

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Language introduction

Plang is a Mon-Khmer language, which is part of the Austro-Asiatic super-family. Within the Northern division of the Mon-Khmer family, it is in the Eastern sub-branch of the Palaungic branch.¹ Along with the Lawa and Wa languages, it is in the Waic group (see Figure 1).

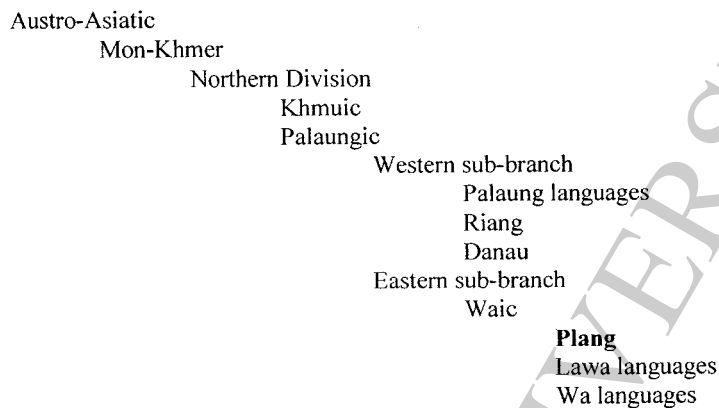


Figure 1. Position of Plang in the Northern Division of Mon-Khmer (Adapted from Block 1994a and Howard and Wattanapun 2001)

Plang languages are spoken in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Myanmar and four or five villages in Thailand. There are approximately 24,000 speakers in the PRC (Gordon 2005). The number of speakers in Myanmar is approximately 12,000. In Thailand, there are approximately 3,000 resident Plang speakers and 2,000 migrant workers (Hopple, p. c.). These numbers include all varieties of Plang. Man Noi Plang is an unwritten language, although Pang Pung (Plang) in Thailand has a written Roman script. Language vitality, according to the Ethnologue and the present researcher's observation, is strong.

In the PRC the Plang are referred to as Bulang (布郎) by the government. They are one of the fifty-five recognized minorities in the country. They live in Yunnan (云南) Province (see Figure 2). There is a concentration of Plang people

¹ The Eastern and Western sub-branches of the Palaungic branch were incorrectly switched in the 2005 edition of the Ethnologue. This mistake will be corrected in the next edition (Hopple, p.c.).

in Shuangjiang County (双江) and Lincang County (临沧) and a larger concentration in Menghai County (勐海) near the border with Myanmar. Plang people from these two groups have had very little contact with each other and when they interact, they must use Mandarin Chinese to communicate. A few preliminary language surveys have been done in Menghai County, including wordlist collection from approximately six villages on Bulang Mountain (Harper, forthcoming). However, the geographic extent of the Plang people as well as the number of language varieties is unknown at this time.

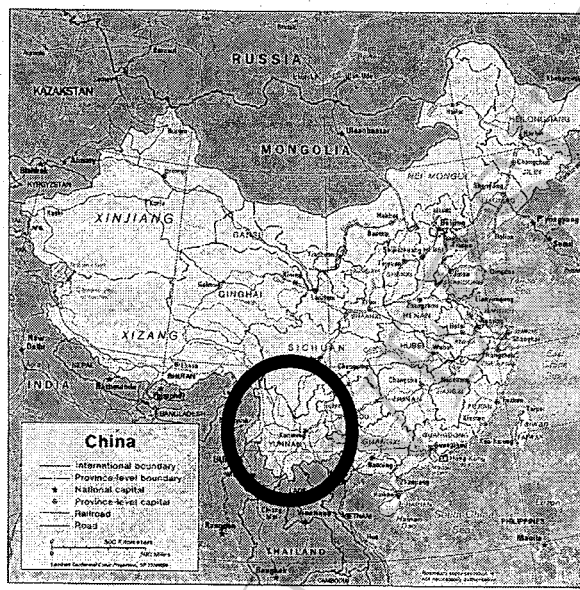


Figure 2. Yunnan Province in the PRC

The language variety studied for this thesis is spoken in the village of Man Noi on Bulang Mountain. Bulang Mountain is at the southernmost tip of Menghai County, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province (see Figure 3).

