

Chapter 2

Hmong Grammar

The following chapter provides an introduction to Hmong Ntsuab grammar, starting with an overview of the typology of the language, the basic word order, and some clause types. It continues with a discussion of modifiers in the noun phrase and the verb complex, and concludes with a review of polar question formation and the clause linker *kuj*.

2.1 Typology

The basic structure and word order employed in Hmong Ntsuab will now be discussed. This will be followed by a look at some simple and complex clause types.

2.1.1 Basic structure

Words in Hmong are largely monosyllabic (with each syllable having its own tone) and monomorphemic (with no derivational or inflectional affixation). Although some bisyllabic and compounded words do exist, they are, by far, the minority (Fuller 1988: 24). Marking for tense, aspect, and modality (TAM) is accomplished through either context or separate TAM words, generally appearing before the main verb. Exceptions do exist, particularly with the forms *lawm* 'finish' and *tau* 'get', which occur post-verbally (Jarkey 2006: 116). These forms are discussed further below (section 4.1).

2.1.2 Word order and clause types

Hmong Ntsuab is a nominative-accusative language with a basic word order of subject – verb – object (SVO): SV for intransitive clauses and SVO for transitive clauses. This is demonstrated below in simple intransitive clauses (section 2.1.2.1) and transitive clauses (section 2.1.2.2). Some additional clause types, such as semi-transitive clauses, verb-initial clauses, and ditransitive clauses, are introduced as well.

2.1.2.1 Intransitive clauses

Intransitive verbs take a single argument and form intransitive clauses, which do not have objects (Dryer 2007: 250). In Hmong Ntsuab these clauses are formed with a subject noun phrase followed by an intransitive verb. The first example below shows a structure with a patient subject *dev* ‘dog’ and an intransitive verb *tuag* ‘die’ (2).

(2)

dev tuag
dog die
'(The) dog died.'

In the next example, *nwg* ‘she’ is the agent subject noun phrase and *qaaj* ‘snore’ is the intransitive verb (3).

(3)

nwg qaaj
s/he snore
'She snores.'

2.1.2.2 Semi-transitive clauses

Semi-transitive clauses “behave in some ways like intransitive clauses, but in other ways like transitive clauses” (Dryer 2007: 270). In Hmong Ntsuab, semi-transitive clauses are often motion clauses, which employ motion verbs such as *moog* ‘go’. These motion clauses are used to “introduce the goal of the motion,” (Jarkey 2006: 117), which is typically a prepositional phrase. This is demonstrated in the following example (4) where an argument of *moog* ‘go’ is the prepositional phrase *tom kav* ‘to (the) market’.

(4)

nwg moog tom kav
s/he go at market
'She goes to (the) market.'

2.1.2.3 Semi-transitive object motion clauses

These clauses frequently occur as multi-verb constructions which are formed by a noun phrase preceding the main verb, followed by another noun phrase, which proceeds the motion verb and a locative prepositional phrase following the motion verb. These constructions employ a SVOV-LOC word order. Clark explains that the locative prepositional phrase is “inherent in the verb” (1989: 178) and is “part of the

matrix of the relevant class of verbs” (1989: 177). This helps to distinguish locative prepositional phrases from optional adjuncts. An example of a semi-transitive object motion construction follows (5), where *dej* ‘water’ is the object in motion and *moog* ‘go’ is the motion verb, followed by *tom kav* ‘to the market’, the prepositional phrase.

(5)

puab coj dej moog tom kav
 s/he take water go at market
 'He took (the) water to (the) market.'

When used in a semi-transitive motion clause, the motion verb *moog* ‘go’ has two semantic arguments, however, as Dryer puts it, “neither is an agent in the narrow sense of someone or something that volitionally causes the event denoted by the verb” (2007: 270). In the example above, (5) the two semantic arguments are *dej* ‘water’ and *kav* ‘(the) market’, neither of which functions as an agent, and *kav* ‘market’ appears in a prepositional phrase.

Semi-transitive verbs, such as *moog* ‘go’, can also be used intransitively in similar multi-verb constructions (6). In these cases, the verb *moog* ‘go’ functions differently as it is used to indicate the direction of the action but does not take an object complement.

(6)

puab coj dej moog
 s/he take water go
 'He took (the) water away.'

2.1.2.4 Transitive clauses

Transitive clauses are formed with a subject noun phrase preceding the transitive verb and an object noun phrase following the transitive verb. In the first example below (7), *qob yawg* ‘man’ is the subject noun phrase, *ntaus* ‘hit’ is the transitive verb, and *dev* ‘dog’ is the object noun phrase.

(7)

qob yawg ntaus dev
 CLF male hit dog
 'The man hit (the) dog.'

