SOME CLASSES OF CLASSIFIER IN IU MIEN (YAO)[1]

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Introduction. A classifier (Clf) is a noun (N) of a special grammatical type in Iu Mien, and quite generally in languages of the East Asian and Southeast Asian area, that co-occurs with numerals (Num). Semantically, Clf's serve to specify in some way, either qualitatively or quantitatively, a N (overt or implicit) or a verb (V) (see Figs. 1-3 below). We shall refer to Clf's of N's as N-Clf's, and to Clf's of V's as V-Clf's. [2] For many of the terms, and for the general plan of the exposition I am indebted to Matisoff (1973: Sec. 3.42). Syntactically, Clf's perform the function of enabling Num's to enter into constituency with N's and V's, while semantically, as specifiers, they individuate, instantiate, or otherwise make precise the reference of a N or V. Especially with N's characterized by homonymy or polysemy Clf's perform a very important disambiguating function, as can be seen from the following examples: (1) *homonymy* :-- /i nɔ́m diə / 'two pills' vs. /i tsév diə/ 'two bolts of cloth' (/diə/ #1 'medicine' vs. /diə/ #2 'cloth'); (2) *polysemy* :-- /i nɔm tsyân-hò/ 'two hours' vs. /i puən tsyân-hâ/ 'two minutes', /i lít uəm/ 'two liters of water' vs. /i tîv uəm/ 'two streams/rivers' vs. /i pəv uəm/ 'two crossings of a stream/river.' [3] As the example /i pəv uəm/ shows, the Clf may not only *narrow* the sense of a N, but it may also add to the meaning of the NP as a whole -- in this case adding a deverbative meaning. It should also be noted that Clf's may fail to disambiguate: thus /i tîv cuŋ/ means either 'two dragons' or 'two rainbows', and /i tîv cáv/, either 'two trails' or 'two methods' (cf. English *two ways*).

As a final general remark on Clf's, it should be noted that finer points of Clf usage are very likely to vary from one locality or subdialect to another.

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[1] The present paper is a somewhat reworked version of Court 1986, which is itself an abridgement and slight modification of materials in Court 1985. It has benefited from the input of Martha Ratliff, who was kind enough to read Court 1986 during the Conference at which it was presented, and to make helpful comments. The debt to Matisoff 1973 will be obvious. A great debt is also owed to Lombard 1968, and its editor, Herbert C. Purnell. Finally, a debt is owed to my informants, principally Fou-One Saephan and Moung-Yoon Chow. Data has been gathered in Berkeley, California, from September 1979 down to the present. The name "Iu Mien," applied to both the language and the people, is commonly shortened to "Mien" by the people themselves, and, following them, by English-speaking people who are familiar with them. They are referred to as "Yao" by the ethnic Thais and Laos, but most linguists now follow Chinese usage in reserving that name, used alone, for a broader ethnic grouping, most of whose languages (or dialects) belong to a common stock, which linguists call collectively Yao, and which forms the Yao branch of the Miao-Yao language family. The subdialect of Iu Mien described in the present paper is substantially the same as that described in Downer 1961 and 1973, Purnell 1965, 1968a and b, and 1970 (s.v. Yao of Chiengrai, or "YCR"), as well as in Mao and Zhou 1962 (s.v. Mian), or the translation of the latter, Mao and Chou 1972 (s.v. Mjen).

[2] The idea that Clf's may occur not only in expressions modifying N's but in those modifying V's as well goes back at least as far as Noss 1964:106 s.v. *metric classifier.*

[3] Transcription of Iu Mien follows Downer 1961 (which is a form of IPA), except that the palatal series is here transcribed "j, c, ch, ɲ, hɲ", glottal stop is here "+",and the tones (in Downer's and the Chinese linguists' conventional order of listing) (1) unmarked, (2) " ˆ ", (3) " ´ ", (4) " ˜ ", (5) " ˇ ", (6) " ˋ ".

The combination of Num + Clf I shall refer to, following Matisoff op. cit., as a quantity-expression (Q); a Q can quantify a N, as with the N's in the above examples: viz. /diə/ #1, /diə/ #2, /tsyân-hò/, /uəm/ and /cáv/. The resultant expression is an NP of which the N is the head, and the head N (Nh) is, of course, a quantified Nh (Nqh). In Figs. 1-3 below are shown the constituent structures of the following sentences respectively: (1) /yiə huə puə tâv (mîən) miŋ/ 'We three go,' (2) /yia bua mîŋ puə tâv (mîən)/ 'We go as a threesome/There are three of us going,' and (3) /nîn dí? dyǎŋ i dzùn/puŋ/ 'He/She/It kicks the tree two times/on two sides'.

