Hmong linguistics resources

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This document is an annotated bibliography of published linguistic research on the Hmong language, primarily dealing with White Hmong and Green Mong varieties. As these two varieties have highly similar grammars, much of this research will be relevant to both (but please keep in mind that there may be some differences).

Please be aware that this list is not comprehensive. Many sources exist that are not included here. In particular, please note that:

- These sources focus on the syntax and semantics (grammar and meaning) of Hmong, rather than on the language's sound system, its history, or its relationship to Hmong culture.

- Sources on other, related languages may be included when they are also relevant to Hmong, but those are not the main focus of this bibliography.

- This list is in-progress; further relevant works may continue to be added.

The annotations in this document are meant to give an indication of the main contributions of each source and to point out those sources that are particularly useful and informative. However, be aware that these annotations represent my opinions, and that these are not necessarily shared by all linguists.

For anyone interested in Hmong phonetics/phonology, historical linguistics, or sociolinguistics, or interested in Hmong-Mien languages more broadly, I suggest that you consult the Oxford Bibliographies page on Hmong-Mien linguistics (WEB, PDF) maintained by David Mortensen.

Contents

1 Grammars and Overviews

Unfortunately there are no comprehensive, book-length grammars of Hmong—but there are still good references available. The two most recent sources mentioned here, Jarkey 2015 and Mortensen 2019, are generally in agreement with one another, but have some slight differences. I recommend reading both of these sources even if you are only intersted in one particular variety.

Eléments de Grammaire Hmong Blanc (Mottin 1978)

> This is a widely cited and foundational description of the White Hmong language, and among the most thorough. It describes many grammatical constructions and includes many, many examples. Though published in French, this is a useful resource for anyone interested in Hmong grammar.

"Hmong (Mong Leng)" (Mortensen 2019)

> A chapter-length description of Green Mong grammar, this is necessarily brief, but gives concise descriptions of most fundamental topics.

Serial Verbs in White Hmong (Jarkey 2015)

> The initial chapter of Jarkey 2015 provides an overview of White Hmong grammar, briefly covering a wide range of fundamental topics.

2 Verbs and the verb phrase

2.1 Serial verb constructions

Serial Verbs in White Hmong (Jarkey 2015)

> The most thorough reference on serial verb constructions in Hmong. Jarkey establishes a typology of four main types, discusses their properties in detail, and compares them with several superficially-similar constructions. (Includes an excellent chapter-length description of White Hmong grammar.)

"Cotemporal Serial Verb Constructions in White Hmong" (Jarkey 2010)

> Discusses serial verb constructions involving motion. The contents of this chapter are incorporated into Jarkey 2015 (see Chapter 3, Section 1).

"Serial Verbs and Propositions in White Hmong" (Riddle 1989a)

Discusses several classes of serial verb construction in White Hmong (including "instrumental" constructions not distinguished by other authors) and argues that fine-grained semantic/pragmatic distinctions between certain verbs (e.g. *muab* 'take' vs. *xuas* 'grasp' vs. *siv* 'use' vs. *tuav* 'hold') determine whether a construction describes a single proposition or multiple propositions. Riddle's conclusions maybe be jeopardized: she appears to conflate multiple distinct classes of serial verb constructions (compare to Jarkey 2015), meaning that the semantic/pragmatic contrasts she describes likely result from different underlying syntactic structures.

Other works

Both **Fuller1990** and Clark (1992b) discuss the apparent link between serial verb constructions and other types of structures in which coordination, subordination, or modification are not overtly signaled. Clark non-standardly labels all of these phenomena as "serialization", while Riddle describes this trend as a preference for a "paratactic surface target structure" in Hmong, though neither paper analyzes this pattern in detail.

Jarkey 1991 is a PhD dissertation updated and published in book form as Jarkey 2015.

Harriehausen-Muhlbauer (1992) discusses limited data from Green Mong in the context of natural language processing. The discussion of NLP is likely outdated, and more complete data can be found in Jarkey 2010 and Jarkey 2015.

2.2 Voice and valency

"Passive and Passive-like Constructions in Hmong" (Creswell & Snyder 2000)

Describes two passive(-like) constructions in Hmong, those formed with *raug* 'hit' or *mag* 'trap', and those formed with *yog* 'to be'. Neither construction results in the demotion of the agent as expected in canonical passive constructions. *Yog*-passives appear to be a copular construction, and *raug*/*mag*-passives appear to involve VP-embedding. (Data from White Hmong.)

2.3 Tense, aspect, and mood

"The Aspectual System of Hmong" (Li 1991)

A fine-grained examination of several aspectual markers in Green Mong, including *tau* (telic or "attainment" marker), *lawm* (PERFECT), and *taabtom* (PROGRESSIVE), some of which have multiple grammatical uses. Li also discusses the role of *yuav* (IRREALIS).

"Non-Spatial Setting in White Hmong" (White 2014)

A good overview of the distribution and use of various grammatical markers, including tense and aspect marking, aspectual verbs, mood/modality, certainty markers, and other adverbs. The descriptions of each word/morpheme are necessarily brief, and on some points appear to differ from those presented in other sources.

2.4 Situational aspect/aktionsart

"Pair-List Answers to Questions with Plural Definites" (Johnston 2023)

Discusses Accomplishment verbs in White Hmong (*nrhiav* 'search for/find', *noj* 'eat', etc.), which are "non-culminating": they do not necessarily mean that their goal was reached. (For example, *kuv* **nrhiav** *lub pob* 'I searched for/found the ball' doesn't necessarily mean that the ball was found.) Focuses on verb serialization as a strategy for adding the "culminating" meaning.