In the next example, (8) *miv nyuam ob peb leeg* ‘the children’ is the subject noun phrase, *noj* ‘eat’ is the transitive verb, and *mov* ‘cooked.rice’ is the object noun phrase.

(8)

miv nyuam ob peb leeg noj mov
child(ren) two three CLF eat rice
'The children eat rice.'

2.1.2.5 Ditransitive clauses

Ditransitive clauses are those which contain “at least two non-subject arguments,” which are often referred to as indirect objects and direct objects in English (Dryer 2007: 253). True ditransitive clauses do not exist in Hmong Ntsuab as a single verb cannot introduce three arguments². However, something similar to a ditransitive clause is often formed with two verbs. For discussion in this section, this type of construction will be called a “three-argument clause.” These clauses are often used to form despatch constructions in Hmong Ntsuab (section 4.2).

In these types of three-argument clauses, the word order is SVOVO, where the subject noun phrase precedes the first verb. This first verb is followed by the object noun phrase, another verb, and then the indirect object noun phrase. The example below (9) shows *miv nyuam tub* ‘the boy’ as the subject noun phrase, *muab* ‘take’ as the first verb, and *dai ntau* ‘the book’ as the object noun phrase. Here, *tsuab* ‘BENF’ is the second verb and *miv nyuam ntsai* ‘the girl’ is the indirect object noun phrase.

(9)

miv nyuam tub muab dai ntau tsuab miv nyuam ntsai
child(ren) male take CLF book BENF child(ren) female
'(The) boy gave the book to (the) girl.'

In Hmong Ntsuab multi-verb constructions are often used to include another argument in the clause. Although only despatch constructions were discussed here, three-argument clauses are used to convey other semantic purposes as well. These types of constructions will be discussed in more detail below (section 4.5.1.2, section 4.7, and section 4.9.1.1).

²Although, in English, a single verb such as ‘give’ can introduce three arguments, in Hmong Ntsuab, this is not grammatical: **miv nyuam tub tsuab miv nyuam ntsai dai ntau* [child-male give child-female CLF-book] Intended: ‘The boy gave the girl the book’, **miv nyuam tub muab miv nyuam ntsai dai ntau* [child-male take child-female CLF-book] Intended: ‘The boy took the girl the book’.

2.1.2.6 Verb-initial clauses

Clauses with a VO word order exist in Hmong Ntsuab as well. As outlined by Fuller, there are three clause types in Hmong which allow verb initial sentences. They are existential clauses, imperative clauses, and conditional clauses (1988: 25-26). Two examples demonstrate existential clauses in Hmong Ntsuab; the first employs the initial verb *yog* 'is', which is followed by the object *noj peb caug* 'New Years festival celebration' (10) and the second employs the verb *muaj* 'have', followed by the object *ntaab ntaus* 'many bees' (11).

(10)

yog noj peb caug pi kig
is celebrate New Year Festival tomorrow
'(There) is (the) celebration (of the) New Years Festival tomorrow.'

(11)

muaj ntaab ntaus
have bee many
'(There) are many bees.'

The next examples demonstrate an imperative clause with the verb-initial *moog* 'go' (12) and a conditional clause which begins with the copula *yog* (13).

(12)

moog ntsuav luaj kaub
go wash pot
'Go wash (the) pot.'

(13)

yog yug caug dej taag te yug kuj
is we soak water finish and we then
muab coj lug khaw tsab
take bring come collect put

'(If it) is (the case) we finish rinsing (them) with water and we then bring (them) to store.'

Some of these verb-initial clauses may also be known as zero-intransitive or ambient clauses (10)(11), which "semantically do not involve any arguments" (Dryer 2007: 267). Because of the prevalence of ellipsis in Hmong Ntsuab (section 2.4.1), it is often difficult to determine whether these verb-initial clauses are pro-drop and have a semantic argument or are zero anaphora and do not. For now they will be called "verb-initial clauses" and are included to show that clauses with no overt syntactic subject do exist in Hmong Ntsuab.

2.1.3 Summary

Words in Hmong Ntsuab are generally monosyllabic and monomorphemic. Basic word order is SV(O), although exceptions to this order do exist. Hmong Ntsuab makes use of transitive clauses, intransitive clauses and a number of other clause types. Although most verbs are clearly transitive or intransitive (Jarkey 2006: 117), it is the ones that are not which are of interest to this study, as they are used in multi-verb constructions to perform various semantic functions. Because this section is intended to serve as an introduction to word order and clause types in Hmong Ntsuab, only a few examples were discussed here, however, variations of MVCs will be detailed in Chapter four.

