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Between South and Southeast Asia - adverbial clauses in Burmese

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South Asia as a linguistic area

- SOV word order (NP-PoP, POSS/DEM-N)
- Morphological causative verbs
- Converbs (“conjunctive particles”)
- Compound verbs (“explicator verbs”)
- Dative subject constructions

Southeast Asia as a linguistic area

- SVO word order (PrP-NP, N-POSS/DEM)
- Isolating
- Serial verb constructions
- Classifiers
- Semantic tones



Where does Burmese belong?

- ✓ Word order: SOV, NP-PoP, DEM/POSS-N
 - ✓ Morphological causatives (*no longer productive*)
 - ✓ **Converbs ?**
 - ✓ **Compound verbs ?**
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- ✓ **Isolating ?**
- ✓ Serial verbs
- ✓ Classifiers
- ✓ Semantic tones

SOUTH ASIA

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Converbs, compound verbs, serial verbs - some definitions

CONVERBS

A converb is a nonfinite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination. (Haspelmath 1995)

Other definitions: not necessarily adverbial, not necessarily nonfinite

Converbs are subordinate forms that do not function as nominal modifiers (relative/attributive expressions) or complements of the main verb.

COMPOUND VERBS

A compound verb is an expression consisting of a non-finite verb and a finite modifying verb belonging to a restricted (possibly closed) class of directionals, resultatives, aspectuals and manner verbs. Unlike converbs in general, the nonfinite verb is the main lexical verb. (Masica 1976)

SERIAL VERBS

A serial verb construction consists of two or more verbs or verb phrases (with or without overt subject and/or object) in juxtaposition, each of which would also be able to form a sentence on its own. (Bisang 1995)

The structure of Serial Verb Constructions:

$(NP_1) V_1 (NP_2) V_2 (NP_3) V_3 \dots V_X (NP_X)$

Often:

$NP_X = \text{subject of } V_X, \text{ object of } V_{X-1}$

Other definitions: root vs. core, symmetric vs. asymmetric serialisation, etc.

Examples

1. Converb

(1) Kannada (Steever 1998, quoted in Ebert 2008:17)

cennāgi *ōdid-are* *oḷḷe* *kelasa* *sigatt-e*.

well study_{II}-CV_{COND} good job get-PRES-3sn

‘If one studies well, one will get a good job.’

2. Compound verb

(2) Oriya (Ebert 2008:12)

so-i *pəṛ-il-i*.

sleep-CV fall-PT-1s

‘I fell asleep.’

3. Serial Verb Construction

(3) Mon (*root serialisation*)

mì? *kwac* *ʔa* *ràn* *kv* *ʔapa* *sət* *dəə* *phya.*
mother walk go buy give father betel loc market
‘The mother walked to the market and bought betel for the father.’

(4) Thai (*core serialisation*)

mêe *phaa* *lûuk* *pay* *riən* *nǎŋ.sǔuu* *nay* *muəŋ.*
mother lead child go learn book in town
‘The mother takes her children to study in town.’

The Kiranti languages

“Athpare subordinate clauses are inflected for PERS and TAM, but they do not carry final tense markers.” (Ebert 1993:91)

“In most Limbu, Camling and Thulung subordinate clauses the verb is fully inflected. There are, however, certain restrictions for the occurrence of final particles like evidentials.” (Ebert 1993:93)

(5) Athpare

<i>yusana</i>	<i>rikt-u-η-ʔuη</i>	<i>ap-u-η-e</i>
tiger	chase-3P-1S-SEQ	shoot-3P-1S-PT

‘I chased and shot the tiger.’

Serial verbs and “compound verbs” in Burmese

(6) *θu ʔein hma thəmìn pyan la sà mε.*
3 house LOC rice return come eat FUT
‘He will come back for lunch/dinner at my place.’

(7) *di hìn po (pì) sà kàun tε.*
this curry exceed (SEQ) eat good NF
‘This is curry is more delicious.’

(8) *mìn thəmìn sà pì θwà pi là.*
2 rice eat finish go NSIT Q
‘Have you eaten/finished your meal?’

