

Some Aspects of Chin Verb Morphology

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0.0 The verb morphology of several Chin languages displays alternations which are not directly attributable to phonological conditioning. The most significant of these alternations deals with the distribution of verbs according to the phenomena labeled Forms I and II in Tiddim Chin (Henderson, 1965), conditions 'A' and 'C' in Lushai (Lorrain, 1940), and Stems I and II in Sizang (Stern, 1963). Bright (1957) has summarized the phonetic shapes of these alternations. Briefly, these involve changes in vowel quality and quantity, change in tones, and change in syllable closing features, such as change of oral stop to glottal stop, change of velar nasal to dental nasal, change of nasal to homorganic stop, as well as change of open to closed syllable. Since the geographic and linguistic spread of these languages is considerable within the Kukish sub-family of Tibeto-Burman (Tiddim and Lushai, at least, are Northern and Central Chin languages in Sauer's (1955) classification), it may be worthwhile to consider the comparative syntax of these languages as this is reflected in alternations in verbal morphology. This paper presents a preliminary effort at such an investigation. In what follows I have attempted to illustrate comparisons in the syntax of Lushai and Tiddim Chin with particular attention to sentence mood, passivity or reflexivity in nominal constructions, and transitivity in verbs, as these comparisons are exemplified by changes in verb morphology.

1.0 Lorrain (1940; xiii) has the following to say regarding the distribution of verbs and their alternations in Lushai:

When a root verb has only one modification, that root form is used under all 'A' and 'B' conditions...and the modification is used under all 'C' conditions. When, however, a root verb has two modifications, that root form is used under 'A' conditions only, the first modification is used under 'B' conditions, and the second modification under 'C' conditions.

Lorrain's conditions generally group indicative and imperative mood under 'A' and 'B' conditions and infinitive mood, subjunctive mood, passive voice, 'cause', 'purpose', benefactive, and similar situations, under the list of 'C' conditions. Lorrain indicates these conditions in terms of the co-occurrence with the verb of various words and particles which imply or denote the notions above. As such, the major bifurcation involved, that between Lorrain's 'A' and 'B' versus 'C' conditions, is remarkably paralleled by Henderson's (1965; 72)

description of the distribution of verbs in Tiddim Chin in terms of Forms I and II:

Verbs are distinguished from all other classes of words by their formal scatter. All verbs have two alternating forms, dependent upon grammatical context....In the great majority of the verbs recorded one of these forms, hereafter referred to as Form II, can always be predicted from the other, hereafter referred to as Form I. Such verbs may be termed regular. All other verbs are irregular.

The formal scatter of regular verbs is correlated with the phonological structure of the last syllable of Form I.

1.1 In Henderson's description of Tiddim, mood characterizes sentences, phrases, and smaller constructions larger than the word, in the narrative style, the style specifically described in her book. Sentences are characterized as 'conclusive' or 'inconclusive' according to whether they occur with the sentence-final particles, hi or leh, respectively. In the narrative (as opposed to colloquial) style, the 'conclusive'/'inconclusive' dichotomy is paralleled by the distinction of indicative versus subjunctive mood. The final predicate phrase of all conclusive (i.e., indicative) sentences contains a verb or verbs in Form I. The final predicate phrase of all inconclusive (subjunctive) sentences contains a verb or verbs in Form II. Phrases may be either subjective, predicative, or adjunctive. Subjective phrases are not characterized by mood. Predicative phrases in all occurrences except as the last phrase of an inconclusive sentence have verbs in Form I. *All adjunctive phrases which contain verbs are subjunctive in mood. Verbs in adjunctive phrases, therefore, are always in Form II.*

2.0 The first obvious parallel of Lorrain's modifications with Henderson's "formal scatter" is the major split of indicative versus subjunctive, those moods characterizing Henderson's Forms I and II respectively. Thus, in Lushai,

- | | | | |
|-------|---------------------|------|-------------|
| 1) ʔá | hrɪat ^{II} | cúan | if he knows |
| he | know | if | |
| 2) ʔá | hrɪa ^I | | he knows, |
| he | know | | |

reflect characteristic morphological changes involved between the subjunctive and the indicative moods. The verb undergoes a change of open to closed syllable with a concomitant tonal change of low-rising (ˊ) to high-falling (ˋ). (Superscribed roman numerals indicate verb

form throughout the paper.)

2.1 In Tiddim, the following colloquial style sentences illustrate indicative versus subjunctive moods where the subjunctive construction expresses the notion of benefaction:

Indicative,

- 3) sá a gò^I hi
animal kill sp
ppf

he killed an animal, e.g.,
for a feast

Subjunctive,

- 4) sá a gáwh^{II} hi

he killed an animal for
me.

