

# The pragmatic word ordering in Bouyei

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## 1. Introduction

The Bouyei people are also known by the names *pu<sup>4</sup>?jai<sup>4</sup>*, *pu<sup>4</sup>?ji<sup>4</sup>*, or *pu<sup>4</sup>?joi<sup>4</sup>*. Yay [jei] is the most frequently used antonym of the Bouyei (Synder 1995). In Thailand Bouyei are known by the name Tai Dioi (Tai Yoi) which refers to the Bouyei people residing in Vietnam.

The Bouyei language belongs to the northern group of the Tai language family (Li 1960). It is spoken by a Tai ethnic group with a population of more than 2,500,000. In China the Bouyei people live in the south, the southwest, and the central parts of Guizhou Province; seventy percent of the total Bouyei population live in Qiannan and Qianxinan prefectures (Snyder 1995). A small number of Bouyei also live in Yunnan and Sichuan, China, and in the mountainous areas of northern Vietnam (Zhou et al. forthcoming).

The variety of Bouyei language used in this study is called Niuchang<sup>1</sup> Bouyei, which is spoken in a town of Zhenfeng county, Guizhou Province. The data were drawn from *Bouyei-Thai-Chinese-English Dictionary* (Zhou et al. forthcoming) and *Kam-Tai Oral Literatures* (Somsonge et al. 1998).

This paper presents the word order variation of Bouyei language in comparison with Thai, its genetically related language, and Chinese, the language which is used along with the Bouyei language. It supports the claim made by other cross-

linguistic studies that the semantic and pragmatic relations, i.e., the information structure, are primarily the main determinants of word order variation rather than grammatical relations such as subject, direct object, and indirect object.

## 2. Canonical word order of the clause

As pointed out by Hawkins (1983:19-20), Greenberg's seminal paper "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements" (1966) has had a considerable impact on all subsequent work on word order universals. Greenberg proposed three universal word order types viz., VSO, SVO, and SOV, and argued that these different verb positions correlate in a principled way with other properties, such as languages with dominant VSO order are always prepositional. Along this main stream, Lehmann (1978:6) distinguished between two types of languages, VO and OV with VSO and SVO as the subtypes of the VO type. This typological analysis is based on the syntactic constructions in which the verb with regard to its object is most fundamental.

Based on the Theory of Word Order Universals posited by Greenberg and statistical count of occurrences, Bouyei seems to fit the subject-verb-object (SVO) type of language like its cousin language, Thai. However, either decontextualized isolated clauses as found in the *Bouyei-Thai-Chinese Dictionary* or contextualized clauses in the *Kam-Tai Oral Literatures* have other word order patterns, such as the predominant variation SOV, as well. The word order in Bouyei seems to be flexible and hence, according to Givón (1984:188), the Bouyei language can be classified as a flexible word order language in contrast to the rigid one.

Whether Bouyei is regarded as a SVO or SOV language, it has the features associated with both types of order according to Greenberg's typological scheme. For example a certain adverbial may follow a verb featuring the SVO and frequently another adverbial precedes its head, which is an SOV

concomitant. The SOV features found in the Bouyei language are listed with examples as follows:

1. SOV clauses occur:

- (1) *δum<sup>2</sup> pa<sup>4</sup> nau<sup>2</sup>δa:n<sup>2</sup> tu<sup>2</sup>*  
 wind PREP roof all  
*ku:at<sup>2</sup> pin<sup>3</sup>θian<sup>1</sup> leu<sup>4</sup>*  
 blow upside down already  
 'The wind has turned the roof upside down.'

2. Certain adverbials precede the verbs:

- (2) *ken<sup>6</sup>ku<sup>2</sup> su<sup>2</sup> tu<sup>2</sup> to<sup>1</sup> wun<sup>2</sup>*  
 corncorb easy light more firewood  
 'Corncorbs are easier to burn than firewood.'

3. Aspect markers follow the verb:

- (3) *ku<sup>1</sup> ku<sup>6</sup>γoŋ<sup>1</sup> taŋ<sup>1</sup>ka:n<sup>6</sup>*  
 I work in process  
 'I am working.'
- (4) *ku<sup>1</sup> γam<sup>6</sup>ʔan<sup>5</sup> ʔdai<sup>4</sup> δan<sup>1</sup> kua<sup>5</sup> te<sup>1</sup>*  
 I night before last get see ever him  
 'I saw him the night before last night.'

