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{itemize}
  \item \textit{nó ràng ràng} \quad 'wear socks'
  \item \textit{sjhà bjèq bjèq} \quad 'chop raw meat'
  \item \textit{dò dà dà} \quad 'tell a proverb'
  \item \textit{i dì dì} \quad 'swim'
  \item \textit{tjhè dyq dyq} \quad 'soak rice'
  \item \textit{ùjé jé} \quad 'to rain'
  \item \textit{ájèq jeq} \quad 'to flower'
  \item \textit{mó ná ná} \quad 'have a wound'
  \item \textit{dò nỳ nỳ} \quad 'sit'
  \item \textit{njìm tsoq tsoq} \quad 'build a house'
  \item \textit{dù xhàn xhàn} \quad 'dig a hole'
  \item \textit{là jà jà} \quad 'stutter'
\end{itemize}

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.\footnote{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.} 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 \textit{mà}, or a numeral + classifier (the noun may

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\footnote{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:

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

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:

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

\[2\] Cf. Lahu s-thî’ tè thî’ thî’ ve. [Ed.]
Object-verb in Akha: the ABB structure

\[
\begin{align*}
tjhé kha kha & \quad \text{‘plant rice’} \\
yô nô kha & \quad \text{‘plant vegetables’} \\
tjhé ânj & \quad \text{‘sell rice’}
\end{align*}
\]

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

\[
\begin{align*}
tjhé kha kha & \quad \text{‘plant rice’} \\
tjhé phi phi & \quad \text{‘carry rice’} \\
tjhé thàn thàn & \quad \text{‘pound rice’}
\end{align*}
\]

\textit{tjhé} ‘rice’ is a monosyllabic noun.

\[
\begin{align*}
\dot{a}dzànj dzànj & \quad \text{‘make a bundle’} \\
\dot{u}dzànj dzànj & \quad \text{‘wear a turban’} \\
djôq dzànj dzànj & \quad \text{‘wear a woman’s belt’}
\end{align*}
\]

dzanj is a verb ‘to bundle’; the prefix \(\dot{a}\)- makes it into a noun: ‘a bundle’; \(\dot{u}\) comes from \(\dot{u}dù\) ‘head’; \(djôq\) ‘waist’ is a monosyllabic noun.

\[
\begin{align*}
i dì dì & \quad \text{‘swim’} \\
i lây láŋ & \quad \text{‘boil water’} \\
i sjhû sjhû & \quad \text{‘urinate’}
\end{align*}
\]

\(i\) is from \(\textit{îtjûq}\) ‘water’.

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

1. The \textit{A} syllable has its origin in a disyllabic 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 \textit{A} syllable comes from the first syllable of a disyllabic 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 \textit{sjhà-djí} ‘meat’ e.g.

\[
\begin{align*}
sjhà bjûn bjûn & \quad \text{‘divide meat into piles’} \\
sjhà bjeq bjeq & \quad \text{‘chop raw meat’} \\
sjhà the the & \quad \text{‘hunt’} \\
sjhà tjhè tjhè & \quad \text{‘pickle’}
\end{align*}
\]
From ᵃⁿⁿ⁻ᵈᵃⁿ ⁣‘buttock, bottom’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘wear a loincloth’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘sit’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘slip and fall on rump’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ˢʳᵃⁿ ‘human being’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘to give a name’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘steal’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘weep for a dead person’

From ᵐⁱ⁻ᵗˢʰᵃ ⁣‘earth’
   ᵐⁱ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘to have a landslide’
   ᵐⁱ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘to have an earthquake’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ⁿᵉ ⁣‘field’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘weed’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘work in the fields’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ⁿᵉ ⁣‘head’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘wear a turban’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘wear a woman’s headdress’
   ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘wear a hat’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ˢᵃⁿ ⁣‘fish’³
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘fish with hook and line’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ⁿᵉ ⁣‘hand, arm’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘wear a ring’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘wear a bracelet’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘hold hands’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘clench one’s fist’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ⁿᵉ ⁣‘foot’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘have a numb foot’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘put on male’s leggings’

From ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ⁿᵉ ⁣‘rope’
   ᵄⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ ᵃⁿⁿ  ‘plait a rope’

³ In Lahu ᵄⁿⁿ ‘fish’ is a free monosyllabic noun, and the binome ᵄⁿⁿ⁻ˢᵃⁿ means ‘fish as food’ (lit. “fish-flesh”). [Ed.]
Object-verb in Akha: the ABB structure

\[ tjaq \ tuq \ tuq \] 'measure circumference in fists with a rope'

From ábó 'tree'
\[ bó \ gú \ gú \] 'for a tree to wither'
\[ bó \ djò \ djò \] 'kill a tree by ringing'

From sàq-lá 'soul'
\[ lá \ bá \ bá \] 'for souls to wander away'

From mè-lá 'tongue'
\[ lá \ njàq \ njàq \] 'stutter'

From khàn-y-lày > ló 'neck'
\[ ló \ bè \ bè \] 'to have a goiter'
\[ ló \ đàn \ đàn \] 'wear a necklace'

From mjaq-pjìhò 'face' (eye + side)
\[ pjìhò \ khà \ khà \] 'wear glasses'

Where the A syllable derives from the second syllable, the first is often but not always the prefix a-. (See above: 'hand', 'foot', 'rope', 'tree'.)

These A syllables can only function as a noun together with the B syllable, or otherwise in their original disyllabic form. The negation can only be placed in front of the second B syllable. Classifiers come after the AB noun with the word order AB (noun) + numeral + classifier + negation + B (verb):

\[ A \ B \ \text{Num} \ Clf \ B \]
\[ sjìhà \ bòjìn \ ò \ bòjìn \ bòjìn \] 'divide into four piles of meat'
\[ dò \ nỳ \ thì \ poq \ nỳ \] 'sit once'
\[ tshò \ mjàŋ \ thì \ mjàŋ \ mjàŋ \] 'give a person one name'
\[ ù \ dzàŋ \ thì \ khàŋ \ dzàŋ \] 'wear one turban'
\[ làq \ bè \ thì \ bè \ bè \] 'wear one ring'

\[ A \ B \ \text{Num} \ Clf \ \text{Neg} \ B \]
\[ làq \ bè \ thì \ bè \ mà \ bè \] 'not wear one ring'
\[ A \ B \ \text{Neg} \ B \]
\[ dò \ nỳ \ mà \ nỳ \] 'not sit'
\[ A \ B \ \text{Neg} \ B \]
\[ tshò \ mjàŋ \ mà \ mjàŋ \] 'not give a name'
2. The A syllable may function as a monosyllabic noun

About 20 percent of the sample belongs to this category. The absolute top scorer in terms of combinatory versatility is tjhé ‘rice’ as e.g.:

| tjhé boq boq       | ‘pop rice’         |
| tjhé dî dî         | ‘thresh paddy’     |
| tjhé dyq dyq       | ‘soak rice’        |
| tjhé bôq bôq       | ‘dry paddy in the sun’ |
| tjhé ná ná         | ‘for rice to become deceased’ |
| tjhé kha kha       | ‘plant rice’       |
| tjhé phi phi       | ‘carry rice on back’ |
| tjhé thàn thàn     | ‘pound rice’       |
| tjhé tsoq tsoq     | ‘transplant rice’  |

Heavenly phenomena, from m ‘heaven’, are also common:

| m dje dje         | ‘to thunder’       |
| m mjòq mjòq       | ‘to lighten’       |
| m tjiq tjiq       | ‘get towards evening’ |

There is a tendency for this m to change into ù, influenced by the disyllabic noun ùdù ‘head’. This ù can’t occur alone but many occur in other ABB structures. Examples:

| ù bja bja         | ‘to dawn’          |
| ù jé jé          | ‘to rain’          |
| ù thù thù        | ‘get up at dawn’   |

Some other examples:

