Hmong-Mien demonstratives and pattern persistence[1]

Martha RATLIFF
Wayne State University

1. Introduction

I am concerned in this paper with a hitherto unremarked member of the demonstrative class in the Hmong Daw (White Hmong) dialect of Hmong[2]—*ko*[3] 'that-near you'. I show its place in the demonstrative network of Hmong Daw, present what seem to be analogous forms in other Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) dialects and languages, and speculate about the role that our knowledge of the Southeast Asian areal type has played in its neglect.

Further, I raise some general questions suggested by the persistence of a three-way, person-oriented demonstrative system in the Hmong-Mien family. What are we to make of grammatical contrasts in a family which are sustained in the daughter languages through relexification? Of specific interest are family-specific, "hallmark" patterns that cannot clearly or easily be attributed to contact because they are not typical of the area. Of even greater interest are those patterns which, in addition, are typologically marked. Specifically,

1) In languages where genetic relationship is uncontroversial, how should these patterns be associated with our reconstruction of the proto-language?
2) In languages claimed to be related (where the relationship is not accepted by all), can the persistence of such patterns be used to help resolve the question?

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[2]Hmong Daw belongs to the Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan branch of West Hmongic, and is spoken by many Hmong in Laos, Thailand, and the West.

[3]A note on the "R(omanized) P(opular) A(lphabet)" used in this paper and by the majority of Hmong in the United States: Hmong words are monosyllabic for the most part. The only final consonant is /ŋ/ , which is signalled by doubling the vowel. The eight tones are indicated by final consonant symbols: high level (historical tone category A1) -*b*, high falling (A2) -*j*, mid rising (B1) -*v*, low level (B2 and D1) -*s*, mid level (C1) -*ø*, falling breathy (C2) -*g*, low glottalized (D2a) -*m*, low fall-rise (D2b) -*d*.

2.   Hmong-Mien demonstratives

2.1. Hmong Daw demonstrative systems

Syntactically, almost all adjectives in Hmong Daw, an SVO language, follow the nouns they modify. The demonstratives occupy the final position in the noun phrase, which takes the following form:

(POSS) (NUM/Q) (CLF) (Adj) N (ADJ) (DEM)