3.0 The second parallel of verb alternation behavior between Tiddim and Lushai concerns verbal notions in nominal phrases, in particular subject noun phrases in passive and reflexive sentences. Lorrain and Savidge (1898; 26) note:

...care must be taken in the pronunciation of the verb in the passive voice, as a slight difference in pronunciation may change the meaning from passive to active.

They provide the following examples:

- 5) saap velh^{II} ka ni
sahib hit ppf sp

I am hit by the sahib;

- 6) mizo huat^{II} ka ni
Lush. hate ppf sp

I am hated by the Lushais;

- 7) tual tha?^{II} a ni
(?) kill ppf sp

He was murdered;

versus,

- 8) saap veel^I ka ni

I hit the sahib;

- 9) mizo hua?^I ka ni

I hate the Lushais;

- 10) tual that^I a ni

He was a murderer (had
murdered).

Bright (1957; 102) observes that his informant rejected these examples, preferring, instead:

- 11) saap in mi veel

The sahib hit me;

- 12) saap ka veel

I hit the sahib;

in which a seemingly agentive particle, *-in*, adds a definitely ergative coloring to the construction, contrasting to the use of passive versus active verb forms in Lorrain's and Savidge's examples. It is worth noting at this point that Tiddim utilizes a particle, *-in*, which strongly marks the agent. We can say that it is possible both languages are drifting (as I understand this concept in Sapir (1921, Chapter VII)) toward ergative constructions from stative-active type constructions. It is intriguing to consider in the light of evidence from Stern (1963) and Lüffler (1973) that this may be a trend to be found in the Chin languages as a group.

3.1 A further illustration of the grammatical distribution of Form I and II verbs is evident in constructions with the verbal prefix, *ki-*, in Tiddim Chin. *Ki-* calls for a reflexive or passive translation in English when it occurs preceding an indicative (Form I) verb:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 13) ki í ^I ní | let us love one another |
| vpf love sp | |
| 14) a ki cì ^I hí | it is called |
| ppf vpf say sp | |
| 15) ka ki sát ^I kha | I hit myself by mistake |
| ppf vpf hit (?) | |
| 16) amau gel a ki í ^I | they love one another. |
| they...one ppf vpf love | |
| another | |
| uh hí | |
| psf sp | |

When *ki-* occurs with a following subjunctive (Form II) verb, the sense is benefactive:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 17) sial ki gò ^I pen | the mithan that was killed |
| mithan vpf kill sp | |
| 18) hausapa sial a | the mithan that was killed |
| headman ppf | for the headman. |
| ki gàwh ^{II} hí | |
| vpf kill sp | |

3.2 In nominal construction with verbal forms, when the verbal forms refer to some recent change of state in the noun referrent, the verbal forms are in Form II:

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 19) lo pá khàwh ^{II} khiát ^{II} | the already weeded-out |
| grass weeded-out | grass |
| sa te | |
| already sp | |

- 20) lo pá a khàw^{II}khíat^{II} the grass (which) he had
 grass ppf weeded-out already weeded-out.
 sa te
 already sp

However, this change does not occur when the verb is preceded by ki-:

- 21) lo pá a ki-khǒ^Ikhíat^I the grass which had been
 grass ppf vpf weeded-out weeded-out.
 sa te
 already sp

(In (20), the pronominal prefix, a, refers to 'he', while in (21), the pronominal prefix, a, refers to the grass.)

In other words, when the verbal notion associated with the noun refers to a durative state of the object, verbal forms are in Form I. The paucity of recent descriptive material on Lushai makes it impossible at this time to make an exact comparison between Tiddim and Lushai for this particular type of construction. Recent work by Lüffler, however, indicates that it is a productive process in Bawn Chin.

3.3 The Lushai post-verbal particle, sak, included among the conditions for Lorrain's 'C' modification of verbs, behaves in a way that is strikingly similar to the Tiddim prefix, ki-, in that combination of sak with a 'C' form of the verb (equivalent to Tiddim Form II) yields a benefactive sense for the verb. Similarly, in Tiddim, there exists a particle, sak (possibly cognate?), conveys a causitive notion in indicative mood (with a Form I verb) and a benefactive notion otherwise:

- 22) zu hóng lǔp^{II}hi he prepared beer for me
 beer pvp prepare sp
 23) hong pai^Ihi he came to see me (not on
 go my behalf)
 24) pǎi^{II}sak in go on his behalf
 25) pai^Isak in let him go

