MEANING BASE FOR STRUCTURE: A RE-EXAMINATION OF VERBS IN BURMESE

THEIN-TUN
La Trobe University

1. INTRODUCTION

Okell (1969:43-44) divides verbs in Burmese into two types: funtive and stative. He explains the difference between the two types on the basis of meaning; that is, those in the former denote actions or functions (e.g. ကဝေ: /θwà/ 'go', ကဝိ /la/ 'come', ကဝေ /nə/ 'live', ကဝိ /thain/ 'sit', ကဝိ /sà/ 'eat', ကဝိ /θau'/ 'drink'), whilst those in the latter denote qualities or states (e.g. ကဝိ /lè/ 'be heavy', ကဝေ /pò/ 'be light', ကဝိ /myan/ 'be fast', ကဝေ /hnè/ 'be slow'). Although, however, the criterion for the initial classification is made on the basis of meaning, the differences between the two types, which he does not specify either as structural differences or meaning differences, are explained in a somewhat circular approach, a mixture of meaning explained in terms of structure and function, and structure and function explained in terms of meaning. This is illustrated in points (1) to (5) below.

(1) According to Okell one of the most important differences between the two types of verbs is the way they are attributed to nouns. Funtive verbs simply precede the noun. For example:

Funtive V N

ကဝိ (θau') + ကဝေ (ye) ⇒ ကဝိ (θau'-ye)

drink

water drinking water

Stative verbs usually follow the noun. For example:

N Stative V

ကဝေ (ye) + ကဝိ (εε) ⇒ ကဝေ (εε)

/εε/ =/εε-

water be cold cold water

1 For describing Burmese words, the broad transcription outlined in the introduction has been used in this paper, and is applied to the paraphrased or quoted material from Okell (1969) in (1) to (5) below.
The way verbs are used attributively with nouns is explained in terms of structure, the word order they conform to – that is, the difference in function is explained on the basis of structure.

(2) Okell sees other differences between the two types of verb as following naturally from their meaning. “For example, functive verbs do not normally occur with the formative prefix ؕ/kah‘/ ‘rather, fairly, -ish’; and stative verbs do not normally occur with imperative markers, or with such auxiliary verbs as _gateway/ ‘dare to’, _gateway/ ‘free to’, _gateway/ ‘manage to’ etc.” (pp.43-44). Thus a structural difference is explained in terms of meaning.

(3) “...with other verbs – particularly those which are not found as attributes in compound nouns – the classification is necessarily subjective and there are therefore many borderline cases and exceptions. Examples of difficult cases are:

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<tr>
<td>1/</td>
<td>1/</td>
<td>be, exist, there is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/</td>
<td>2/</td>
<td>happen, come about, be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td>3/</td>
<td>be true, be so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/</td>
<td>4/</td>
<td>know” (p.44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “difficult borderline cases” are explained on the basis that they are not attributes in compound nouns – an explanation which is half meaning-based and half function/structure-based.

(4) “Some verbs are used with both functive and stative meaning; e.g.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/</td>
<td>1/</td>
<td>stop, bring to a halt; stop, cease, come to an end, be still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/</td>
<td>2/</td>
<td>turn, cause to revolve; revolve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td>3/</td>
<td>place close to, put near; be close, near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/</td>
<td>4/</td>
<td>clear up, make clear, explain; be clear, obvious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/</td>
<td>5/</td>
<td>form a circle, surround; be surrounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/</td>
<td>6/</td>
<td>postpone, delay; be postponed, delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/</td>
<td>7/</td>
<td>join together; be joined together” (p.44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These, Okell says, are the verbs which can belong to two types, having two types of meaning – which is a meaning-based explanation.

(5) “In other cases, verbs that are usually stative are sometimes used transitively, like functive verbs; e.g.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/</td>
<td>1/</td>
<td>be tight, tense – make tight, tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/</td>
<td>2/</td>
<td>be quiet – make quiet, turn down volume</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 The italics in points (2) to (5) are mine.
MEANING BASE FOR STRUCTURE: A RE-EXAMINATION OF VERBS IN BURMESE 175

/cee/  be loud – make loud, turn up volume
/cin/  be narrow – make narrow
/tou/  be short – make short” (p.44)

"These are examples of verbs which are basically stative verbs and can sometimes function as functive verbs" - here, exceptions of shift from one type to the other are explained on the basis of transitivity, a grammatical term of meaning and structure.