From sjhm ‘iron’

| sjhm teq teq    | ‘forge iron’       |
| sjhm kha kha    | ‘for iron to get rusty’ |

From hò ‘cooked rice’

| hò thàn thàn     | ‘make rice cakes’  |
| hò tjhu tjhu     | ‘wrap rice in leaves’ |
| hò tsuq tsuq     | ‘make rice balls’   |
| hò dzà dzà       | ‘eat rice’         |
From njìn ‘house, home’

\begin{align*}
\text{njìn tsoq tsoq} & \quad \text{‘build a house’} \\
\text{njìn đañ đañ} & \quad \text{‘set up one’s own household’}
\end{align*}

From nèq ‘spirit’

\begin{align*}
\text{nèq khè khè} & \quad \text{‘teach reciting to the spirits’} \\
\text{nèq thò thò} & \quad \text{‘recite to the spirits’}
\end{align*}

From shò ‘tooth’

\begin{align*}
\text{shò djiq djiq} & \quad \text{‘gnash one’s teeth’} \\
\text{shò gæq gæq} & \quad \text{‘for teeth to chatter’}
\end{align*}

The word order with classifier and negation is the same: AB + numeral + classifier + negation + B:

\begin{align*}
\text{A} & \quad \text{Num} & \quad \text{Clf} & \quad \text{B} \\
\text{bàn} & \quad \text{thì} & \quad \text{bàn} & \quad \text{bàn} & \quad \text{‘make one nest’} \\
\text{A} & \quad \text{B} & \quad \text{Num} & \quad \text{Clf} & \quad \text{Neg} & \quad \text{B} \\
\text{hò} & \quad \text{tsuq} & \quad \text{thì} & \quad \text{tsuq} & \quad \text{mà} & \quad \text{tsuq} & \quad \text{‘not make one rice ball’} \\
\text{A} & \quad \text{B} & \quad \text{Num} & \quad \text{Clf} & \quad \text{B} \\
\text{hò} & \quad \text{dzà} & \quad \text{thì} & \quad \text{pøq} & \quad \text{dzà} & \quad \text{‘eat once’} \\
\text{A} & \quad \text{B} & \quad \text{Neg} & \quad \text{B} \\
\text{njìn} & \quad \text{tsuq} & \quad \text{mà} & \quad \text{tsuq} & \quad \text{‘not build a house’} \\
\text{A} & \quad \text{B} & \quad \text{Neg} & \quad \text{B} \\
\text{tjìję} & \quad \text{phi} & \quad \text{mà} & \quad \text{phi} & \quad \text{‘not carry rice’}
\end{align*}

3. The A syllable is the prefix a- (in various tones)

These constitute about 16 percent of the sample. The B syllable may be part of another disyllabic noun; it doesn’t occur as a free noun, but does of course occur as a verb. Some examples:

\begin{align*}
\text{ábá bá} & \quad \text{‘be a picture, a reflection’} \\
\text{ábe be} & \quad \text{‘be in the beginning’} \\
\text{ádzyq dzyq} & \quad \text{‘itch’} \\
\text{àho ho} & \quad \text{‘sing in the àho style’}^4 \\
\text{ájeq jeq} & \quad \text{‘to flower’} \\
\text{álím lím} & \quad \text{‘measure in fathoms’}
\end{align*}

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^4 “A type of chanting that praises rice and keeps away rodents and birds” (Lewis 1989:53). ho means ‘rodent’. [Ed.]
ápjhà pjhà  ‘have fever’
áshi shì  ‘produce fruit’
átjhù tjhù  ‘to bud’
áèq àq  ‘to burp’

Examples of B syllables that occur both with prefix a- and in other combinations:

ábòq bòq  ‘make a pattern’
shàŋ bòq bòq  ‘write’ (wood +)

where ábòq bòq has a more general meaning and shàŋ bòq bòq a more specific one.

