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OBJECT MARKING IN BURMESE

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Argument marking in Burmese

- Postpositional markers (SYNTACTIC and SEMANTIC ROLES)

ká, *ha*, *θi* ‘SBJ’, *ko* ‘OBJ’, *ʔà* ‘RECIPIENT’, *yé* ‘POSS’, *hma* ‘LOC’,
né ‘COM, INSTR’, *θó* ‘ALLATIVE’, *hmá* ‘ABLATIVE’, etc.

- Number marking in verbal predicates (PLURAL SUBJECT AGREEMENT)

tcá ‘PLURAL’

(1) *ʔè di phà-khəlè ko θu tó ha θei? tchi? tcá tε.*

ANA this frog-DIM OBJ 3 PL SBJ very love PL NFUT

‘They loved this little frog very much.’

“Case markers”: Formal Burmese vs. Colloquial Burmese

FB	CB	FUNCTION
<i>θi, ká, hma</i>	<i>ha, ká</i>	SUBJECT
<i>ko</i>	<i>ko</i>	OBJECT
<i>ʔà</i>		RECIPIENT
<i>θó</i>		ALLATIVE (GOAL)
<i>hmá, ká</i>	<i>ká</i>	ABLATIVE (SOURCE)
<i>hnaiʔ, hma, twin</i>	<i>hma</i>	LOCATIVE
<i>hnín</i>	<i>né</i>	COMITATIVE
<i>phyín, hnín</i>		INSTRUMENTAL
<i>ʔí</i>	<i>yé</i>	POSSESSIVE

THE OBJECT MARKER *ko*
(Okell and Allott 2001:7f)

𑀓𑀺 /ko/

- (a) Marks N as direct object, CB and FB; regular equivalent of Pali accusative case in *nissaya* translation.

Note 1: N-*ko* is optional. Direct objects are often left unmarked, more often in CB than in FB, and then more often when the object is adjacent to the verb.

- (b) Marks N as **indirect object** with verbs of giving, telling, etc.

OBSERVATIONS:

- Core arguments (SUBJECT, OBJECT) are normally overtly marked in FB, but often left unmarked in CB.

→ **Burmese has DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING (DOM)**

QUESTION TO BE ADDRESSED IN THIS STUDY:

On which factors is the marking of objects in transitive clauses in colloquial Burmese based?

Assumption: Different linguistic constructions convey different meanings, i.e. there is an intrinsic semantic or pragmatic difference between marking and non-marking of an object.

DOM - LOOKING AROUND:

Rheto-Romance (Ladin) (Arquint 1964:22, Ganzoni 1983:198)

“Accusativ persunal”

(2) *Annina salüda a l’ami da Tumasch.*

PN greets DAT the.friend GEN PN

‘Annina greets Tumasch’s friend.’

(3) *El ho mno a spass al chaun.*

he has lead:PP to walk DAT:the dog

‘He took the dog for a walk.’

(4) *No legiain ün bel cudesch.*

we read a nice book

‘We are reading a nice book.’

Lahu (Matisoff 1973:155ff)

“thà? has an accusative function: it may **optionally** occur after a v which is in some sense the ‘object’ of the following verb. [...] thà? by no means occurs mechanically after every noun that is the ‘recipient of the action of the verb’. It is, rather, used quite sparingly, only where **clarity** demands or when **special emphasis** is desired.”

“When a sentence contains two NP’s that are both objects of the verb (one ‘direct’ and one ‘indirect’), it is **bad style** to use thà? after both, but unclear not to use it after one. It will usually appear **only after the indirect object** (generally the **person, not the thing**, acted upon).”

Dolakha Newari (Genetti 1997)

“In Dolakha Newari, the dative case marks **recipients** of ditransitive verbs and **some patients** of monotransitive verbs.” (p. 37)

“Whereas all recipient arguments are indeed marked with the dative casemarker, only some patients of monotransitives are so marked; numerous examples of unmarked patients of monotransitives can be found. [...] The factors which trigger the appearance of the dative casemarker on patients are semantic and pragmatic in nature.” (p. 38)

Findings (p. 42):

▶ More than 2/3 of patient arguments are unmarked

▶ casemarked → animate: 100%

animate → casemarked: 62.7%

animate → unmarked: 37.3%

→ **1. Inanimates are never casemarked**

2. Human referents are often casemarked (112:41)

Casemarking on animate/human referents is triggered by givenness/relevance of referent in ongoing discourse (TOPICALITY).

Hindi (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2007:34ff)

(5) *ilā-ne bacce-ko/*baccā uṭhāyā.*

Ila-ERG child-OBJ/child lifted

‘Ila lifted the/a child.’

(6) *ravī-ne kaccā kelā kāṭā.*

Ravi-ERG unripe banana cut

‘Ravi cut the/a unripe banana.’

(7) *ravī-ne kaccā kele-ko kāṭā.*

Ravi-ERG unripe banana-OBJ cut

‘Ravi cut the/*a unripe banana.’

Factors triggering object marking in Hindi:

- Human (animate) objects are always casemarked with *-ko*, both definite and indefinite.
- Inanimate objects may be casemarked with *-ko* only if definite and not focussed.
- Indefinite inanimate objects are never casemarked.

Relevant features for overt object marking

Scales of topic- and objectworthiness (Aissen 2003)

ANIMACY SCALE

Human > Animate > Inanimate

DEFINITENESS SCALE

Pronoun > Name > Definite > Indefinite Specific > Non-Specific

Assumption: The higher on the scale a referent, the more likely it is to function as SUBJECT of its clause and the more likely it is to be overtly case marked if it functions as OBJECT.