2.5 Studies of specific verbs

"On Two Venitive Verbs in Lan Hmyo" (Taguchi 2019)

A study of two motion verbs in Lan Hmyo, a West Hmongic language closely related to White Hmong/Green Mong. These verbs are *luB* 'come (home)' (Hmong *los/lus*), which Taguchi argues grammatically encodes the notion of "home", and *ðaA* 'come' (Hmong *tuaj*) which Taguchi claims does not.

Linguistic Epidemiology: Semantics and Grammar of Language Contact in Mainland Southeast Asia (Enfield 2003)

Many Southeast Asian languages have a single word that serves all of the following functions: (1) a verb meaning 'get, acquire, attain', (2) an aspect marker associated with completion, (3) a possibility modal meaning 'can, be able to', and (4) an introducer of "descriptive complements". Although this work focuses on data from Lao, it also surveys a variety of other languages and contains a significant amount of data on Hmong *tau*. (More information on *tau* can be found in Li 1991 and Jarkey 2015.)

3 Nouns and the noun phrase

3.1 Classifiers

"Shape and Function in Hmong Classifier Choices" (Sakuragi & Fuller 2013)

> A study examining the factors that affect Hmong speakers' choice of classifiers. The results suggest that classifiers are associated with both particular shapes and particular functions. (E.g., *tus* and *txoj* can both be used for nouns that describe long, thin objects, but *tus* is preferred over *txoj* when the normal use of that noun involves grasping it.) In some cases, Hmong speakers can be led to prefer different classifiers for the same noun, depending on whether they focus on the shape of the noun in question, or on its function.

"Classifiers, Quantifiers and Class Nouns in Hmong" (Bisang 1993)

> On the basis of syntactic and semantic tests, Bisang shows that what are usually called "classifiers" in Hmong are in fact a mixed bag of true classifiers, quantifiers, measure words, and class nouns. This is a detailed and fine-grained description, which offers an contrasting view of the "double classifier constraint" discussed by Ratliff 1991 and an explanation for the "referential salience" analysis of Riddle 1989b.

"*Cov*, the Underspecified Noun, and Syntactic Flexibility in Hmong" (Ratliff 1991)

> Discusses cases of "double classifiers" in Hmong. These usually involve the plural classifier *cov* being added to a classifier-noun pair, but require the noun to be semantically underspecified (e.g. *cov + phau ntawv*, 'the books'). Ratliff argues that the second classifier acts as a noun in these cases, forming the first part of a compound word, and relates this to a broader pattern of syntactic flexibility in Hmong. (Data from White Hmong.)

3.2 Demonstratives

"Hmong-Mien Demonstratives and Pattern Persistence" (Ratliff 1997)

> Discusses the White Hmong demonstrative *ko* 'that (near you)', which has been omitted from several other accounts. Ratliff situates *ko* within the full demonstrative system of White Hmong. This type of system is unusual among Southeast Asian languages, and the historical development of this system is discussed.

3.3 Pronouns and Binding

"Two Types of Variable Elements in Hmong Anaphora" (Mortensen 2004)

> Discusses A and A′ binding, including anaphoric binding into proper names, full pronominals (e.g. *nwg*, 3sG), kinship pronominals (e.g. *yawg*, 'male relative'), null *pro*, and *tug kheej* 'self' forms. Describes an apparent "competition" between these forms. (Data from Green Mong.)

"Topicalized NPs with Expansion Pronouns in Hmong" (Ratliff 1992)

> Provides data on so-called "expansion pronouns" in White Hmong (sometimes referred to as "associative" forms in other languages). These forms combine an NP with a pronoun, in order to describe a larger group containing the noun. For example, *Nplias nkawd* (= Nplias 2DU) describes a group of two people, of whom Nplias is one. Ratliff explores two possible analyses.

4 Clause and sentence structure

4.1 Complementizers and Complement Clauses

"Complement Clause Types and Complementation Strategy in White Hmong" (Jarkey 2006)

> Discusses several distinct types of complement clause in Hmong, as well as the verbs that introduce them. The relationship between clause type and choice of complementizer (*(hais) tias*, *kom*, *tias kom*, and the null complementizer) is described in detail.

4.2 Conjunctions and Discourse Particles

"The Origin and Function of Switch Reference in Green Mong" (Li 1989)

> Argues that the Green Mong clausal conjunctions *huas* and *hab* function as switch-reference markers: *huas* conveys a weak contrast and is used in different-subject contexts, while the semantically-neutral *hab* is used in same-subject contexts. Discusses possible historical origins of this behavior.

Other works

Clark (1988, 1992a) argues that the White Hmong conjunction *los* has an inchoative meaning, and that this allows conjunctions to function as topicalizers. This claim is not presented formally. Also touches on other clause linkers: *mas*, *ho*, *ces*, and *thiab*.

Bleske (2003) discusses eight "particles" in White Hmong/Green Mong that serve as conjunctions, clause-linkers, or discourse-related adverbs (*ces*, *hos*/*huas*, *thiab*/*hab*, *ho*, *kuj*, *mam*, *mas*, and *ma*) and describes their usage based on their occurrence in four texts. Largely corroborates other sources.

Riddle (1992, 1993) presents data on the discourse function of the White Hmong relative clause marker *uas*, which is argued to specify or restrict the reference of the relative clause. Does not discuss the status of *uas* as a complementizer.

4.3 Questions

"Asking Questions in Hmong and Other Southeast Asian Languages" (Clark 1985)

Discusses the "V-not-V" strategy used to form yes-no questions in many Southeast Asian languages. For example, in Hmong, *koj mus (los) tsis mus* (lit. "You go (or) not go?") can mean "Are you going?" Ten languages are studied, and among these, Hmong shows two uncommon features: it makes heavier use of "V-not-V" questions than the other languages, and in yes-no questions, the question word *puas* precedes the verb.

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