

# The degree of definiteness in noun phrase in Iu Mien<sup>1</sup>

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For Asian learners of English it is very difficult to get a good grasp of the articles *a* and *the*. Even good students, including the Iu Mien, who have acquired good amount of vocabulary, seldom use the indefinite and definite articles in writing their works in English because they are absent from their mother tongues. This does not mean, however, that their mother tongues, e.g. Northern Thai, Aka, Karen, Hmong, Iu Mien, Lisu, Lahu, Bisu<sup>2</sup>, etc. do not have the concept of definiteness/indefiniteness of the noun phrases. That is, the absence of grammatical coding of definiteness can be compensated by other means when the concept of identifiability is brought into discussion as Lambrecht states: “The grammatical category of definiteness is a formal feature associated with nominal expressions which signals whether or not the referent of a phrase is assumed by the speaker to be identifiable to the addressee” (Lambrecht 1994:79).

This paper discusses general structure of noun phrase in relation to their definiteness and indefiniteness in Iu Mien. Despite the absence of articles, whether it be definite or indefinite, it is possible to express various degrees of definiteness/indefiniteness distinction, e.g. indefiniteness, numerical specification, definiteness, and identifiability. Devices employed to indicate them include classifiers (e.g. *laanh* HUMAN, *dauh* HUMAN/ANIMAL), numerals (e.g. *yietc* ‘one’), demonstratives (e.g. *wuov* ‘that’), and identification particle (*dongh* ‘same’).

## 1. The Noun Phrase structure in Iu Mien

Without getting into details of the structure of compound noun, two basic groups of NP structures are presented here: nouns combined with determiners and adjectives.

The determiners precede a noun in the following way:

$$\left[ \begin{array}{l} \pm \text{DEM} \pm \text{CLF} \\ \pm \text{NUM} + \text{CLF} \\ \text{Pers Pro/N} + \text{POSS} \\ \text{Clause} + \text{POSS/REL} \end{array} \right] + \text{N} \pm \text{DEM} \pm \text{CLF}$$

The first group is the demonstratives, which precede the nominal head. (1) has the proximal demonstrative *naaiv* ‘this’ before the head noun: <DEM + N>.

- (1) *naaiv ga'naaiv*  
this thing  
‘this thing’

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<sup>2</sup> Roughly 70 % of my classroom was composed of the Northern Thai and 30 % of other ethnic groups mentioned above when I was teaching a course of research methodology in the linguistics section of the Western Language Program, the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, in the summer course of 2013. They deserve my sincere thanks for the opportunity of learning together and leading me to realise the issue of the definiteness/indefiniteness. Due appreciation goes to the Vice President Dr Sornchai Munghthaisong and my colleague Dr Natthaphon in Chiang Rai Rajabhat University, Thailand.

In the same structure, the distal demonstrative *wuov* ‘that’ can also be used.

The demonstratives can be followed by a numerical classifier as in (2); <DEM + CLF + N>:

- (2) *wuov diuh nzung*  
that CLF song  
‘that song’

The numeral comes in the same place as the demonstrative of the structure just mentioned above as in (3); <NUM + CLF + N>:

- (3) *yietc norm biauv*  
one CLF house  
‘one house’

The modifier construction consisting of  $N^1$  + possessive *nyei* also precedes the head noun, i.e.  $N^2$  as (4); < $N^1$  + *nyei* +  $N^2$ >:

- (4) *yie nyei dae*  
1SG POSS father  
‘my father’

The possessive *nyei* can also be used as a relative marker as in (5); <relative clause + *nyei* + N>:

- (5) *meih bun daaih **nyei** biouv*  
2SG give come POSS/REL fruit  
‘the fruits that you gave me’

The second group is the noun modified by adjectives. There are two types of adjectives: the one which follow the head noun (Type I), and the other which precedes the noun (Type II). Both types of adjectives can be used in a predicate position. A large number of adjective follow the head noun as in (6); <N + adj (Type I)>:

