

SYNTAX OF VERBS OF MOTION IN BURMESE

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The purpose of this paper is to give a description of some semantic, structural and syntactic features of verbs of motion in Burmese. The verbs belonging to this group denote change of position in space of an object that is expressed in grammatical subject (contrary to verbs of locomotion).

Below we are going to discuss the verbs and verbal compounds that can be used as verb heads of final verbal syntagma (for the definition of a verbal syntagma see [1, p. 285]). For the time being we'll use the term verb of motion both for simple verbs and compounds.

SEMANTICS

Verbs of motion in Burmese can be subdivided into several semantic groups:

Verbs, denoting orientated movement.

These verbs describe movement, orientated in space (movement up and down, into and out of), such as *te?* - 'to ascend' / *hsin:* - 'to descend', *win* - 'to enter' / *htwe?* - 'to emerge from'; movement, orientated in regard to some point on its trajectory, like *pyan* - 'to return', *yau?* - 'to arrive', *lai?* - 'to follow'; movement, orientated in regard to a point of reference (mainly the speaker) - *la* - 'to come', *thwa:* - 'to go'.

Verbs, denoting manner of movement.

These verbs are mainly not orientated. They describe different modes of movement of certain objects - *si:* - 'to flow (of liquid)', *cwa. myan* - 'to proceed (of respected persons)', or peculiarities of movement, for example, in the water or in the air - *pyan* - 'to fly', *myo:* - 'to drift', or the mode of movement - *pyei:* - 'to run', *hkoun* - 'to jump', *ngou?* - 'to dive'.

Verbs, denoting movement in general:

hlou? sha: - 'to move', *ywei.* - 'to move from one's place'.

In this paper we used the transcription similar to that used in [1] and [2], except that the neutral vowel is marked **a**. The voiced consonants are underlined.

Verbs, denoting change of position without movement: *yein*: - 'to lean', *lu*: *lun* - 'to roll'.

STRUCTURE

We must admit that there is no clear-cut borderline between compound words and word combinations, consisting of loosely linked elements in Burmese. In case of verbal syntagma phonetic changes such as voicing and weakening usually occur in auxiliary elements but not in the verb head and thus can not be used to determine word boundaries. The insertion of the sentence-medial particle *ywei*. [writ.] / *pyi*: [colloq.], proposed by J. Okell [3, p. 31], is optional and does not affect syntactic features of the verb syntagma. The position of the negative prefix *ma*- is generally unpredictable and in many cases different speakers of Burmese are not unanimous on this point. Only in certain cases its position can affect the meaning of the phrase, for example (1) *hkoun* (2) *ku*: - (1) to jump (2) to cross over (1+2) to jump over, negative form - (1) *ma* (2) *hkoun* (3) *ku*: (1) neg. (2) to jump (3) to cross over (1+2+3) not to jump over, but (1) *hkoun* (2) *ma* (3) *ku*: - (1+2+3) to jump but not cross over.

From now on we will call a sequence of verbal elements a verbal complex if it denotes one action and a verbal chain in case of two or more successive actions. Both verbal complexes and verbal chains can function as verb head of the verbal syntagma, but syntactically verbal complexes constitute one unit and verbal chain - several.

Verbal complexes

We find the following types of verbal complexes:

a) complexes consisting of synonymous elements, such as (1) *hcou*: (2) *kwey*: - (1) to turn (2) to turn, to bend, (1) *hsai*? (2) *yau*? - (1) to arrive (2) to arrive, (1) *hpya*? (2) *than*: (3) *ku*: - (1) to cross (2) to cross (3) to cross over;

b) complexes with elements though not strictly synonymous, but still having some significant similarity of meaning, such as (1) *co* (2) *hlwa*: - (1) to step over (2) to leap over (both elements express the idea of overcoming an obstacle), or (1) *lwin*. (2) *myo*: - (1) to be flown away (2) to float down, to drift (both contain the idea of being moved by some natural force - water or air);

c) complexes with elements having in common only the general idea of movement, for example (1) *hkoun* (2) *ku*: - (1) to jump (2) to cross or (1) *hkoun* (2) *ou*? - (1) to jump (2) to cover (1+2) to jump upon (smb).