ábqø bøq  ‘play with ábqø seeds’
mì bøq bøq  ‘shoot with a rifle’ (fire + shoot)
shà bøq bøq  ‘fluff up cotton’ (cotton + shoot)\(^5\)

mì from mì dzà ‘fire’, shà from shà là ‘cotton’. The ábqø bøq game consists of kicking or ‘shooting’ a kind of big seeds, called ábqø, and hitting each others’ in a variety of ways.

ádzàn dzàn  ‘make a bundle’
ìdzàn dzàn  ‘wear a turban’ (head +)
djøq dzàn dzàn  ‘wear a woman’s belt’ (waist +)

The a- prefixed form has again the most general meaning and the others are specific, ‘have a bundle on one’s head, a bundle around one’s waist’.

Classifiers and the negation are placed as usual:

AB  Num  Clf  B
áshi thì  shì shì  ‘produce one fruit’

AB  Num  Clf  B
ájeq thì  jeq jeq  ‘for one flower to flower’

AB  Neg  B
ápjhà mà  pjhà  ‘not have fever’

4. The A syllable occurs only in the AB structure

This group comprises around 22 percent of the data. It seems also as if the B syllable here is less independent, i.e. it occurs mainly as part of ABB. The A syllable doesn’t derive from another disyllabic noun, nor does it occur by itself. The meaning is often very specific, restricting combinatory possibilities. This whole group needs to be further worked upon with informants.

ny dag dag  ‘be filthy, dirty’
tháq djö djö  ‘to rob’
bo duq duq  ‘plant a bush’
gý daq daq  ‘make war’ (daq ‘cut’)
bò kəq kəq  ‘make a box’ (bò from bəŋ ‘nest’?)
xaq ló ló  ‘make a chicken basket’

xaq- occurs in several words for baskets. ló is only used for making this special kind of basket, otherwise djəq ‘weave’ is used.

bo sha shə  ‘use a fan’ (bo ‘blow’)
bo ú ú  ‘clean intestines’
là gà gà  ‘wear a long skirt’
gə djə djə  ‘for there to be a mountain’

gə djə is a commonly used word for ‘mountain’, but djə doesn’t seem to be used by itself as a verb.

5. Miscellaneous

(a) I have so far found two examples of the syllabic order ABA. Both have auto-classifiers but use different syllables:

dà  jəŋ  dà  ‘be a guest’
A  B  Num  Clf  B

dà  jəŋ  thi  jəŋ  dà  ‘be one guest’

jaq  pjh5  jaq  ‘sweep with a broom’
A  B  Num  Clf  B

jaq  pjh5  thi  jaq  pjh5  ‘sweep with one broom’

(b) Some ABB’s I suspect are onomatopoetic:
há tjhà tjhà ‘sneeze’
ì tyq tyq ‘hiccup’
àòq àq ‘burp’

c (c) Some may be nominalized verb concatenations, indicating repetitive or gradual action. Both the A’s and the B’s here seem only to occur independently as verbs, but in the ABB construction here the AB can of course be followed by a classifier or a negation:

fn be be ‘start to work’ (work + begin)
gy lu lu ‘fry’ (dry+stir)
ba nìn nìn ‘to sprout *(give birth + ?)*
thàŋ pjöq pjöq ‘pound in a bamboo mortar’ (pound + spurt)
teq puq puq ‘make gruel’ (slap + boil)
bq tjhe tjhe ‘shoot back and forth’ (shoot + argue)
nì tjhe tjhe ‘have a race in working’
là ya ya ‘go visiting’ (come + visit)

SYNTAX

Of 186 occurrences found in the sample of running text, more than 50 percent consists of an uninterrupted ABB followed by a sentence particle, verb particle, conjunction or a post-head versatile verb meaning ‘go/come to ABB’. For the rest, the last B may be preceded by a negation, adverb or pre-verb-head auxiliary, or followed by a post-head versatile verb, i.e. the same possibilities as for any other object-verb:

ítjùq bàq mèq nàa, ỳà nà nà ǝ, ítjùq ðò ïà ëjà
water carry thirsty when strength rest vP water drink sP fP
‘When they got thirsty carrying water, they had a rest and drank water.’