- (6) *nzungc ndaauv*  
knife long  
‘sword’ (lit. long knife)

The Type II is a small number of adjective that precedes the noun. When they are combined, the adjective undergoes tone sandhi, as in (7); <adj (Type II) + N>:

- (7) *siang- biauv*  
new house  
‘a new house’

The original mid-level tone of *siang* ‘new’ changes to the mid-falling tone when it is combined to the noun *biauv* ‘house’ (The tone sandhi is indicated by the hyphen in the Unified Mien orthography). Type II adjectives include *loz* ‘old’, *domh* ‘big’, *fiuv* ‘small’, *zien* ‘true’ etc. Though there are adjectives which have the same meaning with these (i.e. ‘new’, ‘old’, ‘big’, and ‘small’), the following belong to Type II: *gox* ‘old’ (in age), *hlo* ‘big’, *faix* ‘small’. They never precede the head

noun; e.g. \**hlo-biauv* is not possible but it has to be *biauv-hlo* ‘big house’ (the hyphen between the two words indicates the change of the high rising-falling tone <-v> to the mid-falling tone <-h>). However, in the case that *siang* ‘new’ and *loz* ‘old’ follow the noun, this is the predicate use. In this case the sentence has to have the stative aspectual particle *neyi* as in (8), and *biauv siang* never has tone sandhi showing that it is not a noun phrase.

- (8) *biauv siang neyi*  
 house new ASP.STATIVE  
 ‘The house is new.’

## 2. The concepts of definiteness

The concept of definiteness includes many facets such as specificity, referentiality, indentifiability, familiarity, uniqueness, etc. Among them only selected features for Iu Mien as below will be discussed:

**Specificity**<sup>3</sup>: that which is well defined and elaborated as opposed to a referent broadly mentioned.

**Deixis**: it is expressed by the demonstrative *wuov* ‘that’, the act of “pointing out”.

**Identifiability**: in the case of languages that have definite article, Lyons states, “[t]he idea [of indentifiability] is that the use of definite article directs the hearer to the referent of the noun phrase by signalling that he is in a position to identify it” (Lyons 1999:4-5).

## 3. From simple N(P)s to complex NPs: the degree of definiteness

### 3.1 Indefinite NPs

A series of the following examples show a wide range of definiteness/indefiniteness differences. Starting from the indefinite end, (9) is highly indefinite and unclear. The native speakers would not understand by hearing this whether the speaker is talking about one person or more. The whole sentence sounds that it does not say anything.

- (9) *Yie buac mienh* (highly indefinite)  
 1SG see person  
 ‘I see people.’

<sup>3</sup> The term “specificity” in this paper is used in its most ordinary sense, i.e., that which is clearly defined, described or elaborated. It should be distinguished from “specifier” in X-bar syntax, which Lyons (1999:41-43) discusses to some extent.

Another confusion that has to be avoided is the concept of “specification”, one of the three major functions of copular clauses, of which other two are “predication” and “equation”, discussed by Mikkelsen (2005). An example he uses to describe the specificational copula clause is the complement *Susan* in *The winner is Susan*. See the comparison of the three types (based on Mikkelsen (2005:50, 58, 130)):

Clause type	Example	Subject	Copular	Complement
Predicational	<i>Susan is a doctor.</i>	definite description	BE	AP
Specificational	<i>The winner is Susan.</i> <i>That is Susan.</i>	definite description	BE	name
Equative	<i>She is Susan.</i> <i>That woman is Susan.</i>	(gendered) pronoun	BE	name

It should be noted that the indefinite noun takes the object position despite the well-known tendency that the accusative case or the direct object likely to have a definite marking in many languages, discussed in Lyons (1999: 49 and chapter 5).

Another situation where a purely indefinite noun phrase occurs is the presentational construction typically at the beginning of a narrative story (10).

- (10) *Gongv taux loz-hnoi, maaih dauh m'sieqv dorn nor,*  
 talk abou/ CVB old.days have CLF woman TOP  
 'Talking about old days, there was a woman.'