Object marking in Burmese

1. GENERIC OBJECT: Never casemarked

- (8) *tə̀nə thəmìn (*ko) sà mɛ.*
1M rice (OBJ) eat FUT
'I will eat (rice).'

2. PERSONAL PRONOUN: Always casemarked

- (9) *tə̀nə θú *(ko) tɛai? tɛ.*
1M 3:AT OBJ like NFUT
'I like him/her.'

Is the overt object marking

triggered by ANIMACY?

- (10) *tə̀nɔ̀ ɲà (*ko) θwà hmyà mɛ.*
1M fish (OBJ) go lure FUT
'I will go fishing.'

x

Or HUMANNESS?

- (11) *θu lu (*ko) θaʔ phù tɛ.*
3 people (OBJ) kill EXPER NFUT
'He has killed (people) before.'

x

Or is it triggered by DEFINITENESS?

- (12) *kà tə=sì ko tɛənɔ́ tó ʔəkoun.lòun hɲà tɛ.* **x**
car one=CL OBJ 1M PL all hire NFUT
'We all hired a car.'

Or POSITION?

- (13) *tɛənɔ́ di sa.ʔouʔ ko mə=phaʔ tɛhin phù.*
1M this book OBJ NEG=read DES NEG

- (13') *di sa.ʔouʔ ko tɛənɔ́ mə=phaʔ tɛhin phù.*
this book OBJ 1M NEG=read DES NEG

'I don't want to read this book.'

What about SPECIFICITY, ...

(14) *θu mèin.má (tə=yau?) εa ne tε.*
3 woman (one=CL) seek STAY NFUT
'He is looking for a woman (any woman would do).'

(14') *θu mèin.má tə=yau? ko εa ne tε.*
3 woman one=CL OBJ seek STAY NFUT
'He is looking for a (certain) woman.'

(10') [after talking about a big fish in a pond] 
təno (ʔè di) ηà ko θwà hmyà mε.
1M (ANA this) fish OBJ go lure FUT
'I will go to catch that fish.'

TOPICALITY...

(15) *ho ɛ̀-ɛ̀ toun ká lu-khəlè tə=yau? né*
that long.ago-RDP TEMP ABL person-DIM one=CL COM

khwè-khəlè tə=kaun ɛ́ tɛ.
dog-DIM one=CL exist NFUT

*θu tó ha tə=né tó **phà** phàn phó tò thè ko*
3 PL SBJ one=dayCHNG frog catch PURP forest inside ALL

*θwà tɛ́ tɛ. tò thè yau? tó θu tó ha **phà***
go PL NFUT forest inside arrive CHNG 3 PL SBJ frog

lai? *sa* *teá* *ta* *pó.* *di* *lo* *né* *ye-kan*
 follow seek PL NFUT:NML ASRT this SIM COM water-pond

tə=kan *hma* *phà* *tə=kaun ko* *lu-khəlè* *ká* *twé* *θwà* *te.*
 one=pond LOC frog one=CL OBJ person-DIM SBJ find GO NFUT

lu-khəlè *lè* *wàn.θà ?à* *yá* *né* *ye-kan* *thè* *ko*
 person-DIM ADD happy strength get COM water-pond inside ALL

pyè shìn *pì* *phà-khəlè* *ko* *phàn phó* *teò.zà* *ta* *pó.*
 run descend SEQ frog-DIM OBJ catch PURP try.hard NFUT:NML ASRT

- All further occurrences of the frog are marked with DIM and OBJ (where occurring as object).

‘Long time ago there were a little boy and a little dog. One day they went into the forest to catch (a/some) frog(s)-Ø. When they arrived in the forest, they went looking for frogs-Ø. Then, suddenly, the boy saw a frog-OBJ in a water pond. The boy was very happy and with strong resolution he ran into the pond and tried to catch the little frog-Ø.’

(16) [‘How much is that book?’]

di sa.ʔou? ko mə=yàun phù.

this book OBJ NEG=sell NEG

‘This book is not for sale.’

→ **Topical objects are usually marked.**

Note: *ko* is also used as general TOPIC marker.



and FOCUS?

(17) *ba sà tchin lè? - khau?.shwè pè/*ko sà tchin tɛ.*
what eat DES Q noodles EXCL/OBJ eat DES NFUT
'What would you like to eat?' - 'Noodles.'

(18) *bɛ sa.ʔou? pha? mə=lè? - di sa.ʔou? pè/ko pha? mɛ.*
INTER book read FUT=Q this book EXCL/OBJ read FUT
'Which book are you going to read?' - 'This one.'

(19) *ko-lè ko pè hlu?.*
older.brother-DIM OBJ EXCL let.go
'Let my big brother go.'



→ **Object marking is dispreferred on inanimate FOCAL OBJECTS.**

CONCLUSION:

Overt casemarking on patient arguments in spoken Burmese is triggered (favoured) mainly by two parameters:

- **SPECIFICITY/REFERENTIALITY** of the object
- **TOPICALITY** of the object

ANIMACY is of secondary relevance in the choice of marking or non-marking. While (animate/human > inanimate) **SPECIFIC** and/or **TOPICAL** objects generally receive casemarking, **FOCUSSED ANIMATE** or **HUMAN** objects may be casemarked, while **INANIMATE FOCUSSED** objects are usually unmarked.

GENERIC animate and inanimate objects are always unmarked.

[+KO]

[-KO]

Pronoun > Name > Specific > Non-Specific

Topic > Focus

Human > Animate > Inanimate

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