

A MNONG PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR: THE VERB PHRASE AND CONSTRUCTIONS WITH TWO OR MORE VERBS

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It is generally recognized that, in learning a foreign language, a student reacts to a new language in terms of his own. Features in the target language that are similar to those in his own are readily learned; those that are dissimilar may initially be puzzling to the student or, more likely, be incorporated into his new language system by means of faulty analogies. It would seem only good pedagogy to take advantage of the similar features during the learning process and then to focus attention on the dissimilar; and within practical limits that vary with the type of feature studied, the similar features should come first.

A pedagogical grammar, to meet these general specifications, would have to include several parts: (1) A description of the target language, to provide the framework within which the student may understand the parts of the language structure as he meets them, and to provide the terminology with which he may discuss them. (2) A contrasting of the target and the student's native language, to point out the similar and dissimilar features. This presupposes an adequate description of the native language. (3) An ordering of the target language material for teaching purposes, capitalizing on the similarities and emphasizing the dissimilarities--which are presumably also difficulties that require special mention and/or drilling. In practice the particular needs of the student may also affect the ordering of the material (e.g. as regards subject matter or style), but always within the general order of increasing divergence from native structure.

This paper is a pedagogical grammar of the verb phrase and constructions with two or more verbs in Mnong. It is organized according to the three parts listed above. The target language, Mnong, is a South-Bahnaric language spoken in Quang Duc and southern Darlac provinces in Vietnam and also in eastern Cambodia. The native language, English, is referred to with traditional grammatical terminology, with which it is assumed the reader is familiar, and so no examples are cited.

The result is not a textbook--even within the stated limits--for speakers of English who wish to learn Mnong. But it is offered as the basis on which an effective textbook of that sort could be written, and as an example of the construction of a pedagogical grammar which can be done for any pair of languages.

1. Description of Mnong.

1.1. The Verb Phrase.

Preverb - Auxiliary - Verb - Postverbal

The verb phrase contains a verb and may also have a preverb particle, an auxiliary, and a postverbal, in the above typical order. All of these items except the preverb particle are verbals. Verbals may be distinguished from particles in that verbals may occur after the nominalizer *nau* but particles may not. Verbs are defined by position in the verb phrase.

1.11 Preverb particles are of three subclasses: negatives, temporals, and repetitive.

The negatives *mâu* 'not' and *ê* 'not yet' are commonly but not always augmented by a final particle *ôh*. (A final particle typically occurs as the very last item of a clause other than a final echo of some central part of the clause such as the subject).

Gâp mâu hăn ôh. (I not go not) 'I'm not going.'

Gâp ê hăn ôh. (I not-yet go not) 'I'm haven't yet gone.'

The temporals are *mra* 'future' and *hoq* 'prior'; the latter sometimes cooccurs with the final particle *jêh* 'already', but either one may occur without the other.

Gâp mra hăn. (I will go) 'I will go'.

Gâp hoq hăn jêh. (I prior go already) 'I've gone already'.

The repetitive particle is *loq* 'again', which sometimes cooccurs with the adverb *dông* 'again'.

Gap lôq hăn dông. (I again go again) 'I went again.'

Combinations of preverb subclasses:

Gâp ê hoq hăn. (I not-yet prior go) 'I haven't gone yet.'

Gâp mâu mra loq hăn ôh. (I not will again go not) 'I won't go again.'

1.12. Auxiliaries are verbals that precede and modify a verb. Most of these verbals also occur as verbs but with somewhat different meanings. In the following partial list two glosses separated by semicolon are given for each; the first is the English meaning when the verbal is used as an auxiliary, the second when it is used as a verb: *mâp* 'ever, meet', *mhe* 'very recently; new', *hôm* 'still; remain', *geh* 'exist; have', *guq* 'remaining in a state or act; be at, sit', *leo* 'in the process of going; move, lead', *doi* 'can; win', *plôq* 'repeat; return', *janh* 'dare to; brave, fierce', *ũch* 'about to; want', *sâm~sâm* 'do helpfully; treat with medicine'. Some verbals that are auxiliaries may apparently not be used as verbs: *vay* 'customarily', *năn* 'on time'.

The only cases found of two auxiliaries in a verb phrase involve *dôi* 'can' and usually with it as the first of the two.

