, there, etc.*), and the demonstrative pronouns (*this, that, etc.*)” (Bussman 1996:116).

Section 3.5.2 discussed deictic expressions that function as pronouns. More often, deictic expressions function as modifiers within a classifier phrase, number phrase or noun phrase.

3.6.1 Personal and temporal deixis

Two basic deictic expressions are *ni(ng)* “this” and *hae(ng)* “that.” A note about spelling and the “floating nasals”: “*ni*” and “*hae*” appear to be the standard forms, with occasional spelling variations “*ning*” and “*haeng*.” I will use “*ni*” and “*hae*” in prose, but because the “*ning*” and “*haeng*” spellings appear in edited text data, I include both spelling variations in examples.

Ni and *hae* occur with number markers and classifiers to form more complex personal and temporal deictic expressions such as the following:

Expression	Gloss	Free translation
<i>ni mang</i>	this + NUM:single.specific	this one
<i>hae mang</i>	that + NUM:single.specific	that one
<i>ni mae</i>	this + CLF:thing	it (proximal)
<i>hae mae</i>	that + CLF:thing	it (distal)
<i>ni kam</i>	this + CLF:time	now
<i>hae kam</i>	that + CLF:time	then

Table 13 Deictic expressions

Sometimes these expressions function as adverbial phrases, such as in Example 27).

Example 27) E&T.052

Ni kam Cha la mang nabata ye hkae ngaе
 this time tiger 1spec intens intens afraid PRT
 FT: now the tiger was terrified

Sometimes these expressions function as subjects or object in clauses, such as in Example 28).

Example 28) E&T.059

Hae mae kya meu yang huiŋ yang sao chi
 that thing hear time when 3S run 3S rest PRT
 FT: when [he] heard it [i.e. the question], he stopped running and rested

Ni and *hae* also frequently occur in ordinary noun phrases. Often they occur in Noun + DE + CLF or Noun + DE + NUM constructions, such as in Example 29) and Example 30).

Example 29) Feb.27 data

yum ni lang Pae heu
 house this CFL:building Pae own
 FT: Pae owns this house

Example 30) PS.098,099

ya-ke hka-hpa-ya hae mang lot-htip chuing yaw laen
 child male that 1spec bicycle steer on foot walk go(N)

lae chi
 PRT PRT
 FT: that boy walks the bicycle away (northward)

On rare occasions *ni* or *hae* occur with a noun and without a classifier or number marker. Examples 31) and 32) are two out of only three examples that occur in the texts collected for this thesis.

Example 31) PS.123

Ya ba-koe haeng salawng yo veu cha htawh kan
 3S guava those basket there at FUT spill.out add,put.in

ngae
 PRT
 FT: he is going to dump those guavas into the basket there

Example 32) PRS.004

Yao kaw-tsuing haeng' tawn pi pi taeng mi baw ngae
then rice.stalk those cut whistle make blow play PRT

FT: then [we] cut those rice stalks to make whistles to blow

3.6.2 Spatial deixis

The spatial deixis expressions are *nu* “here” and *yo* “there.” These typically modify noun phrases within postposition phrases. There are no examples of *nu* and *yo* occurring with classifiers or number markers. In Example 33), *yo* “there” is part of the noun phrase which functions as the object of the postposition *veu*. *Yo* “there” refers to a spatial location in the speech situation.

Example 33) PS.007

Ya tam-pawng hta yo veu hpya ta
3S ladder, steps on/above there at climb ascend

cung lae chi
stand PRT PRT

FT: He climbed up to stand at the top of the ladder there

3.7 Quantifiers

Bisu has numeral quantifiers and a small set of non-numeral quantifiers. Both occur with classifiers.

3.7.1 Numeral quantifiers

Two Bisu numerals (cardinal numbers), *htui* “one” and *dichae* “ten” are still used in natural speech. Other numerals have been replaced by Tai numerals. In example 34), the numeral *htui* “one” occurs with the classifier *hkun* “person” and the numeral *dichae* “ten” occurs with the classifier *an* “inanimate thing.”