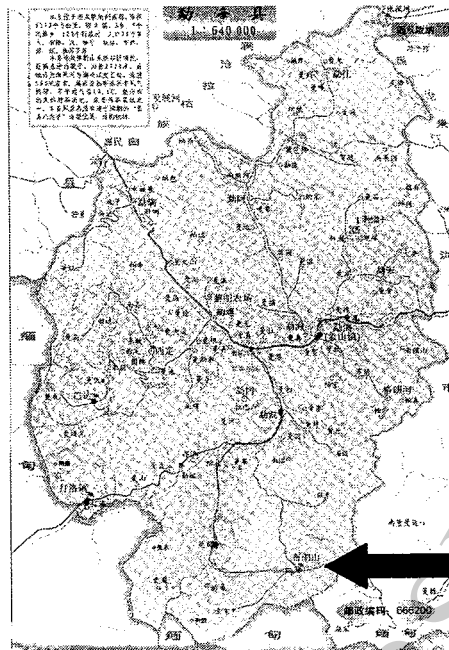


Figure 3. Bulang Mountain in Menghai County

1.2 History and background to the Plang people

The Plang in the PRC migrated from an unknown location further north many centuries ago. According to their stories, they lived in the valleys until the more-numerous Dai people came into the valleys and pushed the Plang up onto the mountaintops. Since then, the Plang have struggled to eke out a living as subsistence farmers. Their main crops are tea, rice, and rubber trees. They sell their tea and rubber tree crops, but generally grow rice for personal consumption. They often raise chickens, pigs, and water buffalo. This provides occasional meat in their usual diet of vegetables and rice.

In the past, Plang families often had many children. However, due to the PRC's child planning initiatives, Plang families may now only have two children without penalty. Parents usually work in the fields all day while children stay with their grandparents. When children are 6-8 years old they begin school. Larger villages have government-built elementary schools. In order to attend high school, Plang children must move to a larger city off of Bulang Mountain. Since school is expensive and extra hands are always needed in the fields, most Plang children only go to school until about the sixth grade, although the education level is rising with each new generation.

The Plang follow Theravada Buddhism, which they learned from their Dai neighbors. Larger villages have their own temples and monks. Boys often spend time as monks at some point in their upbringing. They study Dai translations of the Buddhist scriptures. Before the Plang adopted Buddhism, they were animists. Strong vestiges of animism permeate their practice of Buddhism. For example, animal sacrifices are often part of their religious festivals. Besides Buddhism, a handful of Plang have recently adopted Christianity.

1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Although the Western branch of Palaungic has been studied for many years, very little has been written about the grammar of the languages in the Waic sub-branch of Eastern Palaungic, including Plang. This thesis presents what has been learned about the syntax of one Plang dialect, namely, Man Noi Plang, with examples from texts and elicited material.

This study is limited by the fact that only three Man Noi Plang texts were used. More data would have provided more evidence to prove or disprove certain hypotheses. Research time was also limited due to geographical constraints, i.e., this thesis was written in Thailand away from native speakers. Research time in the PRC was limited by the availability of the Language Resource Person (LRP) and translators. Another limitation is that the researcher is not yet a competent speaker of the language.

1.4 Goal of the Study

The first objective is to describe aspects of the grammar of a previously undescribed dialect of Plang. This will include a general description of Plang word classes and syntax, to provide a workable foundation for further grammatical research in this and other Plang dialects. The second objective is to investigate the syntax of pronouns more fully. This element in Plang grammar appears to be unusual and therefore warrants further study.

1.5 Benefits of the Study

One benefit of this study is grammatical information about a previously unstudied variety of Plang. On a broader scope, this information will also benefit the study of other Waic languages and even comparisons with other languages in

the Palaungic branch as a whole. It is hoped that this study will motivate and direct others in further Plang research endeavors. It is also hoped that this information will benefit future language development among the Plang people of Bulang Mountain in the PRC.

1.6 Methodology and summary of three texts

The three texts that were collected for this thesis are from native speakers of Plang in the village of Man Noi. Other material was elicited from two of these speakers to supplement the three texts. Various general typologies were consulted before and during the analysis stage, as well as books and articles on specialized grammatical topics. Textual material takes precedence over elicited material in this description.

