

Hmong linguistics resources: An annotated bibliography

(In progress, with emphasis on syntax and semantics)

Collected and annotated by William Johnston

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This annotated bibliography covers Hmong syntax and semantics (that is, the materials I am most familiar with from my own research). It is a work in progress, though my aim is to eventually be as exhaustive as possible, given the relative scarcity of published work on the Hmong language.

For anyone interested in Hmong phonetics/phonology, historical linguistics, or sociolinguistics, I suggest that you consult the Oxford Bibliographies page on Hmong-Mien linguistics ([LINK](#), [PDF](#)) maintained by David Mortensen (Mortensen, 2014).

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1 Syntax

For an overview of the syntax of Hmong, the most comprehensive sources are grammars. Mottin (1978) provides an excellent and thorough overview of White Hmong, though the grammar is written in French. If you are searching for a more modern description of the language, Mortensen (2019) provides a brief yet detailed description of Green Mong, and Jarkey (2015) provides a similarly detailed overview of White Hmong.

More focused works are sorted by subject matter below.

1.1 Serial Verb Constructions

Jarkey, N. (2015). *Serial verbs in White Hmong*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill

The most thorough reference on serial verb constructions in Hmong. Jarkey establishes a typology of four distinct types, and discusses their distribution and properties in detail. Jarkey also discusses several superficially-similar constructions involving juxtaposition of verbs, arguing that they should not be treated as SVCs. Includes an excellent chapter-length description of White Hmong grammar.

Jarkey, N. (2010). Cotemporal serial verb constructions in White Hmong. In *Complex predicates: Cross-linguistic perspectives on event structure* (pp. 110–134). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press

The contents of this chapter are incorporated into Jarkey, 2015 (see especially Section 1 of Chapter 3).

Clark, M. (1992c). Serialization in mainland Southeast Asia. In *The Third International Symposium on Language and Linguistics* (pp. 145–159). Bangkok, Thailand: Chulalongkorn University

Clark uses the term ‘serialization’ in a nonstandard way, to refer to any instance of coordination, subordination, or successive modification that is not signaled by an overt conjunction/complementizer. Under this definition, the verbal, nominal, and clausal domains might all be said to exhibit ‘serialization’. (A less loaded term for the notion she describes might be ‘parataxis’.) The data presented by Clark is certainly evidence of at least a morphological trend, though I am skeptical as to how uniform the syntax of these constructions is. (Data from White Hmong.)

Harriehausen-Muhlbauer, B. (1992). Verb concatenation in Hmong Njua: A syntactic description and its treatment in natural language processing. (pp. 398–420). The Third International Symposium on Language and Linguistics. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn Univ.

A proceedings paper with minimal data—limited to one subclass of SVCs, those called ‘Cotemporal Motion SVCs’ by Jarkey, 2015—and the generalizations drawn from that data suffer as a result. Discusses the implications of these constructions for natural language processing. (Data from Green Mong.)

Jarkey, N. (1991). *Serial verb constructions in White Hmong: A functional approach* (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney)

Updated and published in book form as Jarkey, 2015.

Riddle, E. M. (1989). Serial verbs and propositions in White Hmong. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, 12(2), 1–13

Discusses several classes of serial verb construction in White Hmong (including ‘instrumental’ expressions not well-discussed by other authors) and explores certain fine-grained semantic/pragmatic distinctions between verbs (e.g. *hla* ‘cross’ vs. *dhau* ‘cross over’; *muab* ‘take’ vs. *xuas* ‘grasp’ vs. *siv* ‘use’ vs. *tuav* ‘hold’). Riddle argues that these semantic/pragmatic distinctions determine whether a serial verb construction describes a single proposition or multiple propositions. Some of the data presented is quite insightful, but in other cases the true empirical picture is nebulous. (Comparison with later authors, especially Jarkey, 2015, suggests that Riddle makes comparisons *across* classes of serial verb constructions rather than *within* them. It’s my opinion that in the cases discussed here, semantic/pragmatic distinctions only indirectly affect the clausal structure, in that they disambiguate between different underlying syntactic structures.)

1.2 Complementation and Conjunction

Clark, M. (1992b). Conjunctions as topicalizers: More on Southeast Asian languages. *Papers from the First Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*, 87–107

Expands on the data presented in Clark (1988), placing White Hmong *los* alongside similar conjunctions in Vietnamese and Black Tai, but does not significantly expand the analysis. (See Clark (1992a) for further development of this idea, as it pertains to Vietnamese.)

Clark, M. (1988). An inchoative conjunction in Hmong: Extra-sentential topic marker? In *The international symposium on language and linguistics* (pp. 93–106). Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasat University

Argues that the White Hmong conjunction *los* has an inchoative meaning, and that inchoative meanings generally allow conjunctions to function as topicalizers. This analysis is not fleshed out in detail. (Clark also touches on other Hmong clause linkers: *mas*, *ho*, *ces*, and *thiab*. (See also Clark (1992a, 1992b).)

1.3 Topic Prominence and Topicalization

Clark, M. (1992b). Conjunctions as topicalizers: More on Southeast Asian languages. *Papers from the First Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*, 87–107

See full entry in Section 1.2.

Clark, M. (1988). An inchoative conjunction in Hmong: Extra-sentential topic marker? In *The international symposium on language and linguistics* (pp. 93–106). Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasat University

See full entry in Section 1.2.

1.4 Relativization

Riddle, E. M. (1993). The relative marker *uas* in Hmong. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, 16(2), 57–68

A short paper presenting data on the relative clause marker *uas*, which is argued to have a discourse function of specifying or restricting the reference of the relative clause. Does not discuss the related use of *uas* as a complementizer. (Data from White Hmong.)

Riddle, E. M. (1992). Relativization, parataxis and underspecification in White Hmong. In T. J. Hudak & K. L. Adams (Eds.), *Papers from the Second Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society, 1992* (pp. 263–278). Tempe: Arizona State Univ., Program for Southeast Asian Studies

A short paper presenting similar observations to those discussed in Riddle, 1993. (Data from White Hmong.)

1.5 Classifiers

Ratliff, M. (1991). *Cov*, the underspecified noun, and syntactic flexibility in Hmong. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 111(4), 694–703

Discusses cases in which the classifier *cov* can co-occur with another classifier, but only when the corresponding noun is semantically underspecified (e.g. *cov phau ntawv*, ‘the books’, where *phau* is a classifier for ‘bound piles’ and *ntawv* literally means ‘writing’). 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.)

1.6 Miscellaneous

2 Semantics

Under construction.

Full References

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