The demonstratives can also be used pronominally, if no other noun appears with them. To understand the role of *ko* 'that-near you' in the grammar of Hmong Daw, it is necessary to set forth the network of demonstrative forms of which it is a part. I analyze this network as consisting of four subsystems based on formal and semantic considerations:
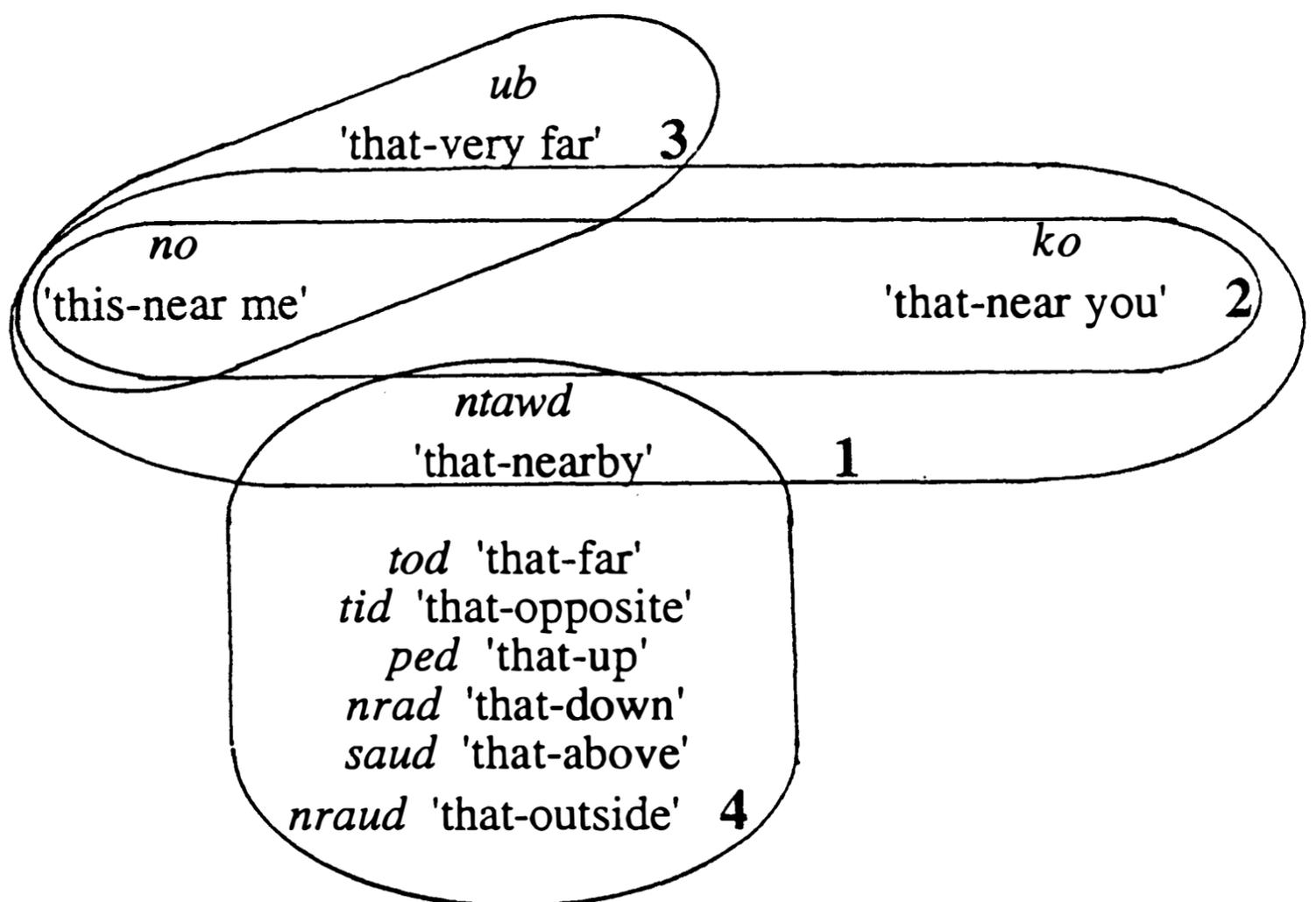
Chart 1 The Hmong Daw demonstrative class network

System 1, of which *ko* is a part, makes reference to the speech event situation and participants. The three were used in contrast by both Lauj Pov Vaj, instructor of the Beginning Hmong class at the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute of 1985 and by his brother Lis Fwm Vaj, instructor of the Beginning Hmong class at SEASSI 1988, in simplified Hmong exercises designed to point out objects in the classroom.[4] For example:

*Kuv nyiam phau ntawv **no**.*
I   like   book   **this**

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[4]The author was a student in the 1985 class and a co-instructor in the 1988 class.

*Kuv nyiam phau ntawv **ko** thiab.*
I   like   book   **that-near you** also

*Kuv nyiam phau ntawv **ntawd** tshaj plaws.*
I   like   book   **that**   most

The meaning and use of *ko* as a common demonstrative pertinent to the space defined by the position of the speech act participants was affirmed by other language consultants in subsequent conversations. I have also since encountered *ko* in texts involving dialogue or other recreations of the speech event.[5] Interestingly, however, the demonstrative *ko* appears in no grammar, dictionary, or other published description of the language.

System 2 is a formally defined group, part of system 1 above: *no* 'this-near me'/*ko* 'that-near you'. The tone of both words is mid-level, usually the reflex of historical category C1. This is a convergence phenomenon, one which I have noted for a number of small systems of tonally defined function words in Hmong (Ratliff 1992, Chapter 3). The 'this-near me' word, *no*, historically was of the B1 tone category, and therefore should have the mid rising -*v* tone. In fact, the form *nov* does exist as a variant in Hmong Daw, and the mid rising tone is the tone of the cognate word in the closely related Hmong Leng (Green Hmong). Similarly, *ko* 'that-near you' is, I claim, derived from the second person singular personal pronoun *koj* 'you (sg.)', with a high falling tone, the reflex of historical category A2. Which word changed tone first is unclear. It is perhaps significant, though, that the mid-level tone is the sandhi variant of words with a mid-rising tone, so perhaps under triggering conditions now lost, *nov* changed to *no*, with a subsequent analogical shift of *koj* to *ko* (Ratliff 1992: Chapter 2).

