

# Bahnar Affixation<sup>1</sup>

ELIZABETH M. BANKER

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## O. Introduction

Many of the Mon-Khmer languages, in contrast with the better known monosyllabic languages of Southeast Asia, have affixation. Affixes have been described in Khmer, Old Khmer,

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1. Bahnar is a member of the Mon-Khmer language family and is spoken by approximately eighty thousand people in Kontum, Pleiku, and Binh Dinh provinces of South Viet Nam. This paper is based on the dialect of Plei Bong Mohr in Pleiku province.

I am indebted to David D. Thomas for help in the analysis and writing of this paper.

Mon, Khmu?, and Khasi, and have been reported to occur in many other Mon-Khmer languages.<sup>2</sup> Bahnar also has considerable affixation, as was briefly outlined by Dourisboure and noted by Guilleminet.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this paper is to present the affix system of Bahnar in detail.

Most Bahnar affixes can only occur on one-syllable roots because the Bahnar word limit is two syllables. *Bσ-*, the one exception, can occur with two-syllable roots by replacing their first syllable. *Jσ-*, which is a clitic, can occur with two-syllable roots and derived stems.

## 1. Nominalizer

**1.1. Function of -σn-.** The only infix found in Bahnar is *-σn-*, which functions syntactically as a nominalizer, converting verbs to nouns.

In many instances the derived noun has a meaning of

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2. Georges Maspero, *Grammaire De La Langue Khmère*, pp. 193-223 (Paris, 1915).

J.M. Jacob, 'The Structure of the Word in Old Khmer', pp. 365, 366, *BSOAS* Vol. XXIII, Part 2 (1960).

Willam A. Smalley, *Outline of Khmu? Structure*, sec. 2.1317, 2.13210 (New Haven, Connecticut, 1961).

Lili Rabel, *Khasi, A Language of Assam*, p. 102 (Baton Rouge, 1961).

3. R.P. Dourisboure, *Dictionnaire Bahnar-Francais* (Hong Kong, Imprimerie de la Société des Missions étrangères, 1889).

Paul Guilleminet and R. P. Jules Alberty, *Dictionnaire Bahnar - Francais* (Paris, 1959).

result, 'that which is made by the action of the verb'; e.g.

*tǎr* 'to weave', *tonǎr* 'woven bamboo'

*bât* 'to make a dam', *bônât* 'a dam'

*dố* 'to divide into parts', *dônố* 'divided out parts'

*gũk* 'to make a pile', *gônũk* 'a pile'

*kao* 'to make a wedge', *konaο* 'a wedge'

*bâng* 'to make a lid', *bônâng* 'a lid'

*chěng* 'to make a partition', *chôněng* 'a partition'

*chât* 'to sprout', *chônât* 'new leaves'

*jít* 'to shave (as wood)', *jônít* 'shavings'

*păt* 'to make a tail of arrow', *pônăt* 'tail of arrow'

*pah* 'to split', *pônah* 'split bamboo'

*dan* 'to place (as target)', *donan* 'a target'

*jôr* 'to put liquid in bottle' *jônôr* 'wine in bottle'

*pũ* 'to carry on back', *pônũ* 'a backload of thatch'

*chok* 'to make a trough', *chônok* 'crossbow trough'

*dâng* 'to stand', *dônâng* 'place where people stand'

In other instances the derived noun has an instrumental meaning, 'that which is used to perform the action of the verb'; e.g.

*pǎr* 'to fly', *pônǎr* 'wing'

*tôn* 'to hit with stick' *tônôn* 'a hitting stick'

*pai* 'to cook', *pônai* 'a stirring stick'

*tung* 'to carry on shoulder', *tɔnung* 'stick for carrying things on shoulder'

*tanh* 'to weave', *tɔnanh* 'weaving materials'

*punh* 'to put burr in hair', *pɔnunh* 'a burr'

In a few instances the derived noun has a locational meaning, 'that place where the action of the verb is performed'; e.g.