Okell’s grammar is universally acclaimed among Tibeto-Burmese linguists as a superb grammar. For the task of analysing Burmese grammar, especially for the use of non-native speakers, it seems impossible to take any approach other than his. The purpose of this paper is neither to contradict Okell’s remarks on verbs nor to criticise his methodological approach, but rather to examine the meaning components in Burmese verb types, which are determinants of the classification of verbs as well as their morphological (structural) make-up when they are attributed to nouns. In this paper, I will attempt first to present the view that meaning is the only criterion for explaining both the initial classification of verb types and their morphological make-up. Such an approach, I believe, will help the grammarian abstain from using exceptions such as those indicated by italic type in the paragraphs above, so that more universal grammatical statements can be made. Secondly, I will attempt to establish the view that classifying all ‘verbals’ in Burmese simply as verbs is merely a subjective treatment. As mentioned previously, Okell’s grammar is a reference grammar, and cannot be expected to contain a detailed analysis of the meanings of verbs. The ultimate objective of this paper is merely to complement Okell’s remarks on verbs.

2. MONOSYLLABIC VERBS

Although verbs in Burmese can be either monosyllabic, disyllabic or polysyllabic, monosyllabic verbs are the cores of all other verbs, because disyllabic and polysyllabic verbs (with the exception of ‘tied noun + verb’ compound verbs such as /hno’ she’l/ ‘greet’) are merely combinations of monosyllabic verbs. Verbs at the monosyllabic level will therefore be dealt with first.

2.1 ANALYSIS OF MEANING

Okell (1969:43) explains that it is useful for some purposes to divide verbs into two types: those which denote voluntary actions or functions, and those which denote qualities or

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3 The term 'verbal' here refers to a word class including verbs and adjectives in the tradition of transformational generative grammar.

4 This term is my own.
states. The second difference in meaning between the two types (which is not explicit in Okell) is the agentive nature of the former and non-agentive nature of the latter. Functive verbs are highly agentive in the sense that they strongly assume an actual agent, a performer, whereas stative verbs are non-agentive in the sense that they do not assume an actual agent or performer, although both types need the formal subject in the sentence construction. The subjects associated with functive verbs play an active (agentive) role, whereas the subjects associated with stative verbs play an inactive (non-agentive) role.

This agentive versus non-agentive component of meaning is not the same as the presence or absence of action. And it is important to establish this component of meaning as one independent characteristic distinguishing the two types because there are verbs which are stative – they still denote actions and the actions denoted by them can be seen. The action takes place by itself and hence the associated (nominal) subject has no role in it. For example:

- \(\text{cep}^\circ\) /pya/' / break off (on one's own accord)  
- \(\text{cå}^\circ\) /cå/ / fall down  
- \(\text{çi}^\circ\) /chí/ / limp  
- \(\text{gå}^\circ\) /nwe/ / be tender and gracious (as a feminine feature)  
- \(\text{çop}^\circ\) /cå/ / be gracefully pleasant

(The first two verbs are more action-orientated than the remaining three, although they are all stative verbs.) The action denoted by these verbs is understood to happen or take place with no effort on the part of the subject associated with them. The subjects associated with stative verbs are more akin to a topic in a topic-comment construction with a verb 'to be' (e.g. 'we are carpenters') and hence they can be regarded as nominal or topical non-agentive subjects. For functive verbs, however, voluntary action is the most prominent. For example:

- \(\text{çpå}^\circ\) /θwå/ / go  
- \(\text{çåå}^\circ\) /lå/ / come  
- \(\text{çåp}^\circ\) /ńe/ / stay  
- \(\text{çåç}^\circ\) /thåin/ / sit

These are functive intransitive verbs and intrasitive verbs and their actions can be seen.

Since these verbs in the two sets of examples above are all intransitive, the transitive/intransitive criterion cannot distinguish these two sets and the agentive element is therefore required as a separate component of meaning to distinguish the two types.