shà the the í má lé
game hunt go sP fP
‘Let’s go hunting.’

hà tjhu tjhu ǝ, dùq-hà bàq ǝ...
rice wrap vP axe carry vP
‘Wrapping rice, carrying an axe and...’

shàn-phà thi ỳà tshò mò mò le ïà ëjà
ruler one CLF person old go sP fP
‘There was one ruler, he had become old.’
ùshò ù thú thú náa, nga djeq djeq ñ í a
morning morning get up when banana cut vP go sP
‘In the morning, when he got up, he went to cut bananas.’

tjhè dyq àdjòq ê dyq phà nga ma ó le
rice soak how soak should sP mother INTERJ fP
‘How should I soak the rice, mother?’

ùbjà mà djó bja tjhò
dawn not stay dawn able
‘Can’t stay up until dawn.’

Syntactically, the ABB doesn’t differ to any great extent from other object + verb sequences. There is a tendency for ABB more often to concatenate with the post-head versatile verbs meaning ‘go/come’, i.e. ‘go/come to ABB’ than what is otherwise found in concatenations.

It has already been mentioned that a negated ABB always is AB + Neg + B. When the AB contains a free noun A, there is a contrast between A + B or AB + B, A + Neg + B or AB + Neg + B. When A doesn’t occur as a free noun, it has to occur as AB or as part of the disyllabic noun from which it derives. There seems to be a difference in stress: in AB + B the verbal action is stressed whereas in A + B the object is stressed, i.e. it contains new information or is in contrast to another expressed or possible object:

\[
\begin{align*}
A &  \quad B &  \quad B &  \\
hò &  \quad dzà &  \quad dzà &  \quad \text{‘eat (action of eating)’} \\
A &  \quad B &  \\
hò &  \quad dzà &  \quad \text{‘eat rice (have a meal)’} \\
A &  \quad B &  \quad \text{Neg} &  \quad B &  \\
hò &  \quad dzà &  \quad mà &  \quad dzà &  \quad \text{‘not eat (not do the action)’} \\
A &  \quad \text{Neg} &  \quad B &  \\
hò &  \quad mà &  \quad dzà &  \quad \text{‘not eat rice (but maybe something else)’} \\
&  \quad \text{hò dzà mà dzà mòq} &  \quad \text{‘don’t want to eat (anything)’} \\
&  \quad hò mà dzà mòq &  \quad \text{‘don’t want to eat rice’} \\
\end{align*}
\]

hò ‘rice’ is a free monosyllabic noun, dzà (V) ‘eat’, mòq (Aux V) ‘want’

While working on this problem I haven’t had access to Akha informants, which would enable me to elicit contrasting examples, but the ones I do have point to this interpretation:
hò méq méq

‘hungry (for food generally)’

but compare:

hò méq jeta ... ja-phí méq jeta... ‘while craving rice...while craving opium’

also:

àjòq hò dzà dzà lá nàa, xhìn-mà mà áŋ e à,
she rice eat come when bowl not have if
hò mà dzà jeta á, hò dzà dzà lá nàa, àjòq hò pha
rice not eat can sp rice eat come when she over there
le kàq nàa, àjòq hò méq méq lá nàa
come arrive when she rice hungry come sp
‘When the time has come for her to eat (in the land of the dead), if she
doesn’t have a bowl, she won’t be able to eat food; when the time has
come to eat, when she arrives over there, she will be hungry.’

The ABB structure is used here for the general meaning ‘to eat’ and ‘to be
hungry’, but when the situation is the need of a bowl to eat ‘rice = food’, ABB
is not used. Cf also:

hò dzà dzà jeta, kaq-thé jú daq thà
rice eat while woven bamboo take up keep
nàa, hò mà dzà áŋ nja lé é a djè
when rice not eat down can sp say sp sp
‘While she eats (lying shrouded), when the piece of woven bamboo
has been taken off (her stomach), she can’t get the food down, she
says (if that piece, like a log, lies on her, hindering her from eating.’