*pung* 'to wallow', *pɔnung* 'wallowing hole'

The 'result', 'instrumental', and 'locational' meanings of the derived nouns can be shown to be structurally contrastive with each other when the verb root and the derived noun are used together in a sentence. An 'instrument' must be preceded by one of the following prepositions: *pǎng*, *sěm*, *hǎm* 'with'. A 'location' must be preceded by one of the following prepositions: *tɔ* 'to, in, at', *lǎm* 'in', *gah* 'side', *'bát* 'place', *kiě* 'place'. A 'result' cannot be preceded by a preposition; e.g.

Result :

*ĩnh tǎr tɔnǎr* 'I weave-bamboo woven-bamboo'

*ĩnh bát bɔnát* 'I make-dam a-dam'

*ĩnh dǒ dɔnǒ* 'I divide-out divided-out-parts'

Instrument :

*sem pǎr pǎng pɔnǎr* 'bird fly with wings'

*ĩnh tôn kǒ pǎng tonôn* 'I hit-with-stick dog with hitting-stick'

*ĩnh pai pǎng pɔnai* 'I cook with stirring-stick'

Location :

*kopô pung to pɔnung* 'carabao wallow in wallowing-hole'

On a given verb root it is not possible to predict which meaning the affixation will take.

The infix is apparently still active in Bahnar as seen in such new coinages as *toneh* 'cigarette lighter' from *teh* 'to strike'. *ĩnh teh toneh* 'I strike cigarette lighter'. But the infix cannot be used freely to convert verbs to nouns.

**1. 2. Allomorphs of -σn-.**<sup>4</sup> The infix -σn- has phonologically conditioned allomorphs -σm- and -σd- before *r*, and -σng- before *l* (because *nr* and *nl* sequences are not allowed in Bahnar), and *bσ-* before verb root initial *m*.

-σm- occurs before *r* when the initial consonant of the root is bilabial.

*preh* 'to hit at', *bσmreh* 'dead stick used for hitting at things'

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4. *a-* 'nominalizer' has been found with one verb root *chǒ* 'to tie up' giving *achǒ* 'a bundle'. This does not fit the other nominalizing patterns.

Because verb roots beginning with *m* take the *bσ* — allomorph giving a *bσm* — sequence, here the *bσm* — sequence is also preferred to the expected *pσm* —.

*-σd* — occurs before *r* when the initial consonant of the root is not bilabial.

*krōu* ‘to poison fish’, *kσdrōu* ‘fish poison’

*kruh* ‘to make a pile’, *kσdruh* ‘fishtrap made by piling trees and leaves over water’

*hring* ‘to string fish, etc’, *hσdring* ‘a string’

*-σng* — occurs before *l*.

*klat* ‘to slice’, *kσnglat* ‘a slice’

*klâp* ‘to cover’, *tσnglâp* ~ *kσnglâp* ‘a cover’

*klang* ‘to construct bamboo-tube water system’,  
*tσnglang* ‘bamboo-tube water system’

In Bahnar initial *k* sometimes alternates with *t* before velars.

*bσ* — occurs before verb roots beginning with *m*.

*muih* ‘to make field in woods’, *bσmuih* ‘field in woods’

*mât* ‘to enter’, *bσmât* ‘west, place where sun enters’

Preglottalization cannot occur presyllable-initial in Bahnar except as reduplication of the initial consonant of the main syl-

lable. When verb roots beginning with preglottalization occur with the nominalizing infix they take various forms :

The preglottalization may be completely lost and the infix keep its regular form *-σn-*,

'*dâr* 'to stamp the earth', *dσnâr* 'a mound of stamped earth on a grave'

The preglottalization may be transferred to the infix as *-σ'n-*, and the initial consonant of the noun stem become voiceless.

'*dâp* 'to cover', *tσ'nâp* 'a cover'

Or the initial consonant of the verb root may be lost and its preglottalization occur presyllable initial, the infix taking the form *-an-*.

