Chapter 1

Introduction

The following Hmong Ntsuab construction utilizes five verbs in succession: *tsaw* 'able', *rov* 'return', *qaab* 'back', *moog* 'go', *khaw* 'collect' (1). This example was elicited from a Hmong Ntusab speaker who was telling a story about Hmong funeral customs.

(1)

tug	*tuag*	*tshab*	*leb*	*tsaw*	*rov*	*qaab*	*moog*	*khaw*
CLF	die	so	PART	able	return	back	go	collect

nwg	*cov*	*neev*	*taws*
s/he	CLF-group	imprint	foot

'The dead person is therefore able to return back (to the places he has been before) and gather up his footprints.'

Whether they are called serial verbs, consecutivization, concatenation, or other names, it is clear that multi-verb constructions are common in many languages, Hmong Ntsuab being one of them. They appear to be strings of unmarked verbs on the surface but, only upon further study, does it become clear that these verbs have various inter-verb semantic and syntactic relationships with each other. This study provides an investigation, description, and classification of Hmong Ntsuab multi-verb constructions, which is based on N.J. Enfield's study of V1-V2 constructions in Lao (2008).

Chapter one begins with an introduction to the Hmong Ntsuab people, the Hmong Ntsuab language family, and the methodology of the study, including background information on the language resource persons, and previous Hmong language research. It concludes with a brief discussion of the orthography used in this paper.

Chapter two provides an overview of the basic grammar of Hmong Ntsuab and an introduction to some clausal structures that employ multiple verbs. Included is a discussion of key grammatical characteristics of Hmong Ntsuab, which contribute to the formation of multi-verb constructions.

Chapter three supplies the reader with background information on the topic of multi-verb constructions. In addition, definitions for serial verb constructions and other multi-verb constructions are addressed and clarified. This chapter also consists of a review of main verb grammatical properties in Hmong Ntsuab and a discussion of the constituency tests used to divide and classify multi-verb constructions in this study.

Chapter four goes on to detail nine structural categories of multi-verb constructions in Hmong Ntsuab and provides a description of the grammatical features of the multi-verb structures in each category based on the constituency tests outlined in chapter three.

This study ends with some concluding remarks and suggested areas for further research.

1.1 Hmong language family

The Hmong language belongs to the Hmong-Mien language family. Most speakers of the approximately thirty-five languages in this family live in China, and Chinese linguists generally refer to this language as Miao (or Meo), and this family as Miao-Yao and not Hmong-Mien (Goddard 2005: 36). In this study, the term "Hmong" will be used, as "Miao" tends to have a negative connotation among Hmong speakers and Hmong people prefer to be called Hmong and not Miao.

There is much debate over the broader affiliations of the Hmong-Mien language family. Some claim that it belongs under the Sino-Tibetan language family, others insist on affiliation with the Austro-Thai family, and still others argue for inclusion in the Austro-Asian family (Arisawa 2006: 8). For now, many linguists, such as Matisoff (2001), prefer to consider this language family as a separate group altogether.

Hmong Daw (White Hmong) and Hmong Ntsuab (Green Hmong or Blue Hmong) are the two main language varieties of Hmong. They are mutually intelligible (Jarkey 2006: 115) and very similar in their phonology and grammar (Taweesak 1984: 7). Hmong Ntsuab is the variety focused on in this study. It is also known as Green Hmong, Mong Njua, Mong Leeg (Striped Mong), or Blue Hmong (Taweesak 1984: 3). Figure 1, below, is a simplified version of the family tree structure listed by Matisoff (2001: 299). See Appendix 1 for the entire figure.