1.6.1 Data Gathering

The first text is titled “Bulang Mountain Trip” (hereafter referred to as “Trip”). It is 109 lines long. It was collected in July 2007 in Jinghong, Jinghong County, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, PRC. The speaker is a 20-year-old female from the village of Man Noi on Bulang Mountain. She had been living and working in Jinghong for approximately two years when this text was collected. The text chronicles a trip in which the speaker took three foreigners to visit her village on Bulang Mountain. She talks about the drive up the mountain, their arrival, and what they did each day. The first full day they were on the mountain they walked up to the Old Village to visit her grandparents and aunt. They spent a lot of time looking for edible things in the forest and climbing fruit trees. The second day one of the foreigners returned home on the public bus. The speaker and one of the other foreigners went up to see her family’s tea fields. Then on the third day, she and the two foreigners who were left went back to their homes.

The second text is titled “Two Brothers” (hereafter referred to as “Brothers”). The text is over eleven minutes long, but only the first seven minutes were used for analysis due to time constraints. The seven-minute portion is 117 lines long. It was collected in April 2008 in the village of Man Noi, Menghai County, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, PRC. The speaker is an approximately 45-year-old female from the village of Man Noi. She was living in

the village when this text was collected. The text is a folktale about two brothers named Aihonam and Ailanam. They are very poor and looked down upon, so they decide to seek “special knowledge,” i.e., religious instruction from a man named Parasi. As they prepare for their journey, it becomes evident that Aihonam has a good, wise helpful wife and Ailanam has a lazy bad-mouthed wife. The two brothers spend time learning how to worship correctly from Parasi and then he tells them that they are ready to return home. Parasi tells them to teach their wives how to worship so that the families can improve their positions. Aihonam returns home and tells his wife what he has learned. He shows her all the good things they received and she is very happy. Then Aihonam and his wife go to see how things turned out for Ailanam. Things have not gone well for him. He is still miserably poor. Ailanam’s wife curses Aihonam and his wife’s horses. Her words cause whores to cover the horses’ heads (end of glossed text). Aihonam suggests to Ailanam that he get a new wife. So the brothers find a poor widow who seems kind and helpful and Ailanam marries her instead. At the end of the story, the storyteller gives the moral, which is that wives should obey their husbands and be good wives. She said that it is a cautionary tale for wives and girls.

The third text is titled “Adam Goes to Church” (hereafter referred to as “Church”). It is 88 lines long. It was collected in March 2008 in Jinghong from a 20-year-old male from the village of Man Noi. In the text the speaker recounts his first experience of going to the local government church in Jinghong. He and the foreigner he lived with went to a Bible study one Saturday night. Everyone was split up into small groups and then they had to introduce themselves. Then they played a game in their group. After the game, a lady taught a Bible lesson. After the meeting, the speaker and his friend walked home with some other friends. The next morning the speaker went to the Sunday morning service by himself. In the service they sang, prayed, and listened to a Bible lesson. Then the speaker went home.²

The total number of lines of text is 314. Over 200 other sentences in isolation were elicited between April and June 2008.

² Appendix 1 contains an interlinearized version of the Church text. Appendix 2 contains a charted version of the Church text.

1.6.2 Data Analysis

Since there is no previous grammatical work on Man Noi Plang, this study does not present its findings in a specific grammatical framework. Instead, a basic linguistic functional approach is used to describe the phenomena. Various typological grammars, which are discussed in 1.8.4, informed the analysis.

1.7 Phonology

A comparison is currently being done by Harper (forthcoming) on the phonology of six Plang dialects on Bulang Mountain in the PRC. The following information and charts on Man Noi Plang consonants and vowels come from his work. Since there is no accepted orthography at this time, data in this thesis is presented using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).³

It is proposed that there are 21 consonant phonemes in Man Noi Plang. They are illustrated in Figure 4.

	Labial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
Plosives	p		t		c		k		ʔ	
	p ^h		t ^h		c ^h		k ^h			
Nasal		m		n		ɲ		ŋ		
Fricatives	f	v	s						h	
Tap			r							
Approximants	w					j				
Lateral App.				l						

Figure 4. Man Noi Plang Consonant Phonemes (adapted from Harper, forthcoming)

It is proposed that there are ten vowel phonemes in Man Noi Plang. They are illustrated in Figure 5.

³ Words that are not Plang (i.e. borrowings from Mandarin or Dai) include symbols that are not part of Plang phonology. The first occurrence of each borrowing is noted.

	Front		Central		Back	
Close	i				ɯ	u
		ɪ				
Close-mid	e				ɤ	o
Open-mid	ɛ				ɔ	
Open			a			

Figure 5. Man Noi Plang Vowel Phonemes (from Harper, forthcoming)

It is proposed by Harper that Man Noi Plang has two tones. However, since phonology work is in progress and there is no orthography at this time, it was impossible to identify the tones reliably. Therefore tone is not marked in the data.