Example 34) P7,8.046

Ya ke htui kkun ka pawng dichae an baw
child NML:one CLF:person can NML:10 CLF:thing play

chi

PRT

FT: A/one child is playing [with] ten cans

Ordinal numbers are expressed differently from cardinal numbers. Cardinal numbers precede classifiers (as shown above), while ordinal numbers occur following the classifier and occur with *hti*. The following example shows the classifier *kaen* “CLF:container” followed by ordinal numbers *hti 1* “first” and *hti 2* “second.”

Example 35) PS.030

salawng kaen hti 1 nae kaen hti 2 mang yet
basket CLF:container ORD and CLF:container ORD dual

kawng ba-koe kan pluing chi
*** guava add,put.in full PRT

FT: The first and second baskets are full of guavas

3.7.2 Non-numeral quantifiers

Two non-numeral quantifiers occur with classifiers: *ku* “every, all” and *ka* “each, some.” In the following example, *ku* “every” occurs with the classifier *hkun* “person.”

Example 36) GN1:44

ga yum'chang ku hkun pahtet Canada veu
1Poss family every CLF:person country Canada at

duing ngaе
live PRT

FT: my whole family lives in Canada

3.8 Classifiers

Like other Southeast Asian languages, the Bisu counting system includes obligatory classifiers. The typical word order for a counting construction is Noun + QUANT + CLF. Three basic classifiers: *hkun* “CLF:persons,” *to* “CLF:legged.things” and *lang* “CLF:buildings” are Tai loan-words, as are many others. This raises the question of whether classifiers are a native Bisu feature or have been added to the language through outside pressure. Xu (2001:43) states that classifiers “appeared relatively late in Bisu” and discusses Dai loan words, including classifiers and numerals, in detail (Xu 2001:61-67). The existence of number markers (see discussion in section 5.5) lends support to the supposition that classifiers are a late addition. Classifiers in Bisu are a relatively small set of words. The set appears to be fairly stable but open to adding new members as the lexicon grows e.g. adding *gan* “CLF:motorized.vehicles” to classify cars and motorcycles. A partial list of Bisu classifiers follows in Table 14.

Classifier	Domain
<i>an</i>	things
<i>bang</i>	stem, trunk
<i>dawk</i>	flower
<i>gan</i>	(motorized?) vehicle e.g. motorcycle, car
<i>hkun</i>	persons
<i>hpeun</i>	wrap skirt
<i>htaen</i>	shoes
<i>hteu</i>	times
<i>kaen</i>	container
<i>kam</i>	time
<i>lang</i>	building
<i>lum</i>	hats
<i>mae</i>	thing
<i>mu</i>	group
<i>sai</i>	long thin flexible thing e.g. river, string
<i>sawng</i>	bag
<i>sui</i>	round thing e.g. fruit, vegetables, the sun, rocks
<i>to</i>	“legged” thing e.g. animals, insects, furniture
<i>tsuing</i>	stalk, trunk
<i>tuing</i>	box

Table 14 Classifiers

Example 37) following shows the numeral two and the classifier *hkun* “person” occurring with *ya ke hka hpa ya* “boys (male children).”

Example 37) P7,8.037

Yake hka hpa ya 2 hkun ca ngaе
 child male 2 CLF:person exist PRT

FT: There are two boys

Example 38) shows the numeral five and the classifier *to* “legged thing” occurring with *cha la* “tiger.”

Example 38) E&T.083

Mi nuing cha la 5 to sha pi lang
today tiger 5 CLF:"legged".things find give ***

a la
correct Q

FT: Today [you will] bring 5 tigers, right?

Classifiers also occur with non-numeral quantifiers and deictic expressions. In Example 39), the non-numeral quantifier *ku* “every” occurs with the classifier *hkun* “person” to form the classifier phrase *ku hkun* “every person.” This classifier phrase modifies the head noun *yum’chang* “family” to form the noun phrase *yum’chang’ ku hkun* which can be translated as “my family, every person” or more freely as “my whole family.”

Example 39) GN1:44

ga yum’chang’ ku hkun pahtet Canada veu
1Poss family every CLF:person country Canada at

duing ngae
live PRT

FT: my whole family lives in Canada

In Example 40), the deictic expression *hae* “that” modifies the classifier *lang* “building.”

