ON SECOND-ORDER ASPECTUALS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BURMESE

*to. (ကန်စ်) AND dhei: (ကြာစ်) RECONSIDERED*

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0. INTRODUCTION. I shall remain content for the time being if I can deal just with the Burmese facts, and I shall go on at a later time to consider how the same account can be extended to account for the different ways various languages handle apparently similar aspect words and particles, e.g., how it is that, say, Standard English *any more/any longer* is used in so-called negative polarity contexts (√I don't know whether Peter is in London *any longer*) interchangeably with *still*, whilst French and German restrict it to the scope of directly expressed negation (van der Auwera n.d.: 5, item 8); why recent American English allows in contexts other than negative polarity ones, as in 'I do that *anymore*, meaning to say that I have finally come to be in the habit of doing something¹, just as Burmese allows the use of postverbal *to., SUPPOSEDLY* translatable in English as *anymore*, in the irrealis (future) and in the realis (past-present) in the affirmative (something neither Standard English nor German or French allows); how one deals with the still obscure relations between the uses of English *still* and *yet*, respectively (e.g., *not yet* = *still not*), so that *yet* is almost² to negative polarity scope, whilst *still* is never proper in such scope. I presume for the moment that in this instance *yet* is implicitly within some sort of negative polarity scope (and so is *still* postverbally), in the sense of an assertion being used pragmatically to deny an expectation to the contrary.

About these problems I have nothing systematic to say as yet. However, I am bound to make two obvious suggestions that I shall follow up at another time. First, it seems clear that a lot of this has to do with the interaction between negation and these aspectuals; and this turns on the difference between taking negation as simply a state of affairs and taking it as a denial of the opposite state of affairs (cf. the relation, mentioned above, between *not yet*—denying the expectation that something affirmative is true—and *still not*—asserting the continuing character of a negative state of affairs).

Secondly, and more importantly, some, and maybe all, of these problems arise because we have the habit of failing to discriminate between underlying conceptual notions,
computationally understood, and the varying ways these can be superficially encoded in the lexicon. Or, in plain language, we start out supposing, for instance, that Burmese to. ought to mean English any longer just because it is often found in the same sorts of (negative polarity) contexts—we shall see, in the body of this paper, that they are really quite different sorts of words, with to. actually signifying something that English employs in its computations of semantic Event-time, but has no way of lexicalising directly. Likewise, we suppose that French encore ought to mean the same thing as English still, simply because it is easiest in many places to translate a French sentence using encore with an English one employing still, and we merely note in passing (as does even van der Auwera n.d.: 20, Section B.a) that encore can also refer to the iterative idea of English again.3 May it not be, rather, that French uses this word once and for all with an iterative assignment, but permits the continuativeness denoted by still to be construed as applying to the iteration that in fact universally and necessarily underlies, in some sense, imperfectivity when Event state spaces are mapped with the real time line, as in Tense Logic (see Lehman 1992a)—something we understand perfectly well when it comes to the 'progressive' of so-called punctual Events, as in, say, 'Paul is hammering the nail'. We must not continue to do our linguistic analysis, either descriptive or comparative, on the basis of convenient glosses from one language into another—not because, as might be supposed, to do so overestimates underlying similarities but precisely because, on the contrary, it ends up masking real similarities at a deeper level! But let me now get on with my main argument and demonstration.

1. BURMESE ASPECTUAL to. AND thei: A FORMAL ANALYSIS. The concrete question I now address is 'What are the real meanings of the Burmese aspectual particles to. and thei?:' I shall also say something about the particle oun:, but only later on. In the light of the references already adduced, I shall make no effort to set out in any detail at all the facts about these particles.

