

VERB CONCATENATION IN KACHIN

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For
LaRaw Maran
Duwa
Partner and Friend

Foreword

During the summer of 1963, after my first year as a graduate student in the Berkeley linguistics department, it was my good fortune to work for several months with LaRaw Maran, then a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Arizona, on a grammatical analysis of the Kachin language (now usually called Jinghpaw or Jingpho), which is his native tongue. LaRaw, now a professor of linguistics at the University of Indiana, was, technically speaking, my "informant", as I attempted to put into practice for the first time the principles of field linguistics I was absorbing from my teachers. Needless to say, LaRaw was no passive purveyor of information, but rather a fully active partner and co-worker in our joint enterprise of exploring his language. We spent endless happy hours together doing things like translating Y.R. Chao's Mandarin Primer into Kachin. LaRaw's casual intellectual brilliance and cheerful physical stamina hooked me for life on Southeast Asian linguistics and indeed on field linguistics in general.

Fate decreed that I could not do fieldwork on Kachin in Burma, and I settled for Lahu in Thailand. But the work LaRaw and I had done together on Kachin turned out to be excellent preparation for my encounter with the grammars of other Tibeto-Burman languages. In particular, the study of Kachin first brought me face to face with a phenomenon which was to preoccupy me later: verb concatenation (serial verbs, verbs in series). This paper was written sometime during the academic year 1963-64, and formed the basis for a talk I presented in March 1964 to the Western Branch of the American Oriental Society. Otherwise, it has languished half-forgotten in a file-folder ever since.

The analysis here is naturally not pushed anywhere near as far as it is in "Verb concatenation in Lahu: the syntax and semantics of 'simple' juxtaposition" [Acta Linguistica Hafniensia 12.1, 1969] or in The Grammar of Lahu, pp. 199-265. In particular, I did not try to deal with "multiversatile concatenations" involving more than one non-head verb (except for a little in the section on "hyperversatile verbs of motion", 2.27 below). I was still groping for terminology to discuss these matters. Anyway, not much has been written on Kachin grammar in the past ten years, and I have left the manuscript substantially as it originally was, transcription and all.²

Serial verbs are attracting wider attention nowadays, both in Southeast Asian studies and in general linguistics. There was a panel on verbs in series at the Sixth Sino-Tibetan Conference (San Diego, 1973) at which papers were presented by Nguyen Dinh Hoa (Vietnamese), John Hou (Chinese), Rosa Needleman (Thai) and W. Warutamasintop (Thai). Li and Thompson (1973) have produced an interesting article on serial verbs in Mandarin. Trần Trọng Hải (Cornell) and Chris Smeall (Berkeley) are carrying on research into Vietnamese and Burmese verb concatenation, respectively.

Eventually it will be fascinating to compare serial verb constructions of the East Asian type with those to be found elsewhere in the world (like Africa). For now, however, let me just lay this modest offering on the altar of concatenatory scholarship.

Transcription of Kachin phonemes.

- (a) tones: mid (unmarked) /ban/ ; high (ˊ) /bǎn/ ; low (ˋ) /bàn/ ; falling (ˋ) /bǎn/ ; high-stopped (ˊ + -p, -t, -k, -q) /bát, báq/ ; low-stopped (ˋ + -p, -t, -k, -q) /bàt, bàt/ .
- (b) glottal stop: written "q"; occurs finally /náq/, initially before vowel /ʔeɪŋ/, and in combination with initial resonants /qrət, qyép, qwá/.
- (c) syllabic nasal: written m- before labials, and n- otherwise, though the different positions of articulation are non-distinctive. Syllabic nasals are fully tonal in Kachin: /ńtǎ , mbun, ñgen/.
- (d) aspirated stops: written "hp, ht, hk" instead of "ph, th, kh". This is just traditional orthography, and does not imply any fancy kind of "pre-aspiration."
- (e) palatal consonants: the digraphs "sy, cy, zy" are used for the unit phonemes /š, tš, dž/, respectively. Kachin lacks a voiced palatal spirant, and has no aspirated palatal affricate.
- (f) shwa: the unstressed toneless vowel is written with /ə/, not with an a-breve (ǎ) as in Hanson.

1.0 Introduction: Kachin form-classes. Kachin morphemes may be grouped into three superclasses: heads, postpositives, and preformatives. Heads include nouns (N) and verbs (V). Postpositives include nominal particles (P_n), verbal particles (P_v), and clause markers (M_c). Preformatives include nominal bound prefixes (B_n) and verbal bound prefixes (B_v).

In a "minimal head-phrase", the head may be preceded by a preformative, or followed by a postpositive, or both, or neither.