4. Prepositional phrases precede the verbs:

(except temporal and locational phrases as discussed below)

The preverbal prepositional phrases are mostly the source or the point of departure of a path (5), beneficiary (6), and accompaniment (7).

- (5) *te<sup>1</sup> luŋ<sup>3</sup> tai<sup>5</sup> mui<sup>4</sup>kue<sup>2</sup> ta:u<sup>1</sup>ma<sup>1</sup>*  
 he just from America come back  
 'He has just come back from America.'

- (6)    *ʔau<sup>1</sup> pa<sup>3</sup>mai<sup>4</sup> ma<sup>1</sup> ku<sup>1</sup>*  
          take    the end of the thread    come    I

*laŋ<sup>1</sup> muŋ<sup>2</sup> ta:m<sup>5</sup>*  
          for    you    tie  
          ‘Let me tie the thread for you.’

- (7)    *ŋuan<sup>2</sup>so<sup>6</sup> ku<sup>1</sup> ta:n<sup>1</sup>tu<sup>2</sup> diaŋ<sup>2</sup>*  
          tomorrow    I    alone    with

*muŋ<sup>2</sup> ka:ŋ<sup>3</sup>*  
          you    talk  
          ‘I will talk to you alone tomorrow.’

The locational and temporal positions of the clauses, whether expressed by prepositional phrases or not may be preverbal or postverbal depending on the pragmatic and semantic factors.

The locational and temporal expressions which serve as a setting of the following events in a discourse are in the initial clause position (preverbal) as in example (8).

- (8)    *mai<sup>6</sup>sau<sup>4</sup> ŋa:m<sup>2</sup>po<sup>1</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> su<sup>4</sup>*  
          before    mountain pass    this    often

*pan<sup>2</sup> pu<sup>4</sup>ʔdip<sup>7</sup>*  
          has    bandit  
          ‘There were bandits in the mountain pass before.’

The locational expression which is the predicate argument indicating the location of action is preverbal (9-10) and is usually introduced by the preposition *ʔju<sup>5</sup>* ‘in’ and the directional verbs *pai<sup>1</sup>* ‘to go’ and *ma<sup>1</sup>* ‘to come’ whereas the one which signals the location of the participant or object is postverbal (11).



- (9) *θoŋ<sup>1</sup> tu<sup>1</sup> tak<sup>8</sup>ma<sup>1</sup> ʔju<sup>5</sup>*  
 two CLS dog in  
*ʔa:ŋ θan<sup>1</sup> tuk<sup>7</sup>kan<sup>4</sup>*  
 middle road fight  
 'Two dogs are fighting in the road.'
- (10) *ma<sup>1</sup> pa:i<sup>6</sup>dai<sup>1</sup> naŋ<sup>6</sup>*  
 come inside sit  
 'Come in and sit inside.'
- (11) *θok<sup>8</sup>lai<sup>3</sup> ku<sup>6</sup> θoŋ<sup>2</sup> su<sup>5</sup> pa<sup>3</sup>ya<sup>2</sup>*  
 sparrow do nest in eaves  
 'Sparrows like to make their nests in the eaves.'
- The preverbal temporal expression signals a specific time (12), whereas the postverbal temporal expression signals a span of time and frequency of action (13-14).
- (12) *pa:n<sup>1</sup>ts<sup>h</sup>e<sup>1</sup> tai<sup>5</sup> kui<sup>5</sup>jaŋ<sup>2</sup> ma<sup>1</sup> ya<sup>3</sup>*  
 regular bus from Guiyang come five  
*tem<sup>3</sup> tsuŋ<sup>1</sup> taŋ<sup>2</sup> ku<sup>2</sup>ni<sup>4</sup>*  
 CLS o'clock arrive here  
 'The bus from Guiyang will arrive here at 5 o'clock.'
- (13) *vaŋ<sup>2</sup> lau<sup>4</sup>si<sup>1</sup> ta:ŋ<sup>1</sup> ʔdai<sup>4</sup> θa:m<sup>1</sup> miau<sup>2</sup>*  
 Wang teacher act as get three year  
*pa:n<sup>1</sup>tsu<sup>4</sup>zun<sup>5</sup> leu<sup>4</sup>*  
 teacher in charge of a class already  
 'Teacher Wang has been in charge of our class for three years.'
- (14) *ʔba:n<sup>4</sup> ni<sup>4</sup> ku<sup>1</sup> ma<sup>1</sup> kua<sup>5</sup>*  
 village this I come ever  
*θoŋ<sup>1</sup> tau<sup>5</sup> leu<sup>4</sup>*  
 two times already  
 'I have been to this village twice.'