2.2 Notes on the noun phrase

Hmong Ntsuab does not mark nouns for number, case, or gender (Jarkey 2006: 116). Hmong Ntsuab noun phrases tend to be left-headed as the modifiers follow the head, with the exception of classifier phrases and some possessors (Fuller 1988: 27). These are discussed separately below (section 2.2.1. and section 2.2.2). The relative order of elements in a noun phrase follows:

POSS – CLFP – N – ATTRIB – DET – QUANT – COMPP

Modifying constituents in a noun phrase may be possessor nouns, classifier phrases, stative attributives, determiners, quantifiers, or complementiser phrases. Some modifying attributives often can be repeated multiple times within a noun phrase. The phrase structure rule for the noun phrase is shown below:

NP → (POSS) (CLFP) N (XP*) (COMPP)

CLFP → (QUANT) CLF

XP → ATTRIB*

XP → QUANTP

QUANTP → { NUM (NUM) }
 { QUANT (QUANT) }

XP → DET

COMPP → COMP S

Three examples (14) (15) (16) are now provided to support this NP phrase structure rule.

(14)

lub tsev lab qub
CLF house red old
'The old red house'

(15)

cov tsev lab hov ntaus ntaus
CLF-group house red those many many
'Those many red houses'

(16)

peb tug tswv neeg luj luj kw muab dej tsuab kuv
three CLF man big big COMP take water BENF I
'The three large men who bring me water.'

Although attributives are explained here to be head noun modifiers, there are instances when they are better analyzed as predicates. These cases are explained further below (section 2.4.2).

2.2.1 Classifiers

Classifiers are used to “categorize, enumerate, specify and define other nouns” (Clark: 1989 182). Hmong Ntsuab does not mark nouns for number, case, or gender but does employ classifiers in cases where the noun is quantified and “instantiated” (Jarkey 2006: 116). The classifier phrase in Hmong Ntsuab contains a classifier, which may be modified by a quantifier. The quantifier can contain one (or two) numbers or it can contain quantifying word(s). Numbers and quantifying words cannot co-occur. The classifier can occur as a head noun substitute as well.

CLFP → (QUANT) CLF

Unique to Hmong Ntsuab is the position of the classifier phrase in the relative ordering of elements. As shown in the phrase structure rules and examples above (14) (15) (16), the head noun can be modified by a *pre-head* classifier phrase. However, elicited data shows that the head noun can also be modified by a *post-head* classifier phrase. This is an alternate position. A simple alternate phrase structure rule is shown below.

NP → N (CLFP)

CLFP → (QUANT) CLF

$$\text{QUANT} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{NUM (NUM)} \\ \text{QUANT} \end{array} \right\}$$

The following example (17) shows the alternate position of the classifier phrase, following the noun. This could be a structure that has been borrowed through language contact from Thai. It could also be a topicalization technique. Although the classifier phrase may occur either before the head noun or after it, the noun phrase cannot have more than one classifier phrase modifying the head noun.

(17)

tuj ob lub
cabinet two CLF
'Two cabinets'

2.2.2 Possession

Hmong Ntsuab has two constructions for possession. In one, the possessive particle *le* follows the possessor noun phrase (NP^{POSSESSOR}) creating NP¹. This NP¹ occurs after the object being possessed (NP^{POSSESSED}). This rule is shown below.

$$\text{NP}^1 \rightarrow \text{NP}^{\text{POSSESSOR}} \textit{le}$$

$$\text{NP}^{\text{POSS}} \rightarrow \text{NP}^{\text{POSSESSED}} \text{NP}^1$$

The Hmong Ntsuab example below demonstrates this type of possession construction (18). In this example, *lub tsev hov* 'that house' forms the object being possessed (NP^{POSSESSED}) and *tswv neeg* 'the man' forms the possessor (NP^{POSSESSOR}) marked by the possessor particle *le*.

(18)

lub tsev hov tswv neeg le
CLF house that man POSS
'(The) man's (that) house'

In the other possession construction, word order indicates possession: the possessor (NP^{POSSESSOR}) precedes the object being possessed (NP^{POSSESSED}). The rule below shows this NP possession structure.

$$\text{NP}^{\text{POSS}} \rightarrow \text{NP}^{\text{POSSESSOR}} \text{NP}^{\text{POSSESSED}}$$

Two examples below demonstrate this type of possession. In the first example (19), *tug tswv neeg kw tuaj teb tshaw suav tuaj* 'the man that came from China' forms NP^{POSSESSOR}, and *lub tsev lab* 'the red house' forms NP^{POSSESSED}.

(19)

tug tswv neeg kw tuaj teb tshaw suav tuaj lub tsev lab
CLF man COMP come country China come CLF house red
'The man that came (from) China's red house'

In the second example (20), the NP^{POSSessor}, *kuv* 'I', precedes the NP^{POSSessed} *dai ntau* 'the book', conveying the sense 'my book'.