Subordination in Burmese

Adnominal (attributive/relative)

- (9) *tsə̀nɔ́* *twé* *té* *θə̀ŋɛ.dzìn*
1m meet NF.ATTR friend
'the friend who I met'

cf. *tsə̀nɔ́* *θə̀ŋɛ.dzìn* *ko* *twé* *tɛ.*
1m friend OBJ meet NF

- (10) *mìn* *mə̀=ɛ́* *tó* *té* *kə̀ba*
2 NEG=exist CONTR NF.ATTR world
'the world that doesn't have you any more'

cf. *di* *kə̀ba* *hma* *mìn* *mə̀=ɛ́* *tó* *phù.*
this world LOC 2 NEG=exist CONTR NEG

Complement

(11) *θu la hma tɛnɔ θi tɛ.*
3 come FUT.NML 1m know NF
'I know that he will come.'

cf. *θu la mɛ.*
3 come FUT

(12) *di lo lou? ta mə=kàun phù thin tɛ.*
this manner do NF.NML NEG=good NEG think NF
'Doing it this way is not good, I think.'

cf. *di lo lou? tɛ*
this manner do nf

Adverbial

- (13) *mò mə=ywa yin tənə ʔəpyin θwà mɛ.*
sky NEG=rain if 1m outside go FUT
'If it doesn't rain, I will go outside.'

cf. *mò mə=ywa phù.*
sky NEG=rain NEG

- (14) *θu paiʔshan ɛí ló ʔəlouʔ mə=louʔ phù.*
3 money exist because work NEG=do NEG
'He doesn't work because he has money.'

cf. *θú hma paiʔshan ɛí tɛ.*
3.ATTR LOC money exist NF

(15) *ʔəme paiʔshan mə=pa pɛ̀ zè θwà tɛ.*
mother money NEG=bring without market go NF
‘The mother went to the market without taking along money.’

cf. *ʔəme paiʔshan mə=pa phù.*
mother money NEG=bring NEG

(16) *tó ʔein mə=pyan khin thəmìn sà ʔòun mɛ.*
1pl house NEG=return before rice eat still FUT
‘We will eat before going back home.’

cf. *ʔein pyan mɛ/tɛ.*
house return FUT/NF

(17) *θu tó sa.tin.τə̀aun mə=yau? khin*
 3 PL school NEG=arrive before

sa.ʔou? twe mə=pa khé ta twé pì
 book PL NEG=bring DISPL NF.NML meet SEQ

shəya-má pyə̀ hma τəu? ló
 teacher-FEM speak FUT.NML fear because

sa.tin.τə̀aun mə=win pè
 school NEG=enter without

ʔein pyan θwà τá τε.
 house return go PL NF

‘Before they arrived at school they found out that they did not bring along their books and were afraid that the teacher would scold them, so they went back home without entering the school.’

Are adverbial subordinate clauses in Burmese converb constructions?

1. Why even bother?

Masica (1976)

“In Tibeto-Burman also, these forms seem in their multiplicity ([...] Burmese *-ywe'*, *-pi*, *-hlyin*, *-tho*, etc.) and certain lack of fixed character to be a late development. St. Jihn [...] speaks of “continuative affixes” (in Burmese) [...]. Maun Maun Nyun, Orlava et al. (1963:72-73) have no hesitation in identifying the Burmese forms with with Russian adverbial (=conjunctive) participles.” (p.124)

“[T]he profound hiatus between India and Southeast Asia beyond Burma.” (p. 183)

“[T]he forms of Burmese [...] give the impression of being patched together in answer to the areal pull of “Indian” syntax.” (p. 139)

WALS (http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals_code_brm)

Morphology

Inflectional Synthesis of the Verb

2-3 categories per word (Okell 1969)

Prefixing vs. Suffixing in Inflectional Morphology

Strongly suffixing (Cornyn and Roop 1968 [passim], Okell 1969 [passim], Stewart 1955 [passim], Wheatley 1982 [passim])

Syncretism in Verbal Person/Number Marking

No subject person/number marking (Esche et al. 1988)

cf. also *Studies in Burmese linguistics* (Watkins 2005)

Verb phrases (verbal complexes) presented as single words

→ subordinate clauses can be analysed as verb forms

2. Verb form - part of paradigm?

Verb phrase formatives - affixes or clitics?

