

Hmong linguistics research

An annotated bibliography

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This is a guide to published research on Hmong linguistics, written for students, teachers, researchers, and anyone else who wants to become more familiar with the study of Hmong grammar.

I focus here on White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb), Green Mong (Moob Ntshuab), and Mong Leng (Moob Leeg). A few works on more distantly-related languages (for example: Iu Mien) are included where they seem particularly relevant.

This bibliography is still in progress, and some relevant works might be missing. For works/topics not included here, please consult the following sources:

- For a more comprehensive list, including works on Hmong culture, language teaching, and language revitalization, see [this bibliography](#) hosted by the Hmong Studies Journal and compiled by Mark E. Pfeifer.
- For Mandarin-language publications, see the [working bibliography](#) compiled by Xuehan Annie Xie.
- For a broader overview of the linguistics of the Hmong-Mien family, see [the Oxford Bibliographies page \(PDF\)](#) compiled by David Mortensen.

If this bibliography was useful to you, if you can't find some of the sources mentioned, or if you have any questions or comments, please let me know. My contact information is on [my web site](#).

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1 Reference works

1.1 Grammars and overviews

To quickly get acquainted with the basics of Hmong grammar, I recommend Jarkey 2015a and Mortensen 2019. For language learners, Jaisser 1995 may be a better starting point.

BOOKS: White, Nathan M. 2025. *A grammar of Hmong: White Hmong and Green Mong as spoken in North Queensland*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. doi: [10.1515/9783111546681](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111546681)

A recent book-length grammar of White Hmong and Green Mong. Contains much useful data, but is written in a less approachable style than some other sources mentioned here.

Jaisser, Annie. 1995. *Hmong for Beginners*. Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California at Berkeley. https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/206360/files/b22239946_C003378091.pdf

An early Hmong language textbook, which also provides a basic description of the language.

Lyman, Thomas. 1979. *Grammar of Mong Njua (Green Miao): A descriptive linguistic study*. Sattley, CA: Blue Oak

An early grammar of Green Mong. The author uses a non-standard writing system and idiosyncratic terminology, making it somewhat difficult to follow.

Mottin, Jean. 1978. *Éléments de grammaire hmong blanc*. Bangkok: Don Bosco

The most widely cited description of the White Hmong language. Though published in French, it contains many, many Hmong examples, and is easy to follow even for those who are not French speakers.

ARTICLES: Mortensen, David. 2019. Hmong (Mong Leng). In *The Mainland Southeast Asia Linguistic Area*, 609–652. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. doi: [10.1515/9783110401981](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110401981)

A chapter-length description of Green Mong grammar, with concise descriptions of most fundamental topics.

Mortensen, David R. 2017. Hmong–Mien Languages. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press. doi: [10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.341](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.341)

An overview of the Hmong–Mien family (usually called Miao–Yao by Chinese scholars), characteristic features shared by its languages, and its possible relationships to other language families of East and Southeast Asia.

Jarkey, Nerida. 2015a. Introduction to the White Hmong language. In *Serial verbs in White Hmong*, 7–69. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill

The first chapter of Nerida Jarkey’s book on Hmong serial verbs provides a brief yet thorough overview of White Hmong grammar.

1.2 Dictionaries

- BOOKS:
- Xiong, Lang, Joua Xiong & Nao Leng Xiong. 1983. *English–Mong-English dictionary = Phoo txhais lug Aakiv-Moob-Aakiv*. Milwaukee, WI: Xiong Partnership
- Yang, Dao. 1980. *Dictionnaire Francais–Hmong Blanc = Phau ntawv txhais lus Fab Kis*. Paris: Comité National d’Entraide & Jacques Lemoine
- Heimbach, Ernest E. 1979. *White Hmong–English dictionary*. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University
- Bertrais, Yves. 1979. *Dictionnaire Hmong–Français*. Bangkok: Sangwan Surasarang
- WEB:
- Xiong, James B. 2011. *Hmong Dictionary Online*. <http://hmongdictionary.us/>