Complexes of this type usually accumulate the meanings of all their elements.

d) complexes containing an element that has no meaning at all and/or is not used independently (at least at present time), like (1)hlou? (2)sha: - (1)to move (2)??? (1+2)to move. But despite the lack of independence such an element can combine with auxiliary morphemes as if they were meaningful, for example the negative form of hlou? sha: is either *ma hlou? sha:* or *ma hlou? ma sha:*. In the second case the negative prefix is placed before the last element as well.

One of formal features of verbal syntagma is a tendency to incorporate an even number of elements - two, four or (very seldom) six and more.

These features are characteristic not only of the verbs of motion, but also of other semantic groups of verbs. But there are some particularities, which characterise only (or mainly) syntagma, containing verbs of motion.

Orientation

One of such features is the use of verbs of orientated movement as components of verbal complexes containing, as a rule, verbs, describing the manner of movement, as their heads.

In such complexes elements, describing the manner of movement go first, then goes the element, which orientates motion in space (*te?* - to ascend / *hsin:* - to descend, *win* - to enter / *htwe?* - to emerge from) and than - the element, which orientates motion in regard to the point of reference (*la* - to come / *thwa:* - to go), for example - (1)*pyei:* (2)*win* (3)*la* - (1)to run (2)to enter (3)to come (1+2+3)to run into (towards the speaker) or (1)*soun* (2)*hsing:* (3)*thwa:* - (1)to go downstream (2)to descend (3)to go (1+2+3)to go downstream (away from the speaker).

Verbal chains

Some verbs, primarily the verbs of orientated movement, can be used as components of verbal chains (see above) - sequences of verbs, which form one verbal syntagma but describe several successive actions. The order of components in a verbal chain corresponds to the order of actions. Components of verbal chains, unlike the elements of verbal complexes, can have their own complements as in

(1)*can* (2)*nga:* (3)*mya:* (4)*kou* (5)*tamu:* (6)*myou.*
(7)*nya.* (8)*nei* (9)*zei:* (10)*thou.* (11)*thwa:* (12)*yaun*
(13)*mi*

(1)to remain (2)fish (3)pl. (4)dir.obj.marker
 (5)Tamu (6)town (7)night (8)sun (7+8)late afternoon
 (9)market (10)dir.obj. marker (11)to go (12)to sell
 (13)fut.

'(They will) go and sell the remaining fish to the evening market of Tamu'[writ.].

In the example above the verb *thwa:* -'to go', being a component of a verbal chain, has a direction-complement *tamu: myou. nya. nei zei: thou.* - 'to the evening market of Tamu' and the verb *yaun* - 'to sell' - has a direct object *can nga: mya: kou* - 'remaining fish'.

In some cases verbal chains are used idiomatically, mainly the chains containing the verbs *win* - 'to enter', *lai?* - 'to follow' and *pyan* - 'to return' at the beginning of the chain. The verb *win* in combination with the verbs of speech means 'to intervene' as in (1)*win* (2)*pyo:* - (1)to enter (2)to say - 'to intervene in somebody's speech saying ...'. The verb *lai?* - 'to follow' can mean 'to repeat somebody's action', for example (1)*lai?* (2)*pyo:* - (1)to follow (2)to say - 'to repeat somebody's words saying...'. The verb *pyan* can precede practically any verb and means - 'to repeat one's own action' as in (1)*pyan* (2)*pyo:* - 'to repeat one's own words, saying...'. In such idiomatic expressions only the second component can preserve its complement and the whole combination is undistinguishable from a verbal complex.

SYNTAX

Below we are going to deal with the elementary syntactic constructions (ESC's), containing verbs of motion. An elementary syntactic construction is an utterance, all components of which are essential for its correct interpretation when such a construction is given outside of context. The elementary syntactic construction contains no optional elements [see 4, p. 113].

The ESC's discussed are composed of:

Subject (S), marked with a subject marker (*thi* [writ.] / *hā* [colloq.] or zero marker). The subject of the ESC's concerned denotes a person or a thing that is moving or changing his/its position in space.

Predicate (V), being a verb or a verbal complex, in a sentence-final position.