At the start of a narrative, there is no preceding referent, hence the first mention participant is indefinite.

In (11) the numeral classifier for person *dauh* (can also be used for animals) is added, which makes the sentence understandable regarding the number of person that the speaker saw. Even though a number is not stated, *dauh* gives a message that the speaker is talking about one person only. The situation it depicts is that only the speaker recognises the referent. The hearer will not be able to identify who the speaker is talking about. Its meaning is too broad to get any message from it even though the sentence itself is grammatical.

- (11) *Yie buatc dauh mienh* (indefinite)  
 1SG see CLF person  
 'I saw a person.' (Tense is contextually determined.)

Comparing (11) and (12), the insertion of the numeral explicitly gives specific information that the number of person the speaker saw is only one. The situation described by (10) and (11) is the same but (12) is emphatic on the number. The native language consultant's explanation is that (12) is *gauh hnyiev* 'heavier' than (11). Yet the referent still is not definite at all to the hearer.

- (12) *Yie buatc yietc dauh mienh* (numerically specific but indefinite)  
 1SG see one CLF person  
 'I saw one person.'

The use of numeral 'one' can be compared with *yāt* 'one' in Cantonese, which, according to Matthews and Yip, "may be used like an indefinite article, referring to an indefinite object or person" (1994:89): (13) is from Matthews and Yip (1994:89).

- (13) *A-Yīng yiu wán (yāt) go leuhtsī.*  
 Ah-Ying need find (one) CLF lawyer  
 'Ying has to find a lawyer.'

Matthews and Yip explain that *yāt* is optional, which yields an equivalent structure in Iu Mien exemplified in (11).

### 3.2 Definite NPs

The numeral *yietc* 'one' of (12) is replaced with the demonstrative *wuov* 'that' in (14). The referent is definite as "pointed out" (*nuqv jienv* 'in the state of being referred to') by the demonstrative *wuov* 'that'. There can be two possible situations where this sentence is spoken: the speaker is reporting the referent to the hearer without "that person's" presence or with the presence where both

the interlocutors are looking at the referent, perhaps the speaker pointing to him/her by his finger or chin. Whether or not the hearer personally knows the referent is not in focus. Therefore, the referent of this sentence is definite but not familiar to the hearer.

- (14) *Yie buac wuov dauh mienh* (definite)  
 1SG see DEM CLF person  
 ‘I saw the/that person.’

### 3.3 Identifiable NPs

The word *dongh* used in (15) has a range of meaning “to be similar, alike, match, identical to, the same as” (Purnell 2012:142). My consultant’s explanation of the NP is *meih yaac buac jiex, yie yaac buac jiex, dongh wuov dauh* ‘the same person whom you and I have seen before’ (Guex-Fongc). Used as a determiner of the NP *wuov laanh/dauh mienh* ‘that person’, it can be termed as identification particle. Thus, the referent is definite and identifiable.

- (15) *Yie buac dongh wuov laanh/dauh mienh* (identifiable + definite )  
 1SG see IDTF DEM CLF person  
 ‘I saw the/that very/same person.’ (IDTF = identification)

The classifier *laanh* is for human only whereas *dauh* can be used for both human and animals.

### 3.4 Possessive particle *neyi* with its attributive function

To form complex noun phrases, the possessive particle *neyi* is employed as in (16):

- (16) *Yie buac meih neyi dorn*  
 1SG see 2SG POSS son  
 ‘I saw your son.’

The referent in (16) is obvious to both the speaker and the hearer as the determining phrase *meih neyi* ‘your’ indicates. It is definite and familiar to both.

The possessive can be used to describe the head noun. The next is an example of descriptive use of *neyi* rather than the possessive in a conversation between (17a) and (17b):

- (17a) *Meih nyanc haaix nyugc lai?*  
 2SG eat what kind food (lit. ‘vegetable’ as opposed to rice)  
 ‘What kind of food do you eat?’