1.8 Literature Review

Nothing has been written on the grammar of Man Noi Plang at this time. The grammar and phonology of Plang dialects found in Thailand have been studied. When the scope of research is expanded to include other Waic languages, there is still a dearth of resources on grammar because most of what has been written about Wa, specifically, is phonological in nature. Various general grammars and grammatical articles guided the researcher during the analysis.

1.8.1 Western Palaungic literature

Much has been written about the Western Palaungic branch of the Palaungic family, especially the Ruching Palaung. Howard and Wattanapun (2001) provide a thorough review of the earliest sources that mention the Ruching Palaung (also called Silver Palaung) including Symes (1827), Yule (1858), Scott and Hardiman (1900), Cecil Lewis (1906), A.A. Cameron (1912), Scott (1921), and Leslie Milne (1910; 1921; 1924; 1931). Most of these sources are not linguistic in nature, but merely mention the Ruching Palaung and comment on their lifestyle and customs. Leslie Milne, in particular, contributed much information on Ruching Palaung culture because she lived among them for various lengths of time for three years. She also studied their language and wrote *An Elementary Palaung Grammar* to document what she learned. The book is descriptive in nature, rather than analytical, but it includes examples of the features she lists. Howard and Wattanapun also review more recent sociological information found in

Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave (1964), Leach (1954), Sao Saimong Mangrai (1965), Martin Smith (1991), Sarapi Shila (1993), and Richard Diran (1997).

Hermann and Margarete Janzen have published three papers on the grammar of Ruching Palaung, which they refer to as Pale Palaung. They have studied clauses and phrases (1972 and 1976b) and verb-aspect words (1976a). They have also written two papers on the phonology of Ruching Palaung. One of the papers (nd.) is in German and the other one (1978) compares Ruching Palaung with two other Palaung dialects. Hermann Janzen has also written a dissertation (1987) on topicalization in Thai and Pale (Palaung).

1.8.2 Literature on other Plang dialects

Gerard Diffloth (1992) wrote about the relationship between different Bulang subgroups based on Proto-Waic reconstructions. He was unable to determine into which subgroup Bulang Mountain Plang⁴ should go because he had only six words from that dialect.

Kontoi and Pangloh are dialects of the Eastern Palaungic branch that is spoken in Plang villages in northern Thailand, specifically in Baan Huay Nam Khun. Debbie Paulsen prepared manuscripts on Pangloh phonology (1987a) and tonal variants in Pangloh (1987b). Her MA thesis was "A Phonological Reconstruction of Proto-Plang" (1989). This thesis was published in *Mon-Khmer Studies* in 1992a. She wrote a paper on tone and intonation in Plang (1991), which she later had published (1996b). She also published a paper on phonology in Plang (1996a).

Paulette Hopple and Paulsen prepared a lexicon of Pangloh (1987), a Pangloh rhyme book (1988a), a phonemic outline of Kontoi Plang and Pangloh (1988b), a phonology of Kontoi Plang (1988c), a Northern Thai-Khmer-Plang-English picture dictionary (1988d), a Kontoi Plang rhyme book (1988e), and a manuscript on Plang tones (1988f). Together with Ting Rew, they prepared a Plang-English lexicon (1990). Hopple has also written an unpublished manuscript on the original location of the Kontoi Plang in the PRC (1987) and one on Plang register (1997).

⁴ Diffloth refers to the dialect as the "Bulangshan dialect." It is unclear which village on Bulang Mountain (*shan* in Chinese) speaks the dialect he is referring to.

Paulsen (1992b) wrote a paper detailing the use of fourteen Kontoi Plang particles. She also co-authored a paper on independent clause structure in Kontoi Plang with Karen Block (1997). Block's (1994) MA thesis was on the discourse of first person narratives in Kontoi Plang. Her thesis includes a chapter on basic Kontoi Plang syntax. A briefer version of her thesis was published in 1996. Also in 1996, Block published a short paper on Kontoi Plang possessive noun phrases. It appears that Kontoi Plang and Man Moi Plang are mutually unintelligible, although their grammatical structure is similar.