(20)

kuv dai ntau yog dai hov
I CLF book is CLF that
'That is my book.'

In addition, both ways to show possession (word order and a possession marker) can be employed in the same sentence. One LRP mentioned that this is sometimes done for greater clarity. This rule is shown below.

NP^{POSS} → NP¹ NP^{POSSessed}

The next example shows this (21). Although the possessor *koj* 'you' (NP^{POSSessor}) precedes the object being possessed (NP^{POSSessed}) *nyaj* 'money', the possessive marker *le* is still used.

(21)

nwg khaw koj le nyaj
s/he collect you POSS money
'He keeps your money.'

2.2.3 Summary

This overview has listed and described some modifying elements in a noun phrase and has shown that head-modifier order is generally maintained. Examples are provided of when it is not.

2.3 Notes on verbs

A discussion on verb modifiers is important and necessary, as it will contribute to understanding some types of modification in the verb complex and the order in which some modification occurs. A comprehensive presentation of the relative ordering of elements in the verb complex will not be attempted here as labels for all types of modification and co-occurrence restrictions have not been determined. According to Fuller, VO languages tend to have the word order head-modifier and OV languages tend to have the word order modifier-head (1988: 25). As Hmong

Ntsuab demonstrates some characteristics of both VO and OV languages (Fuller 1988: 27), determination of the relative ordering is often difficult, as the head may occur before modifying elements in some cases and after modifying elements in other cases.

Verb modification serves many functions in the verb complex. In Hmong Ntsuab, marking for tense, aspect, and modality (TAM) is accomplished both through context and through verbal particles (Jarkey 2006: 116). These are discussed below (sections 2.3.1-2.3.6). In addition, verbs may be modified by intensifiers, permission and possibility auxiliaries, and imperatives (Fuller 1988: 26-27). Most verb modification occurs preverbally but some occurs postverbally.

2.3.1 Context

It is not always necessary to overtly mark a verb in Hmong Ntsuab for time because it can often be inferred through context. For this reason, when taken out of context, some constructions may be ambiguous. For example, the following construction (22) may be interpreted as the past tense '(The) woman went to (the) market' or the present simple '(The) woman goes to (the) market', depending on the context.

(22)

maum khuav moog tom kav
woman go at market

'(The) woman went to (the) market.' or '(The) woman goes to (the) market.'

2.3.2 Temporal modification

In cases where context does not supply enough information, it is possible for the temporal setting to be overtly marked by verbal particles. These particles appear directly before the verb they are modifying. The next example (23) employs the temporal particle *yuav* 'will', marking irrealis/future tense, before the verb complex *moog kawm* 'go study'.

(23)

kuv yuav moog kawm ntau
I will go study book

'I will go study.'

2.3.3 Aspectual modification

Various types of aspectual modification are used in Hmong Ntsuab as well. The example (24) employs the postverbal *lawm* 'finish' to indicate perfective aspect, and

example (25) employs the preverbal *saa swm* ‘presently’ to indicate the imperfective. Another type of imperfective is shown in example (26), where the stative verb *yaus* ‘young’ is preverbally modified by *tseem* ‘still’.

(24)

eb tawg cig lawm eb yug muab tsab huv qhov tsub
 umm fire catch finish umm we take put on stove

‘Umm, (when the) fire (has) caught, umm, we take (the pot and) put (it) on (the) stove.’

(25)

koj saa swm ua mov
 you presently do rice

‘You (are) making rice.’

(26)

nwg tseem yaus
 s/he still young

‘He (is) still young.’

2.3.4 Adverbial modification

Adverbial phrases are also employed to indicate temporal setting. Example (27) shows two adverbial phrases, *naag taag kig* ‘yesterday morning’ and *thaum tswb moos* ‘at five o’clock’, modifying the clause.

(27)

naag taag kig kuv sawv thaum tswb moos
 yesterday morning I arise when five o’clock

‘Yesterday morning, I arose at five o’clock.’

Adverbial modification, such as this, generally applies to the whole clause and not only to the verb.

2.3.5 More verb modification

Other verb modifiers can appear before the verb or after the verb. In example (28) the verb *has* ‘say’ is postverbally modified by the reduplicated *qeeb* ‘slow’.

(28)

has qeeb qeeb
 say slow slow

‘Speak slowly.’

In example (29), the verb *npaaj* ‘prepare’ is preverbally modified by the temporal particle *yuav* ‘will’ and the imperative modal *cum* ‘must’. It is also modified

postverbally by the verb *ca* ‘keep’ (see section 4.3 for more on this type of verb complex).

(29)

puab yuav cum npaaj ca ua ntej lawm
s/he will must prepare keep do before finish
'They will need to prepare (and) make (this outfit in) advance.'