Again, the first reference is to the general act of eating (ABB), and then it is
stressed that she can’t get food down (B not repeated).

The choice of classifiers also reinforces this analysis. Some years ago,
when my attention was first called to this phenomenon, I collected the ABB I
had at the time and asked my best informant to produce classifiers.
Spontaneously he mostly gave poq ‘one time’ as a classifier, i.e. giving the
interpretation ‘doing the V once’ as the first that came to his mind. He did,
though, also give specific classifiers for quite a number of them, sometimes
after having been pressed by me. Some examples—of many—where only poq
was given:

ùbja bja
‘to dawn’ (head + light)

sjhà bjeq bjeq
‘chop meat’ (meat + chop)
í dì dì  ‘swim’ (water + beat)
shà djïq djïq  ‘gnash one’s teeth’ (tooth + move)
gý dâq dâq  ‘make war’ (? + cut)
tjhe dyq dyq  ‘soak rice’ (rice + soak)
jaq pjhó jaq  ‘sweep with a broom’ (broom + ?)
ìn mjõq mjõq  ‘lightning flashes’ (heaven + lighten)
néq thó thó  ‘recite’ (spirit + recite)

The last example also took nay ‘day’ as a classifier, ‘recite to the spirits for a day’, giving the time length of the action.

This leads us to the last aspect of our discussion:

SEMANTICS

What then is the common semantic feature—if there is one—of an object-verb being structured as ABB? Some groupings can be made:

1. Wearing on the body

Some consist of a verb, the B, denoting the way a piece of clothing is attached to the body or how it is worn; and a noun, the A (monosyllabic or derived from a disyllabic noun) denoting the place on the body. Both the noun and the verb can be used independently or in other combinations:

khý bâq bâq  ‘wear female leggings’

khý from àkhý ‘leg’, bâq from bâq bâq ‘make a nest’, cf. also í-bâq ‘bamboo section for carrying water’.

khý taq taq  ‘wear male leggings’

where taq means ‘lock, fasten’

dò kàq kàq  ‘wear loincloth’

dò from dò-dâq ‘buttocks’, kàq ‘put together, bind on’

ù dzâq dzâq  ‘wear a turban’

ù from ù-dù ‘head’, dzâq ‘bundle’. Cf. next:
**djòq dzàn dzàn**  
'wear a female belt'

**djòq 'waist', and next:**

**djòq toq toq**  
'wear a male belt'

*toq 'put a brace under, support'. A female’s belt is tied around her waist, on her long jacket, with the end pieces hanging down in front to keep the skirt in place when walking or sitting, while the male’s belt is used for keeping his trousers up.*

**làq sjàq sjàq**  
'wear a bodice'

*làq from àlàq ‘arm’, sjàq ‘wear crosswise over shoulder’. The bodice covers the breasts but is tied only across one shoulder. Cf. phé-thây sjàq ‘wear a shoulder bag across the shoulders’.*

**pjhò khà khà**  
'wear glasses'

*pjhò from mjåq-pjhò ‘face’, khà ‘cover’.*

Some are more restricted to this one meaning, the A in the same way denoting the place on the body, but the B verb occurring almost only in the ABB frame:

**làq bè bè**  
'wear a ring' (hand + ?)\(^6\)

**làq dùq dùq**  
'wear a bracelet' (arm + ?)\(^7\)

**ù tjhò tjhò**  
'wear a female’s headdress' (head + horn?)

**ù xoq xoq**  
'wear a hat' (head + ?)\(^8\)

The remaining pieces of daily clothing are not constructed in this way but use the verb *dm ‘wear’ preceded by a dissyllabic noun:*\(^9\)

---

\(^6\) Cf. Lahu là?:pè ‘ring’; pè (bound morpheme) occurs in other compounds like qè-pè ‘neck-ring’ and qè-pè ‘neck’ (Matisoff 1988:836). [Ed.]