The third componential difference in meaning between the two types is that there is transitivity and/or intransitivity and/or causativity in the functive verbs whereas there is only intransitivity in the stative verbs. For example:
MEANING BASE FOR STRUCTURE: A RE-EXAMINATION OF VERBS IN BURMESE

Intransitive and functive verbs:

- /θwà/ (go)
- /la/ (come)
- /ne/ (live, stay)

Transitive and functive verbs:

- /yai'/ (hit)
- /θa'/ (kill)
- /kan/ (kick)

Causative ('h') and functive verbs:

- /phya'/ (cut)
- /khwè'/ (break)
- /che/ (crush)

All intransitive:

- /hàun/ (be old)
- /θi'/ (be new)

Intransitive:

- /kwè'/ (broken (by one's own accord))
- /ce/ (crumble (by one's own accord))

Verbs:

- /na'/ (be tender from cooking)

This aspect is not explicit in Okell although he mentions that all 'h' verbs (causative and transitive verbs) belong to the functive type. (Since action-orientated non-agentive intransitive verbs can be changed to (transitive) causative verbs by placing an 'h' (aspiration) after their initial consonant, causative verbs can be mentioned as 'h' verbs.)

The fourth difference in meaning (which is fairly explicit in Okell) is the tendency for application of imperative mood. The tendency to imperative mood is so strong in functive verbs and so weak in stative verbs that the former can function as imperatives when they occur on their own whereas the latter cannot. For example:

- /θwà/ can mean 'go' in imperative mood on its own
- /na/ does not mean 'be painful' in imperative mood on its own.

The fourth difference is in fact a spin-off from the second componential difference in meaning (in the sense that there will be no imperative mood if there is no agent), but it deserves an independent status since it will become relevant to some of the aspects to be explained later. The components of meaning which serve as bases for classifying the two verb types discussed above can be summarised in the following manner in the order of their importance:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plane of meaning</th>
<th>Type one (active verbs)</th>
<th>Type two (inactive verbs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 functive</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 stative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 agentive</td>
<td>2 non-agentive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 combined or separate&lt;br&gt;transitivity&lt;br&gt;intransitivity&lt;br&gt;causativity</td>
<td>3 intransitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 strong imperative mood</td>
<td>4 weak imperative mood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terms under type one and type two can be regarded as end points (not necessarily opposite extremes) on the same plane of meaning. For instance ‘active verb’ is not necessarily the opposite of ‘inactive verb’. The difference between the two is relative. Intransitivity is not necessarily the opposite of the combined status of ‘transitivity’, ‘intransitivity’ and ‘causativity’. The same principle of contrast applies to the ‘agentive’/’non-agentive’ pair and the ‘strong imperative’/’weak imperative’ pair as well.

2.2 Meaning as a basic criterion

In this section, I will argue that meaning is the only reliable criterion on the basis of which verbs in Burmese should be classified and their structural forms and functions explained. In my attempt to achieve the objective of this section, I will relate my arguments as far as possible to the discussion of Okell’s classification as outlined in §1 (1)-(5) above.

2.2.1 Difficult borderline cases

The verbs in §1 (3) above which Okell describes as “difficult cases” can be resolved on the basis of their meaning. Of the four verbs given, Ɪ /jh/ and Ɜŋ /phyi/ are truly stative verbs. Their stative meaning can be specified in terms of the four components: they are inactive, non-agentive, intransitive and the force of imperative mood in them is nil; that is, they cannot function as imperative verbs on their own. The term ‘imperative’ can share both the meaning aspect and the structural aspect, but, as explained earlier, it is used here as a spin-off from the non-agentive component of meaning in which the action takes place virtually of its own accord. This kind of initial classification on the basis of meaning also agrees with the structural formula stated by Okell that stative verbs are attributed in the form of nouns derived with the prefix particle Ꞩ/ and follow the noun. For example:
In these cases verb is subordinated or attributed to the noun. These constructions should not be confused with nominalised verbs formed by nominalisers such as atical, /poun/, ical, /yòu/, ical, /léi/, ical, /thóun/ as in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ical</td>
<td>ical</td>
<td>the manner of happening, event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ical</td>
<td>ical</td>
<td>the custom of happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ical</td>
<td>ical</td>
<td>the custom of happening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and so on where the second syllables are not ordinary nouns as are ical /fwe/ ‘gold’ and ical /léi/ ‘hand’, but special nominalisers.