Example 40) Mar.10 data

Yum hae lang yawhka heu
house that CFL:building headman owns

FT: the headman owns that house

3.9 Postpositions

The postposition *veu* “at” functions as the head of postposition phrases. It appears to be the only postposition in the language. Postposition phrases typically function

as temporal or locational adverbials in clauses. In the following example, *veu* “at” heads a postposition phrase whose object consists of the location noun *kat* “market.”

Example 41) P7,8.027

kat veu hkanum' nae ca keung ang-bya kawng ngaе
 market at candy and food a lot sell PRT
 FT: At the market lots of candy and food are for sale

In the following example, *veu* heads a postposition phrase whose object consists of the temporal noun *tawn-bai* “afternoon”.

Example 42) SRS.005b

tawn-bai veu ga ang-chang kawng lawng-tae sha
 afternoon at 1S friend COM fish look.for,seek

lae ngaе
 go(up,N) PRT
 FT: In the afternoon, I (together with) my friends go hunt fish

3.10 Conjunctions

Bisu has seven conjunctions, which occur in the data with strikingly different frequency. Four are coordinating conjunctions, of which three occur frequently. *Nae* “and,” *naeyao* “and then,” and *yao* “then” are used to conjoin clauses, and together these coordinating conjunctions occur 122 times in the seven texts collected for this thesis. The counter-expectation coordinator *ca* “but” occurs only three times. At the smaller-than-clause level, *nae* “and” is used to conjoin noun phrases and occurs in this role 20 times.

Bisu also has three subordinating conjunctions that signal causal or logical connection. These subordinating conjunctions occur very infrequently. *Yao* “then” occurs twice where it functions as an “if-then” connector; *htao* “if” occurs twice (although mother-tongue speakers claim Bisu has no word for “if” when directly

questioned); and *mai* “because” does not occur in the texts collected for this thesis (*mai* was elicited during language learning).

Bisu’s conjunctions are summarized in Table 15:

Conjunction	Type	Gloss	Occurrences in texts
<i>yao</i>	coordinating temporal events	then	68
<i>nae</i>	coordinating clauses	and	35
<i>nae</i>	coordinating noun phrases	and	20
<i>naeyao</i>	coordinating	and then	19
<i>ca´</i>	coordinating	but	3
<i>htao</i>	subordinating	if	2
<i>yao</i>	subordinating (if- then) relation	then	2
<i>mai</i>	subordinating	because	Ø

Table 15 Conjunctions

In Example 43), the coordinating conjunction *nae* “and” conjoins two noun phrases.

Example 43) P7,8.027

Kat veu hkanum nae ca keung ang-bya kawng ngae.
 market at candy and food a lot sell PRT
 FT: At the market lots of candy and food are for sale.

In Example 44), the coordinating conjunction *yao* “then” conjoins two clauses.

Example 44) PS.048

Ba-koe tsuing yo veu hkeu yao lot-htip cawt chi
 guava tree there at arrive then bicycle dismount PRT
 FT: [The boy] reaches the guava tree there, then gets off his bike

In Example 45), the conjunction *htao* “if” functions as a subordinating conjunction.

Example 45) E&T.038b, 39

ga *plawng* *la va* *htao* *pun* *hpung* *ang pawn*
1S help make/do if rock dust white

sha *la* *vo*
find come(up,N) IMP

FT: I will help [you] if [you] bring [me] white rock dust

3.11 Summary

This chapter has discussed three major and five minor word classes that occur in Bisu. Nouns and verbs are uncontroversial major classes, and pronouns, deictic expressions, quantifiers, classifiers, postpositions and conjunctions are uncontroversial minor classes. Other sets of words are more controversial and more difficult to classify. One of these more controversial classes, namely adjectives, is discussed in this chapter. Adjectives and the debate about the status of this word class are presented, but a conclusion is not drawn about whether adjectives in Bisu are an independent major class or a sub-class of verbs. Suggestions for directions of further research into this question are made. Analysis and classification of two other noun phrase constituents (number markers and case markers) is deferred until Chapter five.