The SOV features of Bouyei mentioned above are similar to Chinese as described in Li and Thompson (1974:230-232). The obvious features are that the SOV construction has the object case marker *pa*<sup>4</sup> compared to the *bǎ* construction in Chinese and the preverbal prepositional phrase which is not common among its genetically related languages such as Thai. Though it is found that Thai also has a similar construction as the preverbal prepositional phrase which is introduced by the preposition *tai*<sup>4</sup> 'from,' the word *ca:k*<sup>2</sup> in the preverbal position in Thai has its lexical meaning 'to leave' and should be treated as a full verb (15). Consequently, the clause having this construction should be taken as a verb serial construction in Thai.<sup>2</sup> In postverbal position, *ca:k*<sup>2</sup> functions as a preposition glossed 'from' (16).

- (15) *khaw*<sup>5</sup> *ca:k*<sup>2</sup> *pra*<sup>2</sup>*the:t*<sup>3</sup> *ʔa*<sup>1</sup>*me:ri*<sup>1</sup>*ka:*<sup>1</sup>  
 he leave country America  
*klap*<sup>2</sup> *ma:*<sup>1</sup>  
 return come  
 'He left America and returned (here).'

- (16) *khaw*<sup>5</sup> *klap*<sup>2</sup> *ma:*<sup>1</sup> *ca:k*<sup>2</sup>  
 he return come from  
*pra*<sup>2</sup>*the:t*<sup>3</sup> *ʔa*<sup>1</sup>*me:ri*<sup>1</sup>*ka:*<sup>1</sup>  
 country America  
 'He returned from America.'

Occasionally, the *tai*<sup>4</sup> construction in Bouyei also occurs in the postverbal position (17) in the same way as (16).

- (17) *pan*<sup>2</sup> *keu*<sup>1</sup> *ðam*<sup>4</sup> *ʔdeu*<sup>1</sup> *lai*<sup>1</sup> *tai*<sup>1</sup>  
 there be CLS water one flow from  
*la*<sup>3</sup> *pia*<sup>1</sup> *te*<sup>1</sup> *ma*<sup>1</sup>  
 below rock that come  
 'A stream of water flows out from below the rock.'

The flexible order of this construction seems to support the idea that the preverbal prepositional phrase is borrowed from Chinese.

### 3. The word order variation

Among the decontextualized isolated clauses used for this analysis, there are a large number of clauses that have the preverbal object yielding the SOV and OSV order and the left-most position of the focally attended element in the clause. Based on the criteria given by Li and Thompson (1975), I believe that the frequent occurrence of this word order variation has confirmed that Bouyei is a topic-prominent language.

#### 3.1 The *pa*<sup>4</sup>-construction

The *pa*<sup>4</sup>-construction is called “the disposal form” by Chinese linguists. The emergence of this construction is due to the strong influence of Chinese (Zhou 1998). According to Li and Thompson (1976), the *bǎ*-construction in Chinese which is parallel to the *pa*<sup>4</sup>-construction in Bouyei emerged during the Tang dynasty (7th-9th c. A.D.). Before this period, *bǎ* was a full verb in classical Chinese, meaning ‘hold, take.’ It then lost all of the syntactic properties and has been grammaticalized from verb to preposition functioning as an object marker. The collapse of the serial verb construction containing the verb *bǎ* has created the modern *bǎ*-construction in Chinese. The word *pa*<sup>4</sup> is obviously a borrowed word from Chinese since it is glossed as ‘to paste, stick, glue’ not ‘to take, to hold’ like the word *bǎ* Chinese or *ʔau*<sup>1</sup> in Thai. Example (18) compares the *bǎ* and *pa*<sup>4</sup> constructions.

- (18) Chinese  
*Zhang-san*   *bǎ*   *Li-si*   *piping*   *le*  
*Zhang-san*   *ba*   *Li-si*   criticize   aspect  
 ‘Zhang-san criticized Li-si.’

Bouyei  
*tuu<sup>2</sup>nai<sup>5</sup>*    *pa<sup>4</sup>*    *ya:i<sup>2</sup>*    *ku<sup>7</sup>*    *kat<sup>7</sup>*  
 mouse    PREP    shoes    my    nibble  
  
*wa:i<sup>6</sup>*    *leu<sup>4</sup>*  
 broken    already  
 'The mouse nibbled my shoes.'