May *map han leq?* (you ever go question) 'Have you ever gone?'

Gâp *mhe* hăn. (I recently go) 'I have just gone.'
 Gâp *leo* hăn. (I in-process go) 'I am on my way.'
 Gâp *mâu dôi janh* hăn. (I not can dare go) 'I don't dare go'.

The auxiliary *geh* 'exist' is used with simple statement of fact. In many cases it could be deleted from the verb phrase without causing a serious change of meaning. *Mâu geh ngai ôh* (not exist far not) and *mâu ngai ôh* (not far not) both mean 'It is not far'. In some sentences, however, its presence or absence is very significant. Compare:

Bu ranh *geh* r**ữ**n leq? (person old exist congregate question) 'Was (or is) the old man at the meeting?'

Bu ranh r**ữ**n leq? 'Is the old man coming to the meeting?'

1.13 Verbs are of two main subclasses. Stative (or adjectival) verbs may be preceded by the causative *an* in adverbial position, : *ueh* 'good', *mbroi*, 'slow'. All other verbs are active verbs.

1.14 Postverbals are inseparable from the preceding active verb which they modify: *an* 'help', *loi* 'complete'.

Pang nkah *an* gâp. (he remind help me) 'He reminded me'.

Chăng *loi* mpông. (shut complete door) 'Shut the door.' The postverbal *an* sometimes cooccurs with the auxiliary *sâm* 'do helpfully'; it often occurs without the auxiliary, but the auxiliary never occurs without the postverbal.

1.2 Verb constructions

Verbs enter into constructions with other verbs, substantives, and particles, but only constructions involving two or more verbs are treated in this paper.

1.21 A compound verb is composed of two related verbs, generally near-synonyms, or of two identical verbs.

Non-stereotyped compounds are separable, but usually the parts occur together: *njũn leo* 'lead', *chiaq uănh* 'guard', *rak suai* 'curse', *sông sa* 'eat', *khĩt òm* 'be dead'.

Stereotyped compounds function as a single verb with a single meaning. The second part of the doublet often has no meaning of its own: *tĩng ndôq* 'follow', *mboh som* 'pray', *lông nâl* 'try'.

Reduplicative compounds, mostly stative verbs, have an added meaning of intensification. In many cases of imperfect reduplication the second half is meaningless: *mbroi mbroi* 'very slow', *ueh ueh* 'very good', *ueh reh* 'very good' *jêq lêq* 'very small', *boq boch* 'very dirty'.

1.22 Centered constructions always have the second verb subordinate to the first. (For convenience the following symbols are used below: sV stative verb, aV active verb, + coordination, < second is subordinate to first, >> second is object of first).

sV < sV: *khĩt kro* (dead dry) 'dead from drying (as plants).'

- aV < sV: *ngoi mbroi* (speak slow) 'speak slowly'
 aV < aV: *nti luh lăp* (study go-out go-in) 'study off and on'; the last two verbs are in coordinate construction. *dăk ntop prăk* (spend add money) 'overspend'; 'money' is the object of the verb construction. *sīt bāk dak* (go-home fetch water) 'come home from fetching water'.
 sV < aV: *ueh uănh* (good look) 'good-looking'.
jêr moh (hard name) 'hard to pronounce'.
kloh pih (clean wash) 'clean from washing'.

1.23 Coordinate constructions, whether coterminus, sequential, or alternative, may have an appropriate coordinating particle to introduce the last head; active verbs may occur in coterminus and sequential constructions without the particle, and so may stative verbs in semi-stereotyped expressions.

- sV + sV: *ueh jêh-ri toyh* 'good and big',
ueh mâu-lah mhĭk 'good or bad',
ueh maak (good happy) 'wonderful'
ji bah bah ji (sick well well sick) 'be fluctuating in health'.
 aV + aV: *tăng jêh-ri saơ* 'hear and see', *sők long sênh ũnh* (take firewood light fire) 'bring firewood and light the fire',
nhũp păng chông klũp tâm ndrung (catch it carry throw in pen) 'catch it, carry it over, and throw it into the pen',
hăn sīt sīt hăn (go go-home go-home go) 'go back and forth'.

1.24 Verb-object constructions.

- aV >> aV: *nti ngoi* (learn speak) 'learn to speak',
 aV >> sV: *tăng ji* (hear sick) 'feel pain'.

