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CHAPTER 7

A note on *taA-/təA-* in Lan Hmyo

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[Abstract]

This paper is a brief sketch of a nominalizer in Lan Hmyo, transcribed as *taA-/təA-*. Lan Hmyo is a Hmongic language spoken in Guizhou, China. *taA-/təA-* constitutes a nominal with the following word of various word classes: numerals, classifiers, nouns, and verbs. The author examines the behavior and function of the nominalizer *taA-/təA-*, including its phonological form, morphological status, syntactic behavior and semantics.

1. Introduction

Lan Hmyo (ISO 639-3: hml) is a Hmongic language spoken in Guizhou, China. It has certain features that are similar to other East and Southeast Asian languages: syllabic tones, meagre morphology, head-modifier order in nominal constructions, and SVO as basic word order. It has a morpheme, *taA-/təA-*, which can be preposed to various classes of words including numerals, classifiers, nouns, and verbs.^{1 2} As the output construction that *taA-/təA-* and the following word constitutes always is a nominal, we treat the morpheme as a nominalizer, and the construction as a nominal construction. The aim of this paper is to briefly describe the behavior and function of the morpheme *taA-/təA-* in Lan Hmyo.

2. The phonological form of the morpheme *taA-/təA-*

The morpheme in question manifests as *taA-* or *təA-*, depending on some conditions. /ə/ represents the vowel of weak syllables in Lan Hmyo, and it has a shorter duration than vowels in strong syllables, with a tendency to assimilate to the vowel of the following strong syllable. In Lan Hmyo, words always carry a strong syllable in the ultimate syllable, with a stress on it. Penultimate syllables do not have a stress, and weak syllables having /ə/ typically appear at this position.

Based on the distribution, the author assumes that the morpheme in question has the form *taA-*, and constitutes a phonological word with the following morpheme. It manifests as *təA-* before a stressed strong syllable. Therefore, *təA-* typically occurs as the first syllable of disyllabic words. The following examples support this assumption. Example 1 indicates that when the morpheme is located before a monosyllabic noun, *təA-* appears as expected; when the morpheme is situated before a noun that begins with a prefix *aA-*, *taA-* appears.³ The form *taA-* in the latter case

¹ A capital letter, *A*, *B*, or *C* at the end of a syllable denotes one of the three tones of Lan Hmyo: *A*, a falling tone, *B*, a high-level tone, and *C*, a rising tone.

² Words in Lan Hmyo differ in terms of autonomy: some words can be used by themselves, thus, autonomous or ‘free’, whereas others must co-occur with another word. When a word is dependent on another word, this is indicated by a hyphen ‘-’ attached on the dependent word to the direction of the word on which it depends.

³ All the examples in this paper are checked by my linguistic consultant, Mr. Song Yun 宋

can be explained as the fused form of *taA-* and the noun prefix *aA-*.

- (1) $təA-tseB = taA- + tseB$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond fruit)
 ‘something analogous to fruit’⁴
 $taA-mbyB = taA- + aA-mbyB$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond \diamond nose)
 ‘something analogous to a nose’

When there is a word homophonous with the root of a noun that has a prefix *aA-*, we can find a minimal pair as in Example 2 and 3.

- (2) $təA-maB = taA- + maB$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond buy)
 ‘something that is bought’
 $taA-maB = taA- + aA-maB$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond \diamond eye)
 ‘something analogous to an eye’
- (3) $təA-ŋɕɔA = taA- + ŋɕɔA$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond sit down on one’s heels)
 ‘someone who is sitting down on
 one’s heels’
 $taA-ŋɕɔA = taA- + aA-ŋɕɔA$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond \diamond mouth)
 ‘something analogous to a mouth’

When the morpheme in question appears before a disyllabic word, *taA-* appears as in the following examples in Example 4. These examples suggest that *taA-* does not become /ə/ in antepenultimate syllables, which can take a stress before an unstressed penultimate syllable.