System 3 involves two old Hmongic roots: *no* 'this' and *ub* 'that-far'. Both roots are widely attested in Hmongic languages and dialects. The antiquity of this

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[5]For example this simple sentence below:

(1) *Muab daim nyias ko los rau kuv.*
grasp flat baby-carrier that-near-you come give me
("Bring that baby carrier to me.")
(*Phau Qhia Nyeem Ntawv Hmoob Dawb* [White Hmong Literacy Primer], Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics 1983:69)

A good source for tokens of *ko* in texts are modern stories with dialogue. I have found a number of instances of its use in the story serialized in the magazine *Haiv Hmoob* from 1986 to 1988, "*Hlub Niam Laus Yuav Niam Hluas*" [Love the Elder Sister, Marry the Younger], for example:

(2) "*Koj xav tau li ko los kuj zoo kawg lawm tiag.*"
You think able like that-near you then good very perfective truly
("If you can think that way, that's fine.")
(Chapter 1, *Haiv Hmoob* 2:1 (1986), p. 8)

(3) "*Nplooj, lam zaum ntawm ko os.*"
"Nplooj, just sit at that (place)-near you (particle)."
("Nplooj, just sit down there where you are.")
(Chapter 2, *Haiv Hmoob* 2:1 (1986), p. 9)

pair is also reflected in their alliance in the structure of a potentially infinite number of four word expressions: *yam ub yam no* 'thing-that-thing-this', *ua ub ua no* 'do-that-do-this', *npaj ub npaj no* 'prepare-that-prepare-this', and so on. Such four word ABAC expressions are literary in style, and tend to preserve older forms (Johns and Strecker 1987).

I have demonstrated elsewhere that System 4 is of recent origin (Ratliff 1992: Chapter 3.5). Like System 2 above, it is also a tonally defined form class, the members of which are at *two* removes from their origin as geographical feature nouns with diverse tones. There is an intermediate tonally defined form class, marked by the *-m* tone, members of which serve as prepositional locatives. Thus,

> **pes** (B2) 'mountain' (archaic) >
> > **pem** *roob* 'up on (the) mountain' >
> > > *lub roob* **ped** 'the mountain that-up there'

> **nrau** (C1) 'place beyond' >
> > **nraum** *zoov* 'outside (in the) jungle' >
> > > *nyob sab* **nraud** 'be-on (the) side that-out there'

The *-d* tone is of limited distribution in the language: it appears either as a conditioned variant of the *-m* tone, as in this case, or in a few analogical extensions of these forms.

2.2. Ko *in Hmong Daw and Hmong Leng reference works*

Despite its simplicity and its role as a common function word in the language, the existence of *ko* in Hmong has been correctly recorded by only one researcher in writing before. Fr. Bertrais gives examples of *ko* in his Hmong Blanc-Français dictionary, not under its own listing, but rather under his listing for *koj*, the second person singular pronoun:

phau ntawv nyob ntawm **ko**	'the book is **by you**'
tus **ko** *yog koj li*	'the one **next to you** is yours'
lub rooj **ko**	'the table which is **next to you**'

The tone change *-j* > *-ø* is not one of the tone sandhi change possibilities (Ratliff 1986, Chapter 2), so the listing of *ko* as a variant of *koj* is misleading (although I agree with Bertrais that the two are cognate). The better analysis would involve listing *ko* as a separate word, the tone change being explained as an analogical change to the tone of *no* 'this' (or vice versa), as given in the description of System 2 of the demonstrative forms above.

