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 ?
✔ Isolating ?
✔ Serial verbs
✔ Classifiers
✔ Semantic tones
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/attributional 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 converses 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:

\[(\text{NP}_1) \ V_1 \ (\text{NP}_2) \ V_2 \ (\text{NP}_3) \ V_3 \ldots \ V_X \ (\text{NP}_X)\]

Often:

\[\text{NP}_X = \text{subject of } V_X, \text{ object of } V_{X-1}\]

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 siga-tt-e.
   well study_I-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-ī pɔṛ-il-i.
   sleep-CV fall-PT-1s
   ‘I fell asleep.’
3. Serial Verb Construction

(3) Mon (root serialisation)

mìʔ kwac ʔa ràn ku ᵃʔa sɔt dɔə 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)

mēe  phaa  lûuk  pay  riən  năŋ.sūm  nay  mɯəŋ.

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

\[ \text{yusana } \text{rikt-u-ŋ-\text{?uŋ}} \quad \text{ap-u-ŋ-e} \]
\[ \text{tiger} \quad \text{chase-3P-1S-SEQ} \quad \text{shoot-3P-1S-PT} \]
‘I chased and shot the tiger.’
Serial verbs and “compound verbs” in Burmese

(6) θu ʔein hma thəmìn pyan la sà mè.
   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 tè.
   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) ʨənɔ twé tɛ́ թəŋɛ.ʥìn
1m meet NF.ATTR friend
‘the friend who I met’

cf. ʨənɔ թəŋɛ.ʥìn ko twé tɛ.
1m friend OBJ meet NF

(10) mìn mə=ɕí tó tɛ́ kəba
2 NEG=exist CONTR NF.ATTR world
‘the world that doesn’t have you any more’

cf. di kəba hma mìn mə=ɕí tó phù.
this world LOC 2 NEG=exist CONTR NEG
Complement

(11) \[ \theta u \, la \, hma \, \text{teño} \, \theta i \, \text{te}. \]
3 come FUT.NML 1m know NF
‘I know that he will come.’

cf. \[ \theta u \, la \, mɛ. \]
3 come FUT

(12) \[ di \, lo \, lou? \, ta \, mə=kàun \, phù \, thin \, \text{te}. \]
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 tənɔ ?əpyin 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

  3 money exist because work NEG=do NEG
‘He doesn’t work because he has money.’

  cf. θuí hma paiʔshan ɕí te.
  3.ATTR LOC money exist NF
(15) ʔəme paiʔshan mə=pa pè zè òwà te.
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/te.
house return FUT/NF
(17) θu tó sa.tin.tèùn mə=yauʔ khin
3 PL school NEG=arrive before

sa.ʔouʔ twe mə=pà khέ ta twé pì
book PL NEG=bring DISPL NF.NML meet SEQ

shəya-má pyò hma təauʔ ló
teacher-FEM speak FUT.NML fear because

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

ʔein pyan θwà təá te.
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)
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) (PR[V]) (NEG) V (V) (NEG) (PoV) (PL) (ASP)/(HON) STAT

Minimal form: V STAT

Preverbs:  
- shɛʔ ‘continue’
- pyan ‘return’
- wàin ‘surround’
- pè ‘give’

Postverbs:  
- ne ‘stay’
- thà ‘deposit’
- laiʔ ‘follow’
- pì ‘finish’
- la ‘come’
- yá ‘get’
- nain ‘win’
- taʔ ‘know’
- phyiʔ ‘be’, ...

Plural:  
- tɛá ‘PLURAL SUBJECT’

Aspectuals:  
- ðè ‘yet, still’
- tó ‘CONTRASTIVE CHANGE’
- ?ðoun ‘again, more’

Honorific:  
- pa ‘POLITENESS’

Status:  
- tɛ ‘non-future’
- mɛ ‘future’
- pi ‘new situation’
- phù ‘negative’
Structure of the verb phrase in Burmese - dependent clause

\[(\text{NEG}) (\text{PR}V) (\text{NEG}) V (V) (\text{NEG}) (\text{PO}V) (\text{PL}) (\text{ASP}^*)/ (\text{HON}**) \text{ SUB}\]

Minimal form: \(V \text{ SUB}\)

\((^* \text{ ASPECTUALS restricted to } \thetaè \text{ and } tó; ** \text{ HONORIFICS not common})\)

Subordinators:

- **adverbial** ló ‘because’, yin ‘if’, yìn ‘while’, phó ‘in order to’, qaun ‘so that’, pe.mé ‘although’, tain ‘each time that’, ...
- **always negated** pè ‘without’, khin ‘before’
- **sequential** pì (tó, nauʔ) ‘and then’, hmá ‘not before’, tó ‘then’, ...

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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


Person
Number
Tense/Aspect/Modality
Politeness
Illocutionary force

Property of independent clause

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”).

MARKING

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


Ebert, K. H. 2008. Forms and Functiona of Converbs. In Ebert, Mattissen and Suter (eds.) 7-33.
WALS Online: http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals_code_brm