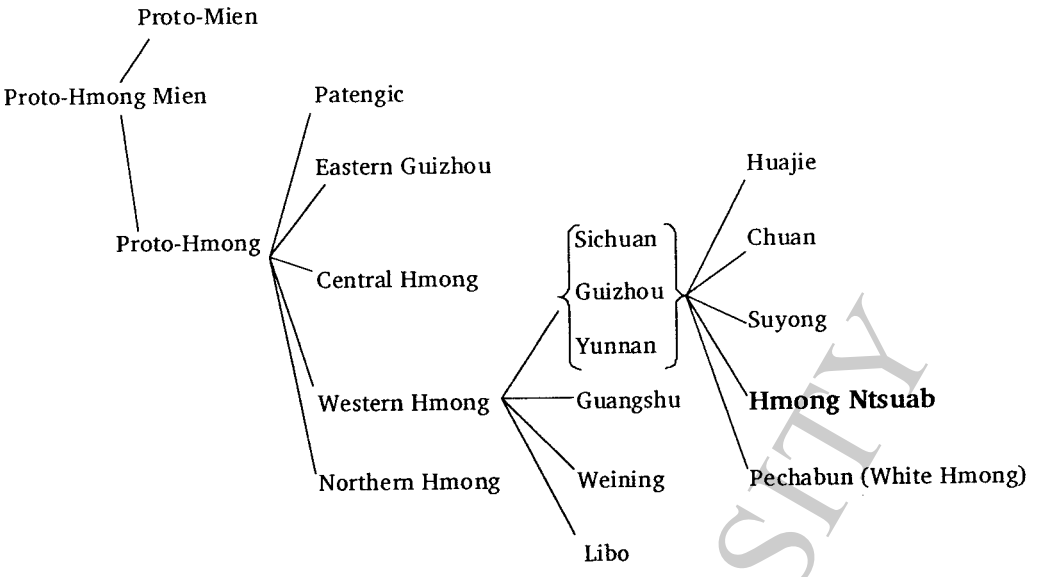

Figure 1. The Hmong-Mien language family

1.2 Hmong speakers

Hmong people are said to have originated from China and have begun migrating south to Vietnam in the 18th century, to Laos in the mid-1800's, and to Thailand during World War II (Taweesak 1984: 4). Estimates for numbers of Hmong speakers across Southwestern China and Southeast Asia vary from approximately five million people (Goddard 2005: 36) to six million people (Smalley et al. 1990: 3) to nine million people (Jarkey 2006: 115, Tapp et al. 2004: xiii). Due to the mass resettlement of Hmong people after the Vietnam War, many Hmong now reside in the United States, Australia, and France as well (Goddard 2005: 36). There are over 190,000 Hmong speakers living in these three countries (Jarkey 2006: 115). The Hmong speakers who served as language resource persons in this study come from various locations in Thailand, where approximately 125,000 Hmong people reside (Mongkol and Thaworn 1995).

1.3 Previous Hmong research

The Hmong people, culture, and language have been studied for many years. In his thorough overview of previous Hmong research, beginning in the early 1990s, Nicholas Tapp explains that notable foundational contributions came from Geddes, Cooper, Lemoine, Morechand, Savina, Bernatzik, Mickey, Lin, Ruey, and Lombard-Salmon (2004: 3-7). Topics from these authors range from shamanism, customs,

society, economy, religion, history and other ethnographic accounts of the Hmong. In addition to these ethnographic and anthropologic studies, the Hmong language has also been widely researched.

Although much of the Hmong-Mien research in linguistics has been conducted by Chinese linguists (Goddard 2005: 36), Western researchers have also contributed to literature on the Hmong language. Considerable contributions to Hmong linguistic research have come from missionaries, such as Barney, Smalley, Bertrais, Mottin, Downer, Pollard, and Hudspeth (Tapp 2004: 6-7). Additional linguistic research contributions have come from Ratliff (1992), Clark (1989), Lyman (1979), Riddle (1989), Bisang (1993), and Jarkey (2006). After the dispersal of Hmong refugees to Western countries in the mid-1970s, and the increased awareness in the West regarding the Hmong, research in Hmong studies began to flourish (Tapp 2004: 8-9). The researchers and works referenced above are not by any means comprehensive. However, they do provide a sufficient overview of Hmong ethnographic and linguistic research and a solid jumping point for further research.

1.4 Background information on LRPs

The Hmong Ntsuab data used in this study was supplied by five language resource persons (LRPs), all of which were native Hmong Ntsuab speakers. Two of them were from Baan Ruam Thai Phathana 9 Village in Tak province in Thailand. The third LRP was from Mae Jaem district, Chiang Mai province, in Thailand. The fourth LRP was a Hmong Ntsuab man originally from Laos. The fifth LRP was a male from Baan Ruam Thai Phathana 1 Village. These LRP's will be referred to as LRP A, B, C, D, and E respectively, for ease of reference.

Both of the first two LRPs were living in Chiang Mai city (Tambon Sriphum, Amphoe Muang) at the time of elicitation, which was conducted in late 2008. LRP "A" was a 19 year old male who was born in Tambon Maelamung (Amphoe Umphang, Tak Province). He also lived in Ka Nian Ki for a few years because of unrest in the area. He then moved to Baan Ruam Thai Phathana 9 Village (in Tambon Ruam Thai, Amphoe Phop Phra, Tak Province). He moved to Chiang Mai to study the Bible after that, and had been living there for two years at the time of elicitation. LRP "A" spoke Hmong Ntsuab as his first language. He also spoke Central Thai and English, and was studying Greek. His parents both spoke Hmong Ntsuab. His father spoke Central Thai and his mother could understand Central Thai but could not speak it.

