

FURTHER TYPOLOGICAL STUDIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN LANGUAGES

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. GENERAL REMARKS

This paper is called "further" typological studies, because it is a sort of long-delayed sequel to a paper presented to the London Conference of 1961 on Southeast Asian linguistics by F.J. Honey and E.H.S. Simmonds, which embraced Thai and Vietnamese: 'Some elements of nominal structure compared'. To this first paper may then be added one read to the similar conference of 1965 by E.J.A. Henderson under the title 'The Typography of Certain Phonetic and Morphological Characteristics of South-East Asian Languages'.

The present paper extends the study to the verb phrase and brings in other languages, as will be described below.

In the original paper, after a very helpful comparison of the structure of noun phrases in Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese, the authors added: "It would be interesting to extend the work (a) by comparing descriptive systems of the verbal complexes of the three languages, and (b) attempting to apply the method of description of the nominal systems of, say, Khmer and Malay." (p.77). In this paper such an attempt is made, with still other languages added.

The paper has further aims as well, which are in a way by-products of the main aim of the descriptive comparison. In a paper presented to the 1965 London Conference, I outlined a typological approach to language description which I called "concept domination". This, in brief, works on the recognition of a certain bias in languages in many parts of the world, towards elaboration of either the noun phrase or the verb phrase in an utterance. Some languages appear to be more interested in

the details of how an event took place than in who or what performed it. In such languages, the VP may be morphologically elaborate, including complex systems of aspects, moods and tenses, inclusion of subject and object markers in the verbal complex, often along with indicators of direction and other details of the action. This may be called *event domination*, and in the S.E. Asian region Santali provides an example. Other languages seem to be more interested in the actor and/or the goal, and the NP then shows class or gender, number, case, and often the verb marks neither person nor number, and aspect, tense and mood or marked syntactically and not morphologically. The interest is in the NP, and these languages may be called *object-dominated*. The abbreviations ED and OD are used. Other languages, again, appear to be equally interested in both event and object - the African Bantu languages have elaborate noun class systems with concord, and these are involved as much in the verbal complex as in the nominal. These are *double dominated* (DD). They do not occur in the Southeast Asian region. Still others, such as English and most of the Austronesian languages, show little bias in either direction, and the morphology of such languages is comparatively simple. In the extreme case of Chinese and similar languages, there is no overt morphology at all. Most of the southeast Asian languages belong to this type, which is called *neutral domination* (ND).

In 1969 I produced a book entitled *A Survey of New Guinea Languages*, in which this typology was used as a basis of arrangement. A reviewer wrote that the author seemed to have lumped together all languages he could not account for under other headings as "neutral domination", with no further analysis. To a degree that is true, and the author was not forgetful of it even while he did it. In New Guinea ND is comparatively rare, and there was no need to subcategorise the group, any more than to account for the verbal classification of the Athapascan languages of North America, which have no counterpart in New Guinea.

The languages of Southeast Asia, however, provide an opportunity for refining one's thinking about subdivisions within the ND class. It is therefore part of the aim of this paper to do this, in addition to taking up the challenge of Honey and Simmond's paper. It seeks to show that although ND would by implication be a homogeneous group, it is not really so, and subdivisions within it can be made similar to those made within the other classes, both in the original paper and in the *Survey*. English and Thai, for instance, show differences amid common qualities. The paper therefore seeks to examine languages classifiable as ND, but differing among themselves so that ND can be further analysed as the other groups have been.

The 1965 paper by Henderson was concerned with just this type of language that in the "domination" arrangement would be classified as ND. The paper was a phonological examination, and studied the distribution of eight phonetic features spread over sixty languages and India to Oceania. The presence of tone is, of course, a differentiating feature, but it is not relevant in concept domination typology, which functions rather on the morphological and syntactic levels. Even so, the materials used here suggest further avenues of research rather than attain positive conclusions, and they are meant to do so. Although the primary purpose is to provide the necessary subdivisions of the ND type of language, the present study should also lead on to other matters which are not part of this paper, such as the question of what type of deep structure lies behind languages so different in structure as Bantu, Latin and Chinese. It has been suggested that only noun, verb and adjective are represented (as one category) in the base, but it seems doubtful whether adjective can be regarded as primary anywhere. Again it has been suggested that perhaps prepositions derive from verbs. These languages of southeast Asia, like those of the ND group in West Africa, have evidence to offer in this matter. However, it may be put forward as an idea, that the search for universals in language is not so simple as some of the searchers appear to think, and that there is probably no "deep structure" of language as such, traceable through a process of differential development in time and space. These aspects of linguistic research cannot be pursued here, but the paper, if developed to its logical conclusion, could well open up research also in this decidedly different field.

1.2. LANGUAGES AND MATERIALS USED

The languages used in the paper on which the present one is based are Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese. Thai has been added as an obvious extension. Korean and Japanese are also obvious extensions as representing north-east Asia; in the south, Khmer is equally called for. Outside this area again, there is the extensive Austronesian family, whose western members impinge on, and indeed intermingle with, the other families. An attempt has been made therefore to give as fair coverage as possible of the languages of this family which are in touch with the other families employed. This means, of course, Malay, but nearer to the field of the other languages, Jarai and Rhade information has been employed, and a missionary among the "Sea Gypsies" of the islands west of Thailand kindly provided material in Urak Lawoi'. Mr Hogan's work here is good, but he has produced his material in a modified Thai script, because the peoples form part of Thailand and it seemed more practical

to produce literacy materials for them in the script employed in the national language - although this could only be done with some modification for certain letters of the Thai alphabet. Moken material was unfortunately unavailable except for a few odd notes. On the southern side of this western Austronesian, the Atjeh language and the Cham dialects offered themselves as near neighbours: and it must not be forgotten that there is a Cham language on the island of Hainan which is very little known to the outside world. This Cham has developed a tonal system based on that of the local Chinese.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE PAPER

In the paper presented in 1961, study was confined to the noun phrase. It is desirable therefore to begin from that point here also, to enable a clear study to be made, embodying the results achieved in the previous paper. Towards the end of their paper, Honey and Simmonds stated, "It would be premature to draw any firm conclusions from such facts (as they had shown in the course of the study), but it would be interesting to extend the work by (a) comparing descriptive systems of the verbal complexes of the three languages, and (b) by attempting to apply the method of description to the nominal forms of, say, Khmer and Malay." It was this suggestion that gave the lead into the present paper, which attempts to cover just these fields: to describe the verb phrase and to extend the scope of languages in the way that has been mentioned above.

Burmese was not originally included in the paper, but on second thoughts it has been added. It was omitted because it steps outside the strict SEA area: it belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages (Wolfenden:1929; Pring (1963) and other authors on general linguistic classification) and thus lies apart from the Mon-Khmer (MK) and Austronesian (AN) languages which form the basis of the paper. But it is in geographical company with them and is as worthy of inclusion as Chinese, Korean and Japanese. It serves in a number of cases to point up contrasts between the structures of the various types, perhaps more in the NP than in the VP. There is much argument about the interpretation of VP in Burmese, too much to be even summarised here. Alliot's paper on 'The verbal syntagma in Burmese' (Alliot 1965:283-308) is the latest and probably the fullest, and is taken here as the guide - but it should be studied in full. In the VP also, tense, voice and mood rather than aspect seem to be dominant, more so than in the MK languages and even the AN languages used here.

Readers of Russian can also use the *Birmanskiy Jazyk* in the Asiatic series of the Moscow Academy of Sciences (Maun Maun Njun etc., 1963)