'*nũng* 'to wrap up', *anũng* / '*anũng* / 'a package'

## 2. Causative

2.1. *Pσ-* ~ *tσ-* ~ *a-* occur with verb roots giving them a causative meaning, e.g.

<i>lôch</i> 'to die'	<i>pσlôch</i> 'to kill'
<i>jĩ</i> 'to be hurt'	<i>pσjĩ</i> 'to make to hurt'
<i>hiong</i> 'to be lost'	<i>tσhiong</i> 'to lose on purpose'
<i>băt</i> 'to know'	<i>tσbăt</i> 'to make to know'
<i>tők</i> 'to go up'	<i>atők</i> 'to make to go up'

*Pō-* ~ *tō-* ~ *a-* are unconditioned allomorphs. Each verb root can occur with only one of the causative allomorphs with the exception of *'bōu* 'to smell' and *wir* 'to be deceived' which have free variation between *pō-* and *tō-*.

Following is a sampling of the verb roots that occur with *pō-* 'causative': *'dôh* 'to explode, burst', *drâng* 'to answer', *hrük* 'to dress', *ché* 'to despise', *kăp* 'to bite', *'lâng* 'to be good', *oh* 'to be sad', *tah* 'to put in', *wao* 'to understand'.

Following is a sampling of the verb roots that occur with *tō-* 'causative': *lěch* 'to go out', *'bích* 'to lie down', *hli* 'to fear', *iung* 'to stand up', *jur* 'to go down', *mât* 'to enter', *oěi* 'to be at', *pŭ* 'to carry on back', *wih* 'to go home'.

*Tōk* 'to go up' is the only verb root found to occur with *a-* 'causative'.

The causative prefix is apparently still active in Bahnar as seen in such new coinages as *pō-ao-wi* 'to make to hurt' from the English word *owie* (ouch). This prefix is used more extensively than the nominalizing infix but cannot be used freely.

**2.2.** A simple transitive verb takes only a direct object. When it occurs with the causative prefix an indirect object



must be added.<sup>5</sup>

*Rök 'bôh 'long* 'Rok see tree'

*Rök tō'bôh kō Set 'long* 'Rok show to Set tree'

A simple intransitive verb root takes no object. When it occurs with the causative prefix a direct object must be added.

*Rök jur* 'Rok go-down'

*Rök tōjur Set* 'Rok let-down Set'

### 3. Reciprocal

**3.1.** *Tō-* occurs with many verb roots giving them the reciprocal meaning 'I do it to you, and you do it to me'.

*jīl* 'to butt', *tōjīl* 'to butt each other'

*druh* 'to chase', *tōdruh* 'to chase each other'

*blah* 'to fight', *tōblah* 'to fight each other'

Following is a sampling of the verb roots that can occur with *tō-* 'reciprocal': *'bet* 'to stab', *chǎ* 'to look for', *chōh* 'to peck', *glâm* 'to knock down', *kǎp* 'to bite', *pi* 'to fan', *tôn* 'to hit with a stick', *trěng* 'to look at closely'.

Some of the verb roots that occur with *pō-* 'causative'

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<sup>5</sup>. Because of the nature of a few verb roots the presence of the causative prefix does not require an indirect object. e.g. *drâng* 'to answer', *pōdrâng* 'to ask' and *wao* 'to understand', *pōwao* 'to make self understand'.

can also occur with *tσ-* 'reciprocal', e.g.

Verb Root	Causative	Reciprocal
<i>drâng</i> 'to answer'	<i>pσdrâng</i> 'to ask'	<i>tσdrâng</i> 'to answer each other'
<i>chê</i> 'to despise'	<i>pσchê</i> 'to make to despise'	<i>tσchê</i> 'to despise each other'
<i>σh</i> 'to be sad'	<i>pσσh</i> 'to make sad'	<i>tσσh</i> 'to be sad because of each other'
<i>krê</i> 'to fear'	<i>pσkrê</i> 'to frighten'	<i>tσkrê</i> 'to fear each other'
<i>kăp</i> 'to bite'	<i>pσkăp</i> 'to make to bite'	<i>tσkăp</i> 'to bite each other'

The verb roots that occur with *tσ-* 'causative' cannot occur with *tσ-* 'reciprocal'.