LRP "B" was a 27 year old male who was born in Naan Province but moved to Peki Village (in Tambon Maelamung, Amphoe Umphang, Tak Province) when he was young. He moved to Ruam Thai Phathana 9 Village (in Tambon Ruam Thai, Amphoe Phop Phra, Tak Province) and lived there for three years. After three years, he moved to Chiang Mai to study the Bible for five years. He moved back to his home Village of Ruam Thai Phathana 9 for the next few years and then back to Chiang Mai to continue studies. He had been living in Chiang Mai for five months at the time of elicitation. LRP "B" spoke three languages. His first language was Hmong Ntsuab, his second was Central Thai, and his third was English. His father and mother were originally from Naan Province. They both spoke Hmong Ntsuab as their first language. His father could also speak Central Thai and Lao but his mother could only understand a little Central Thai. LRP "B" was married with two small children. His wife spoke Hmong Ntsuab and Central Thai. The children could only speak Hmong Ntsuab, but could understand Central Thai as well.

LRP "C" was a 23 year old female who was born in Pha Pu Chom Village, (in Tambon Kuat Chaan, Amphoe Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai Province). She lived there for 21 years, until she married, at which time she moved to Mae Jae Village (in Tambon Mae Na Chon, Amphoe Mae Jaem, Chiang Mai Province). However, from the age of 19 until 23 (her age at the time of elicitation), LRP "C" had been studying at Mae Jo University in Chiang Mai and had the chance to return to these two villages during school breaks only. She was studying food science and technology and was in her last semester of university. LRP "C" spoke many languages: Hmong Ntsuab, Hmong Daw, Central Thai, Northern Thai, English, and Lahu. Hmong Ntsuab was her mother tongue. Her father and mother spoke Hmong Ntsuab (as their first language), as well as Central Thai, and Northern Thai. Both her father and mother were born in the same village as her and, at the time of elicitation, still lived together in that village.

LRP "D" was a 48 year old male who was born in Laos, where he lived for about ten years. He crossed the border to Thailand with his family and lived along the border for two years. He then moved to Baan Nam Seeng, where he lived for seven or eight years and received citizenship. After this, he moved to Umphang where he lived for four or five years, until the Thai government resettled his family and village to Baan Ruam Thai Phathana 9 (in Tambon Ruam Thai, Amphoe Phop Phra, Tak Province), where he was living at the time of elicitation in early 2010. He had studied formally up until 5th grade in Laos and was a native Hmong Ntsuab speaker. He could also speak Hmong Daw, Lao, and Thai and had studied French and Chinese but could no

longer recall them. He worked as a farmer and was married, with five children. His wife could speak Hmong Ntsuab and understand some Central Thai.

LRP "E" was a 22 year old male, studying agriculture at a vocational college in Chiang Mai at the time of elicitation in early 2010. He was born in Tambon Maelamung (Amphoe Umphang, Tak Province) from where he moved to Baan Ruam Thai Phathana 19 Village (in Tambon Ruam Thai, Amphoe Phop Phra, Tak Province). After that he moved to Chiang Mai to study and had been living there for four years at the time of elicitation. LRP "E" spoke Hmong Ntsuab as his first language. He also spoke Central Thai and English. His parents both spoke Hmong Ntsuab and Central Thai.

1.5 Methodology

The Hmong Ntsuab data supplied by all five language resource persons (LRPs) was elicited by this researcher, using Central Thai as the medium language.

1.5.1 Elicitation

Data from LRPs "A" and "B" was elicited at Payap University, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from November 11th to December 1st, 2008, in ten sessions with these two LRPs. Each of the sessions was approximately two hours and was recorded. 436 Hmong Ntsuab words and 32 basic sentences were elicited from these two LRPs.

The data from LRP "C" was elicited in Mae Jae Village in Mae Jaem District, Chiang Mai Province, in Thailand, from December 4-6 of 2008. 134 sentences and four stories were elicited as well as 24 conversational sentences. All sentences and stories were recorded. The recordings were then played back, at which time the LRP provided a gloss and free translation in Central Thai.

Data from LRP "D" was elicited in Baan Ruam Thai Phathana 9 Village in Tak Province from January 27th to February 15th in 2010 in five 3-hour sessions. All elicitation was recorded. A number of multi-verb constructions, based on Enfield's study of Lao V1-V2 constructions, were elicited from LRP "D", who also provided data used to test the verbs and to determine the grammatical distinctions between multi-verb constructions. In addition, LRP "D" provided many of the spellings for the Hmong orthography used in this study.

Data from LRP "E" was elicited on four separate occasions, once in late 2009, twice in February of 2010, and once in March of 2010. Elicitation was conducted at By Grace Coffee shop in Chiang Mai, Thailand. LRP "E" provided much of the original

data for the multi-verb constructions, which was later elicited in more detail from LRP "D". LRP "E" also helped to double-check and clarify the conclusions of the elicited data from LRP "D". Elicitation sessions with LRP "E" were not recorded and lasted for 2-3 hours each.