The meaning of the verb ical /θi/ is pervasive in the sense that it shares both the end points on each of the four planes of meaning (the same as Okell’s verbs mentioned in §1 (4), such as ical /yi/ and ical /ka/). It can therefore be structured as both a funtive and a stative verb when attributed to a noun. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ical</td>
<td>ical</td>
<td>knowing mind, conscious mind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
N + N (V)  
\( \text{\textit{logy}} + \text{\textit{theta}} \)  
\( /\text{lu'/} /\text{theta}/ /\text{theta}/ \)  
\( /\text{lu theta'/} \)

person know  
person who is known

\( /\text{lu theta'/} \) in the above example has the same meaning function as \( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{lu se'in/ 'fresh person, green person, unknown person, stranger'} \) and \( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{lu ce'/ 'known person'} \). This kind of N + V construction should not be fully equated with similar structures where the verbal noun is not attributed to the noun and the meaning is derivative. For example:

N  V  
\( \text{\textit{degree}} + \text{\textit{theta}} \)  
\( /\text{da'/} /\text{theta}/ \)

true nature know  
(but not *\( \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{da' theta/ 'well acquainted person'} \))

The verb \( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou'/ is the most interesting of all the four because it is a perfect example of meaning as the determinant of structure. Being restricted by its own meaning, it belongs neither to the functive type nor to the stative type. It rests exactly halfway between the two end points on each of the four planes of meaning. It cannot function either as a functive verb or a stative verb to attribute nouns and it is thus a dead verb. Its meaning is more akin to the affirmative and negative interjection like 'yes' and 'no' in English (\( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou' te/ and \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{houn phu/ with very little or no grammatical connection. The morphological or structural make-up used with the verb /hou'/ is only for affirmative and negative expressions. For example:

\( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou' te/ } \) yes
\( \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{houn phu/ } \) no
\( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou' pi/ } \) (emphatic) yes, very good, fine
\( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou' me/ } \) probably yes, may be true (not 'will be true')

This view is reinforced when \( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou'/ is compared with other verbs whose meaning is similar but not identical to /hou', that is, \( \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{hman/ 'be correct, true'} and \( \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{si'/ 'be genuine, be pure'. Unlike \( \text{\textit{logy}} /\text{hou'}, the meaning of \( \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{hman/ and \( \text{\textit{degree}} /\text{si'/ are on the type-2 ends of the four planes of meaning and thus they function freely and naturally as stative verbs. For example:
MEANING BASE FOR STRUCTURE: A RE-EXAMINATION OF VERBS IN BURMESE

N N (V)

Ngt + וארู - อง ⇒ ององ
/we/ /osî/ /si/ /we si/
gold be pure, be genuine pure gold

อง: + ฎฟ ⇒ องฎฟ
/ลän/ /hman/ /län hman/
road, way, street true, correct right way

อง: + ฎฟ ⇒ องฎฟ
/ตayan/ /hman/ /tayan hman/
doctrine true, correct correct doctrine, truth

Moreover, all the verb endings that can go with all stative verbs can go with ฎฟ /hman/ and ᶇ. In short, as the meaning of ᶇ /hou/ is so limited and static, resting exactly at the very centre of the four planes, it is neither a functive nor a stative verb and is structurally dead or non-productive – incapable of forming the N + N(V) construction type.

2.2.2 Pervasive verbs - both functive and stative verbs

As with ฎ /θi/ there are verbs whose meaning is pervasive along the four planes and hence their structural make-up attributing nouns can assume both functive and stative forms. Of these pervasive verbs some possess more functive and less stative meaning and vice versa, and some are truly pervasive verbs. In order to demonstrate this sub-classification, I will analyse the verbs in §1 (4), which Okell describes as verbs with both functive and stative meaning.

(a) ᶅ: /shài/, ᶇ /she/ and ᵒ /yi/.

These verbs are more functive and less stative. They can naturally assume the V + N functive attributive structure – they are more active, more agentive, and have stronger transitivity, intransitivities and causativity force, and more imperative force. For example:

V N

NECT: + ṣe ⇒ ṣECTe
/shài/ /khá/ /shài khá/
postpone fee postponement fee
Nonetheless, these verbs cannot assume the \( N + N \ (V) \) stative attributive structure. If it is however possible under certain circumstances to construct \( N + N \ (V) \) structures with them, it is not the verb being attributed to the noun; it is the noun attributed to the verb functioning as a noun. For example:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{N} & \text{N (V)} \\
\text{qo} + \text{cə} & \text{qo} + \text{cə} \\
\text{/ye'/} & \text{/ye' shain/} \\
\text{day} & \text{postpone} & \text{postponement by day} \\
\text{qo} + \text{cə} & \text{qo} + \text{cə} \\
\text{/hni'/} & \text{/hni' shain/} \\
\text{year} & \text{postpone} & \text{postponement by year} \\
\text{qo} + \text{cə} & \text{qo} + \text{cə} \\
\text{/myò/} & \text{/myò she'}/ \\
\text{relation, ancestry} & \text{connect} & \text{connection by ancestry} \\
\text{qo} + \text{cə} & \text{qo} + \text{cə} \\
\text{/shwe/} & \text{/shwe she'}/ \\
\text{friend, friendship} & \text{connect} & \text{connection by friendship}
\end{array}
\]
MEANING BASE FOR STRUCTURE: A RE-EXAMINATION OF VERBS IN BURMESE