Jenvit Suknaphasawat (2007) has researched the grammar of the Pang Pung dialect of Plang. It appears to be more similar than Kontoi Plang to Man Noi Plang, although the two dialects still appear to be mutually unintelligible. Suknaphasawat's grammatical sketch describes lexical categories, clause types, speech act distinctions, and phrase structure. It includes numerous examples.

The Plang in the PRC are given six pages in Ma Yin's *China's Minority Nationalities* (1994), which was edited by Ma Yin and published in the PRC. In the book they are referred to as "Blangs." There is a brief description of their history, daily living, pre-liberation life, and post-liberation life. One book has been written on the Plang language by Chinese linguists Li Dao Yong, Nye His Jen, and Chyou Eh Feng (1986). It has not been translated into English. The book gives a brief phonological and grammatical sketch of two Plang varieties, one of which is found in Xin Man O, which is a village on Bulang Mountain, and the other which is found in Guan Shuang, which is northwest of Bulang Mountain. Unfortunately, the description seems to encompass both varieties without distinguishing which features belong to which dialect.

1.8.3 Relevant Mon-Khmer literature

Rebecca Bequette (2008: 43ff) wrote her MA thesis on participant reference in Bunong, which is a Mon-Khmer language in the Bahnaric branch. In her inventory of participant reference resources in Bunong, she discusses surrogate noun phrases, which are terms of kinship modified by possessors. She notes the use of a surrogate noun phrase with a co-referent pronoun in apposition and comments, "Pragmatically, having a pronoun appositionally after a noun does not appear to add any additional information, but it does add length to the referring expression" (45). Plang also has pronouns in apposition with NPs,

although the researcher has chosen to interpret this structure as an NP and an emphatic pronoun.

In an article on discourse structure in Chrau, which is a Southern Bahnaric language of the Mon-Khmer family, Dorothy Thomas (1978: 235-6) discusses participant reference strategies. She says that the default method of referring to whoever is in focus is to use the third person singular pronoun. When a participant is first brought into focus a demonstrative or the third person singular pronoun often modifies the participant's name or role in a subject NP.

Khasi, which is a Mon-Khmer language of east India, has pronominal clitics that have various functions including independent pronouns and agreement markers (Bedell 2008: 3). This means that the "agreement markers are duplicates of [Khasi's] pronouns and articles" (8). Plang also seems to be unique in that it has verb agreement markers that are identical with its personal pronouns.

Like Plang, Khmu is in the Northern Division of Mon-Khmer. Suwilai Premsrirat (1987) has written a lengthy paper on the grammar of Khmu, focusing particularly on intra- and interclausal syntax.

1.8.4 Grammatical literature

Plang lexical categories were determined according to the grammatical tests used by Paul Schachter and Timothy Shopen (2007) in their article on parts-of-speech-systems. The criteria they use are distribution of word, range of syntactic function, and morphological or syntactic categories that can be used to identify a word (such as case or number for nouns). Paul Kroeger's (2005: 47) comments on determining lexical categories provided similar criteria from a different perspective by which to test categories. For example, what Schachter calls morphological or syntactic categories, Kroeger calls "sameness of internal structure." Audra Phillips' (2004) paper on lexical categories in West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen gives a slightly different organization scheme for parts of speech, taking into account language-specific phenomena.

The analysis of the Plang noun phrase was begun by following the order of Talmy Givon's (2001a and b) basic discussion with reference to Phillips' (2004) article "The Noun Phrase in West-Central Thailand Pwo Karen." Matthew Dryer's (2007b: 154) article on the structure of the noun phrase contains valuable typological information. For example, he notes that in languages without articles

(such as Plang), demonstratives often serve the function of distinguishing definite from indefinite. Regarding the structure of possessors, he contends that it is unusual for a language to use the same pattern for both nominal and pronominal possessors (183). Dryer's article on word order (2007c) contains helpful cross-linguistic generalizations.