The *pa<sup>4</sup>* construction in Bouyei yields the SOV construction. In the *pa<sup>4</sup>* construction a direct object is always flagged by the object case marker *pa<sup>4</sup>* and sometimes tagged by the determiner *ni<sup>4</sup>* 'this' or *te<sup>1</sup>* 'that' as in examples (19) and (20) respectively.

- (19)    *pa<sup>4</sup>*    *ʔdak<sup>7</sup>ʔin<sup>1</sup>*    *ni<sup>4</sup>*    *ʔduŋ<sup>5</sup>*  
          PREP    stone            this    throw  
  
          *pai<sup>1</sup>*    *tʰai<sup>1</sup>*    *nuai<sup>6</sup>*  
          go        far        little bit  
          'Throw this stone far away.'

- (20)    *te<sup>1</sup>*    *pa<sup>4</sup>*    *lu<sup>3</sup>tuai<sup>4</sup>*    *te<sup>1</sup>*  
          he    PREP    rice bowl    that  
  
          *ʔduai<sup>5</sup>*    *wa:i<sup>6</sup>*    *leu<sup>4</sup>*  
          beat        broken    already  
          'He just broke that rice bowl.'

The *pa<sup>4</sup>* construction has a similar construction as the *ʔau<sup>1</sup>* construction in Bouyei, therefore the latter construction is also treated as "the disposal form" by Chinese linguists (Zhou 1998). It is claimed that the *ʔau<sup>1</sup>* construction has developed through the same pathway as the *pa<sup>4</sup>* construction because the word *ʔau<sup>1</sup>* has also been grammaticalized from the full verb *ʔau<sup>1</sup>* meaning 'to take.' However, this study does not include the *ʔau<sup>1</sup>* construction as the SOV variation for the following reasons: First, though *pa<sup>4</sup>* and the *ʔau<sup>1</sup>* construction are syntactically similar, in some instances it is difficult to determine

if they are “disposal forms” or the serial verb construction (Zhou 1998). The difficulty in distinguishing these two constructions may be due to the fact that the word  $\text{?au}^1$  still preserves its syntactic property of a verb and hence may not be completely grammaticalized into the functional word. Second, according to Kingkarn (1986), the word  $\text{?aw}^1$  glossed as ‘take hold of’ in the  $\text{?aw}^1$  construction in Thai, is synchronically still a full verb. It is still in the process of becoming but has not yet become a grammatical marker. The semantic interpretation of the serial verb construction containing  $\text{?aw}^1$  is of the purpose type.<sup>3</sup> So the  $\text{?au}^1$  construction should historically develop in the same pathway as Thai but at a further stage than Thai because of the influence of  $\text{pa}^4$  construction adopted from Chinese. It has been found also that this construction is typical and the most common sentence pattern of “disposal” construction (Zhou 1998) therefore there is a strong tendency that the verb  $\text{?au}^1$  will be completely grammaticalized into the object case marker as in the case of  $\text{bǎ}$  in Chinese earlier than the verb  $\text{?aw}^1$  in Thai. Compare the following parallel examples of the  $\text{?au}^1$  construction and the  $\text{?aw}^1$  construction in Bouyei and Thai, respectively, in example (21).

- (21)  $\text{mu}\eta^3$   $\text{?au}^1$   $\text{sen}^3$   $\text{?dian}^4$   $\text{?di}^1$   $\text{nuai}^6$   
 you take money hide well little bit  
 ‘Please hide your money in a proper place.’
- $\text{khun}^3$   $\text{?aw}^1$   $\eta\text{ən}^1$   $\text{sən}^3$   $\text{hay}^3$   
 you take hold of money hide let
- $\text{di}^1$   $\text{nɔy}^2$   
 well little bit  
 ‘Please hide your money in a proper place.’

The development of object markers out of former serialized verbs like *take* occurs cross-linguistically.<sup>4</sup> Hopper (1991:28) illustrates the development of accusative cases in West African languages out of former serialized verbs like *take*. This development is described as “Persistence,” i.e., the

relationship between the meaning and function of a grammatical form and its history as a lexical morpheme.