1.3 Corpora and vocabularies

- WEB:
- Soh, Hooi Ling. 2026. *University of Minnesota Hmong Corpus*. <https://hmong-corpus.umn.edu/>
- A collection of Hmong texts and transcribed audiovisual files (including stories, website contents, social media posts, and academic writings) annotated with glosses (word-for-word translations) and full-sentence translations in English. Audiovisual files associated with transcribed texts are also available.
- Mortensen, David. 2017. *SCH Corpus*. https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~dmortens/assets/zip/sch_corpus-2.0.zip
- A digital corpus compiled from postings to the soc.culture.hmong (SCH) Usenet group
- Ratliff, Martha. 2009. *White Hmong Vocabulary*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library. <https://wold.clld.org/vocabulary/25>
- A database of words in Hmoob Dawb (White Hmong) categorized according to language of origin.

2 Syntax

2.1 Nouns, pronouns, demonstratives, classifiers, and quantifiers

ARTICLES: Sakuragi, Toshiyuki & Judith Fuller. 2013. Shape and Function in Hmong Classifier Choices. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 42. doi: [10.1007/s10936-012-9223-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-012-9223-5)

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. In some cases, Hmong speakers' preferences change, depending on whether they focus on the shape of the noun in question, or on its function.

Ratliff, Martha. 1997. Hmong-Mien demonstratives and pattern persistence. *Mon-Khmer Studies* 27. 317–328

Discusses the demonstrative *ko* 'that (near you)', which has been omitted from several other works, and situates *ko* within the full demonstrative system of White Hmong (which is somewhat unusual among Southeast Asian languages).

Bisang, Walter. 1993. Classifiers, quantifiers and class nouns in Hmong. *Studies in Language* 17(1). 1–51

Argues that some “classifiers” in Hmong are instead quantifiers, measure words, or class nouns. Offers a contrasting view of the “double classifier constraint” discussed by Ratliff (1991) and an explanation for the “referential salience” analysis of Riddle (1989).

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

Argues that in Hmong “double classifier” constructions, for example *cov phau ntawv*, the second “classifier” and the head noun are in fact a compound noun. Ratliff relates this to a broader pattern of syntactic flexibility in Hmong.

PROCEEDINGS: Saelee, Low & Yining Nie. 2024. Adjective ordering in Iu Mien. In *Papers from the 33rd Conference of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press

Analyzes the differences between Sinitic and non-Sinitic adjectives in Iu Mien, which (among other contrasts) appear on different sides of the noun they describe. Highly similar behavior is found in Hmong.

Ratliff, Martha. 1992c. Topicalized NPs with expansion pronouns in Hmong. In *Papers from the Second Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society, 1992*, 251–261. Tempe: Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies

Discusses associative pronouns in Hmong (called “expansion pronouns” in this text), which combine a noun (phrase) with a pronoun, to describe a larger group containing that noun. For example, *Nplias nkawd* (= Nplias 2.DUAL) describes a group of two people, of whom Nplias is one.

UNPUBLISHED: Bansal, Vipasha. 2021. Condition C in White Hmong. Manuscript. University of Minnesota

An unpublished master’s paper that explores binding in Hmong (focusing on White Hmong). Bansal finds slightly different behavior than D. Mortensen (2004) finds in Green Mong, and compares the two dialects to Thai and Vietnamese, respectively.

Mortensen, David. 2004. Two Types of Variable Elements in Hmong Anaphora. Manuscript

Explores an unusual phenomenon in Hmong (focusing on Green Mong) in which proper names can be anaphorically bound as if they were pronouns. Mortensen also discusses the apparent “competition” between proper names, full pronouns, kinship terms, null pronouns, and ‘self’ anaphors.

2.2 Verbs and the verb phrase

BOOKS: Jarkey, Nerida. 2015b. *Serial verbs in White Hmong*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. doi: 10.1163/9789004292390

The most thorough description of serial verbs in Hmong, and an excellent reference on other areas of Hmong grammar. Supersedes Jarkey 1991 and Jarkey 2010, and contains a much more thorough and detailed description than most older sources (including Owensby 1986, Riddle 1990a,b, Bisang 1991, Harriehausen-Muhlbauer 1992).