 vending  → vending
/se'/  /yi'/  /se' yi'/
machine  rotate  rotation by machine

(b) ၽ俸 /ya'/, ၽႃ /ka'/, ၽင/ and ၽႃ /wain/.

These are truly pervasive verbs and hence they can assume two kinds of construction when attributed to nouns. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funcive</th>
<th>Stative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ၽ俸 + <em>widget</em>  ⇒  ၽ俸widget</td>
<td>ၽ俸 + ၽ俸  ⇒  ၽ俸widget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ya'/  /khá/  /ya' khá/  /tô/  /ya'/  /tô ya'/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stop  fee  fee for stopping  jungle  be settled, stop  jungle which is a stop, jungle which is a settlement</td>
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</tbody>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ၽ俸 +  ၽင/  ⇒  ၽ俸င/</td>
<td>/ya' / /mèin/ /ya' mèin/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stop  order  stopping order, order to stop</td>
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<td></td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ၽ俸 + ၽႃ /ka'/  /pau'/ /ka' pau'/ /ei'/ /ka'/ /ei' ka'/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place near, opening, stick, outlet to be recalcitrant reason for being recalcitrant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chance to be pocket be near, be recalcitrant stuck pocket, pocket stuck on a garment</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ၽ俸 + <em>widget</em>  ⇒  ၽ俸widget</td>
<td>/ka'/  /khá/  /ka' khá/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place near  fee  fee for placing near</td>
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<td></td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ၽင/ + <em>widget</em>  ⇒  ၽငwidget</td>
<td>/fi'n/  /khá/  /fi'n-khá/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear up  payment  payment for clearing (something)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The same method of initial meaning analysis followed by structural types can be applied to those verbs which Okell treats as basically stative (and intransitive) verbs mentioned in example five. Of these verbs, озвд /ǒn/ is the only funtive verb and the remaining verbs are pervasive. озвд /ǒn/ therefore is the only verb in the example which cannot assume the N + N (V)\(^3\) attributive construction. They also classically represent that there is a combined meaning component of ‘transitivity, intransitivity and causativity’ in funtive verbs whilst there is only the element of intransitivity in stative verbs. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funtive</th>
<th>Stative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>озвд + &gt;(*κ</td>
<td>озвд:&gt;*κ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ǒn/</td>
<td>/ά/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tighten</td>
<td>strength</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| озвд + >*κ| озвд:>*κ| озвд + >*κ| озвд:>*κ|
| /ό/    | /θαν/   | /ό θαν/   | /θαν/   |
| make quiet | sound | sound that is made quiet | sound | be quiet | quiet sound |

| озвд + >*κ| озвд:>*κ| озвд + >*κ| озвд:>*κ|
| /εθ/   | /θαν/   | /έθ θαν/   | /θαν/   |
| make loud | sound | sound that is made loud | sound | be loud | loud sound |

\(^3\) In words such as ꜗ:озвд /μύ-όν/ and መозвד ꜗ: /ма’ όν/, the element /όν/ ‘less’ has the meaning opposite to ‘tightening’.
### Meanings of monosyllabic nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functive</th>
<th>Stative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>အိုး  + သော်သော်</td>
<td>အိုးဗေးဗေး</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/</td>
<td>/te/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>be loud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| မြန်        | လောက်ပါလောက် |
| /cin/     | /a/      | /cin a/     |
| make      | strength | ability to  |
| narrow    | decrease/narrow |

| သာ + သော်သော် | သာဗေးဗေး  |
| /to/       | /shê/    | /to shê/    |
| make       | medicine | medicine for making |
| short      | something short |}

| သာသာ + သော်သော် | သာသာဗေးဗေး  |
| /boun/     | /to/     | /boun to/   |
| drum       | be short | short drum  |

| သာ       + သော် |
| /toun/    | /to/     |
| log       | be short | short log  |