The preverbal prepositional phrase featuring the SOV type discussed in section 2 is also ascribed to Chinese influence. The Bouyei speakers have adopted this pattern from Chinese and developed it along the same pathway as the *bǎ* construction and preverbal prepositional phrase in Chinese. That is the preverbal prepositional phrase is created through the collapse of serial verb construction, not through the rearrangement of the sentential constituents. The prepositions *tai*<sup>5</sup> 'from' *laŋ*<sup>1</sup> 'for (somebody)' and *ðiaŋ*<sup>2</sup> 'with' are originally grammaticalized from the full verbs meaning 'pass by,' 'help,' and 'follow,' respectively. This diachronic phenomenon well-known as grammaticalization<sup>5</sup> supports the claim made by Traugott and Heine (1991:8) as follows:

What we find in language after language is that for any given grammatical domain, there is only a restrictive set of lexical fields, and within them only a restricted set of lexical items, that are likely to be sources. For example, case markers, including prepositions and postpositions, typically derive from terms for body parts or verbs of motion; tense and aspect markers typically derive from specific spatial configuration; modals from terms for possession, or desire; middles from reflexives, etc.

### 3. 2 *The left-shift construction*

Whereas the *pa*<sup>4</sup>-construction discussed in the previous section does not involve any movement of the syntactic constituents, the left-shift construction consists of the clause element which is pre-posed to a "focus position" defined by Herring (1995:163) as a special position in the sentence where the focused information to which the speaker/writer wishes to accord particular salience is allocated. A mapping of the locus of focal attention onto sentential constituents at the moment of utterance formulation has been studied by various cognitive

linguists. Tomlin (1995:518) has tried to develop an adequate theory of functional grammar by replacing the classical notion of clause-level theme with the cognitive notion "focal attention," i.e., "a cognitive notion which is well-grounded in psychological literature and which is amenable to experimental manipulation." His claim agrees with what has been found in Bouyei, that is, whatever referent on which focal attention is allocated within the speaker's dynamically unfolding mental representation of events at the moment an utterance is rendered appears at or near the beginning of the clause. The notion of "focus attention" will be used here to explain the use of *pa*<sup>4</sup> construction and other variant patterns resulting from the movement of clause constituents to the initial position of the clause.

The following examples show the clause-initial movement of various clause constituents such as the postverbal temporal phrase (22) and locational phrase (23) which are the predicate argument, subject (24), verb (25), and possessor (26).

- (22) *pu*<sup>4</sup>*lai*<sup>6</sup>*va:n*<sup>2</sup>    *pi*<sup>1</sup>*taŋ*<sup>2</sup>*lap*<sup>7</sup>    *tu*<sup>3</sup>    *?ju*<sup>5</sup>  
 hunter                      the whole year    all            in  
  
*po*<sup>1</sup>                      *le*<sup>3</sup>  
 mountain              run  
 'The hunters make their living in the mountains the whole year.'

The temporal expression in (22) indicates a span of time and is normally placed in postverbal position. However, when it is focally attended, it is moved near the initial-clause position.

- (23) *?ba:n*<sup>4</sup>    *ni:*<sup>4</sup>    *ku*<sup>1</sup>    *ma*<sup>1</sup>    *kua*<sup>5</sup>  
 village    this    I            come    ever  
  
*θoŋ*<sup>1</sup>    *ta:u*<sup>5</sup>    *leu*<sup>4</sup>  
 two            times            already  
 'I have been to this village twice.'

The locational phrase in (23) is not the setting but the predicate argument so it is usually postverbal. It is shifted to the initial position of the clause. This focused referent is further primed by the determiner *ni*:<sup>4</sup> 'this.'

- (24) *ku*<sup>1</sup>    *yam*<sup>8</sup>*lian*<sup>2</sup>    *nin*<sup>2</sup>    *mi*<sup>2</sup>    *tok*<sup>7</sup>*net*<sup>7</sup>  
 I        last night        sleep    not    at ease  
 'I didn't sleep well last night.'

- (25) *ɲuan*<sup>2</sup>*lian*<sup>2</sup>    *ma*<sup>1</sup>    *θoŋ*<sup>1</sup>    *po*<sup>2</sup>    *ye*<sup>3</sup>    *leu*<sup>4</sup>  
 yesterday        come    two    group    guest    already  
 'Two groups of guests came yesterday.'

- (26) *toŋ*<sup>3</sup>*wai*<sup>4</sup>        *ku*<sup>1</sup>    *tɕo*<sup>3</sup>    *ka:t*<sup>7</sup>    *leu*<sup>4</sup>  
 wooden bucket    my    hoop    broken    already  
 'The hoop of my wooden bucket is broken.'