- (4) $taA- suBsuB = taA- + suBsuB$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond \diamond warm)
 ‘something warm’
 $taA- qoAʔyæA = taA- + qoAʔyæA$ (\diamond NMLZ+ \diamond \diamond sweet)
 ‘something sweet’

When it occurs before a negative marker *muA-*, which, in turn, occurs before a verb, it manifests as *taA-*. In Examples 5 and 6, the morpheme in question appears as *təA-* before a verb *ntonC* ‘wear,’ but appears as *taA-* before its negative form *muA- ntonC* ‘not wear.’ These examples can be explained by assuming that *muA-* does not take a stress and thus *taA-* appears.

云, who is a native speaker of Lan Hmyo. I would like to extend my gratitude to him for his kind instruction.

⁴ In the gloss part, each word of the text is represented by a series of the mark ‘ \diamond ’, which represents a syllable. The number of ‘ \diamond ’ corresponds to the number of syllables in the word. After a series of ‘ \diamond ’, the meaning of the word is indicated. Abbreviations used in the gloss line are as follows:

CLF: classifier; CLNK: clause linker; COP: copular; DEM: demonstrative; DGR: degree; FLL: filler; IGN: Ignorative; INTJ: interjection; MOD: modification marker; NEG: negative marker; NMLZ: nominalizer; PN: proper noun; PTCL: particle

- (5) *ðanB naA təA- ntoŋC aAliAmaC*
 CLF human NMLZ wear glass
 ‘someone who wears glasses’
- (6) *ðanB naA taA- muA- ntoŋC aAliAmaC*
 CLF human NMLZ NEG wear glass
 ‘someone who does not wear glasses’

However, this analysis cannot explain a part of the data: the morpheme has the vowel /a/ before a monosyllabic verb denoting a color. We observe a minimal pair such as the following, one of which has a color verb, and the other has a verb homophonous with the color verb.

- (7) *taA-qloA* (◇NMLZ◇white) ‘something that is white’
təA-qloA (◇NMLZ◇free) ‘something that is free’

Further study is necessary to settle this issue. In this study, we represent the morpheme as *taA-/təA-*, and use one or the other form as it actually appears in each example.

3. Morpho-syntactic status of the morpheme *taA-/təA-*

The morpheme *taA-/təA-* must co-occur with its host word in order to appear in a sentence. It can co-occur with various classes of words including numerals, classifiers, nouns, and verbs. Excluding the case of verbs, *taA-/təA-* is immediately preposed to its host word. There is no element that can be positioned between *taA-/təA-* and the host word.

In the case of verbs, a negative marker, which itself is a particle, can appear between *taA-/təA-* and the verb.⁵ This suggests that at least in the case of verbs, *taA-/təA-* does not behave as a prefix. Below, we indicate an example from a narrative text.⁶ In this example, both a nominal construction *təA- ŋaC* ‘strong ones,’ based on a verb *ŋaC* ‘strong,’ and its negative counterpart *taA- muA- ŋaC* ‘not strong ones,’ based on a negative form of the verb *muA- ŋaC* ‘not strong’ appears.

- (8) *təA- ŋaC jeB tsoC- zanC, taA- muA- ŋaC ... oA, phoB*
 NMLZ strong FLL CLNK go.up NMLZ NEG strong INTJ CLF
təA- muA- ŋaC tsoC- venC aApiCyuC tsoC- ðaC
 NMLZ NEG strong CLNK cross PN CLNK die
-teA ŋenC’szC’ wuAfaA- tēB’tēyeA -jaA.
 DGR badly NEG solve PTCL

⁵ As the negative particle *muA-* can be positioned before an adverbial element such as *jiAχaC-* ‘altogether’ to constitute a phrase *muA- jiAχaC-* ‘not altogether,’ *muA-* itself is not a verb prefix.

⁶ Texts used in this paper are narratives collected by the author. They are classified into two types: stories and procedural instructions. The name of the text is indicated in the parentheses after the English translation of an example.

