DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING IN BURMESE

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Argument marking in Burmese

- Postpositional markers (SYNTACTIC and SEMANTIC ROLES)
  
  ne ‘COM, INSTR’, θó ‘ALLATIVE’, hmá ‘ABLATIVE’, etc.

- Number marking in verbal predicates (PLURAL SUBJECT AGREEMENT)
  teá ‘PLURAL’

  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

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<th>FB</th>
<th>CB</th>
<th>FUNCTION</th>
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<td>θi, ká, hma</td>
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<td>ko</td>
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<td>OBJECT</td>
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<td>ᶞà</td>
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<td>ʔó</td>
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<td>ALLATIVE (GOAL)</td>
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<td>phyín, hnín</td>
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<td>ᶞi</td>
<td>yé</td>
<td>POSSESSIVE</td>
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THE OBJECT MARKER *ko*
(Okell and Allott 2001:7f)

[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.
Is -ko really an object marker?


dog-DIM (SBJ) chicken (OBJ) follow bite NFUT

‘The chicken is chasing and biting the dog.’

(3) khwè-khəlè *(ha) tɛaun *(ko) lai? kai? tɛ.

dog-DIM (SBJ) cat (OBJ) follow bite NFUT

‘The dog is chasing and biting the cat.’


cpyicken (SBJ) dog-DIM (OBJ) follow bite NFUT

‘The dog is chasing and biting the chicken.’
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:

Lahu (Matisoff 1973:155ff)

“thè? has an accusative function: it may optionally occur after a ν which is in some sense the ‘object’ of the following verb. [...] thè? 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 thè? 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) \textit{ilā-ne bacce-ko/*baccā uṭhāyā.}
Ila-ERG child-OBJ/child lifted
‘Ila lifted the/a child.’

(6) \textit{ravī-ne kaccā kelā kāṭā.}
Ravi-ERG unripe banana cut
‘Ravi cut the/a unripe banana.’

(7) \textit{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) သားနာသာဝင် (ko) စတာ မခင်
1M rice (OBJ) eat FUT
‘I will eat (rice).’

2. PERSONAL PRONOUN: Always casemarked

(9) သားနာသား (ko) သားအား သား
1M 3:AT OBJ like NFUT
‘I like him/her.’
Is the overt object marking triggered by ANIMACY?

(10) ʨə n ɔ ŋà (*ko) θwà hmyà mɛ.
    1m frog(OBJ) go lure FUT
    ‘I will go fishing.’

Or HUMANNESS?

(11) θu lu (*ko) θaʔ phù te.
    3 people (OBJ) kill EXPER NFUT
    ‘He has killed (people) before.’
Or is it triggered by DEFINITENESS?

(12) \( kà \ tə=si \ ko \ tənč \ tό \ ʔəkoun.ləun \ hyə \ te. \)
    car one=CL OBJ 1M PL all hire NFUT
    ‘We all hired a car.’

Or POSITION?

(13) \( tənč \ di \ sa.ʔou? \ ko \ mə=pha? \ təhin \ phù. \)
    1M this book OBJ NEG=read DES NEG

(13′) \( di \ sa.ʔou? \ ko \ tənč \ mə=pha? \ təhin \ phù. \)
    this book OBJ 1M NEG=read DES NEG

    ‘I don’t want to read this book.’
What about SPECIFICITY, ... 

(14) \( \theta u \) mèin.má \((tə=ya?u?)+a\) \(e a\) \(ne\) \(tɛ.\)  
3 woman \(\text{(one=CL)}\) seek \(\text{STAY NFUT}\)  
‘He is looking for a woman (any woman would do).’

(14’) \( \theta u \) mèin.má \(tə=ya?u?\) \(ko\) \(e a\) \(ne\) \(tɛ.\)  
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]  
təənɔ \((ʔɛ̀ \ di)\) ṣa ko θwà hmyà me.  
1M \(\text{(ANA this)}\) fish OBJ go lure FUT  
‘I will go to catch that fish.’
TOPICALITY...

(15) ho ɕè-ɕè  tòun ká  ywa  tə=ywa  hma
that long.ago-RDP  TEMP  ABL  village one-village LOC

khwè-kholè  tə=kaun  ye  lu-kholè  tə=yauʔ  ye
dog-DIM  one=CL  ENUM  person-DIM  one=CL  ENUM

ɕí tə=té.
exist  NFUT  REP  one=day  CHNG  3  PL  SBJ  frog  catch

phò tò  thè  ko  tò  le  thweʔ  tɛ.
PURP  forest  inside  ALL  forest  middle  go.out  NFUT
di lo né θu tó ha tò thè ko yau? tò
this manner COM 3 PL SBJ forest inside ALL arrive CHNG

phà lai? ea teá tê. di lo né lu-kholê ha
frog follow seek PL NFUT this manner COM person-DIM SBJ

phà ea yìn ea yìn tə=kaun hmá mə=yá tê ṭəshəun
frog seek while seek while one=CL just NEG=get NFUT:ATTR end

yeʔain nə hma phà tə=kaun ko thwà twé tê.
water-pond near LOC frog one=CL OBJ go find NFUT

► All further occurrences of the frog are marked with OBJ (where occurring as object). ‘Frog’ is now both REFERENTIAL and TOPICAL.
‘Long time ago in a village there were a little dog and a little boy. One day they went into the forest to catch (a/some) frog(s)-Ø. So when they arrived in the forest, they went around looking for frogs-Ø. The boy, while looking for frogs for some time, in the end he found a frog-OBJ near a water pond.’

(16) ['How much is that book?']

\[
di\, sa.?ou?\, ko\, mə=yàun\, phù.
\]

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  sä  tèhin lè?  -  khauʔ.shwè  pè/*ko  sä  tèhin te.
    what eat DES Q  noodles   EXCL/OBJ eat DES NFUT
    ‘What would you like to eat?’  -  ‘Noodles.’

(18) be  sa.?ou?  phaʔ  mè=lèʔ?  -  di  sa.?ouʔ  pè/?ko  phaʔ  me.
    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  hluʔ.
    older.brother-DIM  OBJ  EXCL  let.go
    ‘Let my big brother go.’  

→ Object marking is dispreferred on inanimate FOCAL OBJECTS.
CONCLUSION:

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

- **SPECIFICITY/REFERENTIALITY**: SPECIFIC > NON-SPECIFIC
- **TOPICALITY**: TOPIC > FOCUS

ANIMACY is of secondary relevance in the choice of marking or non-marking. While (animate/human > inanimate) SPECIFIC and/or TOPICAL objects generally receive object marking, FOCUSED ANIMATE or HUMAN objects may be marked, while INANIMATE FOCUSED objects are usually unmarked. GENERIC animate and inanimate objects are always unmarked.
Pronoun > Name > Specific > Non-Specific

Topic > Focus

Human > Animate > Inanimate


