

An Analysis of Some Tonally Differentiated Doublets
in White Hmong (Miao)*

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0. Introduction. This paper is designed to reveal in outline a number of the important synchronic and diachronic processes which are responsible for the high number of tonally differentiated doublets in the White Hmong (Miao) dialect of the West, or Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan branch of Hmong, the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) family. It incorporates and builds on the excellent paper by G.B. Downer, "Tone-Change and Tone-Shift in White Miao" (1967). The enterprise is undertaken with a good measure of humility, given the size of the corpus of data, its complicated history, and the likelihood of error in determining cognacy for those pairs for which insufficient supporting data from other dialects has been made available.¹ Nevertheless, the existence of two good dictionaries apiece for White Hmong (hereafter WHm), Bertrais 1964 and Heimbach 1969, and the closely related Green Hmong (hereafter GHm), Lyman 1974 and Xiong 1983, and the availability of native speakers now living in this country as refugees make possible an initial determination of those analogical and expressive processes that give rise to some of the doublets.

Similarly, the availability of three comparative studies, two for Hmong (Wang Fushi's substantial 1979 work and Chang 1976) and one for Hmong-Mien (Purnell 1970) make possible a few comments about the doublets which retain traces of old morphophonemic alternations. These comments are intended to suggest which items could be most profitably sought (from the point of view of the comparativist) in future dialect studies and to provide a theory about the nature of Proto-Hmong-Mien (hereafter PHm) morphophonemics and morphology, to be adopted or discarded as more information becomes available.

Borrowings from Chinese account for many tonally differentiated WHm doublets, a number of which are included in the glossary. Although certain Hmong tones seem to be involved more than others, I have neither the expertise nor the information necessary to comment on this enormously complex problem here.

1. The doublets in this first set are either demonstrably linked to the WHm dialect alone, or will be discussed in terms of this dialect primarily, since evidence of these processes in other dialects is limited. They are assumed to be of relatively recent origin.

1.a. Sex Coding. There are a few WHm doublets referring to people in which tone distinguishes the sex of the individual, and does so in each pair with the whispery², or -g tone for males and the glottalized, or -m tone for females. Although the set of doublets listed below is small, it seems to be a clean little example of tonal morphology:

male (<u>-g</u>)	female (<u>-m</u>)
<u>ntsug</u> "widow(er); orphan"	<u>poj ntsuam</u> "widow"
<u>ntxawg</u> "youngest son"	<u>ntxawm</u> "youngest daughter"
<u>yawg</u> "paternal grandfather; male" (and other older men in F's line)	<u>yawm</u> "maternal grandfather" (and other older men in M's line)
<u>pog-</u> wives of men designated by <u>yawg</u> (< <u>poj</u> "female")	<u>niam-</u> wives of men designated by <u>yawm</u>
<u>npawg</u> "male 1st cousin, different clan; peer, friend"	<u>muam npawm</u> "female 1st cousin, different clan"
<u>nraug</u> "bachelor"	<u>muan</u> "man's sister; peer female relation" (< * <u>-g</u> (C2))
<u>laug</u> male of certain animal species	<u>niam</u> "mother; older female re- lation"
	<u>maum</u> female of certain animal species (corresponding to <u>laug</u> among other male terms); also in reference to female humans

The two clearest pairs are ntsug (C2)³ "widow(er); orphan"/ntsuum (D2) "widow" [Wang PHm *mbr- 11(C2) "without husband, without parents"] and ntxawg (C2) "youngest son (or given name for same); a pet name for little boys"/ntxawm (D2) "youngest daughter (or given name for same); a pet name for little girls". The chief difference between the two pairs is that ntsug, the "male form", is unmarked for the first pair while ntxawm, the "female form" is unmarked for the second pair. A widow can be either poj "female"-ntsuum or poj-ntsug, the latter perhaps derived by tone sandhi but nevertheless falling in with the unmarked (and historical) form, while a widower can only be yawg "male"-ntsug and orphans, both male and female, only ntsug. Conversely, the terms for "father's youngest brother" and his wife employ the "female form": txiv "father"-ntxawm and niam "mother"-ntxawm. We may suppose, then, that ntsuum "widow" and ntxawg "youngest son" are the forms that have been derived to round out this emerging WHm pattern.

Yawg and yawm, both "grandfather", refer respectively to the paternal grandfather (and other older men in the paternal line) and the maternal grandfather (and other older men in the maternal line). Significantly, the wives of the men designated by yawg are called pog- [< poj "female" - Wang PHm *b- 13(A2) "female human" - cf. GHm puj "grandmother", without the tone coding] and the wives of the men designated by yawm are called niam-.⁴

Npawg "first cousin male, different clan" is paired with muam "sister"-npaws "first cousin female, different clan". *Npawm is unattested, but it is interesting that the first element of female kinship terms is often either muam "sister; peer female relation" or niam "mother; older female relation". Npawg has been generalized in both WHm and GHm to mean "peer, friend", and is used as a third person singular male pronoun in GHm (Lyman, p. 189).

Given names, with the exception of Ntxawg/Ntxawm mentioned above, are not distinguished by sex in any consistent way. The same name often serves for both males and females, and when presented with an unknown name in isolation, a native speaker has to be told the sex of its referent.