‘Strong soldiers went up with him, but many of the weaker soldiers drowned when they crossed the Shunyanhe passing.’ (*War of Guizhou*)

Elements other than a negative marker do not appear in the position in question. See Example 9, in which *neAmuAnoNB* ‘last year’ appears after *taA-/təA-*. To express the intended meaning, another nominalizer *-moA*, which also functions as a modification marker, must be used as in Example 10. This suggests that the distance between *taA-/təA-* and the target verb must be considerably close.⁷

- (9) **ḍanB naA təA- neAmuAnoNB ḍaA -eB jonC zzApəNB*
 CLF human NMLZ last.year come DEM COP Japan
təA-naA.
 human
 ‘The person who came last year was a Japanese.’

- (10) *neAmuAnoNB ḍaA -moA ḍanB naA -eB jonC zzApəNB*
 last.year come MOD CLF human DEM COP Japan
təA-naA.
 human

Note that the analysis in the previous section assumes that in the case of nouns with a prefix *aA-*, *taA-/təA-* is preposed to the prefix and fuses with it, since if *taA-/təA-* replaces the prefix and is preposed immediately before the noun stem, *təA-* would appear instead. Therefore, in the case of nouns, we must assume that *taA-/təA-* is not a prefix appearing in the same slot as of the noun prefix *aA-*, but something attached to a noun as a whole. In all, we tentatively conclude that *taA-/təA-* is a particle for numerals, classifiers, nouns, and verbs.

4. Meaning and function of *taA-/təA-*

In this section, the author describes the semantics of *taA-/təA-* when it combines with numerals, classifiers, nouns, and verbs.

4.1 The case of numerals

In Lan Hmyo, monosyllabic numerals designating a single-digit number is a bound form. When *taA-/təA-* is preposed to a numeral, the output construction is always a free form, which functions as a nominal. Semantically, the construction functions as the ordinal numeral corresponding to a numeral to which *taA-/təA-* is preposed. The construction can function as the head of a nominal phrase, or as a modifier in a nominal phrase. Example 11 indicates an example of the former, and Example 12 an example of the latter.

- (11) *ḍanB təA- ʔwuA- -eB jonC jiBsenB.*
 CLF NMLZ two DEM COP doctor
 ‘(Talking about people visiting the speaker in a series,) The second one

⁷ In narrative texts, only the negative particle *muA-* intervenes between *taA-/təA-* and verbs. In elicitation, however, a couple of adverbial elements, such as *χonAtoC-* ‘just now’ are found to appear in the position.

is/was a doctor.’

- (12) *ðanB naA təA- ʔwuA- -eB jonC jiBsenB.*
 CLF human NMLZ two DEM COP doctor
 ‘(Talking about people visiting the speaker in a series,) The second person is/was a doctor.’

4.2 The case of classifiers

When *taA-/təA-* is preposed to a classifier, the output construction is a nominal, meaning the concept of classification that the classifier denotes. See some examples for illustration.

- (13) *təA- tənA* (◇NMLZ◇CLF ‘CLF for rod-like things’) ‘rod-like shape’
təA- ʔlanA (◇NMLZ◇CLF ‘CLF for ball-like things’) ‘ball-like shape’
təA- ntsheA (◇NMLZ◇CLF ‘CLF for lump things’) ‘lump shape’

The output construction can function as a head of a nominal phrase. See Example 14 from a narrative text, in which the construction *təA- ntsheA* ‘lump shape’ appears in the position of a nominal phrase, which to denote the end-state of a resultative serial verb construction, *aC tshenA* (◇make◇become) ‘change something into.’