We shall not undertake a comprehensive analysis of Kachin phrase-structure, but will merely outline the criteria for assigning a particular morpheme to one or another of the above seven classes, briefly mentioning some of the more interesting formal and semantic subclasses into which they may be further divided.

1.1 Nouns: diagnostic environments and subclasses. Nouns are defined as those morphemes which may be followed by a nominal particle. Thus the "diagnostic environment" for a Kachin noun is _____P_n. Other environments (within a minimal NP) in which a noun may occur are: _____N and N_____. That is, a noun may appear "in apposition with" another noun.^{3,4}

Subclasses.

Common nouns: məsyà 'person', hpún 'tree', syərò 'tiger'.

Pronouns (N_{prop}) behave very much like common nouns: nai 'I', syi 'he, she, it', qán 'we two'.

Interrogative nouns (N_{intg}) include words like kənìŋ ~ gənìŋ 'how?', gədə 'how much?', kəđai 'who?'

Introductory nouns (N_{intd}) may occur sentence-initially and followed by pause: syəlɔi 'then, thereupon', mòì 'long ago'.

Limited or post-verbal nouns (N_{lim}) may not occur phrase-initially, but must always appear after a verb: V____. In this respect they are like verbal particles, but their nounhood is proved by the fact that they may be followed by a nominal particle. Thus the verb syá 'eat' may precede the N_{lim} yàn 'if' (syá yàn 'if one eats'). Adding the P_n gò 'topicalizer', we get: syá yàn gò 'in the case that one eats; as for the possibility of one's eating'.

Appositional nouns (N_{app}) characteristically occur before or after another noun. There are a large number of special subtypes of N_{app}:

- (a) The two determiners (N_{det}): dai 'that (one)', ndai 'this (one)' [ndai syərò 'this tiger', dai məsyà 'that person'].
- (b) Numerals (N_{num}): syərò lək̀h̀ŋ̀ 'two tigers', məsyà məsum 'three people'.
- (c) Quantity-nouns (N_q): syərò nlan 'all tigers', məsyà nkau 'some people'.
- (d) Auxiliary numerals or counters (N_{aux})⁵: gà hkò mi 'a single word' [gà (N) 'word', hkò 'N_{aux} for words', mi (P_n) 'one'].
- (e) Locational nouns (N_{loc}): syərò òtsa 'over the tiger', məsyà mhpan 'at the foot of the person'.

(f) Adjectival nouns (N_{adj})⁶: ńtá ñnan 'a new house', ńtá ñsà 'an old house'.

1.2 Verbs: diagnostic environments and subclasses. Verbs occur in the diagnostic environments: _____ P_v and B_v _____. The most important bound verbal prefix (B_v) is the negative morpheme, underlyingly ń-ń. In addition, all verbs may occur before or after some other verb: _____ V or V _____. Some verbs are concatenated in this manner more freely than others, and this phenomenon is the principal topic of the present paper [section 2, below].

Verbs may also begin a sentence, occurring in #_____. Such sentences lack overt noun-phrases, and may be termed "minor sentences."

Subclasses

Action verbs (V_{act}): lùq 'drink', hkui 'hunt', kábàì 'throw'.

Quality verbs or adjectives (V_{adj}): yàk 'be difficult', kəzəyá 'be good', tsan 'be far'.

There is little reason for distinguishing V_{act} 's from V_{adj} 's, outside of certain relatively minor selectional properties. For example, V_{adj} 's are often concatenated with verbs of degree like gráì 'be very' and ńau 'be too'.

The copula (V_{cop}) ráì 'be'. This verb is a study in itself. It has many selectional and distributional idiosyncrasies: e.g., it never occurs in _____ V , but often occurs in _____ # (that is, with no P_v following).

Versatile verbs (VV) are those which usually or characteristically occur before or after another verb. This other verb is the head of the VP. Two subtypes of VV 's may be distinguished:

adverbial verbs (V_{adv}) are those which usually occur before the main verb; complementary verbs (V_{comp}) are those which usually occur after the main verb.

1.3 Nominal particles (P_n) occur in only three environments: N _____, _____ P_n , P_n _____; that is, after a noun, or before or after another nominal particle.

Several subtypes may be distinguished on a semantic basis: relational, locative, numerative, etc. A few examples: syarò gò

'as for the tiger' (topic), syarò hpéq 'the tiger' (object), syarò ní 'tigers' (plural), syarò htéq 'with the tiger' (instrumental).

We cannot go into the interesting question of permissible sequences of two or more P_n 's within a single NP.

1.4 Verbal particles (P_v) occur in only three environments: V _____, _____ P_v , P_v _____; that is, after a verb, or before or after another verbal particle.

P_v 's may be divided and cross-classified into subtypes on a semantic basis (aspectual, temporal, modal, etc.), or on formal grounds (in-