- (17b) (Yie) *nyanc jai neyi orv, nyanc dungz neyi orv.*  
 1 SG eat chicken POSS meat eat pig POSS meat  
 ‘I eat chicken and pork.’

Responding to the question “what kind?” (17a), the other (17b) described the meat (*orv*) she eats with the modifiers *jai neyi* ‘of chicken’ and *dungz neyi* ‘of pig’.

This descriptive, attributive, characterisation function of *neyi* can also be seen in its recursive use quoted by Court in (18) (1986:193):

- (18) *Jorn neyi maa neyi a'nziaauc doic neyi biauv*  
 John POSS mother POSS friend POSS house  
 'John's mother's friend's house'

Each time *neyi* is uttered, the description of characteristics of the head noun becomes particular: 'John' > 'mother' > 'friend' > 'house' (i.e. the item on the left of > is broader in meaning, on the right narrower). (18) shows that the basic function of *neyi*, apart from the physical possession or belongingness, is description, characterisation, and attributive of the head noun. The recursive use of *neyi* increases the elaborating force. However, with regard to the definiteness and identifiability, (18) does not show any of these even though the description of the head noun is detailed.

### 3.5 Relative clause + *neyi* with its specificatory function

In fact *neyi* is highly multifunctional, being a marker for the possessive, relative clause (RC), aspect, and adverbial phrase. (19) shows a complex noun phrase (in the square brackets) using *neyi* as the relativise marker; and it is more complex than the simple noun phrase of (16). Court refers to this construction "the specificatory 'RC + *neyi*' structure" (Court 1986:193).

- (19) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux neyi mienh]* (definite)  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB REL person  
 'I saw the person whom you talked about.'

The head noun *mienh* 'person' is characterised by the relative clause *meih gorngv taux* 'you talk(ed) about'. Because of the characterisation or specificity, the NP is definite.

Another strategy for expressing definiteness is the use of demonstrative *wuov* 'that' as in (20), which should be considered in comparison with (19). The *neyi mienh* 'POSS + person' in (19) is replaced by *wuov laanh/dauh mienh* 'that + CLF + person' in (20):

- (20) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux wuov laanh/dauh mienh]* (definite +  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB DEM CLF person identifiable)  
 'I saw that person whom you talked about.'

Instead of describing the noun 'person' by *neyi*, the use of *wuov laanh/dauh* 'that + CLF' directs the hearer's attention to the referent. In the native speaker's term, what the word *wuov* does is to *nuqv* 'to point a finger at'. Purnell define the meaning of *nuqv* as "to point at, point out, indicate, focus one's attention on" (2013:504). As *wuov* 'that' in its basic meaning is demonstrative, the NP in (20) is definite. Furthermore, the RC *meih gorngv taux* 'you talk(ed) about' indicates that the speaker's utterance is based on the fact that the hearer had previously known the person or the referent; that is, identifiable. Therefore the NP is not specificatory in a sense of being well described or elaborated as the *neyi* without RC does, but definite in a sense that the hearer had already talked about the referent. Thus the NP in (20) is definite and identifiable.

Compare (20) with (21), where *mienh* 'person' is omitted:

- (21) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux wuov laanh Ø]*  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB DEM CLF (person)  
 'I saw that person whom you talked about.'

The head noun *mienh* 'person' of the NP is omissible because the classifier *laanh*, which is used for human only, indicates that the NP's referent is a person. However, the omission of *mienh* 'person' together with the replacement of the classifier use of the classifier *laanh* < HUMAN > with *dauh*

<HUMAN/ANIMAL> would lead to ambiguity: *wuov dauh* ‘that one’ can mean either a person or an animal (22).

- (22) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux wuov dauh] Ø* (ambiguous)  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB DEM CLF (?person/?animal)  
 ‘I saw the one you talked about.’

Such an omission of the head noun is only possible when the speech event is completely shared by the speaker and the hearer with clear understanding of the referent. For example, both interlocutors are together looking at the person they were talking about actually walk toward them, is a situation which can prevent misinterpreting that *dauh* references to an animal. Thus definiteness and identifiability are the basis of the head noun omission.