\(^7\) Cf. Written Tibetan lág-gdub, gdu(h)-bu ‘bracelet’ (Jäschke 1881: 266). [Ed.]

\(^8\) Cf. Lahu ú-cè qhò5? ve ‘wear a hat’, qhò5? ‘wear on the head; protect the head’, as also in cè qhò5? ve ‘spread umbrella over the head’, cè-qè?-pha qhò5? ve ‘protect head with plastic poncho’ (Matisoff 1988:310). [Ed.]

\(^9\) The Lahu cognate is *dr ‘wear/put on an upper garment’* (Matisoff 1988:710). [Ed.]
Object-verb in Akha: the ABB structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akha Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phé-xhāy dm</td>
<td>wear a female jacket’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi-di dm</td>
<td>wear a female skirt’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>làq-di dm</td>
<td>wear male trousers’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maybe the reason is that there is no body term covering the part of the body where those pieces are worn?

2. Heavenly and earthly phenomena

Heaven ín (or changed to ù) and earth mí-tshà > mí combine with various verbs—some restricted to the ABB construction only:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akha Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mì bjaq bjaq</td>
<td>be a landslide’ (earth + scatter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mì luq luq</td>
<td>be an earthquake’ (earth + move)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ù bja bja</td>
<td>‘dawn’ (heaven + light)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ín djè djè</td>
<td>‘thunder’ (heaven + ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ù jè jè</td>
<td>‘rain’ (heaven + ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ín mjəq mjəq</td>
<td>‘be lightning’ (heaven + ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ín tjiq tjiq</td>
<td>‘get towards night’ (+ ?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also some combinations with ítjàq > ílỳ ‘water’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akha Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ý djà djà</td>
<td>‘overflow’ (water + expand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ý né né</td>
<td>‘river to get muddy’ (+ red)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Bodily functions and sicknesses

This is quite a big group, similar to group 1 above, in that A often refers to a place on the body and B varies in versatility, often restricted to the ABB construction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akha Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mjəq djó djó</td>
<td>‘be squint-eyed’ (mjəq-nyq ‘eye’ + ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mjəq bèq bèq</td>
<td>‘be blind’ (eye + ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khỳ byq byq</td>
<td>‘have numb feet’ (foot + ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lɔ bè bè</td>
<td>‘have a goiter’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

lɔ from khàng-làŋ > lɔ ‘throat’. In the next example, A (khɔ) probably comes from the first syllable of khàng-làŋ:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akha Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>khɔ sjhɔ sjhɔ</td>
<td>‘sing or recite in a special rhythm’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shà djaq djaq</td>
<td>‘gnash one’s teeth’ (tooth + move)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shà gəq gəq</td>
<td>‘for teeth to chatter’ (tooth + ?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
me djoq djoq 'clean one’s mouth’ > ‘brush one’s teeth’
(xhà-me ‘mouth’ + wash)
ù pèq pèq ‘vomit’ (ù-màq ‘stomach’ + break open)
dò thè thè ‘fall on rump’ (dò-dày ‘buttocks’ + ?)
dò nỳ nỳ ‘sit’ (buttocks + sit)
ny tshá tshá ‘feel hot’ (ny-ma ‘heart’ + hot)

Some derive from mò-do > mò/má ‘body’:

má bjoq bjoq ‘have a scar’ (+ ?)
mó nà ná ‘have a wound’ (+ be in pain)
má taq taq ‘shroud a corpse’ (+ fasten)
má lù lù ‘have a boil’ (+ mound)
má nìm nìm ‘for wounds to heal gradually’

Sometimes the A is the prefix a-:

ápjhà pijhà ‘have fever’
ásaq saq ‘have a rash’

One, I think, describes the sound of the action:

í sjhù sjhù ‘urinate’ (water + ?)