Consider the model of state-spaces with mode and aspect intersecting described in Lehman 1992a. Assume now basically two things: first, that any Event, Ei has a natural inertia. This is not hard to motivate. Many actions and states that verbs can describe have a natural completion, which is what the idea of a resultative is all about: you go up to your
arrival, and this is true even if the goal is indefinitely far away and quite unspecific; you eat until the food is gone. This intuition is so strong that we seem to have nearly insuperable problems coming to grips with the idea of the infinite. We feel that every Event continuum ought to have a conclusion, however arbitrary, and the fact that we seem to have no such intuition about Time itself only goes to confirm the suspicion that the relation is quite indirect between the time-line of Tense Logic and the representation of time in the ordinary language of mode and aspect, i.e., as applied to event predication. Any Event is conceptualised, then, to put it not all that oversimply, headed towards its culmination. Even the Universe, if understood as an Event (cf. the Big Bang theory of physical cosmology), i.e., as a state of affairs having a definite beginning, seems to make physicists more comfortable if it can also be seen as having a definite conclusion, even if it means coming to terms with the quite counter-intuitive notion of a finite end to time itself.

Events, then, have inertia, and I call it that because it has at least formal properties quite like the inertia of ordinary mechanics—an Event goes on towards its culmination inexorably unless something intervenes either to extend its span or to terminate it prematurely, as it were. If I am going to some definite goal, my going is naturally complete if I reach the goal, but of course I can quit going, or be forced to quit, long before reaching the goal; alternatively, I can go on beyond the goal, never pausing in my progress, or else I can be so slowed down that my progress towards the goal goes on beyond all expectation.

Secondly, it seems to follow that there must be what, for lack of any better name, I shall call the inertial moment of an Event. This is the change of state that van Baar, Wheatley and many others have remarked upon in dealing with aspectuals.

Having regard to these two parameters of the space of the dynamics of Events in State Space, we can go on to consider our aspectuals. Any Event (any State of Affairs whatsoever) can be retarded in its inertial moment. This can come about in exactly two ways: the transition from the presumptive, Inchoative, transition from irrealis to realisation may be postponed or blocked, or its progress towards culmination and/or termination (the presumptive transition from perfectivity of Aspect to Perfectivity—from being [+perfect, - perfective] to [+perfective] ) may be held up. This, and just this alone, is the cognitive universal underlying the
overlap between otherwise diverse, lexico-semantic meanings of words such as English *still*, German *noch*, French *encore*, Burmese *-thei*: and so on.

To say *thu thwa:thei* te (ဗာ ဏိုက်ခြင်း ၾက္ဟီ), 'he/she is/was still going', is to mark the event as more than merely imperfective; it is now marked as (say at least mnemonically) [-inertial], in the sense of failing, in the obvious way, to achieve its expected temporal point of inertial moment transition to perfectivity. If, on the other hand, I say *thu mathwa:thei* hpu: (ဗာ ဏိုက်ခြင်း ၾက္ဟီ), 'he/she is not yet/still not going', (m \ ... hpu: /ဝ ... က) the same abstract computational idea is at work. One expects the inchoation of the Event of going, but it is blocked. And so the Event\(^4\) remains in irrealis mode, and hence also (see Lehman 1992a for the complicated way Mode and Aspect interface) [-perfect]. But this is also true of a simple negation, without *thei*: . With this particle, the Event is additionally marked [-inertial].

Suppose, now, we want to make explicit that an Event's threshold Moment of Inertia has been achieved. Why do this? Clearly because up to now this has not been the case even though one may have expected it. Intuitively at least one expects, by default, Events not construed in one's Knowledge-structures as in the realm of Imaginaries (e.g., conditionals, hypotheticals, impossibles, fictions and the like), to come to pass, and that is exactly why, in a language like Burmese for instance, the unembellished irrealis ending (colloquially *-me / -ဝါ*) on a verb serves to mark to future.\(^5\) In this case, then, we want to mark the Event as [+inertial], meaning that it has, at long last, so to speak, achieved its inertial moment.

So, if I say *thwa:to.me* ၾက္ဟီ။ ဗာသာစားညီ, I signify not just that I will go, nor even just that I am on the very point of going [+Inchoative], but that I have virtually already begun the transition to actually being on my way. If I say, however, *mathwa:to.hpu:* ၾက္ဟီ။ ဗာသာစားညီ / ကမြား, I intend you to understand that I am *no longer* going.