Complements, such as:

direct object complement (O), marked with direct object marker *kou* or unmarked and denoting a reference object ;

complement of position (C-loc), marked with the markers *twin*, *hnai?*, *we* [writ.] / *hma*, *me* [colloq.] and denoting a portion of space or position in which the action takes place ;

complement of source (C-ex), marked with the markers *hma* [writ.] / *ka* and denoting a portion of space or position, from which the movement starts;

complement of destination (C-dir), marked with the markers *thou* [writ.] / *kou* [colloq.] or unmarked and denoting a portion of space or position in which the action ends.

Location nouns

The complements of position, source and destination can incorporate location-nouns - nouns, which define the exact localization in space and usually can be used independently. These are (a) *po* - 'upper part', *au?* - 'lower part', (a) *twin*, (a) *hte* - 'interior', (a) *pyin* - 'exterior', (a) *shei* - 'front part', (a) *nau?* - 'back', *htan* [writ.], *hsi* [colloq.] - 'vicinity'.

When used inside a complement, the location-nouns containing prefix *a-* usually lose it. The possibility of insertion of a location-noun allows to distinguish complement of destination from direct object complement when they have a zero marker or are marked with *kou*.

Elementary syntactic constructions

We can distinguish the following ESC's, containing verbs of motion as a predicate:

ESC-1: S - V

This construction is characteristic of verbs, denoting movement in general - *ywei* - 'to move from place to place', *hlou?* *sha* - 'to move', *toun* - 'to tremble, to shiver', verbs, denoting mode of movement *pyan* - 'to fly', *hkoun* - 'to jump', *pyei* - 'to run' and verb complexes, describing chaotic movement like *lu: la soun hsan* - 'to move chaotically up- and downstream. In some instances verbs describing movement in general can form constructions with double subject. Such constructions are used when only some part of something is moving for example:

(1) *aye?thama*: (2) *thi* (3) *le?* (4) *toun* (5) *thi*

(1) drunkard (2) S-marker (3) hand (4) shiver

(5)pres. -past

'The drunkard's hands tremble' [writ.].

ESC-2: S - C-loc - V

The predicates in these constructions are verbs and verb complexes, denoting appearance - *po* - 'to appear', *hpyi?* *po* - 'to come into being', *pau?* - 'to come out' etc, for example:

(1)kan: (2)hcei (3)hnin. (4)ni: (5)ka? (6)thi.
(7)nei (8)ya (9)twi (10)thi? (11)pin (12)mya: (13)hka?
(14)ce: (15)ce: (16)pau? (17)yau? (18)nei (19)thi

(1)bank (2)foot (3)C-comit (4)to be near (5)to join (6)attributive marker (7+8)place (9)C-loc marker (10+11)tree (12)pl. (13)rather (14)to scatter (15)to scatter (16)to appear (17)to arrive (18)to be present (19)pres.-past

'Near the river-bank grew [some] scattered trees' [writ.].

ESC-3: S - C-dir - V

This construction is formed by verbs and verbal complexes denoting change of direction - *kwei* - 'to bend around', *hcou:* - 'to turn', verbs and complexes, denoting change of position in space - *yein:* - 'to lean, be inclined' or movement up to a certain point - *yau?* - 'to arrive', *hsai?* - 'to arrive (of trains ect.)', for example

(1)a (2)myan (3)ya hta: (4)ci: (5)ha (6)shwei bou
(7)myou (8)kou (9)yau? (10)pa (11)te

(1+2)speed (3)carriage, train (1+2+3)express train (4)to be large (5)S-marker (6)Shwebo (7)town (8)C-dir-marker (9)to arrive (10)polit. particle (11)pres.-past

'The express-train arrived at Shwebo' [colloq.].

ESC-4: S - C-ex - V

This construction is characteristic of verbs and verbal complexes denoting disappearance - *pyau?* *kwe* - 'to disappear' and change of position - *hta.* - 'to stand up', as in

(1)cano (2)htain (3)ya (4)hma. (5)hta. (6)thi

(1)I (2)to sit (3)place (4)C-ex -marker (5)to stand up (6)pres.-past

'I stood up from where I was sitting'.