THESES: Johnston, William. 2024b. *Event structure and serial verbs in Hmong*. Montreal, QC: McGill University dissertation. doi: 10.82308/28098

A formal investigation of serial verb constructions in Hmong, which compares them to similar grammatical constructions found in other languages. This thesis mainly addresses: (i) direct and indirect causatives, (ii) prepositions and motion events, and (iii) how Hmong describes events that are fully completed (a.k.a. culminating, telic, or bounded events). Supersedes Johnston 2024a,c, 2025.

ARTICLES: Jarkey, Nerida. 2004. Process and goal in White Hmong. In *The Hmong of Australia: Culture and Diaspora*, 175–189. Canberra: Pandanus

Discusses the ways in which Hmong represents the attainment of a goal (i.e., the full completion of an event). Similar issues are discussed in Jarkey (2015b).

Riddle, Elizabeth 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. Although later works (see Jarkey 2015) cast doubt on some of Riddle’s conclusions, this includes useful discussion of “instrumental” verbs that have not received much attention elsewhere.

PROCEEDINGS: Creswell, Cassandre & Kieran Snyder. 2000. Passive and passive-like constructions in Hmong. *West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL)* 19. 71–82

Describes two passive-like constructions in Hmong, neither of which demotes the agent (as expected in typical passive constructions). Those formed with *raug* ‘hit’ or *mag* ‘trap’ appear to involve verb phrase embedding, while those formed with *yog* ‘to be’ are a copular construction.

2.3 Tense, aspect, and mood

THESES: White, Nathan M. 2014. *Non-spatial Setting in White Hmong*. Langley, BC: Trinity Western University MA thesis

A descriptive overview of various grammatical markers in Hmong, including tense and aspect marking, aspectual verbs, mood/modality, certainty markers, and other adverbs.

ARTICLES: Li, Charles N. 1991. The aspectual system of Hmong. *Studies in Language* 15(1). 25–58

A fine-grained examination of aspect markers in Green Mong, including *tau* (telic or “attainment” marker), *lawm* (PERFECT), and *taabtom* (PROGRESSIVE). Li also discusses the role of *yuav* (FUTURE or IRREALIS).

PRESENTATIONS: Johnston, William & Hooi Ling Soh. 2024. Clausal Complementation, Finiteness and Object Control in Hmong. In National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan

A conference presentation on two puzzles related to the choice and position of Hmong complementizers in control constructions. Argues that the complementizers *kom* and *(hais) tias kom* mark non-finite clauses while *(hais) tias* marks finite clauses (i.e., clauses with tense).

2.4 Complementation, coordination, and clausal embedding

THESES: Jaisser, Annie. 1984. *Complementation in Hmong*. San Diego State University MA thesis

A master’s thesis on complementation in Hmong, including discussion of complementizers *(hais) tias* and *kom*, the verb *ua* ‘make’, and several perception verbs *hnov* ‘hear’, *pom* ‘see’, and *mloog* ‘listen’.

- ARTICLES: Sposato, Adam. 2012. Relative clauses in Xong (Miao-Yao). *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society* 5(1). 49–66
- An overview of relative clauses in Xong, which take a surprising number of different forms.
- Jarkey, Nerida. 2006. Complement clause types and complementation strategy in White Hmong. In *Complementation: A cross-linguistic typology*, 115–136. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Discusses several types of complement clause and the verbs that introduce them, with particular focus on the choice of complementizer: (*hais*) *tias*, *kom*, *tias kom*, or $\emptyset$.
- Mortensen, David. 2003. Hmong elaborate expressions are coordinate compounds. Manuscript
- Discusses the syntax, semantics, and morphology of coordinate compounds (e.g.: *caij-nyoog* ‘time-time’ = ‘time’; *muag-nug* ‘brother-sister’ = ‘brother and sister’) and the four-word phrases sometimes called “elaborate expressions” (e.g.: *txiv-maab-txiv-ntoo* ‘fruit-vine-fruit-tree’ = ‘fruit’; *kawm-txuj-kawm-ci* ‘learn-art-learn-art’ = ‘to become educated’).
- Riddle, Elizabeth M. 1993. The relative marker *uas* in Hmong. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 16(2). 57–68
- A brief discussion of relative clauses in Hmong.
- Li, Charles N. 1989. The origin and function of switch reference in Green Mong. In *Language change: Contributions to the study of its causes*, 115–129. Berlin: de Gruyter
- Argues that the clausal conjunction *huas* is a switch-reference marker, used when the subjects of two clauses differ, and the conjunction *hab* is semantically-neutral and used in same-subject contexts.
- PROCEEDINGS: Riddle, Elizabeth M. 1992. Relativization, parataxis and underspecification in White Hmong. In *Papers from the Second Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society, 1992*, 263–278. Tempe: Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies
- 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.
- Clark, Marybeth. 1988. An inchoative conjunction in Hmong: extra-sentential topic marker? In *The international symposium on language and linguistics*, 93–106. Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasat University
- Argues that the conjunction *los* has an inchoative meaning, which allows conjunctions to function as topicalizers.