Multiple preverbal focused elements are also possible as in example (27) which has the focused object and temporal phrase (span of time).

- (27) *pu*<sup>6</sup>*dai*<sup>1</sup>        *muŋ*<sup>2</sup>    *kau*<sup>4</sup>*ji*<sup>5</sup>  
 underwear        your        for a long time  
  
*wi*<sup>6</sup>    *θak*<sup>8</sup>    *leu*<sup>4</sup>  
 not    wash    yet  
 'You haven't washed your underwear for a long time.'

### 3.3 The *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> construction

The *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> construction in Bouyei is similar to the *bèi*-construction in Chinese and the so-called passive construction in Thai. It yields another variant pattern, SOV order as in example (28).



- (28) S O V  
 (patient) (agent)  
*ku<sup>1</sup> teŋ<sup>1</sup> tu<sup>1</sup>ma<sup>2</sup> yap<sup>8</sup> leu<sup>4</sup>*  
 I suffer dog bite already  
 'I was bitten by the dog.'

This construction usually carries an inherently adversative meaning, that is, the patient subject undergoes an unpleasant event. Compare the following parallel examples in Bouyei, Thai and Chinese (Li and Thompson 1974:202) which all carry adversative connotation.

- (29) Bouyei  
*te<sup>1</sup> teŋ<sup>1</sup> lau<sup>4</sup>si<sup>1</sup> ku:at<sup>7</sup> leu<sup>4</sup>*  
 he suffer teacher criticize already  
 'He was criticized by the teacher.'

Thai

- khaw<sup>5</sup> thu:k<sup>2</sup> khru:<sup>1</sup> tam<sup>1</sup>ni<sup>2</sup> læ:w<sup>4</sup>*  
 he come into contact with teacher criticize already  
 'He was criticized by the teacher.'

Chinese

- Zhang-san bèi Li-si piping le*  
 Zhang-san bèi Li-si criticize aspect  
 'Zhang-san was criticized by Li-si.'

The historical development of *teŋ<sup>1</sup>* is along the same pathway as *thu:k<sup>2</sup>* in Thai and *bèi* (called the agentive case marker by Li and Thompson 1974) and *bǎ* in Chinese. That is, it was originally a verb meaning 'touch, hit.' The modern Bouyei language uses *teŋ<sup>1</sup>* both as a verb as in examples (30) and as an adversative indicator usually glossed as 'suffer' as in (29)

- (30) *nij*<sup>2</sup> *tuai*<sup>4</sup> *te*<sup>1</sup> *kue*<sup>3</sup> *teŋ*<sup>1</sup>  
 piece rice bowl that cut hit  
*lu:k*<sup>8</sup>*wuŋ*<sup>2</sup> *ku*<sup>1</sup> *leu*<sup>4</sup>  
 finger my already  
 'My fingers have been cut by that piece of broken rice bowl.'

The fact that *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> was originally a verb leads to the question whether the *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> construction is a transformationally derived passive construction as in English or a serial verb construction in which *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> is a full verb as in Thai. Kingkarn (1986) labels the verb *thu:k*<sup>2</sup> in Thai as "submissive verb" denoting an action in which the patient subject experiences an unpleasant event. The submissive concept inherent in the lexical verb *thu:k*<sup>2</sup> is combined with the process of verb serialization resulting in the expression of the concept of passivity. The verb *thu:k*<sup>2</sup> 'comes into contact with' in the so-called passive construction in Thai still carries its original meaning in that the patient subject comes into contact with an event and thus is treated as a full verb in that construction which is actually a serial verb construction.<sup>6</sup>

Semantically and syntactically, the adversative marker *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> behaves in the same way as *thu:k*<sup>2</sup>, that is, it implies an adversative effect on the subject noun phrase. The subject noun phrase may encode a person who suffers from an event or encode an entity which undergoes a negative change or effect from an event. Consequently, the adversative indicator *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> should be treated as a full verb meaning 'to suffer or to undergo an unpleasant event' as well in the *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> construction.

### 3. 4 *The existential presentative construction*

The existential presentative construction introduces another variant pattern, VS, into the Bouyei language. In existential presentative clauses, what is being asserted is the

existence or location of a new referent as in example (31) or the existence (happening) of an ambient event as in example (32).