In the other two standard Hmong Daw references, *ko* has fared less well. In his White Hmong-English dictionary, Ernest Heimbach lists *kos* as a demonstrative with the meaning 'over there' (p. 86) and also shows *koj* used in this way with the meaning 'there—near you' (p. 85). I suspect that both the tone

and the meaning were misunderstood in the first instance[6] and the tone was misperceived in the second (perhaps because the meaning was clearly understood as one involving the hearer). It is possible, though, that *ko* is very new, and Heimbach correctly recorded two of the variants involved in a change-in-progress. In his Hmong Daw grammar, Jean Mottin claims that of all the demonstratives (with no mention of *ko*), a central role is played by only two, *no* and *ntawd*, the unmarked 'this' and 'that' pair[7]:

> Nous ne retiendrons cepandant que 'no' et 'ntawd' qui correspondent exactement au français 'celui-ci', 'celui-là', qu'il y ait référence à un lieu ou à un rang, ce qui n'est pas le cas pour les autres. [Meanwhile, we will retain only 'no' and 'ntawd' which correspond exactly to the French 'celui-ci' and 'celui-là' because they make reference to either a place or a rank, which is not the case for the others.]
> (p. 47)

On this point, Mottin's analysis was clearly influenced by the Eurocentric mold he used as a principle of organization throughout his otherwise very useful grammar. Indeed, if the complex network of demonstratives is to be boiled down to a simple two-way contrast it is not clear that *ntawd* should be the 'that' term: Yang Dao, a native speaker of Hmong Daw, in the French-to-Hmong Daw dictionary which he wrote for Hmong refugees living in French-speaking lands, translates *celui-ci* as *no*, but *celui-là* as *tod*, the other rather abstract demonstrative, which we might translate as 'that-<u>not</u> nearby' in contrast to *ntawd* 'that-nearby'.

The closely related (mutually intelligible) Hmong Leng preserves the historical tone (the reflex of category B1, a mid-rising tone) for the 'this' demonstrative: *nov*. If the second person demonstrative is formed on analogy with the first person demonstrative in Hmong Leng also, we should be looking for a *kov* 'that-near you' word in this dialect (the second person personal pronoun in Hmong Leng is identical to the Hmong Daw: *koj*, with a high falling tone). This word was recorded by Taweesak Kunyot, in a 1984 M.A. thesis. The following sentence is given as an illustration of *kov*, a demonstrative which is glossed as 'that (far)' (p. 74-5):

> *txwb txaab ntawm kov luj*   '*that box over there is big*[8]

Although this researcher has been the only one to record the form for Hmong Leng, I believe its correct meaning was not established.

There is no mention of *kov* (or *ko*) in either the Hmong Leng dictionary by the Xiong (Xyooj) group or the Hmong Leng (Mong Njua) dictionary or grammar of Thomas A. Lyman. Upon my inquiry, Professor Lyman suggested that *ko* in Hmong Daw might be cognate with the demonstrative *hov* 'there' of Hmong Leng. Given Lyman's own observation that both [q^h] and [χ] are allophones of *qh-* in

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[6]Although there seems to be some variation on the part of speakers between the mid-level ø-tone and the low-level *s*-tone, possibly heralding a merger of the two.

[7]Mottin calls *ub* and *no* (System 3 above) "faux démonstratifs" because their sense is indefinite (p. 47).

[8]The spelling system has been regularized to the RPA; Taweesak uses a less well-known spelling system.

Hmong Leng (1979:13), however, it seems more likely that *hov* is a variant of the multifunctional *qhov* 'hole; thing; place'. *Kov* is also absent from the Xiong dictionary, which is the only one of the standard sources for Hmong Leng compiled by native speakers. This may be explained by the fact that the Xiong dictionary was compiled as an aid to Hmong students (like the Yang Dao dictionary for Hmong Daw), and is therefore primarily English-to-Hmong (460 pages of 557) and text-oriented. *Ko(v)* 'that-near you' is a word used as a tool in conversation (where a "you" is present), and is harder to find in written texts than *no* or *ntawd*.