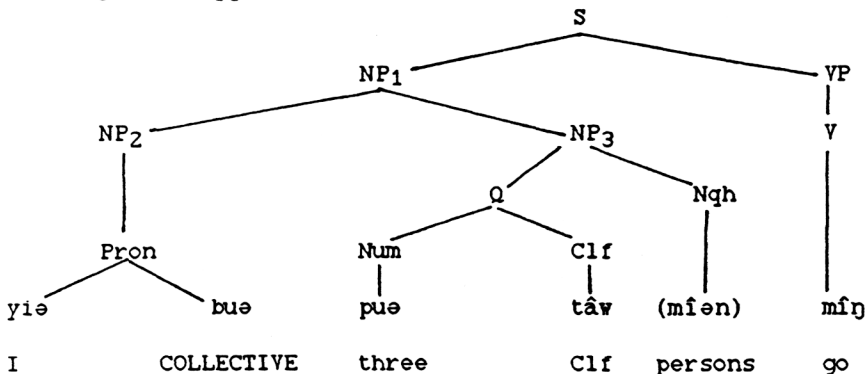**FIGURE 1. Structure of yiə buə puə tâv (mîən) mîŋ 'We three go'.** NP₂ and NP₃ are in apposition to one another.

S
NP₁   VP
NP₂   NP₃   V
Q   Nqh
Pron   Num   Clf
yiə   buə   puə   tâv   (mîən)   mîŋ
I   COLLECTIVE   three   Clf   persons   go

FIGURE 2. Syntactic Structure of yiə-buə mîŋ puə-tâv (mîən) 'We go as a threesome (à trois)'.

S
NP   VP
VP   AdvP
V   NP
Q   Nqh
Pron   Num   Clf
yiə   buə   mîŋ   puə   tâv   (mîən)
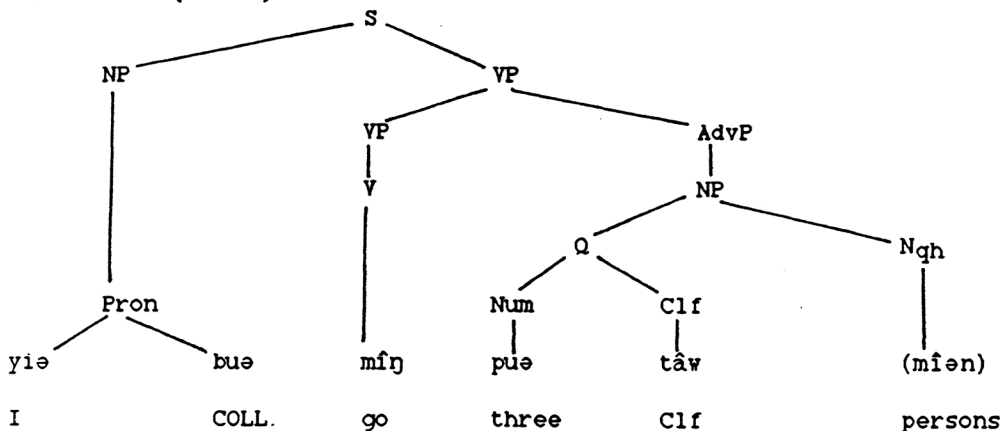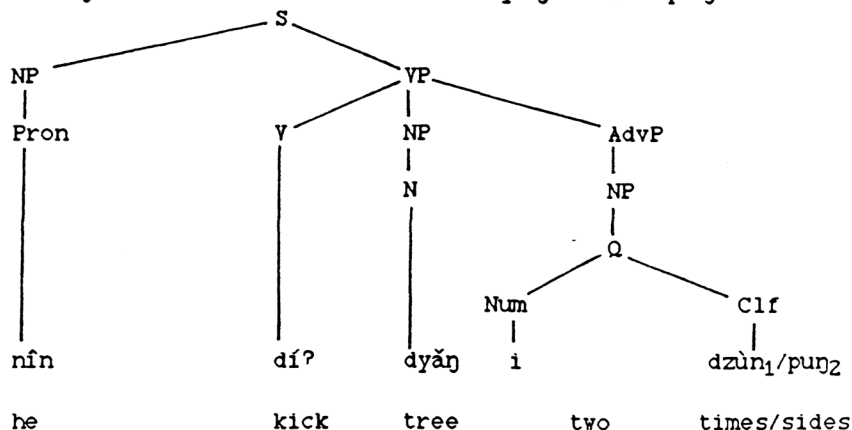I   COLL.   go   three   Clf   persons

FIGURE 3. Syntactic Structure of nín dí? dyăŋ i dzùn/puŋ.

