

## Modelling variation in the structure of nominal phrases in Southeast Asian languages

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Southeast Asia is a geographical area which is extremely rich from a linguistic point of view, being a Balkan-like region where a wide range of language families meet and interact with each other. The focus of interest of this presentation will be the internal structure of nominal phrases/DPs and the specific problem of how to account for the considerable amount of cross-linguistic variation which appears to occur in the ordering of constituents in DPs. Some of the patterns found are schematised in (1-3) (RC = relative clause, CL = classifier):

- |     |                              |     |     |    |     |     |     |
|-----|------------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| (1) | Thai, Khmer:                 | N   | Adj | RC | Num | CL  | Dem |
| (2) | Burmese:                     | Dem | RC  | N  | Adj | Num | CL  |
| (3) | Hmong, Malay,<br>Vietnamese: | Num | CL  | N  | Adj | RC  | Dem |

What is of considerable interest is that the variation attested often does not seem to follow or correspond to the apparent headedness of the relevant languages. Thus, Thai and Khmer are both canonical SVO head-initial languages yet at first sight seem to be head-final in their DPs with elements such as Num, CL and Dem all following the head noun N (and in the post-nominal placement of Num and CL, Thai and Khmer pattern with the canonical SOV language Burmese rather than the SVO languages listed in (3)). Other aspects of (1-3) can be similarly argued to be unexpected given the assumed general headedness of the languages in question. The presentation sets out to examine what factors might be responsible for the diversity attested, asking whether there are indeed any significant principles regulating the internal structure of DPs in Southeast Asian languages, or whether it has to be conceded that the patterns are random and unconstrained.