

## *Tonal inflection and grammaticalization of demonstratives in Thai and beyond*

### 1. Definition:

First and foremost, three definitions repeatedly occurring in this presentation are very useful for further discussion (Richards & Schmidt 2002: 148, 152, 429):

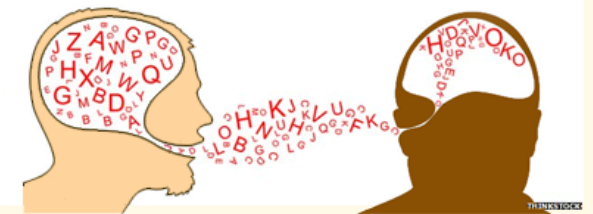
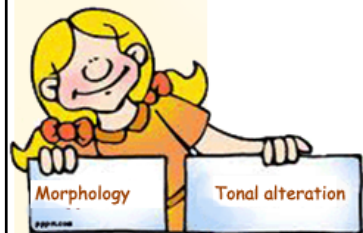
#### **Demonstrative:**

A *demonstrative* is a word (a PRONOUN or a DETERMINER) which refers to something in terms of whether it is near to or distant from the speaker.

The demonstratives in English are: *this, that, these, those*. For example:

You take *these* books (here) and I'll take *those* (there).

A demonstrative can refer to objective or subjective distance in space or time, as in “*This* idea does not seem as feasible as *that* you mentioned yesterday”.



## Determiner:

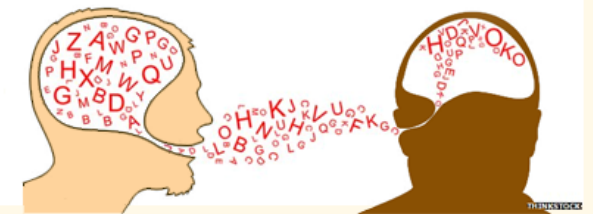
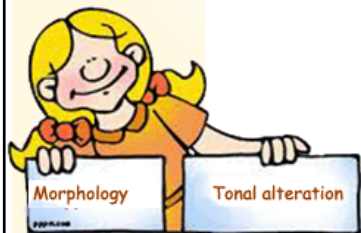
A *determiner* is a word which is used with a noun and limits the meaning of the noun in some way. In English the following words can be used as determiners:

- a. ARTICLES, e.g. *a* pencil, *the* garden;
- b. DEMONSTRATIVES, e.g. *this* box, *that* car
- c. POSSESSIVES, e.g. *her* house, *my* bicycle
- d. QUANTIFIERS, e.g. *some* milk, *many* people
- e. NUMERALS, e.g. *the first* day, *three* chairs

## Pronoun:

A *pronoun* is a word which may replace a noun or noun phrase (e.g. English *it*, *them*, *she*). For example:

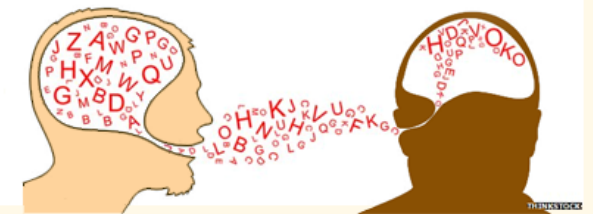
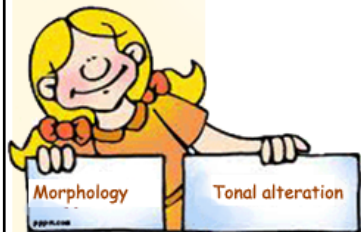
*She* does not like *them*.



As tonality of these languages in the area is mainly lexically rather than grammatically significant, investigation of the grammatical operations of tonal inflection of their demonstratives is necessary. Data from Thai and other Tai-Kadai languages are used in this paper.