The functions of the Plang noun phrase (NP) were analyzed according to Avery Andrews' (2007a) distinction between core functions and oblique functions. Core functions, according to Andrews, have the grammatical functions A, S, or P and "whatever other grammatical functions [that] are sufficiently like them to be plausibly grouped with them" (153). An NP has the grammatical function A if it is an agent or if it is treated grammatically like an agent. Similarly, an NP has the grammatical function S if it is a subject or if it is grammatically treated like a subject. Finally, an NP has the grammatical function P if it is a patient or if it is treated grammatically like a patient. Any argument that is not A, S, or P (i.e., a core function) and all adjuncts are classified as obliques (157). However, his criteria for distinguishing oblique arguments and oblique adjuncts are based more on semantic roles rather than on his core grammatical relations. Since this study aims to use grammatical criteria, Andrews' analysis proved unsatisfactory. Kroeger (2005: 58), on the other hand, provides grammatical criteria for distinguishing arguments and adjuncts; therefore this study utilizes them for analysis of NP functions. Kroeger defines arguments as elements of a sentence that are required by the verb to make the sentence complete; the verb, in fact, subclassifies the arguments it will take. Arguments are unique within their clause, and there can only be one argument of its kind in a clause. All subjects and objects are arguments, although arguments are not limited to subjects and objects. Adjuncts are not required or subclassified by the verb. They are not unique within a clause and many arguments of the same kind can occur in the same clause. Adjuncts are never subjects or objects.

Analysis of the verb phrase in Plang began with Givon's (2001a) verb categories. However, this produced too many small categories and failed to draw a broad picture of the Plang verb phrase. It proved more helpful for this study to describe verb phrases in Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) terms. Van Valin (2005: 4) describes clause structure in terms of "the layered structure of the clause." The different layers are the nucleus, the core, and the periphery. The semantic unit that underlies the nucleus is the predicate, which usually consists of a verb. The

core contains the nucleus and whatever arguments the predicate requires. The periphery contains non-argument elements. Van Valin's treatment of grammatical categories such as tense, aspect and modality is particularly helpful. He says that these and other elements, such as negation and illocutionary force, are operators that function at different levels of the clause (8). This notion provides a way of explaining how these elements can modify the nucleus, the core, or the clause as a whole without occurring next to the verb in a linear fashion.

Enfield's (2003) discussion on the syntactic areal features of the Lao word *daj* 'can' helped explain the behavior of the Plang word *pun*, which can be a main verb, modal, or aspect marker, depending on its syntactic position.

Andrews' (2007a) comments on languages with fluid word order were insightful. Some languages do not have strict word order, but their order is not free, either. Concerning these, Andrews comments, "Fluid word order is usually not actually free, but is rather signaling pragmatic functions rather than grammatical relations" (10). Plang word order is not free, but it is not as stringent as some languages with strict word order.

For the analysis of Plang clause types Dryer's (2007a) article on clause types was studied. His discussion is based on the structure of the predicate with the major distinction being verbal and nonverbal predicates. In his discussion of verbal predicates, he notes that the distinction between objects and adjuncts is sometimes not a clear one grammatically. The guideline is that "objects complete the meaning of the verb in a way that adjuncts do not" (22). Sandra Thompson, Robert Longacre, and Shin Ja Hwang's (2007) article on adverbial clauses was also considered. Their comments on special word order marking a subordinate clause were helpful in the analysis.

Li and Thompson's two articles (1976 and 1981) give a general discussion of topics, which proved helpful for determining if subjects and topics are distinct in Plang. Talmy Givon's (1983) discussion of the factors involved in topic continuity provided cross-linguistic guidelines for coding participants. For example, the less accessible a participant is to a listener, the more coding is necessary. Conversely, highly persistent and important topics are often coded syntactically with zero anaphora or clitic pronouns.

Plang pronoun syntax is unique: not only do pronouns occur in the default subject position, but they also seem to occur after the verb when they are referring to the subject participant or when they are co-referential with a subject. In order to try to understand the function of the pronoun behavior, Levinsohn's (2007) materials on narrative discourse analysis were employed. Although the focus of this thesis is not on text analysis, it proved useful, from a grammatical point of view, to chart the texts. Charting facilitated classification of structures that were default and structures that were marked by noting the frequency of different structures. Besides frequency, Dryer (2007c: 73ff) also mentions other criteria for determining default word order. He says that the structure with the least restrictions, simplest structure, and neutral pragmatic effect is usually the most basic one. Charts were also used to keep track of what referent particles such as *ti* were marking, keeping the attention on local continuity, rather than discourse continuity.

1.9 Organization of thesis

Chapter 2 discusses the lexical categories found in Plang and the tests used to determine them. Chapter 3 discusses adverbial adjuncts. Chapter 4 investigates the phrase structure of noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases. Chapter 5 examines the structure of independent clauses. Chapter 6 discusses Plang's pronoun and clitic syntax, as well as three discourse particles. Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the findings and suggestions for further research.