2.3. *Other Hmong-Mien second-person demonstratives*

In chart 2 below, to the forms already discussed above are added some second person demonstratives either described or inferred from various descriptions of Hmong-Mien languages.

	this-near me	that-near you	that-neutral
West Hmongic			
Hmong Daw	$nɔ^{33}$(C1)/$nɔ^{24}$(B1)	$kɔ^{33}$(C1) cf: $kɔ^{52}$ (A2) 'you (sg.)'	$ndaw^{214}$(D2b)
Hmong Leng	$nɔ^{24}$(B1)	$kɔ^{24}$(B1) cf: $kɔ^{52}$ (A2) 'you (sg.)'	$ndaw^{214}$(D2b)
Bunu of Meizhu	nau^{43}(B1)	kau^{12}(A2) 'that-middle' cf: kau^{12}(A2) 'you (sg.)'	$uŋ^{33}$(A1) 'that-far' nu^{43}(B1) 'out of sight/unknown' $iŋ^{43}$(B1) 'out of sight/known'
East Hmongic			
Hmu of Yanghao	$noŋ^{35}$(B1)	nen^{35}(B1) 'that-near you' cf: $moŋ^{55}$(A2) 'you (sg.)'	$moŋ^{55}$(A2) 'that-neutral' cf: nen^{55} (A2) 's/he' $ɛ^{33}$(A1) 'that-far' i^{35}(B1) 'that-out of sight'
Mienic			
Iu Mien	nai^{55} (B1/D1)	nai^{11} (C2/D2) 'that-near you' cf: $məy^{42}$ (A2) 'you(sg.)'	$uə^{55}$(B1/D1) 'that-yon'

Chart 2 Person-oriented demonstrative systems in Hmong-Mien

It is likely that a 'near you' demonstrative also exists in Bunu, considered a "Yao" language by the Chinese for cultural reasons but linguistically a dialect of "Miao" (=Hmong) (Mao, Meng, and Zheng 1982 and Moskalev 1978), and in Yanghao Hmu, a dialect of a separate language of the Hmongic branch (Wang 1985). The middle demonstrative in Bunu and the third demonstrative in Hmu are homophonous with, and I believe cognate with, the second person singular personal pronouns. The Hmu system is person-oriented now; the Bunu system either is now person-oriented or was so earlier.

In Hmu, there has been an interesting flip-flop of forms and meanings and a tonal convergence. The second person personal pronoun has as its cognate form the neutral demonstrative 'that', whereas the third person personal pronoun has as its cognate form the second person demonstrative 'that-near you'. And while the second person personal pronoun is homophonous with the 'that-neutral' demonstrative, the second person demonstrative has shifted tone to 35, to establish a form class with the 'this' demonstrative in a manner reminiscent of Hmong Daw and Hmong Leng.

Christopher Court (1985:110-12) has also described a 'this-near me', 'that-near you', 'that-yon' system for Iu Mien (Yao), a language representing the Mienic branch of the Hmong-Mien family spoken both in China and in northern Southeast Asia. The 'that-near you' demonstrative of Mien, however, is neither cognate to Hmong *ko/kov*, nor is it cognate to the Iu Mien second person singular personal pronoun. Mao, Meng, Zheng (1982:30) also record a three-way contrast for Iu Mien, but do not note that the middle member indicates 'near you'.

3. The tyranny of word-lists and written texts

So far, there is no clear evidence for three-way person-oriented demonstrative systems from the word lists and texts available to me for other Hmong-Mien languages and dialects. But I do not think that this means that the second place forms do not exist in these languages and dialects. No fewer than five dictionaries for Hmong Daw and Hmong Leng missed the existence of this common word. This is due to three things: (1) the expectations of the linguist about what type of languages these are, (2) the related problem of the necessary tyranny of the prepared word list, which leads one to probe for a 'this' and a 'that', but not for a 'that-near you', and (3) the strong link between a second place demonstrative and dialogue. We should not expect texts which are descriptive and which contain no record of conversation to contain these forms.