Structure of the verb phrase in Burmese - independent clause

(NEG) (PRV) (NEG) V (V) (NEG) (PoV) (PL) (ASP)/(HON) STAT

Minimal form: V STAT

Preverbs: *shε?* ‘continue’, *pyan* ‘return’, *wàin* ‘surround’, *pè* ‘give’

Postverbs: *ne* ‘stay’, *thà* ‘deposit’, *lai?* ‘follow’, *pì* ‘finish’, *la* ‘come’, *yá* ‘get’, *nain* ‘win’, *ta?* ‘know’, *phyi?* ‘be’, ...

Plural: *téá* ‘PLURAL SUBJECT’

Aspectuals: *thè* ‘yet, still’, *tó* ‘CONTRASTIVE CHANGE’, *?òun* ‘again, more’

Honorific: *pa* ‘POLITENESS’

Status: *tε* ‘non-future’, *mε* ‘future’, *pi* ‘new situation’, *phù* ‘negative’

Structure of the verb phrase in Burmese - dependent clause

(NEG) (PRV) (NEG) V (V) (NEG) (POV) (PL) (ASP*)/(HON**) SUB

Minimal form: V SUB

(* ASPECTUALS restricted to *θè* and *tó*; ** HONORIFICS not common)

Subordinators:

adverbial *ló* ‘because’, *yin* ‘if’, *yìn* ‘while’, *phó* ‘in order to’, *ʔaun* ‘so that’,
pe.mé ‘although’, *tàin* ‘each time that’, ...

always negated *pè* ‘without’, *khin* ‘before’

sequential *pì* (*tó*, *nauʔ*) ‘and then’, *hmá* ‘not before’, *tó* ‘then’, ...

Why the verb phrase formatives are not affixes → not morphology

◆ Verb phrase not a strong prosodic unit, voicing not consistent

◆ Order within the verb phrase not always fixed

- > Negation either before **PRV**, **V**, or **POV**, sometimes with semantic differences
- > Different order of **ASPECTUALS** and **HONORIFICS** in affirmative/negative expressions

◆ Some of the formatives are not restricted to verb bases

CONTRASTIVE CHANGE marker *tó* also for CONTRASTIVE TOPICS

HONORIFIC *pa* also with non-verbal bases bases

3. Non-finite? Finiteness in Burmese

Features of finiteness (cf. Bisang 2007, Givón 2001, Langacker 2008)

Person	}	MARKING
Number		
Tense/Aspect/Modality		
Politeness		
Illocutionary force		
Property of independent clause		FUNCTION

Finiteness as a functional clausal category is marked in Burmese by STATUS (including TENSE and EPISTEMIC MODALITY), which is not expressed by a verbal affix, but by a clitic formative in the verb phrase. In this respect, subordinate clauses are less finite than independent clauses (“minimally reduced”).

Conclusions

Burmese subordinate clauses are close to converb constructions, both in form and function, but differ from these in that they do not involve a special morphological ‘**VERB FORM**’, but rather a ‘**VERB PHRASE FORM**’. Subordinate clauses show (minimally) reduced finiteness, bringing them to the vicinity of some Kiranti systems.

This leads to the question whether the features involved are due to **areal diffusion** or rather an **internal drift** in Tibeto-Burman languages. Maybe the Burmese system is not an “answer to the areal pull of “Indian” syntax” (Masica 1976:139), but an indigenous feature (“inner dynamic”) of Tibeto-Burman languages.

SEA-like features could possibly be seen as a “pull towards SEA syntax” rather than the other way round.

Abbreviations

ASP	Aspectual marker
CONTR	Contrastive (~ change, ~ topic)
CV	Converb
DSPL	Displacement (spatial and/or temporal)
FUT	Future (irrealis, predictive)
HON	Honorific (politeness) marker
NF	Non-future (realis, certain knowledge)
NSIT	New situation (situation after expected change)
PoV	Postverb (operator/auxiliary)
PrV	Preverb (operator/auxiliary)
SEQ	Sequential marker ('X and then Y')
STAT	Status marker (tense, epistemic modality, evidential)

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