- (14) *χonA ʔmiA aAntenB ndzanB mpiC -moA təAcib aC tshenA*
 then take knife chop pig MOD body make become
təA- ntsheA aAnkanC.
 NMLZ CLF meat
 ‘Then, cut the body of the pig into pieces with a knife.’ (*The Spring Festival*)

The modifier use of the construction is not attested in the case of classifiers.⁸

4.3 The case of nouns

When *taA-/təA-* is preposed to a noun, the output construction is a nominal. The output construction can function as the head of a nominal phrase. The modifier use of the construction is not attested. The semantics of the construction can be described as metaphorical extension of the concept denoted by the noun involved. The prototypical case is that of nouns denoting human body parts indicated in the Table 1. In general, the output construction can denote the original concept as well, but the noun without *taA-/təA-* cannot denote the metaphorical meaning. For example, *taA- ŋɛzoA* can denote ‘human mouth’ or ‘something like human mouth, e.g., mouth of animal or mouth of bottle,’ but the original noun *aŋɛzoA* only denotes ‘human mouth.’

⁸ In the phrase *təA- ntsheA aAnkanC* (◇NMLZ◇lump shape◇◇meat) in Example 14, *aAnkanC* ‘meat’ modifies the preceding nominalized word *təA- ntsheA*.

Table 1

| Noun | <i>taA-/təA-</i> + Noun |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>aAŋdzoA</i> ‘mouth’ | <i>taA- ŋdzoA</i> ‘something analogous to a mouth’ (e.g., mouth of bottle) |
| <i>aAqoBtoB</i> ‘skin’ | <i>taA- qoBtoB</i> ‘something analogous to skin’ (e.g., skin of orange) |
| <i>aAχuB</i> ‘head’ | <i>taA- χuB</i> ‘something analogous to a head’ (e.g., head of car) |
| <i>aAqoBtshoNB</i> ‘bone’ | <i>taA- qoBtshoNB</i> ‘something analogous to a bone’ (e.g., corncob) |
| <i>aAambleB</i> ‘tongue’ | <i>taA- mbleB</i> ‘something analogous to a tongue’ (e.g., seeds of sunflower) |
| <i>aAmaB</i> ‘eye’ | <i>taA- maB</i> ‘something analogous to an eye’ (e.g., eyes of insect) |
| <i>aAambyB</i> ‘nose’ | <i>taA- mbyB</i> ‘something analogous to a nose’ (e.g., eye of needle) |
| <i>aAmbiA</i> ‘ear’ | <i>taA- mbiA</i> ‘something analogous to an ear’ (e.g., handle of cup) |
| <i>aApenB</i> ‘neck’ | <i>taA- penB</i> ‘something analogous to a neck’ (e.g., neck of bottle) |
| <i>aAqaB</i> ‘bottom’ | <i>taA- qaB</i> ‘something analogous to a bottom’ (e.g., backside of table) |
| <i>NGeA</i> ‘flesh’ | <i>təA- NGeA</i> ‘something analogous to flesh’ (e.g., flesh of fruit) |

Some of the output constructions from nouns function as locatives. For example, in Table 1, *taA- χuB* ‘head’ and *taA- qaB* ‘bottom’ can function either as a noun or a locative (for locatives in Lan Hmyo, see Taguchi 2019).

However, not all nouns denoting human body parts can be preposed by *taA-/təA-*. Some of them have *təA-* by default. See examples in Table 2. In these nouns, the default form is also used when to denote the metaphorical meaning. For example, *təAhmiB* ‘tooth’ can denote ‘tooth of mortar,’ and *təAtoC* ‘foot’ can denote ‘foot of table.’ In these cases, we represent the apparent derived forms without a hyphen.

Table 2

| Noun |
|------------------------|
| <i>təApluA</i> ‘hair’ |
| <i>təAhmiB</i> ‘tooth’ |
| <i>təAwiB</i> ‘hand’ |
| <i>təAtoC</i> ‘foot’ |

The similar observations can be made in nouns denoting parts of plant. See examples in Table 3.