To elaborate on the second point above, Chinese descriptive grammar sketches follow a prescribed form. In the discursive section of the Hmu grammar sketch I did find the description of the demonstrative system which glossed the middle demonstrative as a 'that-near you' form. But the word lists which accompany these sketches only call for 'this'/'that', and 'here'/'there'. Similarly, the dictionary for the Mun language of Hainan Island by Shintani and Yang (1990) makes use of the vocabulary list from the Handbook of Chinese Dialect Vocabulary, and contains prompts to the field worker for 'this', 'that', 'here' and 'there', but not for a 'that near-you' demonstrative. A good field worker with all the

time in the world would find these forms if they existed, but given real-life constraints, and this word list, it would not be surprising if he or she did not.

4. The Southeast Asia areal type

The Hmong and Mien are minority peoples in all of the countries they inhabit, which in Southeast Asia include China (the southern provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Hunan), Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma. Because of their status as minority people, multilingualism is characteristic of all who need to come into contact with the dominant culture. If second person demonstratives were found in the national languages of the host countries, we would have a straightforward explanation of their appearance in these languages. It would be the usual case of the Southeast Asia areal type propagating itself in a situation of linguistic cross-fertilization. However, not one of the national languages has a person-oriented system of demonstratives. Mainland Southeast Asian languages are typically characterized by distance-oriented demonstrative systems in which the central point of reference is the location of the speaker.[9] In fact, I have only read of one mainland Southeast Asian language with a person-oriented demonstrative system: Sre, a Mon-Khmer language of southern Vietnam, as described by Manley 1972, and discussed in Anderson and Keenan 1985. Being outside the Hmong area of northern Southeast Asia, however, Sre is unlikely to have played a role in the development of this system.

Related to the unlikelihood of the development of person-oriented demonstrative systems through contact is the failure of people who know, for example, Hmong Daw well to find and account for the common and work-a-day second-person demonstrative. This is due, I believe, to the fact that most linguists come to the study of Hmong-Mien languages with a background of work (or native knowledge of) one or more other, major Asian languages. The misidentification of the second-person demonstratives is understandable given the areal type.

5. Discussion

5.1 Relexification studies

I am left with a concern that my discovery of this family preference for person-oriented demonstrative systems has no place in reconstruction work broadly speaking, that is, in the effort to develop a picture of what the ancestor language was like. Work on relexification as part of regular transmission within the history

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[9]Y. R. Chao 1968 for Mandarin Chinese, Norman 1988 for southern Chinese languages, Thompson 1965 for Vietnamese, Yates 1970 for Lao, Noss 1964, William Gedney, David Solnit, and David Strecker (all p.c.) for Thai, and John Okell (p.c.) for Burmese. Gérard Diffloth has told me that such a system is also not common for the Mon-Khmer languages (apparently with the occasional exception such as Sre). For the Tibeto-Burman languages, Solnit reports no such contrast in Karen (p.c.) and the Lahu system described by Matisoff (1973: 51-2) is a distance oriented one. Thompson reports a secondary "near you" role for *dó* in southern Vietnamese (p. 144) and Noss reports a secondary "near you" role for *nán* in Thai (p. 103), but apparently these are covert rather than primary meanings.

of individual languages is, of course, not new: for example, (1) in 1926, Meillet described the process of "renouvellement" or relexification of conjunction functions in Indo-European; (2) in 1968, Benveniste wrote of "conservative mutations", or the replacement of a morphemic category by a periphrastic category with the same function; and (3) in 1993, Herring discussed "functional stability in language change" as exemplified by the relexification of Tamil aspect markers over several hundred years.

Dell Hymes (1955, 1956) has written specifically about how pattern maintenance through relexification may be used as a tool in reconstruction: he writes "not of cognate morphemes, but of 'cognate' categories" (1955:10). He has made the strong claim that non-cognate morphological contrasts can be used to help determine genetic relationship even in the absence of good lexical matches, using similarities in both the order and function of morphemes in the verbal complexes of several Na-Dene languages to make the point. Thomason (1980) has criticized this position as being too strong; she suggests that a language contact explanation for such similarities should be considered first.