1.3 Verbs of taking, carrying, and putting are taken here as a specific case of cooccurrence restrictions on combinations of verbs in sentences. The order when there are two verbs is:

First verb - Object - Second verb - Destination.

For this purpose these verbs may be divided into the following subgroups:

1.31 Deposit verbs: *ăn* 'put, give', *chêq* 'put into', *dom* 'put down', *prăp* 'put away', etc.

Ăn ta kalo chhung (put to top table) 'Put it on the table.'

1.32 Carry verbs: *chông* 'carry with two hands', *ndjôt* 'carry with one hand', *tui* 'carry on the shoulder', *mbăk* 'carry with a shoulder-pole', and many others, each specifying the mode of carrying.

Chông ndrơ jâk aơ. (carry thing heavy this) 'Carry this heavy thing'.

1.33 Motion verb *leo* 'move'. As the second verb it adds the idea of motion. It is especially useful with

verbs such as the carry group that do not imply any directed motion by themselves.

Chông hip leo kalở ngih. (carry box move top house)
'Carry the box upstairs'.

Another way to indicate the direction of the motion of the first verb is to have a Deposit verb, rather than the Motion verb, directly before the destination. A sentence with a carry verb and a destination must have as the second verb a deposit verb or the motion verb.

Chông đống hip ri ản ta ntũk ỏm. (carry again box that put to place original) 'Carry that box back to its original place'.

If the object is omitted, being understood from the context, the rest of the elements follow in normal order.

Chông ản ta ntũk ỏm. 'Carry it back to its original place'.

1.34 Take verbs: *sỏk* 'take' (with no indication of subsequent Motion). A sentence with a Take verb and a destination must have as the second verb a deposit verb, the motion verb or a construction consisting of a Carry verb and the motion verb.

Sỏk hip ri ản ta kalở chhũng. (take box that put to top table) 'Bring that box and put it on the table'.

Sỏk hip ri leo ta chhũng ả. (take box that move to table this) 'Bring that box to this table'.

Sỏk hip ả ndjỏt leo ta ngih may. (take box this carry move to house you) 'Take this box to your house'. The Carry and Motion verbs here may be reversed in order with apparently the same meaning.

1.35 Transfer verbs: *vỏt* 'transfer a short distance', *njũn* 'transfer a long distance'. These verbs include the idea of motion though not of direction. They may occur as first verb in a sentence that includes a destination with or without (more often without) a Deposit or Motion verb as a second verb. But the compound *njũn leo* is common. The Transfer verbs may occur as second verb in a sentence with a Carry verb as first.

Vỏt hip ả ma pảng. (transfer box this to him) 'Take this box to him.'

Vỏt hip ri ma gập. (transfer box that to me) 'Bring me that box.'

Vỏt hip ri ản gập. (transfer box that give me) 'Bring me that box.'

Njũn sambũt ả ma pảng. (transfer -far letter this to him) 'Take this letter to him.'

Njũn leo sambũt ả ma pảng. (same).

Njũn sambũt ả leo ma pảng. (same, but not as commonly used.)

Chông chhũng ả njũn ta ngih ri. (carry table this transfer-far to house that) 'Carry this table over to that house'.

1.36 Summary of the order of these verbs.

The verb subgroups under study in section 1.3 occur in the following order: 1) Take verbs, 2) Carry verbs, 3) Transfe

verbs, 4) Motion verbs, 5) Deposit verbs.

They may occur in the following combinations:

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 as the only verb. But 1 and 2 occur only if there is no destination expressed.
 - b. 1 as first verb, with 3, 5 or a construction 24 or 42 as second.
 - c. 2 as first verb, with 3, 4 or 5 as second.
 - d. 3 as first verb, with 4 or 5 as second.
2. Contrast with English.
- 2.1. The Verb Phrase.
- 2.11 Preverb Particles.

The temporal particles, glossed as 'future' and 'prior', stand before the verb just as the English verb auxiliaries do. The negative particle 'not' precedes the temporal particles, but in English the negative adverb follows the auxiliary, or follows the first in a series of auxiliaries. The position of the repetitive particles, corresponds to that extent to one of the permitted positions of the English adverb 'again.'