4.0 The vestige of what may have been an earlier form of marking transitivity in these languages underlies a third manifestation of verbal alternation in both Lushai and Tiddim. Bright (1957) noted that transitive derived forms of some verbs displayed a hint of alternation with respect to the basic form. In the table that follows (extracted from Bright, 1957; 110) the transitive Form I is identical

to the intransitive Form II for the first three items

<u>Intrans.</u>		<u>Trans.</u>	
<u>Form I</u>	<u>Form II</u>	<u>Form I</u>	<u>Form II</u>
?áaw -----	?àaw 'to shout';	?áaw -----	?àw? 'call to';
nùy -----	nùy? 'to laugh';	nùy? -----	nùy? 'laugh at';
?éen -----	?èen 'be bright';	?èen -----	?èen 'brighten (tr)';
təl -----	təl 'be included';	təl? -----	təl? 'to include';
hér -----	hèr 'turn (intr)';	hèr? -----	hèr? 'turn (tr)';
dín -----	dín 'stand';	dín -----	dín 'place upright'.

Bright was unable to comment on this deviation from the data he had available.

4.1 The same phenomenon, however, occurs in Tiddim Chin. That is, some verbs which appear to be irregular (See above, 1.0) according to their Form I to Form II changes are evidently derived transitive forms of basic verbs:

dam^I --- dà^mII 'to be well'

has a regular Form II (the lack of a diacritic on Form I indicates a mid-level tone), whereas, compare,

dà^mI --- dà^mII 'to heal',

where the low-falling tone (ˋ) on Form I would lead us to expect dap in Form II. The mid-level to low-falling tonal change on 'to be well' is a regular type of Form I to Form II alternation. Compare also,

dáy^I --- dàⁿII 'to be different'

dàⁿI --- dàⁿII 'to differentiate',

which further illustrate the regular as opposed to irregular verbal alternation involving transitive notions.

4.2 On the other hand, Tiddim has an abundance of examples of regularly alternating verb forms (as does Lushai as depicted in the last three items in the Table, above) in which transitivity notions are involved:

taan^I --- tà^anII 'to be bright'

tà^an^I --- tà^tII 'to flash a light'

nam^I --- nà^mII 'to smell (intr)'

nà^mI --- nà^pII 'to smell (tr)'.

The regular forms suggest a vestige of causative relation expressed in the history of the language by tonal ablaut and/or change in the manner of syllable closure.

5.0 It is possible to demonstrate that the semantic notions underlying Form I to Form II alternations in Tiddim are paralleled by the specific notions included on Lorrain's lists of conditions. In particular, the notions of 'recent change of state' and 'for the purpose of' as adjunctive verbal ideas associated with nominal constructions in Tiddim are specifically paralleled by several items on Lorrain's lists. Thus, under condition 'B', indicative mood, there occurs tawh 'now', tawh ang 'now' or 'inchoative mood', tawh lo 'not...again, no longer', dawn 'about to', and lo 'inception of change of state'.

5.1 Similarly, a comparison of Lorrain's condition 'C' particles, natuur, natuurin, naan, ataan, etc., meaning, 'purpose, for the purpose of', with Henderson's

lam ^{II} na	ding	'for the sake of dancing'
dance nsf	for,	
	on behalf of	

again illustrates the productivity of this type of comparison.

6.0 Mood, as expressed by alternation of verb forms, is thus a productive process, albeit one in flux, in both Tiddim and Lushai, to mention only those languages specifically discussed here. It operates moreover in a way too strikingly similar in these languages to be dismissed as accidental independent but parallel development. An even earlier source than Lorrain and Savidge, Shaha (1884), lists as causative post-positions in Lushai, avang-in and tan, as clause-final marker of subjunctive mood, cuan 'if', and tur, in, turin, a, nan, and tan, as markers of the infinitive mood. All of these notions are also found in Lorrain's (1940) lists of conditions. A good modern description of grammatical processes in Lushai is obviously the suitable partner at this time for Henderson's description of Tiddim and Lüffler's (1973, and forthcoming) work on Bawn. With such new additions, a serious attempt at describing the grammatical drift of these languages could be made. Certainly the old sources have done their job.

NOTES:

1. All Tiddim examples are derived from Henderson (1965). Abbreviations in this paper are roughly adapted from those in her book. They are as follows: nsf: nominal suffix; ppf: pronominal prefix; paf: pronominal suffix; pvp: preverbal particle; sp: sentence particle; vpf: verbal prefix.

2. A final -h indicates that the sound preceding is uttered in an "abrupt" manner. We may assume it to be equivalent to the low or low-

falling stopped tone which is characteristic of short, closed syllables throughout Chin languages. A type of alternation not described above (0.0) is found in (10) here. This involves replacement of a final glottal stop (Form I) with a final oral stop (Form II) in Lushai. This is only found, however, in Lorrain and Savidge (1898).

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