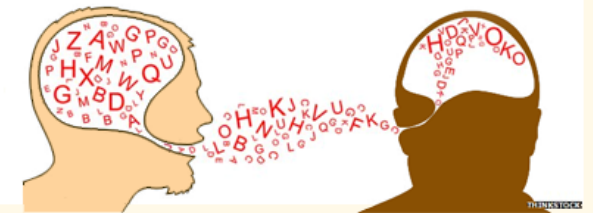
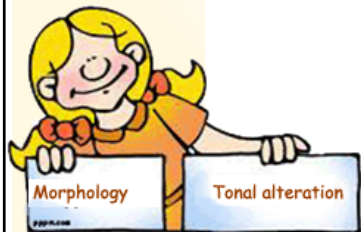
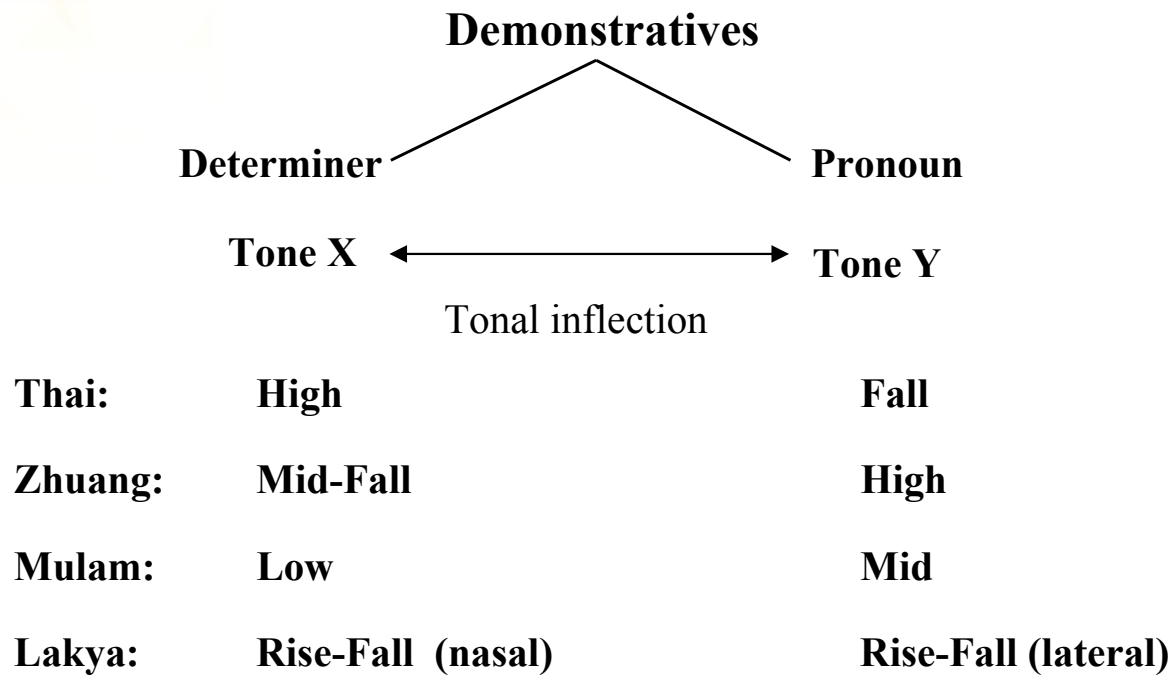
Tai-Kadai demonstrative determiners, as the term suggests, mainly behave as determiners modifying nouns or classifiers, while demonstrative pronouns function as pronouns. So, demonstrative determiners, like the Thai *níi*, are used to modify a noun phrase, while demonstrative pronouns, like the Thai *nîi*, normally occur as a deictic pronoun or an anaphor, e.g.

- |     |            |            |      |         |                  |
|-----|------------|------------|------|---------|------------------|
| (1) | van        | <b>níi</b> |      |         | “today”          |
|     | day        | this       |      |         |                  |
|     | but        |            |      |         |                  |
| (2) | <b>nîi</b> | khuuu      | dòok | kù làap | “This is a rose” |
|     | This       | be         | CL   | rose    |                  |



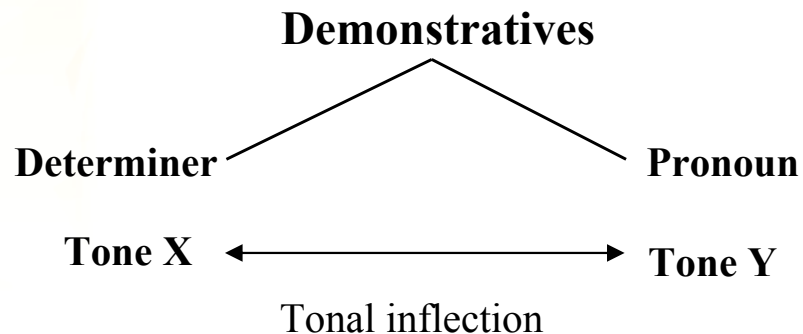
In Thai, as in other Tai-Kadai languages like Lakya, Mulam, Zhuang, etc, grammatical properties of the demonstratives (roughly equivalent to *this* and *that*) are distinguished by distinct tonal patterns, featuring two syntactically distinct groups:

“*demonstrative determiners*” vs. “*demonstrative pronouns*”:



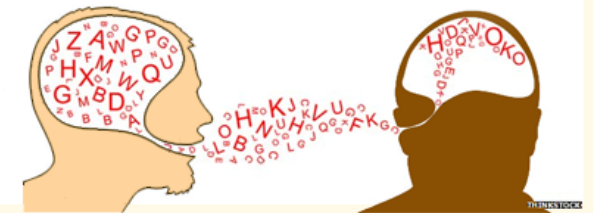
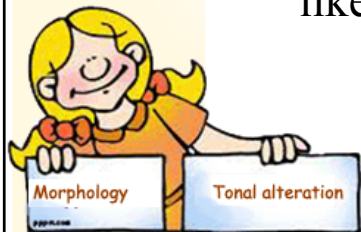
## 2. Thai:

The distinction of determiner vs. pronoun in Thai can be shown as follows:



Proximal:	níi	nîi
Medial:	nán	nân
Distal:	nóon	nôon

Many Thai linguists (Prasithratsint 2000: 134-135; Panupong 1989: 67, etc) find that the determiner níi is only used to express special meaning and occurs as object of prepositions like nay “in”, bon “on”, tâay “under”, khâan “beside”, among others.

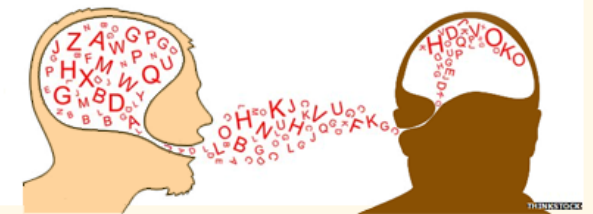
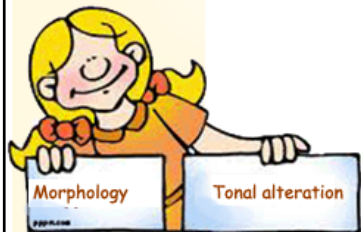


Bo (2006: 14) points out that a construction like “preposition + demonstrative adjective” can be expanded to one like “preposition + noun + demonstrative adjective”, e.g.

(3)        **nai**<sup>1</sup>        **hɔ:ŋ**<sup>3</sup>        **ni**<sup>4</sup>  
              in            room        this  
              “In this room”

(4)        **bon**<sup>1</sup>        **toʔ**<sup>4</sup>        **ni**<sup>4</sup>  
              on            table        this  
              “On this table”

which implies that **níi** is still a determiner in the deep structure.





Prasithratsint suggests that if the determiner **níi** is used as a pronoun it often carries abstract meanings like time, viewpoint, etc, like **càak níi** “from this time”, **kòon níi** “before this time”, **taam níi** “according to this”, etc. Therefore, the following is ungrammatical:

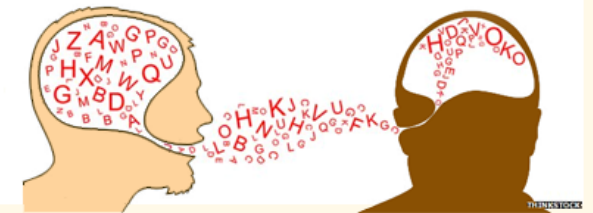
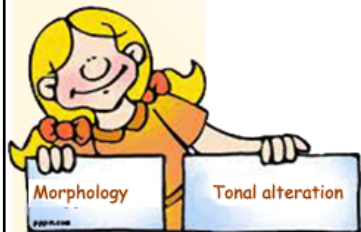
- (5) \***hây níi** “for this” (beneficiary)  
(6) \***kèε níi** “to this” (recipient)

The following phrases involving **nîi** and **níi** display the difference of concrete and abstract entities:

- (7) a. **càak nîi** “from here”  
b. **càak níi** “from this (time)”

No evidence so far has shown that **níi** has ever been used as subject or object (Prasithratsint 2000: 134). The word **nîi** often complements with **níi** where **níi** does not occur (ibid: 136). Obviously, the syntactic features of the high tone **níi** and falling tone **nîi** are distinct.