2.3.6 Negation

Verbs in Hmong Ntsuab are generally negated preverbally (30). In cases where verbs are also marked for future tense, as in example (31), the negation occurs after the future tense marker *yuav* ‘will’ but before the main verb *muas* ‘soft’.

(30)

nwg tsi tsav ntooj
s/he NEG cut tree
'She (did) not cut (the) wood.'

(31)

moob tseeg has ta yog yug tsi tsab ncev ma
Hmong believe say COMP is we NEG put salt PART
zaub ntsuab yuav tsi muas ma
vegetable green will NEG soft PART
'Hmong people believe (and) say that, if we (do) not add salt, (the) green vegetables will not be soft.'

In some cases verbs may be negated medially. This may occur when more than one verb is present in a multi-verb construction and when the second verb is a modal auxiliary such as *tau* ‘can’ (32).

(32)

nwg tsav tsi tau
s/he cut NEG can
'She cannot cut (the wood).'

In addition, medial negation occurs in resultative constructions, in some causative constructions, and in some complement constructions. These types of constructions are discussed further in Chapter four. Interesting patterns of negation are also present in the formation of polar questions. These are discussed below (section 3.2.4).

2.3.7 Summary

Verb modification may occur through verbal particles, aspect words, intensifiers, permission and possibility auxiliaries, imperatives, and other markers. Negation occurs in two positions: preverbally and medially. Verb modification can occur both preverbally and postverbally and, as a result, Hmong Ntsuab demonstrates some characteristics of both VO languages and OV languages. Now for a discussion of some additional grammatical features of Hmong Ntsuab.

2.4 Additional grammatical features

This section provides an explanation of some of the grammatical features of Hmong Ntsuab which contribute to allowing (indeed, sometimes even requiring) long strings of verbs to occur, complete with a discussion on ambiguity in the structural and semantic interpretation of some of these multi-verb constructions. Crucial to the understanding of the frequency of the occurrence of multi-verb constructions in Hmong Ntsuab, is the wide use of subject and object ellipsis. Equally essential, is the realization that many verbs also seem to function as adjectives, prepositions, adverbs, and tense-aspect-modality markers. Finally, polar question formation and the uses of the clause linker *kuj* are discussed as a foundation for the tests and examples detailed in Chapter three and Chapter four.

2.4.1 Ellipsis

Enfield defines ellipsis as “the normal form of anaphora for referents which are contextually retrievable” (2008: 86). Hmong Ntsuab makes wide use of both subject argument and object argument ellipsis. The following example (33) shows subject ellipsis³.

(33)

muaj dai ntau ib dai
have CLF book one CLF
'(I) have one book.'

³ When taken out of context, there are two possible readings to these types of sentences. The first reading interprets this as an existential clause with a free translation of “There is a book”. The lack of a subject is common in existential clauses in Hmong Ntsuab, which are formed with the verb *muaj* ‘have’ or with the verb *yog* ‘is’. In fact, in existential clauses, there is no subject. It is not ellipted, rather, it simply does not exist. In the second type of reading, however, the clause is a clause of possession. In this reading, the subject ‘I’ is ellipted.

The next example (34) shows object ellipsis multiple times in the utterance. The object, a corpse, was ellipsed three times in this sentence, which comes from a Hmong story about funeral customs. When this sentence is taken outside of the context of the story, what the speaker is referring to becomes unclear.

(34)

coj moog paam tsuab tom tshaav ib nub txug ntsua
 take go period.of.time give at outside one day arrive until

thaum peb moos tsaus ntuj te puab le mav *coj moog*
 when three o'clock when night and s/he then take go

zai los coj moog loog
 hide PART take go bury

'(They will) take (it) out into the open for one day until three o'clock in the afternoon and they then take (it) to 'hide' or take (it) to bury.'

In these examples (33) (34), ellipsis is used for expedience and efficiency in speech, when the referents are active in the discourse, and understood through context. Explicitly adding the referents to the sentences would not be ungrammatical, it would simply be unnecessary. However, in some Hmong Ntsuab constructions ellipsis is obligatory. For example, in same-subject control complement constructions object ellipsis is mandatory. As noted by Clark, this is when a verb “allows an embedded verb whose logical subject is coreferential with the subject of the main verb” (1989: 221). This is what Enfield terms “syntactic control of coreference” (2008: 87). An example of a same-subject control complement construction follows (35).

(35)

puab xaav noog nkauj
 they want listen music

'They want (to) listen (to) music.'

Since the subject is coreferential, it does not need to be repeated and is actually not allowed to be repeated. Below (36), the intended meaning is 'They want themselves (to) listen (to) music.' However, this type of construction is ungrammatical in Hmong Ntsuab (36).