- (31) *ʔa:ŋ<sup>1</sup> ka:i<sup>1</sup> pan<sup>2</sup> pu<sup>4</sup>ðak<sup>8</sup>*  
 street have pick-pocket  
 'There are pick-pockets on this street.'

- (32) *tau<sup>3</sup> wun<sup>1</sup>*  
 drop rain  
 'It rains.'

The existential presentative construction in Bouyei is not much different from Thai and Chinese. Both Thai and Chinese also have the construction stating the referent's existence as follows:

- (33) Thai  
*nay<sup>1</sup> ba:n<sup>3</sup> mi:<sup>1</sup> ma:<sup>3</sup> yu:<sup>2</sup> tua<sup>1</sup> nuŋ<sup>1</sup>*  
 in house there is dog exist CLS one  
 'In the house there is a dog.'

- (34) Chinese  
*(zai) yuanzi-li you yi zhi gou*  
 (LOC) yard-inside exist one CLS dog  
 'In the yard there is a dog.'  
 (Li and Thompson 1981:509 cited in LaPolla 1995:311)

The existential presentative clauses which are statements about the weather in Bouyei have the same syntactic structure as Chinese but differ in Thai as follows:

- (35) Chinese  
*xia yu le.*  
 fall rain ASP  
 'It's raining.'  
 (LaPolla 1995:318)

- (36) Thai  
*fon*<sup>5</sup> *tok*<sup>2</sup> *læ:w*<sup>4</sup>  
 rain fall ASP  
 'It's raining.'

#### 4. The motivation of word order variation

The order variation can be explained by some cognitive and pragmatic factors which may be reduced to a single factor having to do with a severely limited amount of focal attention, that is, whatever item is in the speaker's focus of attention at any given time is placed at the front of the clause (Payne 1992:5). This factor is supported by cross-linguistic evidence as described in Givón (1987). Based on this evidence, the correlation between the discourse contexts and the left shift of noun phrase, i.e., NP-pre-posing is summarized as follows:<sup>7</sup>

- a. A constituent is fronted in the context of either **low informational predictability** or **high thematic important**;
- b. The use of the same structural device-preposing-to signal both predictability and importance is not an accident. Rather, what unifies the two contexts is the psychological dimension: Pre-posing a constituent is a cognitively-transparent device for **attracting attention** to them.

(Givón 1992:311)

The factor of focal attention evidently motivates the ordering patterns in Bouyei. The existential presentative construction, the VS order, is usually used at the beginning of a narrative discourse to introduce a new referent to the story. This referent is placed in the post-verbal position because the focus is on the existence of the referent expressed by the verb in the initial position of the clause.

After the new referent is introduced in the first clause, an assertion is made about it in the following clause. The

referent becomes salient and encoded as subject represented by a topical NP. Here a distinction should be made between the notion of “topicality” and that of “focality” which described above. The notion of topic/referent has been proposed by Givón (1983:8) as follows:

Within the thematic paragraph it is most common for one topic to be the continuity marker, the leitmotif, so that it is the participant most crucially involved in the action sequence running through the paragraph; it is the participant most closely associated with the higher-level ‘theme’ of the paragraph; and finally, it is the participant most likely to be coded as the primary topic-or grammatical subject-of the vast majority of sequentially ordered clauses/sentences comprising the thematic paragraph. It is thus, obviously, the most continuous of all the topics mentioned in the various clauses in the paragraph.

It is clearly seen that the notion of “topicality” is closely related to the notion of theme or storyline (in narrative discourse)<sup>8</sup> whereas the notion of “focality” has to do with a cognitive domain in which any focally attended elements will be placed in a pre-verbal or clause-initial position.

Therefore the topical referent which is overtly expressed in the subject position, i.e., the topical position, is automatically focal. The sequentially ordered clauses having the topical referent as the subject is usually in SVO order.<sup>9</sup> When the topical referent continues to be the topic of a topic chain, it is encoded by a zero anaphor. Then the reduced word order VO is used and the verb is focally attended whereas the active referent covertly represented remains topical. The series of initial-clause verbs in the sequentially ordered clauses constitutes the storyline of the narrative.

During the topic continuity, the *pa'* construction,  $S_{actor}OV$  order, may be used to shift focus from the thematic

verb to the object. The *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> construction,  $S_{\text{patient}}\text{OV}$  order, is used for a patient-undergoer type of argument. The patient becomes the subject of this construction and may be established as a topical referent in the following clauses. This construction functions to prime the patient who suffers from an unpleasant event through the narrator's viewpoint.