The cooccurrence of augments after the verb phrase--final particles augmenting 'not' and 'prior', and an adverb augmenting 'again'--has no parallel in English. A partial analogy may be found in discontinuous adverb phrases such as *not ...at all, not...yet*.

2.12 Auxiliaries.

The auxiliary 'can' resembles the English modal *can* in its position before the verb but in little else. The negative stands before the auxiliary but after the English modal. The auxiliary may follow temporal particles, but the English modal never occurs with a future auxiliary, and precedes rather than follows other auxiliaries.

The auxiliaries 'remaining in a state or act' and 'in the process of going' bear a resemblance to the English progressive tense auxiliaries in function and position before the verb. They are also similar in their position following temporal particles/auxiliaries. But as with 'can' they differ in the position of the negative. Furthermore these auxiliaries have far lower text frequency than the English progressive tense auxiliaries.

Most of the auxiliaries correspond to English adverbs, which, if they can be expressed in one word, may stand in a comparable position before the verb and after negative and tense words. Thus *ever, recently, still, repeatedly, customarily* can precede the English verb, but *on time* follows it. But none of these English adverbs are fixed to preverb position as the Mmong auxiliaries are.

Two of the auxiliaries add nuances to the verb that would normally be omitted in English translation: 'exist' and 'do helpfully.' Both could usually be deleted in Mmong too without serious loss of meaning. The exception in the case of 'exist' was exemplified at the end of 1.12.

2.13 Verbs.

Stative verbs correspond to English adjectives. As the main verb of a clause they correspond to English predicate adjectives preceded by a copulative verb.

2.14 Postverbals.

There are no postverbals in English. But the postverbal 'complete' corresponds in function to the closely-bound English adverb complement to such verbs as *take (off)*, *throw (away)*, *put (out)*, *close (up)*, *kill (off)*; (these examples translated into Mngong would all normally take the postverbal). But the English adverb complement is separable from the verb in a clause, whereas the Mngong postverbal is not.

There is no English parallel to the postverbal 'help', nor to its cooccurrence with an auxiliary.

2.2. Verb constructions.

2.21. Compound verbs.

There is nothing comparable in English.

2.22 Centered constructions of two verbs or verb phrases.

English has no such constructions, but it does have constructions involving non-verbs that correspond well with several of the Mngong centered verb constructions.

aV < sV corresponds regularly to English verb + adverb.

sV < sV corresponds to English adjective + adverbial phrase consisting of a preposition, such as *by* or *from*, and a gerund or other substantive cognate with the second adjective. E.g. *dead from drying*, *dead from hunger*.

aV < aV is quite unlike English.

sV < aV corresponds to English adjective + infinitive (*hard to pronounce*), adjective + prepositional phrase with a gerund as object (*clean by washing*), or an adjective compound consisting of adjective + participle (*good-looking*).

2.23 Coordinate constructions of verbs or verb phrases. English has all of the same constructions as Mngong with coordinating conjunctions to introduce the last head. In a series of transitive verb phrases involving a common object, Mngong needs state the object only once (or not at all if it is understood), but English must repeat it or the pronoun substitute for it with every verb: *Catch it, carry it, and throw it into the pen*.

Although Mngong also readily allows coordination of verbs without conjunctions, English does not except with the first verb limited to *go* or *come*, e.g. *go find him*.

2.24 Verb-object constructions in which the object is a verb.

This construction is not permitted in English. The nearest comparable constructions would be those with the object as a gerund, infinitive, or a cognate noun.

2.3 Verb of taking, carrying, and putting.

The Deposit and Take verbs when occurring as the only verb in a sentence are closely parallel in use to the

comparable words in English.

The same is true for the Carry and Transfer verbs when used as the only verb in a sentence. But the semantic distinctions among the verbs of each set are quite foreign to English and would constitute a learning problem. The dozen or more Carry verbs specify modes of carrying; there is no general, all-purpose word 'carry'. The Transfer verbs distinguish the distance of the transfer but not the direction with respect to the speaker or referent as English does.