PRESENTATIONS: See [Johnston & Soh \(2024\)](#).

2.5 Spatial language: location, direction, and deixis

THESES: See [Johnston \(2024\)](#).

ARTICLES: Johnston, William. Submitted. (De)prepositional motion predicates: The path spine in Hmong. Manuscript

Discusses directed motion predicates in Hmong. On the basis of comparisons with other languages, Johnston argues that motion verbs in Hmong are derived from prepositions. (Builds on data and observations originally from [Clark \(1979, 1980a,b\)](#) and [Jarkey \(2015\)](#). [Johnston & Leung \(2025\)](#) extend this approach to other languages.)

Taguchi, Yoshihisa. 2019. On Two Venitive Verbs in Lan Hmyo. *Journal of Research Institute, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies* 60. 169–179

A study of two motion verbs in Lan Hmyo (West Hmongic): *luB* ‘come (home)’ and *ǎaA* ‘come’. The same contrast is found in Hmong (*luB* = Hmong *los/lus*, *ǎaA* = Hmong *tuaj*).

Clark, Marybeth. 2000. Deixis and anaphora and prelinguistic universals. In *Grammatical analysis: Morphology, syntax, and semantics: Studies in honor of Stanley Starosta*, 46–61. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press

Examines the three-way proximal-medial-distal deictic contrast in Hmong, and argues that this contrast is “prelinguistic” and also found in animal behavior.

PROCEEDINGS: See [Ratliff \(1992\)](#).

Ratliff, Martha. 1990. The influence of geographical change on grammar: The case of Hmong spatial deictics. In *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics*. University of Texas, Arlington.

Discusses “spatial deictics” (or locative prepositions) in Hmong.

2.6 Topics, questions, and discourse particles

THESES: Dej-amorn, Somruedee. 2006a. *The Grammar of Green Hmong Particles*. Nakhon Pathom, Thailand: Mahidol University dissertation

The most thorough reference on discourse particles and other sentence-final particles in Hmong. (Parts of this thesis appear as [Dej-amorn 2004, 2006b](#). Supersedes [Bleske 2003](#).)

Fuller, Judith Wheaton. 1985. *Topic and comment in Hmong*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota dissertation

A master's thesis exploring the topic-comment structure of Hmong sentences, the topic markers *mas*, *ne*, and *ces*, and the relationship between topics and subjects in Hmong grammar. (Published in book form as [Fuller 1988](#)—though the digitized thesis is much easier to find these days. An article-length excerpt appeared as [Fuller 1987](#).)

ARTICLES: Clark, Marybeth. 1985. Asking questions in Hmong and other Southeast Asian languages. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 8(2). 60–67

Discusses yes/no questions in ten Southeast Asian languages. Hmong shows two uncommon features: it uses “V-not-V” questions more often (for example, *koj mus (los) tsis mus?* = “you go (or) not go?”), and the question word *puas* precedes the verb rather than following it.