In relation to the above quoted example (20) (i.e. <*wuov laanh* + N> ‘that + CLF + N’), see that (23) uses the combination of <*dongh* + RC + *wuov laanh* + N> ‘the same + RC + that + CLF + N’:

- (23) *Yie buatc [dongh meih gorngv taux wuov laanh/dauh mienh]*  
 1SG see IDTF 2SG speak about/CVB DEM CLF person  
 ‘I saw that very/same person whom you talked about.’ (definite  
+ identifiable)

My main consultant explains that ‘*dongh*’ *wuov joux waac gunv nzengc* ‘the word *dongh* controls/dominates/covers/rules (*gunv*) everything [that follows]’ (Guex-Fongc); that is, *dongh* rules the relative clause *meih gorngv taux* ‘you talk(ed) about’ and connects it to the NP *wuov laanh mienh* ‘that + CLF + person’. By the concurrence of the demonstrative or *nuqv nyei waac* ‘the word which is pointing at’ (i.e. *wuov* ‘that’) with *dongh* ‘the same’, the NP of the sentence is definite, identifiable, and unambiguous.

Consider (24), where the concurrence of *nyei* and *wuov* is not permissible in this construction:

- (24) \**Yie buatc [dongh meih gorngv taux nyei wuov laanh/dauh mienh]*  
 1SG see IDTF 2SG speak about/CVB POSS DEM CLF person  
 (lit.) ‘I saw the-same-person-whom-you-talked-about’s that person’

This shows that the identificatory RC *dongh meih gorngv taux* ‘the (same) one you talk(ed) about’ cannot take the possessive when it is followed by the definite NP *wuov laanh/dauh mienh* ‘that person’. Rather, the RC *dongh meih gorngv taux*, which is a nominal as a whole, should be interpreted that it is juxtaposed to another nominal *wuov laanh/dauh mienh*. As juxtaposition of two constructions there is no need of the insertion of the possessive *nyei* in between. Otherwise, *nyei* works as a mark of inclusion, i.e. [*dongh meih gorngv taux*]  $\supset$  [*wuov laanh/dauh mienh*], which is wrong.

In other words, the difference between (19) and (23) indicated in (24) can be explained as the mutual exclusiveness between the specificatory construction (expressed by <RC + *nyei* + N> in (19)) and the identification (expressed by < [*dongh* + RC] + [*wuov* + CLF + N] > in (23)). In the specificatory construction the speaker creates a referent in the hearer’s mind or mental space. By contrast, in the identification construction (using *dongh* ... *wuov*), which is a corporative work between the interlocutors, the speaker points at the referent which already exists in the hearer’s mind by the constructing *dongh*-phrase, then further refers to it by *wuov* ‘that’. The former belongs to a domain of describing/specifying noun phrases; the latter a domain of discourse information structure or pragmatics.

Court (1986:193-4) only briefly mentions the omission of *nyei* and of the head noun (each in less than one page). He says:

[T]he possessive <nyei> is not omissible [from the specificatory use of it in (19) and (20)], whereas the <nyei> after RC's may in certain cases be either replaced by <uav [sic, i.e. *wuov*] nyugc > (lit. "that kind") or omitted altogether (ibid:194).

His comments presupposes the following three possibilities: the first, (25) shows the omission of all *nyeis* from (18); the second, the use of *wuov nyungc* 'that kind [as CLF]', *wuov laanh* 'that + CLF (person)' by re-quoting (21); the third, the total omission of *nyie* + N, (which is actually impossible as mysterious as his comment is (26)).

(25) \**Jorn maa a'nziaauc doic biau*  
 John mother friend house  
 (lit.) 'John mother friend house'

(21) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux wuov laanh] ∅*  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB DEM CLF (person)  
 'I saw that person whom you talked about.'