Noss (1964: 55) pointed out that **nîi**, **nân** and **nôn** are derived from **níi**, **nán** and **nón** through superfixation.





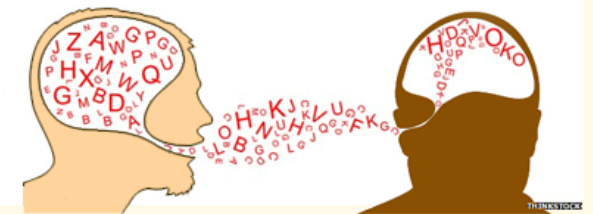
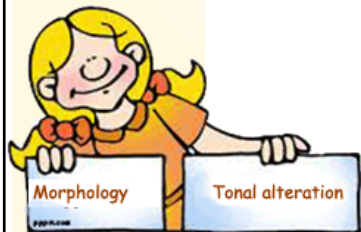


The function of *nei*<sup>4</sup> is to modify the preceding classifier. Therefore, it does not occur in the slot for an argument. Hence the following sentence is either unacceptable or uncommon:

- (10)      \**nei*<sup>4</sup>      *tu:k*      *an*<sup>1</sup>      *ha:k*<sup>8</sup>      *yau*<sup>2</sup>  
          this      be      CL      school      1PL:incl  
  
          (This is our school.)

Such a sentence is possibly found in some modern registers like speeches by government officials. The prototypical expression should be:

- (11)      *an*<sup>1</sup>      *nei*<sup>4</sup>      *tu:k*      *an*<sup>1</sup>      *ha:k*<sup>8</sup>      *yau*<sup>2</sup>  
          CL      this      be      CL      school      1PL:incl  
  
          “This is our school.”







For example:

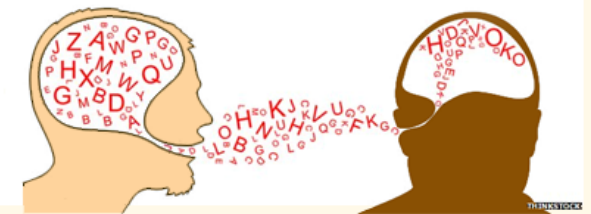
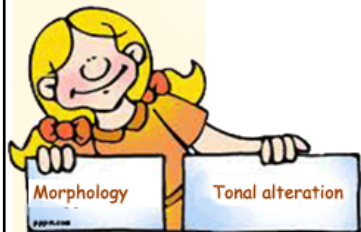
- (17)      **ni**<sup>5</sup>              **si**<sup>6</sup>              **ə**<sup>5</sup> **na:ŋ**<sup>2</sup>?
- this              be              what
- “What is this?”

But

- (18)      \***na:i**<sup>6</sup>              **si**<sup>6</sup>              **ə**<sup>5</sup> **na:ŋ**<sup>2</sup>?
- This              be              what
- (What is this?)

This is because **na:i**<sup>6</sup> is a determiner.

- (19)      **ŋa**<sup>2</sup>              **a:u**<sup>1</sup>              **ni**<sup>5</sup>,              **həi**<sup>2</sup>              **a:u**<sup>1</sup>              **hui**<sup>5</sup>
- 2SG              take              this              1SG              take              that
- “You take this one and I take that one.”