When the reciprocal prefix occurs with the verb root it requires two actors or a plural actor, e.g.

*Rök päng Set totôn (dih-băl)*

'Rok and Set hit-each-other-with-sticks (each-other)'

*Lũ sũ totôn (dih-băl)*

'Plur. he hit-each-other-with-sticks (each-other)'

*Rök totôn päng Set*

'Rok hit-each-other-with-sticks and Set'

*Dih-băl* 'each other' may be used following all reciprocal constructions except those in which one of the actors follows the verb (note example 3 above). But it is able to be omitted without affecting the meaning, except when the action of the verb root is being performed on the possessions of the actors ; e.g.

*Rök päng Set totôn dih-băl kǒ*

'Rok and Set hit-each-other-with-sticks each-other dog'

*Rok and Set hit each other's dog with sticks*

**3.2.** *Dih-băl* can be used alone, without *tǒ-* reciprocal prefix, to give the verb roots a reciprocal meaning. Verb roots that occur with *tǒ-* 'causative' cannot occur with *tǒ-* 'reciprocal', therefore must form their reciprocal with *dih-băl*. Affixed stems and two-syllable verb roots must also form their reciprocal in this manner, e.g.

*Rök päng Set hli dih-băl*

'Rok and Set fear each other'

*Rök päng Set tohli dih-băl*

'Rok and Set scare each other'

*Rök päng Set kǒdah dih-băl*

'Rok and Set kick each other'

## 4. Passive

**4.1.** Bahnar has a *tǒ-* 'passive' prefix which is ho-

mophonous with *tσ-* 'reciprocal' and *tσ-* 'causative' prefixes. This passive prefix can be clearly distinguished from the reciprocal and causative prefixes by its syntactic function.

*Tσ-* 'passive' occurs with a few verb roots giving them the meaning 'the action of the verb root performed on the subject', e.g.

*'long togâ* 'tree broke'

The passive prefix has been found with only the following verb roots :

<i>glěch</i> 'to twist'	<i>toglěch</i> 'to be twisted (as joint)'
<i>gâ</i> 'to break'	<i>togâ</i> 'to be broken'
<i>hak</i> 'to spread apart'	<i>tōhak</i> 'to be spread apart'
<i>hek</i> 'to tear'	<i>tōhek</i> 'to be torn'
<i>hleh</i> 'to take apart at seams'	<i>tōhleh</i> 'to be apart at seams'
<i>plǒ</i> 'to peel off'	<i>toplǒ</i> 'to be peeled off'
<i>plâ</i> 'to turn inside out'	<i>toplâ</i> 'to be turned inside out'
<i>plōih</i> 'to open'	<i>toplōih</i> 'to be open'
<i>yaih</i> 'to untie'	<i>toyaih</i> 'to be untied'

The verb roots that occur with *tσ-* 'passive' can also occur with *tσ-* 'reciprocal', but cannot occur with *tσ-* 'causative'.

**4. 2.** The functional contrast between the three *tσ-* affixes may be clearly seen when the affixed constructions are transformed to an unaffixed form.

S = subject, P = predicate, and O = object. Within a given battery the occurrence of a certain number indicates the occurrence of its manifesting root, whether in the subject or object position.

Passive	Causative	Reciprocal
$S_1 - t\sigma - P$	$S_1 - t\sigma - P - O_2$	$S_1 - S_2 - t\sigma - P$
$S_2 - P - O_1$	$S_2 - P$	$S_1 - P - O_2$

Passive :

<i>'lonq togâ</i>	'tree broken'
<i>Rök gâ 'long</i>	'Rok broke tree'

Causative :

<i>Rök tσjur Set</i>	'Rok let-down Set'
<i>Set jur</i>	'Set went-down'

Reciprocal .