(36)

* *puab xaav puab noog nkauj*
 they want they listen music

In cases where the second verb takes a different subject, such as in *xaav* ‘want’ constructions, simply adding a second subject to the construction is not allowed (37). In these cases, it is necessary to add an additional verb *kua* ‘give’, which serves to indicate a second non-coreferential subject (38). This is similar to what Enfield describes in Lao (2008: 87).

(37)

* *puab xaav koj noog nkauj*
 they want you listen music

(38)

puab xaav kua (koj) noog nkauj
 they want APPL you listen music
 ‘They want you (to) listen (to) music.’

This additional *kua* ‘give’ verb is obligatory. However, the second non-coreferential subject can be ellipled because the addition of the second verb is sufficient in indicating the introduction of another participant. It is exactly grammatical features such as these that contribute to the creation of surface strings of verbs in Hmong Ntsuab.

2.4.2 Attributive verbs

Attributive verbs, or stative verbs, are what speakers of western languages would often consider adjectives, as they convey concepts such as ‘heavy’, ‘delicious’, ‘cold’, ‘young’, ‘good’, ‘far’, and ‘big’, among others. In Hmong Ntsuab, these forms are considered verbs, as they can appear as the only predicate in a sentence. The following two examples demonstrate the attributive verbs *tshaag* ‘cold’ and *tshab* ‘new’ in sentences (39) (40).

(39)

dej tshaag
 water cold
 ‘(The) water (is) cold.’

(40)

lub tshe kauj vaab hov tshab
 CLF bicycle that new
 ‘That bicycle (is) new.’

Attributive verbs in Hmong Ntsuab often take modification as well. In the example below (41), the attributive verb *yaus* ‘young’ is preverbally modified by the tense-aspect-modality marker *tseem* ‘still’.

(41)

nwg tseem yaus
s/he still young
'He (is) still young.'

Some ambiguity arises when it is noted that Hmong Ntsuab makes use of many of these same forms as nominal modifiers as well (42).

(42)

qa qaab nyob huv tsev
chicken delicious stay in house
'(The) delicious chicken is in (the) house.'

In some cases the meaning of the form may be ambiguous without contextual cues. In the following construction, *qaab* 'delicious' could be interpreted as an adjective (43) or as an attributive verb (44).

(43)

qa qaab
chicken delicious
'Delicious chicken'

(44)

qa qaab
chicken delicious
'Chicken (is) delicious.'

Because of this ambiguity, contextual cues are important in deciphering the function and meaning of many of these forms. If someone was asked "What did you eat today?", and the answer *qa qaab* [chicken delicious] was given, then the form *qaab* 'delicious' would be interpreted as an adjective and the answer would mean 'delicious chicken'. However, if the question asked was "Is the chicken delicious?" then the answer *qa qaab* [chicken delicious] would be interpreted as '(The) chicken (is) delicious.' To clarify ambiguous situations additional contextual information must be provided.

These examples demonstrate how the nature of attributive verbs, which may function as adjectives in certain grammatical contexts, contributes to the frequency of the appearance of strings of verbs in Hmong Ntsuab. However, sometimes, what may appear to be a verb is actually functioning as an adjective in a construction. Now for a discussion on ambiguity due to the prepositional and adverbial functions of some of these verb forms.

2.4.3 Synchronically derived forms

Ambiguity due to attributive verbs and their dual function as adjectives has already been discussed in the previous section. However, the areal feature of synchronically derived prepositions and adverbs from source verbs also contributes to both the increased number of verb-like forms in a multi-verb construction and the ambiguity in deciphering the meaning and structure behind surface strings of verbs. This is because a word that is a verb can often also be used for either prepositional or adverbial functions in a sentence.

2.4.3.1 Synchronically derived prepositions

Synchronically derived prepositions are what Enfield would term “deverbal prepositions,” as they are “verbs [that] ‘become’ prepositions when they appear elsewhere as main verbs” and are “marked not by morphological material but by syntactic position” (Enfield 2008: 153). Clark states that these prepositions are “verbs which have a distinct locus marking, and their derived prepositions mark their nouns goal or location Locus... and in some cases Time case relation” (1989: 190). She lists four White Hmong words that fit this definition: *txug* ‘arrive at’ – ‘reaching’, *rau* ‘put in/onto’ – ‘to’, *nyob* ‘be at’ – ‘at, in, on’, *nrog* ‘be with’ – ‘with’ (192). Hmong Ntsuab makes use of these same four forms as both source verbs and derived prepositions. Note that although the spelling and pronunciation may change across dialects, the Hmong Ntsuab words are essentially the same words.

The Hmong Ntsuab verb form *txug* ‘arrive’, for example, can function as a goal locus preposition meaning ‘regarding, about’ (45) (46) or as a time expression meaning ‘until’ (47) (48).