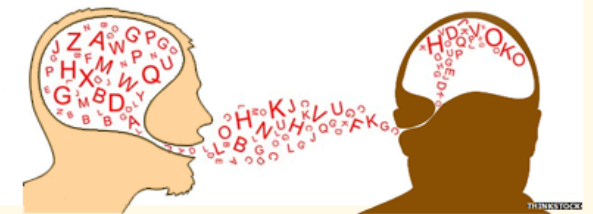
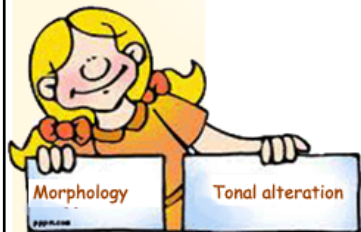


When the determiners **na:i**<sup>6</sup> and **ka**<sup>6</sup> occur in the subject position, they usually represent time, which is in accordance with the usage in other Tai-Kadai languages. For example:

- (21)      **na:i**<sup>6</sup>          **si**<sup>6</sup>          ə<sup>5</sup>**na:ŋ**<sup>2</sup>          **si**<sup>2</sup>**hau**<sup>5</sup>?
- Now          be          what          time

“What time is it?” (ibid: 51)

The determiner **na:i**<sup>6</sup> cannot be replaced by the pronoun **ni**<sup>5</sup> because it refers to time in this sentence.









The pronouns, by contrast, occur in an argument slot rather than a modifier slot:

(25)      **li**<sup>2</sup>            **tok**<sup>7</sup>            **tsi**<sup>1</sup>            **in**<sup>3</sup>            (distal)

this            be            1SG            POSS

“ This is mine. ”

(26)      **la:n**<sup>2</sup>            **tok**<sup>7</sup>            **ma**<sup>2</sup>            **in**<sup>3</sup>            (medial)

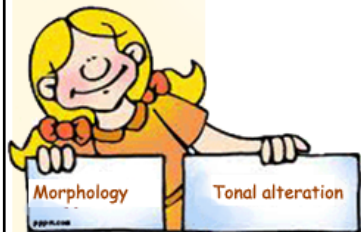
that            be            2SG            POSS

“ That one not far away is yours. ”

(27)      **lu**<sup>2</sup>            **tok**<sup>7</sup>            **tu**<sup>6</sup>            **in**<sup>3</sup>            (distal)

that            be            3PL            POSS

“ That one over there is theirs. ”

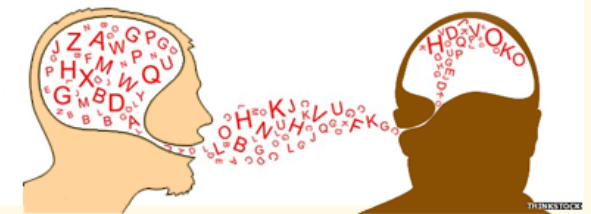
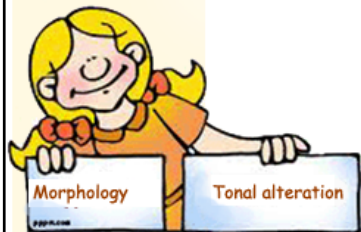


The following demonstratives occur in an argument slot and can be translated as “here”, “there”, etc:

(28)      **tsi**<sup>1</sup>              **at**<sup>7</sup>              **li**<sup>2</sup>  
1SG              at              this/here  
“I am here.”

(29)      **tu**<sup>6</sup>              **at**<sup>7</sup>              **lu**<sup>2</sup>  
3PL              at              there  
“They are over there.”

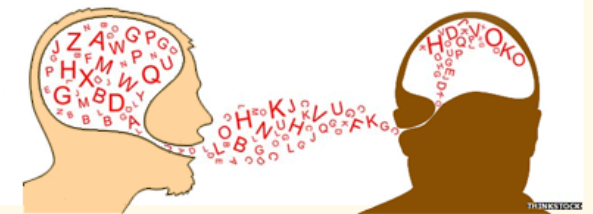
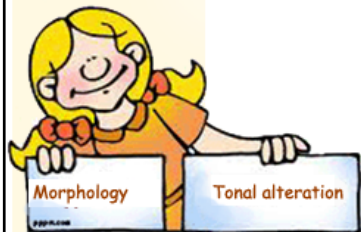
(30)      **ma**<sup>2</sup>              **at**<sup>7</sup>              **la:n**<sup>2</sup>  
2SG              at              there  
“You are there not far away.”





The study of Enfield (2007: 98-100) shows that the Lao determiners do not function as head of a phrase but as a dependent. For example:

- (31)        a. **qanø-nii4**                      **dii3**  
                 MC.INAN-DEM                      good  
                 “This (thing) is good.”
- b. \***nii4**                      **dii3**  
                 DEM                      good  
                 (This is good.)