(26) \**Yie buatc meih gorngv taux*  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB  
 'I saw you were talking about....' (Incomplete and the meaning changed from (19))

But the point is that the important contrast between (19) and (23) is not explained by Court: he just says that *wuov nyungc* (in our case *wuov laanh* 'that + CLF') and <*nyei* + N> after RC are interchangeable. However it should be pointed out that they differ in that the NP in (19) is definite by virtue of the specificatory RC, whereas the NP in (23) is deictic by means of the demonstrative *wuov* 'that', hence identifiable. (The previous examples are repeated for the sake of comparison):

(19) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux nyei mienh]*  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB REL person  
 'I saw the person whom you talked about.'

(23) *Yie buatc [meih gorngv taux wuov laanh/dauh mienh]*  
 1SG see 2SG speak about/CVB DEM CLF person  
 'I saw that person whom you talked about.'

As was analysed above, however, the property of the NP in (19) is specificity (as Court's rightful term "specificatory RC" indicates), describing the head noun *mienh* 'person' by the preceding RC, whereas the property of (23) is definiteness. Because the definiteness is entailed in identifiability, i.e. mutually well understood in (23), the head noun is liable to be omitted resulted in (21). On the other hand, because it is the specificity that the intention of the speaker in (19) to expressed by *nyei*, it is not possible to omit it nor to discard the head noun.

There is one more example which shows that a specifically described head noun is not necessarily identifiable. See Court's example in (27) (1986:193):

(27) (?) *zouv nyanc nyei norqc*  
 boil eat POSS bird  
 'a bird that is to be eaten by boiling.'  
 (Court translates 'a bird that is boiled before it is eaten.')



While it is true that the head noun *norqc* ‘bird’ is explained by the specificatory RC + *neyi* construction as to what kind of bird, this noun phrase immediately evokes in the native speakers mind a strange feeling “Can’t we eat a bird by other ways of cooking, like *ziqv* ‘roast’, *zin* ‘fry’ or *caauv* ‘stir-fry’? Why does he have to specify it as being eaten by boiling only?” Specific as it is, the expression’s referent is neither definite nor identifiable; rather it is as unnecessarily specific as unrealistic that it does not fit common knowledge of the Iu Mien. Being specifically described is one thing but being identifiable is another.

#### 4. **Specificity, demonstration, definiteness, identifiability, and demarcation**

##### 4.1 *Four kinds of constructions*

To summarise the discussion so far, four semantic and pragmatic concepts regarding the definiteness of noun phrases can be correlated with the following constructions in Table 1:

**Table 1: Breaking down of “definiteness” into four constructions**

Constructions	Functions and semantic values	Category
<N <sup>1</sup> + <i>neyi</i> + N <sup>2</sup> >	Possessive, modifying, and describing N <sup>2</sup>	Descriptive, attributive
<RC + <i>neyi</i> + N> (Court’s specificatory “RC + <i>neyi</i> ” structure)	Defining, specifying, and elaborating N	Specificatory
<RC + <i>wuov</i> + CLF + N>	Defining and referring to N	Deictic
< <i>dongh</i> + RC + <i>wuov</i> + CLF + N>	Identifying N with the presupposed referent in the hearer’s mind	Identifiability

##### 4.2 *Dongh RC + wuov + (CLF) + N with its identification function*

Now, in order to further analyse the identifiability expressed in (23), consider the following short conversation between an Iu Mien farmer (A) and me (B) in (27a-c).

(27a)(A) *Naaiv normh nziaaux normh*  
 this sword grass leaf  
 ‘This is a leaf of sword grass.’

(27b)(B) *Naaiv se...* (Looking for something in my mind that I can make association with)  
 this COP  
 ‘This is ...’

(Then, I could remember that this was used to make brooms.)

(27c)(A) *Dongh wuov nyungc normh* (Holding the leaf in his hand)  
 IDTF (same) DEM kind leaf  
 ‘(This is) that kind of leaf.’

