

Title: Numerals and reckoning in Hmong-Mien
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Abstract

Numerals and reckoning in Hmong-Mien

Work on the Leipzig Loan Typology project has unearthed interesting patterns of native and loan elements by semantic field in Hmong-Mien. One of the most striking semantic fields in this regard is the Quantity and Number field. It has been well-known for a long time that at the oldest stratum, most of the HM lower numerals—with the exception of 2 and 3—have been borrowed from some Tibeto-Burman source. It was therefore not surprising to find that the higher numerals and the ordinals have also been borrowed. In addition to the numerals, however, several other basic quantity words, including ‘count’, ‘more’, ‘some’, ‘half’, and ‘only’ also turn out to be borrowings in White Hmong, at least, the language for which etymological work has been finished. Under the assumption that many of these borrowings represent introduction of novel elements rather than replacements of pre-existing words in the native lexicon, I attempt to interpret the native core in light of work on the development of number systems in language history as a function of human cognitive abilities (Hurford 1987, Wynn 1995, Rutkowski 2003).

References

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