| သာ + သော် |
| /flan/    | /to/     |
| road      | be short | short road |

### Summary of the meaning-based argument for monosyllabic nouns

In the examples described above, I have argued for the approach of first classifying monosyllabic nouns in Burmese on the criterion of meaning, and then explaining the differences of their structural functions or structural forms on the basis of meaning. Such an approach can enable the grammarian always to resort to the lexical meaning of the verb and explain the exceptions which s/he may encounter when analysing its structural forms. Although this approach does need a crosscheck from differences in structural forms, the central theme of the approach is that meaning is the final arbiter. This meaning-based approach is applicable to disyllabic and polysyllabic (compound) verbs as well, as can be seen in the following sections.

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6 As in /ausera /taw u tau/ a the' to shê be/ alcohol drink nominaliser life short medicine emphatic particle

Drinking alcohol is medicine for making life short indeed.
3. THE ROLE OF MEANING IN DISYLLABIC AND POLYSYLLABIC COMPOUND VERBS

Since the V + N and N + N(V) constructions are in fact compound nouns where monosyllabic verbs are attributed to nouns, the role of verbs in these construction types is no longer relevant to disyllabic and polysyllabic compound verbs (because for compound verbs, verb structure is the target but not noun structure). Nevertheless, the concept of four planes of meaning is applicable to the classification of syntactic forms of disyllabic and polysyllabic verbs as well. In §2, the issue at point is how to explain the role of monosyllabic verb types in the construction V + N and N + N(V) noun types. But the formation of compound nouns with disyllabic and polysyllabic verbs (e.g. _xt_ɔɔ /kho yei/ ‘rest house’ and ɔɔ ɔɔ /sào ɔao/ ‘restaurant’) is very rare. The construction type that remains to be discussed for disyllabic and polysyllabic compound verbs on a meaning-based criterion therefore falls within the domain of verb construction alone.

3.1 COLLECTIVE MEANING AND SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES

The formation of compound verbs and a meaning-based explanation of the way in which they assume their structural forms (i.e. the way in which they take different verb endings) is fairly straightforward. Okell (1969:25-39) has analysed the formation of compound verbs under eight main categories: ordinary compound, doubled verb, artificial compound, pre-verb compound, compound with bound member, frequentative compound, tied noun compound and multiple compound. On the basis of the collective meaning given, all these eight types of compound verbs mentioned in Okell can be classified under the ‘funicte versus stative’ criterion. Once the verbs are compounded, their meaning becomes specific and hence it seems that there are no pervasive compound verbs.

Functive compound verbs can take the three auxiliary verbs ɔ/ ɔe/ ‘dare to’, ɔɔɔ /be free to’, and ɔɔ /phyi/ ‘manage to’ as Okell (1969:43-44) remarks; whereas stative compound verbs cannot take any of these. In the sections that follow I will attempt to demonstrate that all the eight major compound verbs described in Okell can be classified either as functive or stative on the basis of their collective meaning. In these sections it will be clarified that compound verbs with functive collective meaning can take the three auxiliary verbs whereas those with stative collective meaning cannot. In other words, those compound verbs which can take the three auxiliary verbs (ɔ/ ɔɔ /ɔɔɔ) are functive verbs and those which cannot are stative.

---

7 Okell also mentions a number of relevant constructions such as pre-verb members, auxiliary members, ambivalent compounds and so on, but these are not discussed here because they cannot be treated as compound verbs in a strict sense.
3.1.1 Ordinary compound verbs

The only stative verbs in this group are:

- ကြည်း /ce na'/ be satisfied
- ပေါ်က် /pau' kwè/ explode
- သေးသည် /tò te'/ make progress
- ကျော် /cì ce/ be grand

The rest of the group are functic verbs. For example:

- စိုးအောင် /she'θwe/ clean up, be clean
- ထန်းစိုး /θán jìn/ clean up, be clean
- ရောင်ရောင်စွဲ /yàun we/ trade
- ဗောင်း /θwà la/ travel about

3.1.2 Doubled compound verbs

The only stative verbs in this group are:

- ကြည်းနေ့ /kàun mun/ be good
- ကြည်းနေ့ /kin jìn/ be free from
- ရောင်ရောင် /shi shain/ be relevant

The rest of the group are functic verbs. For example:

- ပြော /pyè sho/ speak
- စော /cé jú/ look
- ဝယ် /we yu/ buy
- ကျော်စိုး /che' pyou'/ cook
- ဗောင်း /yè θà/ write

3.1.3 Artificial compound verbs

Functive verbs in this group are:

- နေ့နေ့ /kho wo/ call, name
- ကြည်း /hña ta/ be considerate
- ကြည်း /ka' θa'/ be recalcitrant
- စိုး /sa na/ be compassionate (by comparing oneself with others)
- ထောင်စိုး /twè tò/ think
- လေး /lo lè/ favour, be favourably disposed to
\[ \text{be uncooth} \]
\[ \text{be even, be united} \]

The rest of the group are stative verbs. For example:
\[ \text{be fluent, alert, active} \]
\[ \text{be harmonious (as a crowd)} \]
\[ \text{be quick} \]

3.1.4 PRE-VERB COMPOUNDS

All the pre-verb compounds given in Okell are functive verbs. For example:
\[ \text{say in jest} \]
\[ \text{lie} \]
\[ \text{pluck and eat} \]

3.1.5 COMPOUNDS WITH BOUND MEMBERS

The only stative verbs in this group are:
\[ \text{be destroyed} \]
\[ \text{be bad} \]
\[ \text{be easy} \]

The rest of the group are functive verbs. For example:
\[ \text{consult} \]
\[ \text{worry} \]
\[ \text{be respectful} \]
\[ \text{enjoy, suffer} \]

3.1.6 FREQUENTATIVE COMPOUND VERBS

The only stative verb in this group is:
\[ \text{become slacker and slacker} \]

The rest of the group are functive verbs. For example:
\[ \text{play again and again} \]
\[ \text{keep sending in advance} \]
\[ \text{keep coming in and speaking} \]
\[ \text{keep coming and asking} \]
3.1.7 Compound verbs with tied nouns

The only stative verbs in this group are:

\[ \text{/to/} \]

\[ \text{to be short tempered} \]

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{be joyful} \]

\[ \text{t/} \]

\[ \text{be embarrassed} \]

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{be good-natured} \]

The rest of the group are funtive verbs. For example:

\[ \text{/hno/} \]

\[ \text{greet} \]

\[ \text{n/} \]

\[ \text{listen} \]

\[ \text{l/} \]

\[ \text{chat} \]

3.1.8 Multiple compound verbs

The only stative verbs in this group are:

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{look lovely} \]

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{be damp and dull} \]

The rest of the group are funtive verbs. For example:

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{respect and revere} \]

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{think seriously} \]

\[ \text{to/} \]

\[ \text{transport} \]

4. ARE STATIVE VERBS SOMETIMES ADJECTIVES?

Mainly because all stative verbs in Burmese can take all verb endings except \[ /pa/ \], the politeness marker, Burmese has been treated as a language with no adjectives (Okell 1969, Cornyn and Roop 1968). I have argued in the previous sections that structure (syntactic features) alone is not a sound basis for classifying words. Even if one can accept stative verbs under the general classification of 'verb', the fact that stative verbs can function as adjectives has to be recognised. In highly inflectional languages, such as Sanskrit and Pali, and partially inflectional languages such as English, the way in which a word undergoes changes in structural or grammatical function and meaning is very obvious because these changes usually take place with the help of suffixes or internal changes. For example:

\[ \text{grind (verb),} \]

\[ \text{grinder (-er noun),} \]

\[ \text{grinding (present participle which can function as an adjective)} \]

\[ \text{ground (past participle).} \]
In most tonal languages which are not inflectional, such as Burmese where the inflectional suffixes serving as grammatical mechanisms (especially for participles) are almost non-existent, similar grammatical functions are accomplished firstly by the original lexical meaning and secondly by the position in the morphological make-up. The adjectival nature and functions of stative verbs in Burmese are therefore subtle, but their existence is fairly obvious. In the sections that follow, I will attempt to establish the following views:

(1) Although one type of words can be assigned to one major class in Burmese, their grammatical function can shift depending on the original lexical meaning and the position in the morphological make-up;

(2) The words which are basically classified as 'verbs (stative)' in Burmese are endowed with a number of features which are regarded as adjectival features in other languages.