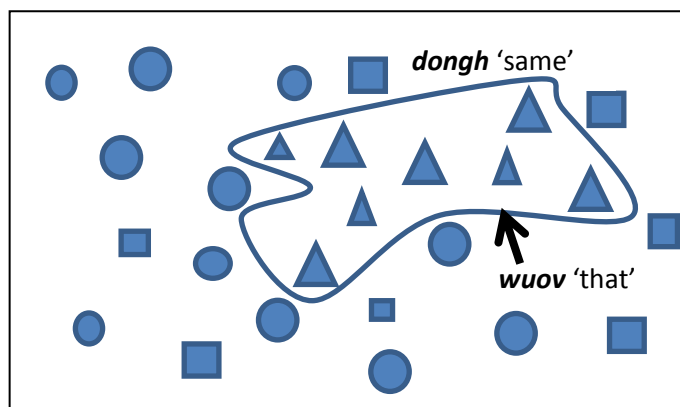
In (27a) I could not recognise *normh nziaaux* ‘sword grass’ because I did not know the word. So looking at the leaf which he was holding in his hand, I was trying to making an association with something I had in my mind while uttering (27b). Then, I asked “*Longc naaiv puotv ndau nyei fai?*” ‘Sweeping a floor with this?’ He immediately confirmed it saying ‘That kind of leaf’ in (27c). Here, the demonstrative *wuov* ‘that’ points to a broom which I pictured in my mind, not the sword grass we were looking at beside his field house. The particle *dongh* ‘same’ identifies what he was trying to explain with what I just recalled in my mind. He also added one more piece of information that the Iu Mien use the leaves to wrap rice cake.

A generalisation of the process of identification may be presented as follows (an imaginary situation depicts a female speaker and male hearer):

- I. In hearer’s mind, materials are scattered, disconnected, forgotten, or organised only in his own way.
- II. The speaker knows (or presupposes) that the hearer has in his mind the referent which she already has.
- III. The speaker reorganises, as if she entered inside the hearer’s mind, the materials in the hearer’s mental space to help him identify the referent which she is referring to.

Figure 1 schematises the identification function of the construction  $\langle \textit{dongh} + \textit{RC} + \textit{wuov} + \textit{CLF} + \textit{N} \rangle$ .

**Figure 1: Identifiability expressed by *dongh* and *wuov***



The outside rectangular frame represents the hearer’s mind. The different shapes inside it represents materials stored in the mind whether they are words, names of items or people, memories, images, information, etc. When the speaker knows that the hearer has what she means, she uses the construction  $\langle \textit{dongh} + \textit{RC} + \textit{wuov} + \textit{CLF} + \textit{N} \rangle$ . She would start with *dongh*, then demarcate characteristics of the referent symbolised by the triangles in the relative clause. The RC lead by *dongh* draws a line to make the referent discrete. She then continues to say *wuov* ‘that’ in order to demonstrate what she is trying to make the hearer identify the referent. The *dongh* + RC is in turn connected to the head noun lead by its appropriate classifier. The referent that the speaker has in her mind is now replicated in the mind of the hearer through the construction  $\langle \textit{dongh} + \textit{RC} + \textit{wuov} + \textit{CLF} + \textit{N} \rangle$ , where *dongh*, as it were urging the hearer “I know you know it”. Let us name this corporation of the speaker and the hearer in identifying the common referent demarcation.

#### **4.3 Dongh RC + *wuov* + (CLF) + N with its demarcation function**

It seems the demarcation use of the construction  $\langle \textit{dongh} + \textit{RC} + \textit{wuov} + \textit{CLF} + \textit{N} \rangle$  is illustrated in the following example too. (28) is a prayer offered by an elder, who is in his early 60s, at

the end of church service. Though it appears elaborated, this is not a written language or translation from European languages but is a spontaneous prayer.

(28)-line 1 *Yie mbuo nyei Ziouv Tin-Hungh, yie mbuo za'gengh laengz zingh Ziouv*  
 1SG PL POSS Lord God 1SG PL truly thank Lord  
 'Our Lord God, we are so grateful that (you) Lord...'