PROCEEDINGS: Jaisser, Annie. 1992. White Hmong utterance particles: an introduction. In *The Third International Symposium on Language and Linguistics*, 160–168. Bangkok, Thailand

Brief discussion of two Hmong discourse particles.

3 Morphology

BOOKS: Ratliff, Martha. 1992a. *Meaningful tone: A study of tonal morphology in compounds, form classes, and expressive phrases in White Hmong*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Center for Southeast Asian Studies

The definitive book on tone in Hmong. Ratliff addresses tone sandhi, tonally-derived classes of words, and tonal sound-symbolism (onomatopoeia or “expressives”), as well as the way tone relates to the syntax, semantics, and lexicon in these phenomena. (Related works include: [Ratliff 1986, 1987, 1997](#))

PROCEEDINGS: Ratliff, Martha. 1992b. The development of nominal/non-nominal class marking by tone in Shimen Hmong. In *Proceedings of the 17th Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 267–282. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society

Describes an unusual split in the tone system of Shimen Hmong.

4 Phonetics and phonology

To come!

5 Semantics

Very little work exists on the semantics of Hmong. Some works that may be relevant (to a greater or lesser extent) are included here.

- BOOKS: See [Ratliff \(1992\)](#).
- THESES: See [Johnston \(2024\)](#).
- ARTICLES: Riddle, Elizabeth M. 1999. Metaphorically speaking in White Hmong. In *Papers from the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*, 377–392. Tempe: Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asia Studies
- Discusses metaphorical language in Hmong.

6 Historical linguistics, typology, and varieties of Hmong

- BOOKS: Ratliff, Martha. 2010. *Hmong-Mien language history*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics
- The definitive work on the history of the Hmong–Mien family.
- Enfield, N. J. 2003. *Linguistic epidemiology: Semantics and grammar of language contact in mainland Southeast Asia*. London: Routledge
- Discusses a common pattern among Southeast Asian languages, where a single word 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”. Contains a significant amount of data on Hmong *tau*.
- ARTICLES: Enfield, N. J. 2017. Language in the mainland Southeast Asia area. In *The Cambridge handbook of linguistic typology*, 601–623. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- A survey of typological properties of the languages of the mainland Southeast Asia area, covering over 600 languages from five families.
- PROCEEDINGS: Ly, Chô. 2019. Some Linguistic Features in Green Hmong, White Hmong, and Hmong Leng. In *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Western Conference on Linguistics (WECOL 2018)*. California State University, Fresno
- Describes the three most commonly-spoken varieties of Hmong in the diaspora—White Hmong/Hmoob Dawb, Green Mong/Moob Njua, and Mong Leng/Moog Leeg—and the features that set them apart. (This is particularly useful given that many sources treat Green Mong and Mong Leng as a single variety.)

7 Sociolinguistics and discourse studies

- THESES: Kaiser, Eden. 2011. *Sociophonetics of Hmong American English in Minnesota*. University of Minnesota dissertation
- ARTICLES: Stanford, James N. 2010a. Gender, generations, and nations: An experiment in Hmong American discourse and sociophonetics. *Language & Communication* 30(4). 285–296
- Stanford, James N. 2010b. The role of marriage in linguistic contact and variation: Two Hmong dialects in Texas. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14(1). 89–115
- Burt, Susan. 2010. *The Hmong language in Wisconsin: Language shift and pragmatic change*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen

8 Writing systems

- BOOKS: Smalley, William A., Chia Koua Vang & Gnia Yee Yang. 1990. *Mother of writing: The origin and development of a Hmong messianic script*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- ARTICLES: Ly, Chô. 2020. An Explanation of the Logic of Hmong RPA. *Hmong Studies Journal* 21. 1–15
- Smalley, William A. & Nina Wimuttikosol. 1998. Another Hmong messianic script and its texts. *Written Language & Literacy* 1(1). 103–128
- Smalley, William A. 1976. The problems of consonants and tone: Hmong (Meo, Miao). In *Phonemes and orthography: Language planning in ten minority languages of Thailand*, 85–123. Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University

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- Bleske, Karen Gaynor. 2003. *The syntax of hmong: The uses of particles in discourse*. California State University, Chico MA thesis.
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