Table 3

| Noun | <i>təA-</i> + Noun |
|--------------------------|--|
| <i>aAntseC</i> ‘treetop’ | <i>taA- ntseC</i> ‘something analogous to a treetop’ |
| <i>aAvuB</i> ‘thorn’ | <i>taA- vuB</i> ‘something analogous to a thorn’ |
| <i>aAqoNAjona</i> ‘root’ | <i>taA- qoNAjona</i> ‘something analogous to a root’ |
| <i>hnoA</i> ‘seed’ | <i>təA- hnoA</i> ‘something analogous to a seed’ |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>veNA</i> ‘flower’ | <i>təA- veNA</i> ‘something analogous to a flower’ |
| <i>mblonA</i> ‘leaf’ | <i>təA- mblonA</i> ‘something analogous to a leaf’ |
| <i>ʔjanA</i> ‘seedling of rice’ | <i>təA- ʔjanA</i> ‘something analogous to a rice seedling’ |
| <i>tseB</i> ‘fruit’ | <i>təA- tseB</i> ‘something analogous to a fruit’ |

There are two nouns that obviate the above-mentioned pattern: *aApaB* ‘father,’ and *aAmiC* ‘mother.’ These nouns take *təA-*, not *taA-*, despite that they have a prefix *aA-*. See Table 4. Note that the semantic extension that these two derived words indicate is slightly different from what we have observed in the previous examples. *təApaB* means ‘male animal’ besides ‘father animal,’ and *təAmiC* means ‘female animal’ besides ‘mother animal.’ Furthermore, *təApaB* has a meaning ‘leader,’ which considerably deviates from the expected meaning. These facts suggest that in these cases, the nominalized forms have already been lexicalized. In these cases, we represent the apparent derived forms without a hyphen.

Table 4

| Noun | <i>təA-</i> + Noun |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>aApaB</i> ‘father’ | <i>təApaB</i> ‘father animal, male animal, leader’ |
| <i>aAmiC</i> ‘mother’ | <i>təAmiC</i> ‘mother animal, female animal’ |

There are some nouns for which preposing *taA-/təA-* does not cause the expected difference in meaning. See some examples in Table 5. In these cases, too, the derived forms appear to have already been lexicalized. In these cases, too, we represent the apparent derived forms without a hyphen.

Table 5

| Noun | <i>təA-</i> + Noun |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>naA</i> ‘human’ | <i>təAnaA</i> ‘human’ |
| <i>teiB</i> ‘road’ | <i>təAtəiB</i> ‘road’ |

4.4 The case of verbs

When *taA-/təA-* is preposed to a verb, the output construction functions as a nominal phrase. In this case, there are two types of construction: argument nominalization and event nominalization (Shibatani 2019, 2021). In the former, the nominal construction denotes an entity that functions as an argument of the verb, whereas in the latter, the nominal construction denotes the concept of the verb itself.

4.4.1 Argument nominalization

In the case of argument nominalization, the construction can function as the head of a nominal phrase, or as a modifier in a nominal phrase. In the former subcase, what the construction denotes is determined by the transitivity of the verb involved. When the verb is intransitive, the construction denotes the S argument of the verb. When the verb is transitive, the construction denotes the A or O argument of the verb, while when no argument is specified, the O argument is denoted in general. See Example 15 and 16 for illustration. Example 15 indicates examples in which an intransitive verb is used, and Example 16 indicates examples in which a transitive verb is used.

- (15) *təA- δaA* (◇NMLZ◇come) ‘someone who comes/came’
təA- δaC (◇NMLZ◇die) ‘someone who dies/died’
- (16) *təA- maC* (◇NMLZ◇sell) ‘something that is/was sold’
təA- maC λqiA (◇NMLZ◇sell◇vegetable) ‘someone who sells/sold vegetable’

In the latter subcase, in which the output construction modifies the head of a nominal phrase, the construction functions as a relative clause (for the relative clause of Lan Hmyo, see Taguchi 2018). See examples below. In Example 17, the construction *təA- qweA* ‘wise one’ modifies the S argument of the verb *naA* ‘human,’ and Example 18, the construction *təA- ηtuA hloC* ‘someone who strikes iron’ modifies the A argument of the verb *aAqəAzanC* ‘master.’