The Motion verb is not comparable to any verb in English. As the only verb in a sentence it is translated in the same way as a Transfer verb. As the second verb it is translated as a Deposit verb or more often as a preposition. The Deposit verbs, too, as second verb may be translated as Deposit verbs or prepositions. Or conversely, in terms of an English-to-Mnong contrast, the English preposition of a prepositional phrase specifying the destination to which an object is moved is expressed in Mnong by a Deposit verb or the Motion verb as the second verb after a Take, a Carry, or optionally a Transfer verb, or by a Transfer verb after a Take or Carry verb.

3. Pedagogical Presentation.

The portion of Mnong grammar arranged in Section 1 for convenience of description may now be rearranged for maximum efficiency in teaching. This new order--to the extent that it coincides with the order of increasing divergence from English structure--may be determined from the contrasts noted in Section 2. The particular mode of teaching the grammatical points, such as by means of basic dialogues, drills, etc., is not a part of the present discussion. If the mode should force the introduction of some grammatical constructions before they have been taught, their appearance as "tokens" in advance of the rule if not too numerous, should not be confusing and should help to make the rules more meaningful.

The following subsections, and also the items within each, are arranged in the order in which it is thought best that they be taught. In practice there will doubtless need to be some intermeshing of the subsections with adjacent ones and with much other grammatical material that is important to the language but outside the scope of this paper.

3.1. Verbs, both active and stative, must be used from the beginning.

Many of the active verbs, when used as the only active verb in a sentence, should give no problem beyond vocabulary retention.

Stative verbs should be introduced as modifiers of substantives and of active verbs (aV < sV); later as reduplicative compounds in aV < sV; and finally as main verbs.

Other verb compounds may be taught as if they were single words.

3.2 Preverb particles and Auxiliaries.

Of the preverb particles, *mra* 'future' should be introduced first, without other particles or auxiliaries.

Then the auxiliary *dri* 'can', also without particles or other auxiliaries.

Then other auxiliaries which are translatable as English adverbs.

The latter can then be combined with the negative particles in normal English order, except that Mngong also has a final negative augment.

The preverb particles *hoq* 'prior' and *loq* 'again' also commonly occur with augments. The uses of the final particle *jêh* 'already', either augmenting *hoq* or independent of it, need pointing out.

Then one may introduce negative particles in combination with other preverb particles and auxiliaries. Here the order is contrary to English.

The auxiliary *geh* 'exist', though its use is hard to explain, occurs so frequently in conversation that its introduction should not be delayed too long.

Most of the auxiliaries are also usable as main verbs with somewhat different meanings. The two uses of each should be noted as "grammatical points" to aid in discrimination of these homophonies.

The auxiliaries *guq* 'remaining in a state or act' and *leo* 'in the process of going' should be left to the last. They do not have high text frequency, and introducing them early might cause them to be confused with the English progressive tenses.

3.3 Postverbals.

First, *loi* 'complete' which is the analogue of adverb complements in English. Then, *an* 'help' on the analogy of *loi*.

With *an* 'help' can be taught the optionally cooccurring auxiliary *sâm* 'do helpfully', which has low text frequency and cannot occur without the postverbal, though the postverbal often occurs without the auxiliary.

3.4 Coordinate constructions.

Verbs with coordinating particles are presented first.

Active verb constructions of the *go* + aV type without coordinating particles, since these have a parallel in English.

Then other active verb constructions without coordinating particles should be learned.

Stative verbs without coordinating particles.

3.5. Verbs of taking, carrying, and putting.

Representatives of all the five types of these verbs (1.36) may be introduced earlier in the course as the only verb in a sentence.

In sentences that include a destination, Transfer verbs should be taught first, since no second verb is

required. There should be a drill on the selection of Transfer verbs according to the situation, since their meanings cut across the meanings of English *bring* and *take* in a confusing way.

Then combinations of Take and Deposit verbs and of Take and Transfer verbs may be studied.

More of the common Carry verbs should be introduced along with drills for selecting among them.

Combinations of Carry and Deposit verbs and of Carry and Transfer verbs on the analogy of the combinations with Take verbs as against the analogy of English constructions with *carry* are next.

Finally, the Motion verb *leo*, first in constructions where it can substitute for Deposit verbs, then in constructions with Take and Transfer verbs where there is no analogy is introduced.

3.6 Centered constructions.

aV < sV was easily handled in 3.1.

The other centered constructions may be introduced here in the order of increasing difficulty:

sV < aV, sV < sV, aV < aV