ESC-5: S - C-ex - C-dir - V

This construction is formed by verbs and verbal complexes, denoting orientated movement - *win* - 'to enter', (1)*soun* (2)*hsin*: (3)*la* - (1)to go downstream (2)to descend (3)to come, as in

(1)*thu* (2)*thi* (3)*lan*: (4)*ma*. (5)*ci*: (6)*hma*. (7)*lan*: (8)*ca*: (9)*hte*: (10)*thou*. (11)*hcou*: (12)*win* (13)*thwa*: (14)*thi*

(1)he (2)S-marker (3)road (4)main (5)to be great (6)C-ex -marker (7)road (8)to be apart (7+8)lane (9)inside (10)C-dir -marker (11)to turn (12)to enter (13)to go (14)pres.-past

'He turned from the main street into a side street'[writ.].

ESC-6: S - O - V

This construction is formed by verbs and verbal complexes denoting movement in relation to some moving object - *lai?* - 'to follow', *ahmi lai?* - 'to follow so as to overtake', or in relation to some object, which does not coincide with the initial or final point of movement - *co lun* - 'to overcome', *hpya?* - 'to traverse', for example

(1)*thu* (2)*thi* ... (3)*thi?* (4)*pin* (5)*mya*: (6)*da?* (7)*mi*: (8)*tain* (9)*mya*: (10)*kou* (11)*pyei*: (12)*hlwa*: (13)*co* (14)*hpya?* (15)*hke*. (16)*ya*. (17)*lei* (18)*thi*

(1)he (2)S-marker (3)wood (4)plant (3+4)tree (5)pl. (6)element (7)fire (6+7)electricity (8)column (9)pl. (10)O-marker (11)to run (12)to leap (13)to pass over (14)to cross (15)hither (16)auxilliary verb (17)pres.-past

'He ... was running past trees, lamp posts standing along the road'[writ.].

The ESC's, that contain verbs of motion can be

transformed either by substituting one of their complements by another or by inserting some optional ones, as well as by adding dependent clauses denoting the aim or cause of action, expressed by the sentence final verb.

The substitution of the complexes in ESC's usually takes place when the complement of destination is substituted with complements containing verb-derived nouns with prefix *a-* (*ahti.* - 'up to', from *hti* - 'to touch, to come in contact', *ayau?* - 'arriving', from *yau?* - 'to arrive'), for example

(1)*kabya:* (2)*ta?* (3)*hmu:* (4)*ci:* (5)*yo:ga.* (6)*ka.*
(7)*akatha.* (8)*ahti.* (9)*ku:* (11)*la* (12)*ta* (13)*pa* (14)*Ia:*

(1)poetry (2)army (3)to be chief (4)to be great
(2+3+4)commander (5)disease (6)Topic-marker (7)space
(8)up to (9)to pass (10)to propagate (11)to come
(12)pres.-past (13)polite particle (14)dir.question
-marker

'Has the poetic disease of the commanders spread up to space?' [col.].

Optional complements include both complements mentioned above, as they are inserted into an ESC, where they are initially absent, and some other ones (see below).

The complement of instrument (C-instr), marked with *hpyin.* (only written) and comitative complement (C-comit) marked with *hnin.* [writ.] / *ne.* [collog.] are two of the most frequently used optional complements. They denote means of transportation or ways of travelling and usually modify the ESC-5 and ESC-6.

Complements containing verb-derived nouns *atain:* - 'along' (from *tain:* - 'to measure') - complement of route (C-route) - and *hma. tahsin.* - 'through' (? from *hsin.* - 'to place one upon another') - complement of intermediate point (C-via) - usually modify the ESC-5 and denote either a point on the route other than initial or final point (*hma. tahsin.*) or the route itself, or part of it (*atain:*), as in

(1)*hsaya* (2)*u:* (3)*co yin* (4)*tou.* (5)*ein* (6)*tha*
(7)*su.* (8)*hma* (9)*man:talei:* (10)*hma. tahsin.* (11)*myau?*
(12)*pain:* (13)*shan:* (14)*pyi* (15)*thou.* (16)*hkayi:*
(17)*hse?* (18)*htwe?* (19)*mi*

(1)teacher (2)uncle (3)Cho Yin (4)pl. - 'and the

others' (5)house (6)son (5+6)member of the family
 (7)group (8)Topic-marker (9)Mandalay (10)through
 (11)north (12)part (13)Shan (14)state (15)C-dir (16)way
 (17)to continue (18)to emerge from (19)futur

'The members of teacher U Cho Yin's family will continue their travel out to the Northern Shan State via Mandalay'[writ.].

