OBJECT-VERB IN AKHA: THE ABB STRUCTURE*

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In Akha there are numerous examples of noun-verb constructions—syntactically mostly object-verb—where the verb has the same phonetic shape as the second syllable of the preceding noun. These are sometimes referred to as cognate object constructions. E.g.:

\begin{align*}
nò bàŋ bàŋ & \quad \text{‘wear socks’} \\
sḻà bjèq bjèq & \quad \text{‘chop raw meat’} \\
dò dà dà & \quad \text{‘tell a proverb’} \\
i̱ dì dì & \quad \text{‘swim’} \\
tjë dyq dyq & \quad \text{‘soak rice’} \\
ùjè je & \quad \text{‘to rain’} \\
ájèq jeq & \quad \text{‘to flower’} \\
mò ná ná & \quad \text{‘have a wound’} \\
dò nỳ nỳ & \quad \text{‘sit’} \\
njìm tsòq tsòq & \quad \text{‘build a house’} \\
dù xhàn xhàn & \quad \text{‘dig a hole’} \\
là njà njà & \quad \text{‘stutter’}
\end{align*}

Going through my files, and adding a few from Lewis 1989, I easily found 300 examples, and have stopped there to analyze what I have so far before hunting for more.1 I also went through some 700 pages of transcribed texts, i.e. around 40,000 words, to analyze this “ABB construction” from the points of view of word structure, syntactic behaviour and semantics.

STRUCTURE

Generally speaking, all the ABB’s can be separated between AB and B through e.g. the negation marker mà, or a numeral + classifier (the noun may

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1 There are many fewer in Lahu. I have counted only about forty in my Dictionary. See the following article in this issue. [Ed.]
have its second syllable as the classifier), or a noun particle. The verb may function as the verb-head in a concatenation or as a versatile verb following an inserted verb-head, i.e. the AB behave as any other noun + verb:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{mì bəq mà bəq} \quad \text{‘not shoot with a rifle’} \\
&\text{rifle not shoot} \\
&\text{hò tsuq thì tsuq tsuq} \quad \text{‘make one rice ball’}^2 \\
&\text{riceball one CLF make} \\
&\text{dáŋ xhà thì mò xhà} \quad \text{‘give one dáŋ-xhà ceremonial chicken’} \\
&\text{cerem.chicken one CLF give} \\
&\text{mì bəq nè bəq sèq} \quad \text{‘shoot to death with rifle’} \\
&\text{rifle nP shoot kill} \\
&\text{hò mèq ja mèq} \quad \text{‘fly and get hungry’} \\
&\text{rice hungry fly hungry} \\
&\text{ny nò mà nò thà njà} \quad \text{‘can’t remember’} \\
&\text{heart think not think keep able}
\end{align*}
\]

The ABB can be formed in the following ways: (1) the A syllable has its origin in a dissyllabic noun, being its first or second syllable, and can’t occur as a free noun; (2) the A syllable may occur as a free monosyllabic noun by itself and is not part of a dissyllabic noun; (3) the A syllable may be the prefix a-; (4) the A syllable is not part of a dissyllabic noun, nor can it occur by itself, but only in connection with B, i.e. as AB. The second B, i.e. the verb, can, it seems, always occur by itself and doesn’t have to be preceded by AB. The A/AB nouns and B verbs may of course also occur with other nouns or verbs with various degrees of versatility:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{hò mèq mèq} \quad \text{‘hungry (for rice, food)’} \\
&\text{hò mà djaq} \quad \text{‘not have rice’} \\
&\text{já-phi mèq} \quad \text{‘hungry for opium’} \\
&\text{mì bəq bəq} \quad \text{‘shoot with a rifle’} \\
&\text{mì bəq zó} \quad \text{‘buy a rifle’} \\
&\text{ádi bəq} \quad \text{‘shoot a bird’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[^2\text{Cf. Lahu 5-thì? tè thì? thì? ve. [Ed.]}\]
tjhé kha kha ‘plant rice’
γɔ njɔ kha ‘plant vegetables’
tjhé àŋ ‘sell rice’

Some verbs and nouns may enter into more than one ABB construction, as e.g.

tjhé kha kha ‘plant rice’
tjhé phi phi ‘carry rice’
tjhé thàŋ thàŋ ‘pound rice’

tjhé ‘rice’ is a monosyllabic noun.

ádzàŋ dzàŋ ‘make a bundle’
ùdzàŋ dzàŋ ‘wear a turban’
djòq dzàŋ dzàŋ ‘wear a woman’s belt’

dzàŋ is a verb ‘to bundle’; the prefix ̀á- makes it into a noun: ‘a bundle’; ̀ù comes from ̀udù ‘head’; djòq ‘waist’ is a monosyllabic noun.

í dì dì ‘swim’
í láŋ láŋ ‘boil water’
í sjhū sjhū ‘urinate’

í is from ítjūq ‘water’.

Below I go through the different categories in order of frequency.

1. The A syllable has its origin in a dissyllabic noun.

This is the most frequent structure, with 105 examples from the basic list, i.e. 37 percent of the examples assembled so far. Of these, the A syllable comes from the first syllable of a dissyllabic noun in 64 cases, but from the second syllable in 41 other examples. Some occur in many combinations, others are restricted to one. Consider the following:

From sjhà-djí ‘meat’ e.g.
sjhà bjín bjín ‘divide meat into piles’
sjhà bjeq bjeq ‘chop raw meat’
sjhà the the ‘hunt’
sjhà tjhé tjhé ‘pickle’
From *dɔ̞-dàŋ* ‘buttock, bottom’
- dɔ̀ kàq ƙàq  
- dɔ̀ ný ný  
- dɔ̀ thé thé  

‘wear a loincloth’
‘sit’
‘slip and fall on rump’

From *tshó-hà* ‘human being’
- tshó mjáŋ mjáŋ  
- tshó xhô xhô  
- tshó ƙọ ƙọ  

‘to give a name’
‘steal’
‘weep for a dead person’

From *mí-tshà* ‘earth’
- mí bjáq bjáq  
- mí luq luq  

‘to have a landslide’
‘to have an earthquake’

From *já-ŋe* ‘field’
- já móq móq  
- já ƙíŋ  

‘weed’
‘work in the fields’

From *ũdù* ‘head’
- ũdzáŋ dzáŋ  
- Ńûtjô ƙhô  
- Ńùxôq xôq  

‘wear a turban’
‘wear a woman’s headdress’
‘wear a hat’

From *ŋà-shà* ‘fish’
- ŋà djýq djýq  

‘fish with hook and line’

From *làq* ‘hand, arm’
- làq bê bê  
- làq duq duq  
- làq tsàq tsâq  
- làq tuq tuq  

‘wear a ring’
‘wear a bracelet’
‘hold hands’
‘clench one’s fist’

From *âkhý* ‘foot’
- khý byq byq  
- khý taq taq  

‘have a numb foot’
‘put on male’s leggings’

From *tjaq* ‘rope’
- tjaq pje q pjeq  

‘plait a rope’

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3 In Lahu ŋà ‘fish’ is a free monosyllabic noun, and the binome ŋà-šà means ‘fish as food’ (lit. “fish-flesh”). [Ed.]