'He/She/It kicks the tree two times.' (Clf$_1$)
'He/She/It kicks the tree on two sides.' (Clf$_2$)

Etymologically, several Clf's have been traced back to Chinese, and it is very likely that further investigation would reveal a Chinese origin for quite a few more.

1. Kinds of Clf's. On formal or semantic grounds it is convenient to distinguish at least the following sub-types of Clf's.

1.1. Auto-Clf's. (a-Clf's).

1.1.1. Noun auto-Clf's (N-a-Clf's). Some N's may be their own Clf's. This is often the case in SE Asian languages, but Mien seems to contain remarkably few such. In fact, the present investigator has found only a handful, of which several refer to units of time, e.g. /hnɔ́y/ 'day' and /hɲă꞉ŋ/ 'year'. Furthermore, they seem to have the syntactic peculiarity that the homophonous N$_h$ must be obligatorily deleted: thus one says, for instance, /i hnɔy/ and not */i hnɔy hnɔy/ for 'two days'. This contrasts with analogous expressions in, for instance, Thai, such as /khon sɔ̌ɔŋ khon/ [4] (N$_h$ Num Clf) 'two people,' where homophony between Clf and N$_h$ is not only permitted, but quite common. Possible reasons for the non-occurrence of expressions with homophonous Clf and N$_h$ in Mien are (a) the two elements are not, as in Thai, separated by the intervention of the Num, so that the result might sound awkward, and (b) Mien, unlike Thai, has the grammatical feature of reduplicated Clf's in the meaning of 'every' (see Sec. 2. below), albeit with tone-sandhi, and homophonous Clf + N$_h$ expressions might be avoided because of their similarity to these reduplicated Clf expressions. From a transformational perspective it is possible that what is going on here is the deletion not of the homophonous N$_h$ but of the Clf, but we

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[4] Transcription of Thai follows IPA usage, except that the tones are marked as in Haas 1964.

will not attempt to settle this question here. Some other N-a-Clf's are /puŋ/ 'direction; side', and /ɲùŋ/ 'kind; manner; way'.

1.1.1.1. Familial N-a-Clf's of concerted involvement. These are an interesting kind of N-a-Clf, also found in other languages in the area. As human beings, kinsmen normally take the specific Clf's for human beings (see Sec. 1.1.3. below), but when certain combinations of kinsmen are living or acting together as a group certain kinship terms may be used as a-Clf's.

Thus one says /i mũə/ 'the two siblings (together)' (cf. Thai /sɔ̌ɔŋ phí:-nɔ́:ŋ/ '(id.)', literally "two elder sibling-younger sibling"), /i tɔn-mà:/ 'mother and son (together)' [literally "two son-mother": cf. Thai /sɔ̌ɔŋ mɛ̂:lû:k/ 'mother and child (together), literally "two mother-child", and its analogue /sɔ̌ɔŋ phɔ̂:-lû:k/ 'father and child (together)']. But in order to say in Mien 'father, mother and child together' one resorts to the prototypical familial a-Clf of concerted involvement, /hmwáŋ/. This can be glossed for convenience as 'family', but in order to understand its behavior as an a-Clf, it is better translated as 'family co-members, comprising at least the nucleus of husband and wife': thus, /i hmwáŋ/ ("two *hmwáŋ*'s") means 'married couple; husband and wife (together)'.

This then brings us to the way in which one says 'father, mother, and child (together)', viz. /puə hmwáŋ/ ("three *hmwáŋ*'s"), though one can also say, periphrastically, /i hmwáŋ tshǎw tâw tɔn/ (literally "two *hmwáŋ*'s and [one] Clf son").

1.1.2. Verb-Autoclassifiers (V-a-Clf's): homophonous cog-nate objects. In some cases, evidence suggests that a V may be its own Clf. Thus, the V 'to kick' is /dí?/, and as in Fig. 3. above, in order to say 'He kicks the tree two times/He gives the tree two kicks', one may say /nîn dí? dyǎŋ i dzùn/ ("He kicks tree two times"); using the Clf /dzùn/ 'time(s) /occasion(s)', one may, on the other hand, also say /nîn dí? dyǎŋ i tsǎw-dí?/ ("He kicks tree two foot-kicks") in order to convey the same meaning. In these two sentences, the word /dzùn/ in the first, and /tsǎw-dí?/ in the second, have the function of enabling the V /dí?/ to be numerically specified, and hence are V-Clf's (see Sec. 1.2. below). Now in the second sentence, the syllable /dí?/ of the V-Clf is an exact echo of the V, but it is used not alone, but in composition with the morpheme /tsǎw/. If it did occur alone, i.e., in the sentence of the same meaning */nîn dí? dyǎŋ i dí?/, it would be an example of a V-a-Clf. The only cases found by the investigator in which the Clf occurs alone and is a replica of V are cases where it is functioning as a measure Clf (see Sec. 1.5. below).