In Bouyei, the demonstrative pronoun has not yet been developed from the demonstrative determiner. The demonstratives  $ne^{31}$  and  $te^{24}$  can be used as modifiers only. For example:

(33) a.  $pu^{31}$       $ne^{31}$       $te\eta^{24}$       $ko^{33}$       $ku^{24}$

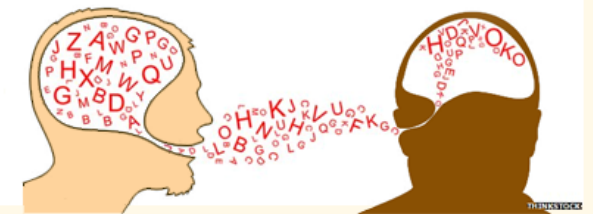
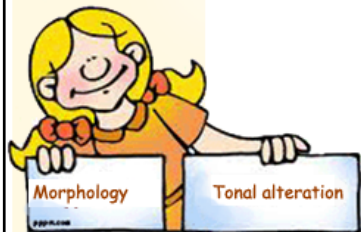
CL     this     be     elder brother     1SG

“This is my elder brother.”

b. \* $ne^{31}$       $te\eta^{24}$       $ko^{33}$       $ku^{24}$

this     be     elder brother     1SG

(This is my elder brother.)



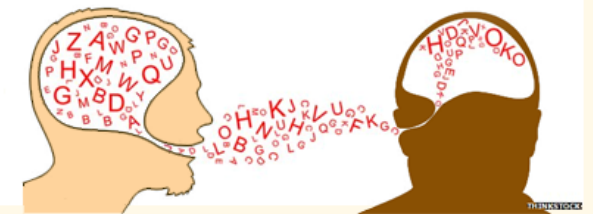
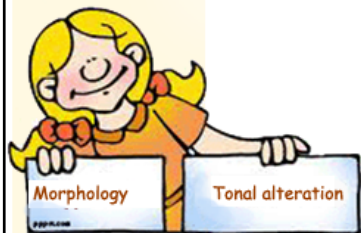






## References

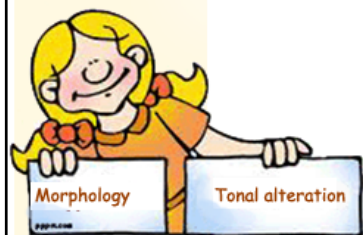
- Bo, Wenzhe. 2006. Thai Demonstratives and Investigation and Definition of Kam-Tai Demonstratives. *Minority Languages of China*. 2006. No. 6. 10-16.
- Enfield, N. J. 2007. *A Grammar of Lao*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Richards, Jack C. and Schmidt, Richard. 2002. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. London: Pearson Education Limited
- Haas, Mary R. 1955. *Thai Vocabulary*. Washington D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies.
- Iwasaki, Shoichi and Ingkaphirom, Preeya. 2005. *A Reference Grammar of Thai*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Liu, Baoyuan. 1999. *A Dictionary of Han and Yao (Lakya)*. Chengdu: Sichuan Nationality Press.
- Noss, Richard B. 1964. *Thai Reference Grammar*. Washington, D.C.: Foreign Service Institute.
- Prasithratsint, Amara. 1999. The Syntactic and Semantic Features of /nii/ 'this' and /nan/ 'that' in Sukhothai Thai. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 17, No. 2. 69-83.
- Prasithratsint, Amara. 2000. What part of speech is nii 'this' in Thai? *Oceanic Linguistics Special Publications*, 29. 129-140.
- Smyth, David. 2002. *Thai-An Essential Grammar*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wang, Jun, Zheng, Guoqiao. 1980. *A Sketch of Mulam*. Beijing: Nationality Press.
- Wei, Qingwen. 1985. *A Study on Zhuang Grammar*. Nanning: Guangxi Nationality Press.
- Yu, Cuirong, Luo, Meizhen. 1981. *A Sketch of Dai*. Beijing: Nationality Press.



Fine

Thank you!

ขอบคุณมากครับ!



---

Lu, Tianqiao (Prof.). Office: 206, School of Linguistic Sciences,  
Jiangsu Normal University, Xuzhou, China. E-mail: lutianqiao@maonan.org