- (17) ... *təBqweNAnonB jeB, thanC'thonB'niB' tsəA- maA tɛhiB*
 after.that FLL PN separately exist CLF
naA təA- qweA -eB muB zoC thanC'thonB'niB' zoCseA.
 human NMLZ wise DEM go say PN say
 ‘After a while, one of the General Tang’s staff went to him to persuade him not to kill Lan Zhongye. (*War of Guizhou*)’
- (18) *yoA-λwuA- nenA -waC jeB, δanB aAtanA -eB tsəC- aC*
 ten-two year PTCL FLL CLF child DEM CLNK make
teA laAχaB ... zoC tʃhoA
 PTCL FLL say village
δanB aAqəAzanC təA- ηtuA hloC tsəC- muB ηtuA tuC
 CLF master NMLZ strike iron CLNK go strike acquire
tsiA- tʃenA aAntenB.
 three CLF sword
 ‘When he became twelve years old, the boy asked a blacksmith of the village to make three swords.’ (*The Dragon’s Head*)

4.4.2 Event nominalization

In the case of event nominalization, the construction can function as the head of a nominal phrase.⁹ In this case, it does not seem that any verb can be an input of the construction. Rather, the apparent output construction is actually a lexicalized form. See *təAtʃiC* ‘love, sympathy’ in the following example. In this case, we represent the apparent derived forms without a hyphen.

- (19) *λwuA- δanB -nonB -niB, δanB -aAtʃiB loB- tsəC- muA-*
 two CLF DEM PTCL CLF IGN also CLNK NEG
maA ... laAχaB ... təAtʃiC -jaA.
 exist FLL love PTCL

⁹ It is not clear whether the construction can modify another nominal in the case of event nominalization.

‘Nobody had sympathy for them.’ (*The Mountain Witch 2*)

There is a construction in which an event nominalization of verbs is formed productively: an interrogative construction to inquire the degree of quality/state and the corresponding answer. See examples in Example 20 collected by elicitation for illustration. In this example, *muAðuB-* is an interrogative word meaning ‘how many/much,’ and it is followed by a nominalized verb *təA- senA* (\diamond NMLZ \diamond high) ‘height.’

- (20) *təNA ntonC -nonB maA muAðuB- təA- senA.*
 CLF tree DEM exist IGN NMLZ high
 ‘How tall is this tree?’
maA tsiA- miB təA- senA.
 exist three meter NMLZ high
 ‘It is three meters high.’

Verbs denoting an upper range of quality/state can appear in the position after *muAðuB-* to construct an interrogative construction similar to the above example. See Example 21.

- (21) *muAðuB- təA- ntiB* ($\diamond\diamond$ IGN \diamond NMLZ \diamond long) ‘how long’
muAðuB- təA- qwenB ($\diamond\diamond$ IGN \diamond NMLZ \diamond wide) ‘how wide’
muAðuB- təA- ndanC ($\diamond\diamond$ IGN \diamond NMLZ \diamond big) ‘how big’
muAðuB- təA- hɣonB ($\diamond\diamond$ IGN \diamond NMLZ \diamond heavy) ‘how heavy’

5. Summary

In this paper, the author provides a brief outline of the behavior and function of the morpheme *taA-/təA-* in Lan Hmyo. At the present stage of study, we have tentatively concluded that the morpheme is a particle that is preposed to various class of words to constitute a phonological word with them, and functions as a nominalizer. When it is preposed to a numeral, it derives the ordinal numeral corresponding to a numeral to which it is preposed. When it is preposed to a classifier, it derives a nominal that means the concept of classification that the classifier denotes. When it is preposed to a noun, it derives a nominal that designates a metaphorical extension of the concept denoted by the noun involved. Finally, when it is preposed to a verb, the output construction can be categorized into two: the case of argument nominalization and that of event nominalization. In the former, the derived constructions denote an entity that functions as an argument of the verb, while in the latter, the nominal construction denotes the concept of the verb itself.

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