The left-shift construction also has a focal attention function. Any elements in a clause can be shifted to the left position of the clause if they are focally attended. They can be focused during a topic continuity of a referent and thus the shifted elements are not topical. Even the topical NP in subject position can also be focused by being shifted to the initial position in the clause if it is preceded by a temporal or locational setting as in example (24).

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the predominant occurrence and the syntactic features associated with the SVO order, Bouyei is basically an SVO language. However due to the strong influence of Chinese, some SOV characteristics have been found, such as the SOV order in the *pa*<sup>4</sup> construction, the preverbal prepositional phrases, the preverbal adverbials, and the postverbal aspect markers.

The emergence of SOV features in Chinese has brought about the new syntactic structure SOV. It is claimed that the newly emerged syntactic structure was not derived from the old SVO order through rearrangement of the sentential constituents but from the collapse of serial verb constructions (Li and Thompson 1976:477).

In Bouyei the SOV features have been adopted from Chinese. In comparison to its cousin languages, such as Thai and Nung, the development of such constructions does not emerge. In Thai the prepositional phrase is almost exclusively postverbal and the use of *pa*<sup>4</sup> as the object case marker in SOV

clauses does not exist. Therefore, it seems that the Bouyei language is approaching the SOV status through language contact with Mandarin Chinese, not because of its internal development. Most Bouyei speakers are bilingual in Chinese so the SOV features may have been introduced into the Bouyei language from Chinese. These SOV features are the result of the predominance of one language type over another.

Despite the SOV features found in the Bouyei language, this language should still be considered an SVO language due to pragmatic factors. This conclusion is supported by the claim made by Longacre (1995: 333) that if two word order patterns exist in a language, the norm or the unmarked word order should be the one that moves the story forward. In the Bouyei folktales the contextualized clauses which carry thematic information have the preferred word order (S)VO with the subject omitted once it is established as the topical referent.

Other word order patterns in Bouyei, which have either been borrowed from Chinese or which have developed in the language itself, have been also motivated by the information structure of the discourse. The basic assumption is any salient information will be placed at or near the beginning of the clause. The *pa*<sup>4</sup> construction which triggers the SOV clauses appears in the story when an entity is brought into focal attention. During the employment of this construction, the subject carrying old information remains topical though grammatically omitted, not the focused entity. The left-shift construction resulting in the OSV order functions to focus the object and at the same time may topicalize it if it continues to be the topic of the following topic chain. The left-shift construction in which the verb precedes the subject, the VS order, functions to bring focus to the thematic verb. The existential presentative VS construction focuses on the existence of a referent (cf. Chinese in LaPolla 1995). The passive-like construction, the *teŋ*<sup>1</sup> construction, is used both to focus and topicalize the salient character encoded by a topical NP who is the patient of some target event. This construction

seems to support the SVO status of Bouyei as claimed by Lehmann (1978:22) that "Passivization is prominent in SVO languages, but not at all in OV languages; it is essentially a tool for achieving topicalization for the object, and such a tool is unnecessary in OV structures."

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Niuchang is the former name of a small town in Zhenfeng county, Guizhou Province. The name of the town is now Xingbei.

<sup>2</sup>See a similar construction in Nung, another genetically related language (Saul 1980:62).

<sup>3</sup>See further discussion of *ʔaw<sup>1</sup>* as a coverb which does not carry the propositional meaning in Ngampit (1992).

<sup>4</sup>See Lord (1982) for further discussion of the development of object markers in serial verb languages.

<sup>5</sup>The term was first used by Meillet (1948 [1912]) as "the evolution of grammatical forms (function words, affixes, etc.) out of earlier lexical forms" (Traugott and Heine 1991:2).

<sup>6</sup>See Amara (1988) for more discussion of the passive constructions in standard Thai.

<sup>7</sup>See more detailed discussion of the summary in Givón (1987).

<sup>8</sup>See Longacre (1990, 1996) and Grimes (1975) for detailed discussion of discourse information such as participants, non-events and events (storyline).

<sup>9</sup>The sequentially ordered clause or temporally sequenced clause is defined by Myhill (1992:265) as "one which advances the time reference of a narrative." It is referred to by Hopper (1979) as "a foreground clause" and by Longacre (1990) as "a storyline clause." See more discussion of a correlation between temporal sequencing and word order in Myhill (1992).



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