<i>Rök päng Set totôn</i>	'Rok and Set hit-each-other-with-sticks'
<i>Rök tôn Set</i>	'Rok hit-with-stick Set'

**5. Similitive *Lσl-*** 'similitive' occurs with demonstrative roots giving them the meaning 'to be like'. This prefix

has been found with the following six roots :

<i>õu</i> ‘this’	<i>lõlõu</i> ‘like this’
<i>'nu</i> ‘this’	<i>no'nu</i> ‘like this’
<i>ěi</i> ‘that’	<i>lõlěi</i> ‘like that’
<i>noh</i> ‘that’	<i>no'noh</i> ‘like that’
<i>'noh</i> ‘that’	<i>no'noh</i> ‘like that’
<i>yõ</i> ‘what’	<i>lõlio</i> ‘like what’

Before *n*, *lõl-* becomes *no-* by assimilation, the second *l* dropping out because the *ln* cluster is not permitted in Bahnar.

## 6. Completed Action

**6.1.** *Jõ-* is a clitic meaning ‘completed action’. Affixes can only occur with one-syllable roots, but the clitic *jõ-* is able to occur with two-syllable roots and prefixed stems as well; e.g.

One-syllable verb roots :

<i>bãt</i> ‘to know’	<i>jõbãt</i> ‘to have known’
<i>khan</i> ‘to say’	<i>jõkhan</i> ‘to have said’
<i>thuõ</i> ‘to lose’	<i>jõthuõ</i> ‘to have lost’
<i>nõng</i> ‘to try’	<i>jõnõng</i> ‘to have tried’
<i>jãk</i> ‘to escape’	<i>jõjãk</i> ‘to have escaped’
<i>õh</i> ‘to be sad’	<i>jõõh</i> ‘to have been sad’

## Two-syllable verb roots :

<i>chokăl</i> 'to lock door'	<i>jochokăl</i> 'to have locked door'
<i>doliël</i> 'to stick out tongue'	<i>jodoliël</i> 'to have stuck out tongue'
<i>gonam</i> 'to threaten'	<i>jogonam</i> 'to have threatened'
<i>homet</i> 'to prepare'	<i>johomet</i> 'to have prepared'
<i>kodah</i> 'to kick'	<i>jokodah</i> 'to have kicked'
<i>so'nâr</i> 'to wake up'	<i>joso'nâr</i> 'to have waked up'

## Prefixed stems :

## Caus :

<i>polôch</i> 'to kill'	<i>jopolôch</i> 'to have killed'
<i>to'bôh</i> 'to show'	<i>joto'bôh</i> 'to have shown'

## Recip :

<i>tochă</i> 'to look for each other'	<i>jotochă</i> 'to have looked for each other'
<i>tohil</i> 'to be angry with each other'	<i>jotohil</i> 'to have been angry with each other'

## Passive :

<i>togâ</i> 'to be broken'	<i>jotogâ</i> 'to have been broken'
<i>toyaih</i> 'to be untied'	<i>jotoyaih</i> 'to have been untied'

Simil :

*lɔləi* 'like that'      *ʃɔlɔləi* 'to have been like that'  
*lɔləu* 'like this'      *ʃɔlɔləu* 'to have been like this'

**6. 2.** In normal Bahnar speech the meaning of 'completed action' is more often expressed by *boih* 'already' than by the clitic *ʃɔ-*. Both the clitic and *boih* may occur at the same time, but either can be omitted without affecting the meaning ; e. g.