1-2 *bun yie mbuo hiuv duqv meih Ziouv Tin-Hungh,*  
 let 1SG PL know acquire 2SG Lord God  
 'let us know you Lord God...'

1-3 ***dongh*** *zeix<sup>1</sup> lungh zeix<sup>2</sup> ndau nv dauh Ziouv, zeix<sup>3</sup> cuotv maanc mienh*  
 IDTF create heaven create earth DEM CLF Lord create out all human  
 'the Lord the one who created the heaven and earth (also) created all human...'

1-4 *yiem naaiv baamh gen duqv hiuv taux meih Ziouv Tin-Hungh*  
 be.in DEM:this world acquire know about/CVB 2SG Lord God  
 'on this world, (and that you let us) get to know...'

1-5 *nyei kuv fienx*  
 POSS good news  
 'your Good News.'

Line 3 has the construction <*dongh* + RC + *wuov* + CLF + N>, except a replacement of *wuov* 'that' by *nv*, which is a contract form of *naaiv* 'this': ***dongh zeix lungh zeix ndau nv dauh Ziouv*** 'the one who created the heaven and the earth'. The particle *dongh* in this noun phrase is not of identifiability, but should be treated as demarcation because this is not trying to help the hearers (i.e. the congregation) to identify the referent which the hearers have not recalled yet. The construction is juxtaposed with the precedent, i.e. *meih Ziouv Tin-Hung* 'you Lord God' in line 2. This looks similar to the unrestricted use of relative pronoun *which* in English but it actually has closer semantic connection with the precedent than just an explanatory insertion. However, structurally the inserted/juxtaposed part is discrete by virtue of the marks <*dongh* ... N>. This N (*Ziouv* 'Lord') is a repetition of the precedent *meih Ziouv Tin-Hung* 'you Lord God' in line 2. By this repetition, the hearers easily recognise that this long noun phrase is discrete, hence the main verb of the actor (*meih Ziouv Tin-Hung* 'you Lord God' in line 2) is *zeix<sup>3</sup>* 'create', not *zeix<sup>1</sup>* nor *zeix<sup>2</sup>* in line 3.

The next example (29) exhibits even stronger demarcation force by the repetition of the head noun:

(29)	<i>Naaiv</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>Kaeqv Fei</i>	<i>nyei</i>	<b><i>biauv</i></b>	<b><i>dongh</i></b>	<i>a'hnoi</i>	<i>gorngv</i>	<i>taux</i>	<i>wuov</i>	<i>norm</i>	<b><i>biauv</i></b>
	this	COP	Kae Fei	POSS	house	IDTF	yester- day	talk	about /CVB	DEM	CLF	house

'This is Mr. Kae Fei's house,  
 which we talked about yesterday.'

This construction appears strikingly parallel to English relative clause except the repetition of the head noun. The strategy in Iu Mien, however, in this construction can be schematise: N<sup>1</sup> = <*dongh* + CR + *wuov* + CLF + N<sup>2</sup>> (where N<sup>1</sup> and N<sup>2</sup> are identical). It can be seen that NP<sup>1</sup> ('Kae Fei's house') and NP<sup>2</sup> ('the house which we talked about yesterday') are appositional or juxtaposed in the sense that

they are identical with NP<sup>2</sup> lead by the identification particle. Thus, NP<sup>2</sup> is clearly differentiated from any other houses that may occur in the hearer's mind.

Though further investigation is needed, it seems that the construction <*dongh* + RC + *wuov* + CLF + N> has one more function besides the identification of the referent: demarcation of the referent as a discrete entity.

## 5. Conclusion

Heuristically summarised as follows: *neyi* for possession and description, <RC + *neyi* + N> for specificity, *wuov* for demonstration, *dongh* for identification, and *dongh* ... *wuov* is for demarcation. Through the different kinds of combination of these elements, Iu Mien expresses various degree of definiteness.

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