(45)

kuv xaav txug tom hao tej
I think regarding at future
'I think about (the) future.'

(46)

peb has txug lug moob
we say regarding CLF Hmong
'We talked about Hmong people.'

(47)

yog puab paam txug nub kw muaj noob nyoog zoo
is they period.of.time until day COMP have time good

kw puab yuav coj moog zai los coj moog loog
COMP they will take go hide or take go bury
'They (keep the body for a) period of time, until (the) day that (is) good, when they will take (it) to 'hide' or take (it) to bury.'

(48)

noj mov taag thaum taav sub peb kuj rov qaab moog dos ncoj
eat rice finish when noon we then return back go pick grass

hab lwg nploo txug thaum tswb moos tsaus ntuj
and pick leaf until when five o'clock at night
'(When we) finished eating cooked rice at noon, we then went back to pick grass and pick leaves until five o'clock at night.'

The remaining three verbs, *rau* 'put in/onto', *nyob* 'be at', and *nrog* 'be with', also serve as prepositions when they appear in certain syntactic positions. The verb *rau* 'put in/onto' can also be interpreted to mean 'to', and is used both as a goal preposition and as a marking of location phrases, the verb *nyob* 'be at' is used as a location locus preposition meaning 'at, in, on', and the verb *nrog* 'be with' can also be used as the comitative preposition 'with' (Clark 1989: 194-196). Constructions with these types of verbs are discussed further in Chapter four (section 4.6).

2.4.3.2 Synchronically derived adverbs

Synchronically derived adverbs are derived from verbs. In V1-V2 constructions, Enfield refers to these verbs as "adverbial complements," which make a 'predication... about the phrase headed by V1' (2008: 138). Clark mentions that, in White Hmong, some verbs can form prepositions and adverbs and lists three of these verbs and their adverbial reading: *mus* 'away', derived from 'go', *txug* 'reaching', derived from 'arrive', and *rau* 'into', from 'put into' (1989: 198-199). Hmong Ntsuab makes use of these derived adverbs as well.

The adverb *txug* 'reaching' is derived from the same verb form, *txug* 'arrive', which produced the preposition *txug* 'regarding', as discussed above (section 2.4.3.1). Below, this adverbial usage is demonstrated in two Hmong Ntsuab sentences (49) (50).

(49)

nwg lug txug naag moog
s/he come arrive yesterday
'She came (here) arriving yesterday.'

(50)

miv nyuam lug txug tsev pua tsi muaj leeg tug nyob
child(ren) come arrive house but NEG have CLF CLF stay
'(The) child came, reaching (the) house, but (there) was not anyone there.'

The fact that this verb, *txug*, and other forms, may function as a verb 'arrive' or adverb 'reaching' contributes to the ambiguity in interpreting strings of verbs. Because of this ambiguity, constructions containing what appear to be many verbs are easily mis-interpreted as being multi-verb constructions, although often some of these perceived verbs are, in fact, functioning as adverbs or adjectives modifying verbs, and are in a subordinate position. These types of constructions are discussed further in Chapter four (section 4.5.2 and section 4.5.3).

2.4.4 Aspect-modality marking

As noted by Enfield in Lao, some verbs can also function as tense aspect-modality (TAM) markers (2008: 113-114). In Hmong Ntsuab, this is also the case. For example, the verb *tau* may function as a transitive main verb in one setting and as a TAM marker in another setting⁴. The following example shows the verb *tau* 'acquire' as the single verb in a transitive construction (51).

(51)

peb tau ib tug cuv
we acquire one CLF tiger
'We acquired a tiger.'

As a tense-aspect-modality marker *tau* appears in the V1 position, immediately before another verb. The examples below (52) (53) (54) show *tau* 'succeed' marking achievement.

(52)

kuv tau ua teb
I succeed do field
'I worked (the) field.'

⁴ This verb may also function as a secondary verb meaning 'able'. As the secondary verb it appears in the V2 position: *kuv ua tau* [I do able] 'I can do (it).' Marybeth Clark notes that this verb *tau* may also function as a benefactive marker meaning 'get' and as a durative time phrase (1989: 217).

(53)

kuv tsi tau ua teb
I NEG succeed do field
'I did not work (the) field.'

(54)

koj pua tau ua teb
you QST succeed do field
'Did you work (the) field?'

These and other TAM markers are “transparently related to existing verbs” and thus termed “deverbal.” Constructions that make use of these types of verbs are discussed further in Chapter four (section 4.1).