4.1 Change of grammatical function due to meaning and position in the morphological make-up

It has been proposed that functive verbs can be attributed to a noun in the V + N compound noun structure as in /θau' ye/ 'drinking water' (in §1). It may be within reason to treat these as functive verbs and the label for them in this environment may simply be a matter of terminology. In the formation of nouns in the N + V (funtive) structure, however (which (Okell 1969: 90-92) places under "fixed headless NV attributes"), they do not appear to function as verbs. It is more plausible to treat the functive verb in this construction as a head noun, though they are verbs in their original classification. In these N + V constructions such as set out below, it is not the verb which is attributed to the noun, but the noun which is attributed to the verb functioning as a head noun:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ပြောင်မှု</td>
<td>/pə kain/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>မြောက်</td>
<td>/myo sà/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>လူ</td>
<td>/lé ne/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>သီချင်</td>
<td>/thəmin che'/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ပြော်</td>
<td>/pa' mál/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>စာပြ</td>
<td>/sa pó/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For instance in ပြောင်မှု လူ  'lawyer', it is not လူ  'stay' qualifying or attributing ပြောင်မှု, /lé/ 'in front', but the reverse ('stayer in front, legal representative, advocate, lawyer'), and the same applies to the other examples. The functive verbs in this construction are the counterparts of English -er nouns such as grinder from grind, taker from take and so on. These examples demonstrate the fact that words in Burmese can change their classification
and grammatical function depending on their original lexical meaning and the environment in which they occur.

4.2 Adjectival qualities in stative verbs

There are a number of qualities in stative verbs, which cannot be treated as those of any other word class, but only as those of adjectives. Firstly, in the same way as adverbs can be formed from adjectives in English with the use of the suffix -ly, adverbs in Burmese can be formed from stative verbs (not from functive verbs) by reduplication. For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
/\text{myan myan la/} & \quad \text{come quickly} \\
/\text{hnè hnè ðwà/} & \quad \text{go slowly} \\
/\text{yò yò lou'/} & \quad \text{behave honestly} \\
/\text{kou' kou' ne/} & \quad \text{live humbly}
\end{align*}
\]

Secondly, in the same way as English adjectives can inflect in degrees such as positive, comparative and superlative, these reduplicated stative verbs in Burmese can be ranked as adjectives in degree by more than the three levels that exist in English. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/pu/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>အိမ် /ye pu/</td>
<td>hot water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>အိမ်က /ye pu pu/</td>
<td>somewhat hot water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>အိမ်ကာ /ye kha' pu pu/</td>
<td>considerably hot water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>အိမ်ကား /ye thei' pu pu/</td>
<td>very hot water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The construction type with stative verb, which Okell (1969: 79) describes as “derived AV noun attributes” such as မိမိကြာခေါ်: /myó hâun/ ‘old city’, စား ဆီ /nâw phyu/ ‘white bull’, and စား ဆီ /phâyä pye'/ ‘ruined pagoda’, can be arranged in this order of adjectives in degree. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/hâun/</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ဆီ ဆီ /myó hâun/</td>
<td>old city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ဆီ ဆီကြာ /myó hâun hâun/</td>
<td>somewhat old city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ဆီ ဆီကြာ /myó kha' hâun hâun/</td>
<td>considerably old city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ဆီ ဆီကြာ /myó သား hâun hâun/</td>
<td>very old city</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And finally, it is obvious that the greater the number of syllables in multiple compound nouns with stative verbs, the stronger the attributive/adjectival element of the stative verbs.
For example:

/phaə÷ə pye’ hnasəu/
two ruined pagodas (the meaning of /pye’/ ‘ruined’ becomes more adjectival.)

/hsê pyin lei’ təθou’/
a packet of strong cigars (the meaning of /pyin/ ‘strong’ becomes more adjectival.)

/sa to pha’ cî/
big royal reader (the meaning of /cî/ ‘big’ becomes more adjectival.)

/sa ou’ thu cî/
big thick book (the meaning of /thu/ ‘thick’ and /cî/ ‘big’ become more adjectival and so on.)

5. CONCLUSION

In order to analyse the structure of verbs in Burmese for practical purposes of teaching the language to non-native speakers, there seems to be no better approach than that followed in Okell (1969). This approach should not however be stretched to the extent of treating Burmese as a language with no adjectives and adjectival structures.

Dixon (1991) has demonstrated that the grammar of English can be explained satisfactorily and systematically on the basis of meaning alone, without the need to resort to the model of generative grammar. An analysis of the verb types in Burmese has shown that such a meaning-based approach is the only satisfactory method one can rely upon for explaining finer details of verbs in Burmese.

REFERENCES