1.2. Verb-Classifiers (V-Clf's). A diagram of the syntactic structure in which V-Clf's occur is given in Fig. 3. above. What is happening is that they are occurring in NP's dominated by adverbial phrases (AdvP), i.e., in NP's that are functioning adverbially. They are in fact what are traditionally known as *cognate objects* , and Chao (1968:312ff) uses this latter term with reference to Chinese. As Chao notes, cognate objects may occur as structures indicating the number of instances of an action, its duration, extent, direction or destination (see also Court 1985: Chap. IV). But we can go beyond cognate objects and argue that the Clf's in Fig. 2. above, which indicate the number of participating *subjects* , might also be viewed as V-Clf's (the possible presence of a N_h is a problem for that view, and we shall not dwell on it here). A few V-Clf's that are

not a-Clf's are: /pə́w/, for strokes of an ax; /pə̀w/, for steps; (cf. /bìə/ below); /puŋ/ for directions, sides; /bìə/ for steps or strides, stitches; /dzùn/ for times, occurrences, instances; and /ɲùŋ/ for manners, ways, modes. The class of V-Clf's, as well as the other classes of Clf's that we are setting up show some overlap.

1.3. Specific Clf's. These are the "classifiers" par excellence, that have, in principle, to be memorized separately for each N in the language. However, to describe them thus is an overstatement for at least two reasons: (a) N's referring to non-discrete entities take *measure* Clf's that are, in many cases, determined not by the identity of the N, but by real-world circumstances, i.e., the object or action used to do the measuring, and (b) specific Clf's tend to refer not so much to particular N's as such as to classes of real-world entities, such as human beings, animals, long thin objects, and so on. Having said that, however, we must, on the other hand, note (a) that some specific Clf's are used for very restricted classes of things, such as /sím/ used only for lengths of thatched mats (Lombard 1968:341; other kinds of mats have the Clf /khwáy/), (b) with other Clf's it is hard to see what the things classified have in common: e.g., /phə̌w/, for boats and scissors (Lombard 1968:341), and (c) there is a Clf /nɔm/, of very broad use (see Sec. 1.4.) that seems to be the unmarked Clf for things in general. Some examples of specific Clf's are /tâw/ for human beings, higher animals, ghosts and spirits (in some cases), and doors; /tîw/ for long narrow objects, animate or inanimate, literal or metaphorical, including snakes, dragons, rainbows, rivers, roads, stories, songs, lives, and minds; /pě̌ŋ/ for pencils, guns, and other long, thin objects (my informants said that the objects classified were not as long as those classified by /tîw/, and it should be noted that /pě̌ŋ/ also exists as an ordinary N meaning 'handle'); /chɔ́ŋ/ for rooms, narrow fields, small spaces; /dzoŋ/ for fields to be cultivated; /pha:n/ for mosquito nets; /tìw/ for reasons, tasks, Elements (of the Four Elements); /pyáw/ for families, households (also exists as an ordinary N meaning 'house'): /tsun/ for knives, clumps, clusters. Although some of the specific Clf's also exist as ordinary N's, they are not N-a-Clf's, for they are not used to classify those N's: thus the specific Clf for the ordinary N /pyáw/ 'house' is not /pyáw/ but the broad-purpose specific Clf /nɔm/ (see following section).

1.4. The broad-purpose Clf /nɔm/. Like many languages with systems of N-classification, Mien has one specific Clf of very general scope, viz. /nɔm/. The functionally corresponding Clf in Mandarin is gè [5] in Thai /ʔan/, and in Lahu /mà/. In some languages the broad-purpose Clf is fairly freely substitutable for more specific Clf's, but this seems to be much less the case in Mien, and it certainly differs from Mandarin gè and Lahu /mà/ in not being applicable with human beings. Nor is it used with higher animals. But it is used with lower animals, and a whole array of material and immaterial entities: for instance, while it is true that fishes require /tâw/, /nɔm/ is used with birds, (including chickens) tortoises, crabs, shrimps, ants, flies, mosquitoes, and insects in general, fruits and vegetables (referring to individual pieces of fruit and individual vegetables), medicine (referring to individual pills), ball- and grain-shaped things (perhaps its original sphere of usage), cups, bottles, boxes, bags,

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[5] Transcription of Mandarin forms is in the pinyin system.

sacks, animal horns, teeth, hammers, vehicles, houses, shops, beaches, places, countries, forests, corners, barriers and checkpoints, written characters, names, timepieces, watches of the night, months, seasons (which can also be auto-classified), souls and certain kinds of ghosts (others take /tâw/), customs and traditions, sorrows (there may be some overlap with another Clf, /thɔ̌ŋ/, here), etc.