2.4.5 Polar question formation

There are many methods of forming polar questions in Hmong Ntsuab. One way is the use of “alternative propositions”, where “the verb put into question is stated in a positive proposition and then is opposed by a negative preposition of the same verb” (55) (Clark 1989: 209). Another way is to employ a “full alternating pattern”, which makes use of a “full explicit positive-negative alternation with the alternative ‘or’: V-or-not-V” (56) (Clark 1989: 210).

(55)

koj noj tsi noj
you eat NEG eat
'(Are) you eating?'

(56)

koj noj los tsi noj
you eat or NEG eat
'(Are) you eating or not eating?'

Two more methods of forming polar questions are by using “tag questions”, where “the two verbs are different” (57) and by merely using the alternative form *los* ‘or’ (58) (Clark 1989: 213).

(57)

koj noj mov lawm los tsi tau
you eat rice finish or NEG succeed
'(Did) you eat food already or not?'

(58)

koj noj los
you eat or
'You ate, right?'

The final way to form a polar question in Hmong Ntsuab, and the method used for testing MVCs in this study, is by adding the preverbal interrogative particle *pua* to a declarative sentence. This particle does not appear sentence-finally, but rather, sentence-medially, immediately preceding a verb. The interrogative particle may appear immediately after the subject and precede the initial verb, as in example (59), or may precede the final verb (60).

(59)

koj pua tau muab pov tseg
you QST succeed take throw keep
'Did you throw (it) away?'

(60)

koj xaav ta puab pua moog
you think COMP s/he QST go
'Do you think she went?'

To answer a polar question of this variety, one can either reply with a portion of the initial declarative sentence or simply repeat the main verb. The latter is by far the quickest and most common response in conversation. The preverbal interrogative particle *pua* never occurs as a response (Clark 1989: 214). The examples below show a polar question (61) and two acceptable answers (62) (63).

(61)

puab poob choj pua tuag
they fall bridge QST die
'(Did) they fall (from the) bridge (to their) death?'

(62)

poob tuag
fall die
'(They) fell (to their) death.'

(63)

tuag
die
'(They fell to their) death.'

2.4.6 The clause linker *kuj*

The Hmong Ntsuab particle *kuj* is similar to what Enfield explains to be the focus particle/clause linker *ka* in Lao (2008: 99). He explains that this particle may serve a variety of other discourse functions including aiding to express the benefactive, contrast, focus, or hesitation/pausing, and can be translated in many ways, as ‘also’, ‘too’, ‘so’, ‘then’, and ‘for to’ (2008: 99-101). Similar to Lao (Enfield 2008: 99), the Hmong Ntsuab *kuj* often appears after the sentential subject and immediately before V1. Some examples of *kuj* are shown below. It serves to convey ‘also’/‘too’ (64) (65), ‘so’ (66), and ‘then’ (67).

(64)

puab cov kuj muab qab rau miv nyuam
they CLF also take chicken give child(ren)
'They also gave chicken (to the) children.'

(65)

kuv kuj pum lug
I also see come
'I also see (them) come.'

(66)

puab kuj poob tuag
they so fall die
'So they fell (to their) death.'

(67)

yug dles zaub ntsuab
we gather vegetable green

lug teb yug kuj muab lug caug dej
come and we then take come soak water
'We gather (the) green vegetables and we then bring (them to) soak (in) water.'

In the next example (68), *kuj* serves to indicate ‘for... to’, as described by Enfield (2008: 100).

(68)

kuv noj mov kuj zoo
I eat rice CLINK good
'For me to eat rice is good.'

There are a number of restrictions on the appearance of this particle in Hmong Ntsuab. For example, *kuj* can not appear before S in OSVV. This is similar to what

Enfield describes about *ka* in Lao, in that it cannot appear “before left position and subject” (2008: 100) in a sentence with the object fronted (69).

(69)

* *qab kuj puab cov muab rau miv nyuam*
chicken CLINK they CLF take give child(ren)

Because it is a sentence-level marker, *ka* cannot appear inside a “tightly subordinating” clause, like relative clauses in Lao (Enfield 2008: 99). This is the same of *kuj* in Hmong Ntsuab (70).

(70)

* *qab kw puab kuj muab rau miv nyuam*
chicken COMP they CLINK take give child(ren)

Although this particle probably has some focusing function in Hmong Ntsuab, not enough data has been compiled to confirm this. It will be referred to as a “clause linker” from now on with the understanding that it most likely serves a number of other functions as well. As described further in Chapter three (section 3.2.3), because of the various functions and restrictions on this clause linker, it is useful for testing verb relationships in multi-verb constructions, as they relate to the insertability of *kuj*.

2.4.7 Summary

This section has provided an overview of various grammatical features of Hmong Ntsuab, intended to serve as the foundation for the further discussion of constituency tests and the specific multi-verb constructions presented in Chapter three and Chapter four.