It is hard to say now to what extent sex coding is characteristic of the Hmong family. GHm has two of the pairs: ntxawg/ntxawm and yawg/yawm. In the two GHm dictionaries, yawm alone is listed as the term for "grandfather" while yawg appears as the term for "husband" and as a more general male term in compounds. Jacques Lemoine, however, in his detailed GHm ethnography (pp. 174-75) records a division of the two terms along the lines described for WHm: yawg for older men in the paternal line, yawm for older men related through women, either mother or wife (affinials). He observes that the main oppositions in Hmong kinship nomenclature are clansmen vs. affinials and elder vs. younger. It may be the former opposition that is being encoded in yawg/yawm, an opposition related to, but slightly different from, male vs. female. Ruey Yih-Fu records both [jeu³³] (C2) and [jeu¹³] (D2) for "grandfather" in another dialect of the Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan branch, Xuyong (Hmong Ntsu), in his 1958 article "Terminological Structure of the Miao Kinship System", but the tone/sex correspondence is different. The D2 form corresponding to yawm seems to be the more general term for older male relatives, denoting, among others, both paternal and maternal grandfathers. The C2 form corresponding to yawg is used for "husband" as in GHm, but also for older men in the wife's family.

The history of the WHm/GHm word for a man's sister, muam (D2), "correctly" tone coded, lends support to the theory that sex coding is a relatively new utilization of these distinctions in the grammars of these dialects. This root appears with the tonal reflex of C2 in Xuyong (Ruey, op. cit.) and in two Mien dialects (Purnell's Chiengrai and Haininh). If C2 reflexes are now felt more appropriate for the male members of such pairs in WHm and GHm, a tone switch to D2 would be well motivated.

It is risky to speculate about which form(s) may have served as the model for the analogy, if this is another instance of what Downer (1967) calls "analogical tone shift". The primary terms "male"/"female", "husband"/"wife", "father"/"mother", "son"/"daughter" are not coded with C2/D2 reflexes in the family, with the exception of niam "mother" and yawg "husband; male" in GHm. It may be significant that Wang's comparative study includes two male roots for which tone C2 must be reconstructed: PHm *nd- 17(C2) "young man" > WHm nraug "unmarried man" and PHm *dz- 26(C2) "male" > an unattested WHm *cag.

1.b. Affect Contrast. The whispery tone (C2) was characterized by one native speaker as the "angry" tone. This came up in a discussion of the difference in meaning between sentences with the completive particle tas (B2) [Purnell PWestHm *dan (B) "finished"] and its variant tag (C2). According to this speaker, in a proposition about a bee whose legs had been

broken "...tas" ("all"), the bee might still be wiggling a little bit (perhaps one leg), but if they had been broken "...tag" the bee would be left completely immobile. By "angry", he seemed to mean "insistent", or simply "stressed". It may yet be discovered that the tas/tag contrast is correlated with other syntactic or semantic properties of the sentence⁵, but so far, Heimbach's observation (p. 304) that tag is the stressed form of tas is as far as we can go.

Similarly, the classifier tus (B2), when used as an anaphoric pronoun in a possessive construction, can alternate with a stronger, more insistent tug:

Tus no yog kuv tus. "This is my (pen)."
 clf-long this is I clf-long

Tus no yog kuv tug! "This is my (pen)! (...and I
 won't loan it to you)"

Another native speaker observed that when a discussion turns into an argument, about the ownership of a horse, for example, which also takes the tus (here "animate") classifier⁶, the tone will shift from tus to the stressed tug in this way. This correlation of stress and the whispery tone does not apply to GHm because in this dialect B2 and C2 have merged: the base form of the completive is taag and the base form of the classifier is tug.

There is some indication that a shift to the whispery tone can give a negative meaning to the word thus altered. Nyuan "little" [Purnell PWestAHm *nyua (C/D), PIuMien *-nyaa (B), PKimMun *nyau (A) "child"] is neutral, while nyuag is denigrating, "un peu méprisant" (Mottin, p. 48):

Tsis muai ib tee nyuag dej. "There is not one lousy drop of
 not exist one drop little water water left." (Mottin, p. 48)

Nyuag-vaus tsis paub dab-tsi. "Little-old-me doesn't know
 little young not know something" (Bertrais)

Yau "small, younger" [Wang PHm *z- 15(C1) "small"; Purnell PHm *yeu¹ (C) "small"] has a semantically analogous variant vaus (B2) [GHm yaug], but in the low level tone, as in the nyuag-vaus "this humble person" (= the speaker) of the last sentence.

The negative associations of nplog "amus", almost certainly derived from nplos "a socket, hole for the handle of an implement" are evident. A more problematic doublet is niam/niag. Niam "mother" [Wang PHm *nz- 21(D2) "female (dog)"; Purnell PHm *nia? (D) "mother"] is the likely cognate of niag, which, according to Bertrais, is a pejorative term used to refer to an individual. Heimbach calls it a term of familiarity (p. 140), that same quality which often breeds contempt. The problem is that it can and does mean "old lady", but it can also be used to describe men (niag yawg "old fellow, old friend") and even inanimate objects. This gives rise to ambiguities, since niag also means "large, great" (a meaning also derivative of "mother" according to Lyman (p. 196), cf. English "mother-lode"). Hence, tus niag dej can mean either "the great river" or "the little-old river" depending on context.