1.5. Measure Clf's. These are used to quantify N_h's referring to entities that are, or can be viewed, as non-discrete, such as liquids, particulate substances, areas of land, stretches of road, and so forth, i.e., things that are typically designated by mass nouns in English. Except for "abstract" measures, introduced from other languages, such as the Chinese ounce, the liter, the meter, and so forth, they are mostly "concrete," i.e., derived by homonymy from either the N for the *thing* which measures, or the V for the *action* which measures. For instance, /pîən/ is an ordinary N meaning 'basin.' Now basins are discrete entities, and as (empty) items of equipment they can be counted: /pîən/ in this case is a N_h and takes as its specific Clf /nɔm/. But when rice is being measured by the basinful, /pîən/ (or its homonymous derivative) is used as a measure Clf: thus /i pîən byâw/ 'two basin(ful)s of rice.' It is probable that the name of any container can also serve as a measure Clf (as, for instance, in Thai).

On the other hand we have V's of action from which measure Clf's are homonymously derived. Thus there is a V /phwáŋ/ 'to scoop up in two hands' from which is derived the measure Clf meaning 'a double handful,' as in /i phwáŋ byâw/ 'two double handfuls of rice.' [6] Some measure Clf's that are not "concrete" in the sense just defined are provided by nature itself rather than human intervention, such as /hnɔy/ 'day,' and /hŋǎ:ŋ/ 'year'.

1.6. Group Clf's. Clf's referring to pluralities, aggregates or collectivities of individual entities are what is meant by the term group Clf's. Some examples are /pùə?/ for groups of people, /duy/ for piles of things, /kwân/ for herds, crowds, groups, /tɔ́/ for bunches or clusters. It seems to be the definitive characteristic for group Clf's that with them the Num /yìət/ 'one' takes on the meaning of 'all' or 'the whole': thus /yìət púə? mîən/ 'the whole group of people.' [7]

1.7. Round-number Clf's. These are the Clf's that refer to powers of ten: viz. /tsìəp/ 'ten,' /pɛ́?/ 'hundred,' /tshin/ 'thousand,' /wà:n/ 'ten thousand,' /sǐn/ 'hundred thousand,' /lâ:n/ 'million.' Of these /tsìəp/ and /pɛ́?/ are distinguished by taking a special set of Chinese-derived Nums rather than the native stock.

1.8. Quasi-Clf's. There are certain words which fail to meet the criterion for being Clf's, yet resemble them in certain respects: for instance they may be usable only with the Num /yìət/ 'one,' or they may be reduplicable in the same way as Clf's (see next Sec.), but not be usable with Num's. They require further investigation.

2. Reduplication of Clf's. The only use of Clf reduplication that the investigator has discovered is to convey the meaning of 'every.' The first

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[6] Cf. Thai /kɔ̀:p/ '(id.).'

[7] Actually, other Clf's may take /yìət/ in this sense, provided that their referent may be viewed as divisible: e.g., /yìət hnɔy/ 'all day.'

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constituent of the reduplicative construction undergoes tone sandhi: e.g., /mə̂y hnɔy-hnɔy tâːy náy/ 'You come here every day' (lit. "You day-day come here"). Other examples are /tâɰ-tâɰ/ 'everybody,' /nɔm-nɔm/ 'everything.' The reduplicated Clf may be followed by its N_h: e.g., /tâɰ-tâɰ mìən/ 'everybody.'
3. Conclusion. This completes our survey of some aspects of Clf's in Iu Mien. Further details about the grammatical structures in which they occur are found in Mao and Zhou 1962 (translated in Purnell 1972: 239-255), and in greater amplitude and technical detail in Court 1985: Sec. 3.11 and passim. A substantial list of Clf's is found in Lombard 1968: 341-343. This list is somewhat expanded, and categorized according to the scheme of the present paper in Court 1985: Secs. 3.4.2.-3.4.218.

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