4. Producing a specific thing

In this type, the occurrence of B outside ABB seems to be rather restricted, though there are exceptions. The first two examples consist only of AB:

báŋ báŋ ‘make a nest’
tjhò tjhò ‘make a friend’
dja le le ‘make riceballs’
dá lé lé ‘make a ritual star’
djeq dzín dzín ‘cut a double rib’ (rib + pair)
bò kæq kæq ‘make a box’

Some A’s derive from sjhà-djì ‘meat’:

sjhà bjìn bjìn ‘divide meat into piles’ (+ pile)
sjhà bjeq bjeq ‘chop meat’ (+ chop)
sjhà tjhè tjhè ‘pickle meat’ (+ sour)
Some A’s are the monosyllable ḥò ‘rice’:

ḥò thày thày ‘make rice cakes’ (+ pound)
ḥò tʃu tʃu ‘wrap rice in leaves’ (+ wrap)
ḥò tsuq tsuq ‘make a rice ball in one’s hand’

Some are prefixed with a-:

абь q бь q ‘make a pattern’
адzan dzан ‘make a bundle’
ájaq jaq ‘make flat cakes’
ánè nè ‘make bamboo strips’
áshi shi ‘produce fruit’
ájeq jeq ‘blossom’
ätjhu tʃu ‘bud’

* * *

These are the main semantic categories that can be set up. There are others, with just a few examples so far of each—and some outstanding and peculiar cases, like:

ànjo thà njò ‘don’t talk about buffaloes’
buffalo don’t buffalo

This ABB occurs only in the negative imperative—and can also be used with monkeys and a few other animals. I have the feeling that maybe my informant got tired and made a fool out of me!

The same ABB structure is reported for Lahu by Matisoff (1973:68), where the examples given are often perfect cognates with Akha. Lahu has only a relative handful of them though (Matisoff, personal communication). They are analysed as having the noun derived from the verb as in Akha. Diehl (1988) finds the corresponding construction in Jingpho but concludes that the noun is the base and the verb derives from it. He gives some interesting examples of recent loanwords from Chinese. It is not clear to me how frequent a feature ABB is in Jingpho.

In Akha it is frequent but I don’t know how productive it is, e.g. in dealing with new loanwords. I will look into that at the first opportunity.

As we have seen, there is in Akha a great variety in the origins of the A syllable:
1. a monosyllabic noun, e.g. *tjhé* ‘rice’
2. the 1st syllable of a disyllabic noun, e.g. *mi* from *mi-dzà* ‘fire’
3. the 2nd syllable of a disyllabic noun, e.g. *lá* from *sàq-lá* ‘soul’
4. A occurs only with B as a disyllabic noun, e.g. *bò-duq* ‘bush’
5. A is a prefix, serves to nominalize B, e.g. *ábòq* ‘pattern’, *bòq* ‘make a pattern, write’

Always in the ABB structure, AB can occur as a noun followed by a numeral and a classifier, and the B can be preceded by the negation *mà*. The combinatorial possibilities of AB to serve as objects to verbs other than B, and of the verb B to take other objects than AB, vary from ‘never’ to ‘rarely’ to ‘very often’.

For example, ‘rice’ *tjhé* is planted, weeded, harvested, threshed, carried, pounded and soaked with ABB, and finally eaten as *hò* ‘cooked rice’, also in ABB: *hò dzà dzà*. Other edibles are not planted etc. with ABB:

\[
\begin{align*}
\gammaò-njó kha & \quad \text{‘plant vegetables’} \\
\ádu kha & \quad \text{‘plant maize’} \\
ló-bò tsâq & \quad \text{‘pluck tea’} \\
djí-bà dò & \quad \text{‘drink liquor’}
\end{align*}
\]

There are no expressions like *du kha kha, ló tsâq tsâq* etc. The work with rice is so basic, that most times when you perform an agricultural operation, it is a question of rice.

As I showed in the contrasting examples with negated AB + neg + B contra A + neg + B, the stress in the ABB seems to be on the action more than on the object. This is also hinted at with the regular choice of *poq* ‘once; (one) time’ as classifier. The noun is almost incorporated into the verb, and only comes out in full strength when combined with its second syllable, or by standing alone as a monosyllabic noun, followed only by a single B.
REFERENCES