The complement of place can modify ESC-1 with verbs expressing the manner of movement. The same complement can modify ESC-5, but such modifications are not frequent:

(1)pagan (2)lan: (3)hteí? (4)sakain (5)lan: (6)po
 (7)twin (8)lu (9)nge (10)ta (11)u: (12)thi (13)ashei.
 (14)hma. (15)anau? (16)thou. (17)shau? (18)thwa:
 (19)lei (20)thi

(1)Pagan (2)road (3)top (4)Sagaing (5)road
 (6)upper part (7)C-loc (8)man (9)to be small (8+9)young
 person (10)one (11)classifier (12)S-marker (13)east
 (14)C-ex-marker (15)west (16)C-dir -marker (17)to pass
 length-wise (18)to go (19)eufon. particle (20)pres.-past

'A young man was going along Pagan-street (at the beginning of Sagaing-street) in west-ward direction'[writ.].

Besides, sentences containing verbs of motion can incorporate aim and cause constructions. The former is characterized by complements, marked with *atwe?* or *ahpou.* and dependant clauses, marked with *yan* [writ.] / *hpou.* [colloq.] - 'with the intention to ...' and *aun* - 'so as to ...'. The aim construction is possible only with verbs denoting actions of animate doer performed of their own free will.

On the contrary, the cause-constructions imply that the action is due to some external factors and do not imply any definite kind of the doer. This construction is formed by a noun or a noun-phrase marked with *caun.* or by a clause marked with *tho:* *caun* [writ.] / *lou.* [colloq.], *thahpyin.* [writ.] / *ta ne.*, *te atwe?* [colloq.], and sometimes with dependent-clause marker *ywei.* [writ.] / *pyi:* [colloq.]. The latter usually designates action, which directly causes some motion and is used mainly in combination with verbs denoting involuntary movement or change of position, as in

(1)kou(2)sei?ta (3)thi (4)cau? (5)yun. (6)ywei.
(7)toun (8)hlou? (9)ya. (10)i.

(1)brother (2)Seitta (3)S-marker (4)to be afraid
(5) to shrink (6)Clause-marker (7)to tremble (8)to move
(9)aux. verb (10)pres.-past

'Ko Seitta shiverd from fear' [lit. - '... on being
afraid ..'] [writ.].

It seems to be possible that in some cases such constructions are members of the ESC's.

In conclusion we give a list of verbal complexes containing verb *pyei*: - 'to run'. All entries were taken from modern texts and are supplied by patterns of the syntactic constructions in which they occurred. Where constructions, characteristic of other components of these complexes are also given.

pyei: S - V ; S - C-ex - V ; S - C-loc - V
to run

pyei: te? S - C-dir - V
to run + to ascend

pyei: win S - C-dir - V
to run + to enter

pyei: la S - C-dir - V ; S - C-ex - V
to run + to come

pyei: win thwa: S - C-dir - V
to run + to enter + to go

pyei: htwe? la S - C-dir - V ; S - C-ex - V
to run + to emerge from + to come

pyei: hlwa: S - C-loc - V
to run + to leap over = to run with a leaping motion

pyei: hlwa: co hpya? S - O - V
to run with a leaping motion + to cross

te? S - C-dir - C-ex - V ; S - C-dir - V
to ascend

<i>win</i> to enter	S - C-dir - C-ex - V
<i>la</i> to come	S - C-dir - C-ex - V ; S - C-dir - V
<i>thwa:</i> to go	S - C-dir - C-ex - V ; S - C-dir - V; S - C-comit - V ; S - C-via - V
<i>co hpya?</i> to step over + to cross	S - O - V

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