1.5.2 Organization and categorization of data

Although some data was transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and some transcribed using the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA), all elicited data in this study was entered into Fieldworks using the RPA Hmong orthography alone, in an attempt to standardize the data. The Hmong orghography is further discussed below (section 1.6). English glosses, parts of speech and free translations were also entered into Fieldworks. The data was then organized, based on Enfield's categorization of multi-verb constructions in Lao (2008). Lao categories prescribed by Enfield were discarded when Hmong Ntsuab data was not found for that category.

1.6 Notes on Hmong orthography

Over the years many Hmong orthographies have been developed. Some utilize a Thai-based script, such as the one developed in 1932 by a Vietnamese missionary (Smalley et al. 1990: 150). Several are based on Chinese: one uses Chinese characters and is used in Sichuan province in China (Coulmas 2002: 213) and another one is based on Chinese Pinyin (338). Still another Hmong orthography exists, called Pawah Hmong, which was developed in Laos and Vietnam in the 1950's and 1960's (Smalley et al. 1990). Different Roman-based scripts exist as well, two of which are the Pollard Miao script and the Romanized Popular Alphabet (Coulmas 2002: 213-214). The Pollard Miao script uses inverted Roman capital letters and is used in southern China (214). It was developed by a British missionary Samuel Pollard (338). The Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) was developed in Laos in the 1950's by missionaries and Hmong language informants (213). Several other Hmong orthographies exist as well (Smalley et al. 1990: 149-163).

Because so many Hmong orthographies have been developed, there is some notable hesitation in deciding which orthography to use in Hmong research. In this study, the orthography used in all examples and in the appendixes is the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA). Although many other Hmong orthographies exist, this orthography was chosen because of its prevalence, worldwide acceptance, and widespread use in Hmong literature, dictionaries, and scholarship (Smalley et al.

1990: 150). It must be noted that, even within the Romanized Popular Alphabet, variant spellings also exist. Spellings used in this research are primarily based on spellings provided by LRP "D" (section 1.4 and section 1.5.1). See Appendix 3 for Hmong a orthography and pronunciation guide.

1.7 Objectives and hypotheses

Hmong Ntsuab makes use of many types of multi-verb constructions. Because these constructions can appear as strings of consecutive unmarked verbs on the surface, this creates some difficulty in the structural analysis and interpretation of meaning among non-native speakers. Upon further study, however, it is possible to categorize the different types of multi-verb constructions and clarify some of the relationships of the verbs in the constructions in Hmong Ntsuab. Through specific testing, these unique relationships are displayed in grammatical characteristics, including patterns of distribution, clause separability, and headship.

This study seeks to provide a description of, and an organized classification of, Hmong Ntsuab multi-verb constructions, based on the structural categories outlined in N. J. Enfield's study of V1-V2 constructions in Lao (2008). It includes a discussion of the grammatical features of main verbs, a description of the tests used to clarify verb relationships in multi-verb constructions, and a description of the grammatical distinctions of each multi-verb structural category, supported by elicited Hmong Ntsuab examples.

In relation to the objectives outlined above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1) Multi-verb constructions do exist in Hmong Ntsuab.
2) These multi-verb constructions can be classified into structural categories, as proposed by Enfield in his description of multi-verb constructions in Lao (2008).
3) Multi-verb constructions in different categories display some different grammatical properties and multi-verb constructions in the same category display a similar set of grammatical properties.

1.8 Scope and limitations

This study provides a description of some types of multi-verb constructions in Hmong Ntsuab. The theoretical debate regarding what qualifies as a "serial verb construction" is largely avoided due to the nature of this descriptive approach. This

means that the elicited Hmong Ntsuab multi-verb constructions are structurally categorized according to objective grammatical properties. These constructions are limited to those multi-verb constructions that, as Enfield explains, "normally form prosodically integrated units" (2007: 339). They will not be discussed in terms of whether or not they are deemed acceptable under narrower definitions of "serial verb constructions." [1]

The language used during elicitation with all five language resource persons (LRPs) was Central Thai. This may limit the results of the research to only multi-verb constructions that are able to be expressed in Thai, and may leave out some uniquely Hmong Ntsuab constructions. This research is also limited to the structural categories provided by Enfield in his study of Lao (2008), which may or may not be a full representation of V1-V2 categories in Hmong Ntsuab. Some Hmong-specific characteristics of MVCs have been discovered through this research, such as the unique patterning of headship in handling-despatch constructions (section 4.2.1) and the usage of the preverbal particle *pua* in interrogative structures.

[1] See section 3.1 for a discussion of SVC and MVC properties.