Let us assume for a moment that contact is behind the appearance of person-oriented demonstrative systems in four languages from different branches of the Hmong-Mien family. The following type of contact situation is one that might have given rise to these demonstratives as a structural innovation from, presumably, an older distance-oriented system:

> ...a borrowing language is under intensive long-term pressure from the source language, with very widespread bilingualism among the borrowing language's speakers. Frequently, in such cases, the recipient language's speakers are gradually shifting to the source language, and a typical feature of these situations is the lack of a readily available standard language that might provide a model to inhibit recipient-language restructuring. (Thomason 1980:366)

This scenario describes the contact situation between many of the Hmong-Mien languages and Chinese precisely—and Chinese has had a number of profound contact effects on Hmong-Mien languages. For example, Chinese is the source of modifier-noun structures in the noun-modifier Hmong-Mien languages, and it is the likely source of the perfective marker in Hmong Dawb. However, I am not aware of any second-person demonstratives in Chinese which could have served as a model for this innovation, although it certainly is plausible that they existed at an earlier time[10]. If such evidence from Chinese comes to light, I would favor the view that the person-oriented demonstrative system which appears in Hmong-Mien should be traced to contact with Chinese.

5.2 The actuation problem

If a plausible mechanism for relexification can be identified, it would lend credence to the idea that this is truly an internal process. Herring (1993) considers and discards a number of possible mechanisms for the preservation of aspect markers to signal the difference between foregrounded and backgrounded material

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[10]Perhaps in the Chinese dialect Benedict has named "D(onor)-M(iao)-Y(ao)".

in traditional Tamil narrative texts over a span of 1500 years: the contrast may be (1) mystically inherent in the language, (2) determined by the cultural experiences of speakers, or (3) consciously reintroduced. She prefers the hypothesis that the unbroken tradition of oral narrative may have preserved the awareness of the contrast, even at a point when the specific forms marking the contrast were becoming obsolete. Tamil speakers would typically be familiar with both a contemporary and an archaic version of the same language, and from this dual orientation would come the lexical renewal of the contrast.

However, an explanation of this type for the renewal of Hmong-Mien second person demonstratives, the common stuff of everyday—rather than elevated—discourse, does not work well. The actuation problem remains for cases such as these.

5.3. Hmong-Mien as Austro-Tai?

Examples of pattern persistence are not easy to find,[11] and may provide only a small contribution to our understanding of the past. However, I also believe that we can ill afford to ignore them. I therefore propose the following answers to the questions posed in section 1 above:

1) In languages known to be related, how should these patterns be associated with our reconstruction of the proto-language? As addenda to these reconstructions. So, for example, in addition to having phonological inventory X, with word list Y, the proto-language had the following reconstructable morphology and the following morphological contrasts—

2) In languages claimed to be related (where relation not accepted by all), can the existence of such patterns be used to help resolve the question? Yes—as addenda to the main argument for relationship. For languages that otherwise show correspondences in some core vocabulary items, and perhaps some reconstructable morphology, one might also posit certain unreconstructable morphological contrasts to strengthen the argument for relatedness.

In this spirit, it is significant to note that unlike the languages of mainland Southeast Asia, the languages of the Pacific are characterized by person-oriented demonstrative systems: (1) the Austronesian languages are overwhelmingly characterized by person-oriented demonstrative systems, (2) Japanese has such a system, and (3) languages of the Papuan group contain second-person demonstratives. If accompanied by other, more traditional lexical correspondences of sufficient number and weight, the renewal of this kind of demonstrative system within Hmong-Mien, against the areal type, might contribute to Benedict's hypothesis that Hmong-Mien is ultimately related to the Southeast Asian languages that long ago put out to sea.

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[11]Another such example may be the presence of gender contrasts in the pronominal system, up to and including first person, in both the Nama group in southern Africa and in east African Hadza, for which a genetic connection (Khoisan) has been proposed on the more superficial basis of the presence of clicks in both. This similarity cannot be easily dismissed since it is both marked typologically (as reflected in Greenberg's Universal #44) and atypical of the two areas.

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                                                              Ann Arbor MI 48103
                                                                           USA