*ɪnh ʃɔbăt*      'I know-already'  
*ɪnh băt boih*      'I know already'  
*ɪnh ʃɔbăt boih*      'I know-already already'

## 7 Other Affixal Forms<sup>6</sup>

### 7. 1. *Bɔ-* 'Pig-latin'

Bahnar has a type of 'pig-latin' that is formed by prefixing *bɔ-* to all the words in a given utterance, except the connective *kɔ* and the preposition *tɔ*, which are omitted. When two-syllable words occur the *bɔ-* prefix replaces the first syllable. The clitic *ʃɔ-* does not figure as an integral part of the word, so *bɔ-* is inserted between *ʃɔ-* and the word root.

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<sup>6</sup>. Guilleminet described a *hɔ-* prefix in his article, 'Langages Spéciaux Utilisés Dans La Tribu Bahnar Du Kontum (Sud Viêt-Nam-Indochine)', p. 125, *BEFEO* Tome L, Fasc. I.



The *bo-* affix in no way changes the meaning of the utterance.

This form of speech is characteristic of Rok, one of the popular characters of Bahnar legends. It is not used in normal speech except in imitation of the legendary Rok. Following are examples of the occurrence of *bo-*:

*ĩnh tǎr tonǎr* 'I weave-bamboo woven-bamboo'

*boĩnh botǎr bonǎr* 'I weave-bamboo woven-bamboo'

*ĩnh to'boh ko Set 'long* 'I show to Set tree'

*boĩnh bo'boh boSet bo'long* 'I show to Set tree'

*ĩnh jopoloch Set* 'I kill-already Set'

*boĩnh joboloch boSet* 'I kill-already Set'

## 7. 2. *To-* 'Measure'

*To-* is prefixed to the numbers '*bar*' 'two', *pêng* 'three', and *puăn* 'four' giving them the meaning 'two-fingers size', 'three-fingers size', and 'four-fingers size' respectively.

The Bahnar people describe the size of some things in comparison with the size of their fingers. A fish may be two-fingers size. A cloth may have a hole in it three-fingers size, etc. They also use this system to measure or compare abstract qualities. This measuring system does not exceed five-fingers size. The words expressing one-finger size and five-

fingers 'size are separate roots, *bât* and *pah*, respectively; e. g.

*ih răt hơnhuăl ih năng lữn tở topêng*

'you buy fish net you look put-in size three-fingers'

*You buy a fish net with holes big enough to put three fingers in*

*pơgê ỉnh 'bôh 'dêl sỏke, mah tở topuăn*

'morning I see footprint wild-pig, enough size four-fingers'

*This morning I saw the footprint of a wild pig that was the  
size of four fingers*

*ỉnh apo brữ' tở to'bar apo hmar tở topêng*

'I dream bad size two-fingers dream good size three-fingers

*There was more good in my dream than bad*

### 7.3. *Kơ-* 'Negative'

*Kơ-* can occur with all one-syllable verb roots making them negative. Following is a sampling of the verb roots that can occur with *kơ-* 'negative' :

<i>'bôh</i>	'to see'	<i>kơ'bôh</i>	'not see'
<i>ăn</i>	'to give'	<i>kơăn</i>	'not give'
<i>iung</i>	'to stand up'	<i>kơiung</i>	'not stand up'
<i>chă</i>	'to look for'	<i>kơchă</i>	'not look for'
<i>wẻnh</i>	'to wring'	<i>kơwẻnh</i>	'not wring'
<i>wih</i>	'to go home'	<i>kơwih</i>	'not go home'

The free form of the negative which is more often used

consists of *wh* 'negative' followed by *ko* 'connective'.

Free form :

*ĩnh wh ko băt* 'I neg. conn. know' *I don't know*

Affixed form :

*ĩnh ko băt* 'I neg.—know' *I don't know*

When the negative prefix occurs with *wă* 'to want' it contracts to *kuă*. *wh ko wă* 'don't want' is one of the more widely used negative Bahnar expressions and has probably contracted to the form *kuă* for convenience. Similar verb roots such as *wěnh* 'to wring' and *wih* 'to go home' leave the prefix uncontracted. (See examples above).