

Transitive directionals in Mon - form, function and implications for linguistic typology

Oral presentation

Directionals are used to indicate absolute or relative directions in a verb complex in Mon. The directionals form a closed set of verbal morphemes, consisting of ‘movement away from origo’, ‘movement towards origo’, ‘movement up’, ‘movement down’, ‘movement in’, ‘movement out’ and ‘movement back to point of origin’. All directionals appear in two forms, basic/intransitive and causative/transitive. The causative/transitive forms are in either morphological causatives or suppletive forms. The choice of the form of the directional employed depends on the movement or affectedness of the participants of an expression. If the S/A argument is described as moving by the main verbal predicate, the basic form of the directional is used, as in (1). If the P (or T) argument is set in motion, the causative form of the directional is obligatorily used, as in example (2). In transitive expressions, the basic form is used if the A rather than the P argument is set in motion, or if the setting in motion of P is backgrounded. As seen in examples (3) and (4), the same main verb may combine with either the basic or the causative directional. In the former case, it is the movement of the A argument that is important, while in the latter it is the movement of P. In ditransitive expressions, the causative directional refers to the movement of the T, never the G argument. The main trigger for the choice of the directional is apparently the “affectedness of the O argument” (Hopper & Thompson 1980). This systematic distinction between basic and causative directionals, which is rare not only in Southeast Asian languages, but also globally, allows a distinction in the degree of (semantic) transitivity of an event based on the linguistic expression. It can be shown, for example, that morphological causatives in Mon have a higher degree of transitivity than periphrastic causatives, as only the former trigger the causative directionals. The findings of this study are therefore relevant in a broader typological context, both regarding transitivity parameters and causative constructions.

The present study investigates the different uses of causative/transitive directionals in Mon and the functional differences between the basic and causative forms. Dealing with a typologically rare phenomenon, this study adds to our understanding of complex verbal predicates and transitivity not only in the Southeast Asia context, but also cross-linguistically. The study is based on original data collected in Thailand and Myanmar from different varieties of Mon, supplemented by published texts such as journal articles and short stories.

Examples

(1)

kon.ŋàc kwac cao ʔa phèə.
child walk return go school.
‘The child walked back to school.’

(2)

ràə kok phyao na hpaʔ. (**kok cao ʔa*)
friend call CAUS.return CAUS.go house
‘The friend brought (her) back home.’

(3)

dəh pèk ʔa ka.
3 follow go car
‘He is driving the car.’

(4)

dəh pèk na klèə.
3 follow CAUS.go cow
‘He is driving the cattle.’

References:

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