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 *dŏng* 'again'.

Gap *lôq* hăn dôh. (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', *ŭch* 'about to; want', *sâm~săm* '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 *doi* '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 *doi janh* hăn. (I not can dare go) 'I don't
dare go'.
The auxiliary *geh* 'exist' is used with simple state-
ment 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* rbŭn leq? (person old exist congregate
question) 'Was (or is) the old man at the meeting?'
Bu ranh rbŭn 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 involv-
ing 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: *njŭn leo* 'lead', *chiaq uănh*
'guard', *rak suai* 'curse', *sông sa* 'eat', *khĭt ôm* '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: *tĭng ndôq* 'follow', *mboh som*
'pray', *lŏng 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: *khĭt kro* (dead dry) 'dead from drying (as
plants).'

aV < sV: *ngơi mbrơi* (speak slow) 'speak slowly'
aV < aV: *nti luh lăp* study go-out go-in) 'study off
and on'; the last two verbs are in coordin-
ate construction. *dăk ntop prăk* (spend
add money) 'overspend'; 'money' is the
object of the verb construction. *sĭt băk
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 mă_u-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 sao* 'hear and see', *sŏk long
sênh ŭnh* (take firewood light fire)
'bring firewood and light the fire',
nhŭp păng chŏng klŭp tăm ndrung (catch it
carry throw in pen) 'catch it, carry it
over, and throw it into the pen',
hăn sĭt sĭt hăn (go go-home go-home go)
'go back and forth'.

1.24 Verb-object constructions.
aV >> aV: *nti ngơi* (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',
dơm 'put down', *prăp* 'put away', etc.
Ăn ta kalo chhŭng (put to top table) 'Put it on the
table.'

1.32 Carry verbs: *chŏng* '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.
Chŏng ndo jăk ao. (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.
   Chŏng hip *leo* kalɗ 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.
   Chŏng ɗŏng hip ri *ăn* ta ntŭk ɗm. (carry again box that
put to place original) 'Carry that box back to its original
place'.
   If the object is obmitted, being understood from the
context, the rest of the elements follow in normal order.
   Chŏng ăn ta ntŭk ɗm. 'Carry it back to its original
place'.
   1.34 Take verbs: *sŏk* 'take' (with no indication of sub-
sequent Motion). A sentence with a Take verb and a destinat-
ion must have as the second verb a deposit verb, the motion
verb or a construction consisting of a Carry verb and the
motion verb.
   Sŏk hip ri *ăn* ta kalɗ chhŭng. (take box that put to top
table) 'Bring that box and put it on the table'.
   Sŏk hip ri *leo* ta chhŭng aɗ. (take box that move to
table this) 'Bring that box to this table'.
   Sŏk hip aɗ *ndjŏt 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: *vɗt* 'transfer a short distance',
njŭn '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 *njŭn leo* is common. The
Transfer verbs may occur as second verb in a sentence with
a Carry verb as first.
   Vɗt hip aɗ ma pǎng. (transfer box this to him 'Take
this box to him.'
   Vɗt hip ri ma gâp. (transfer box that to me) 'Bring me
that box.'
   Vɗt hip ri *ăn* gâp. (transfer box that give me) 'Bring
me that box.'
   Njŭn samɓŭt aɗ ma pǎng. (transfer -far letter this to
him) 'Take this letter to him.'
   Njŭn leo samɓŭt aɗ ma pǎng. (same).
   Njŭn samɓŭt aɗ *leo* ma pǎng. (same, but not as commonly
used.)
   Chŏng chhŭng aɗ *njŭn* 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 cooccurence 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 Mnong 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
Mnong 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 Mnong would all normally take the postverbal). But the English adverb complement is separable from the verb in a clause, whereas the Mnong 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 Mnong 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 Mnong with coordinating conjunctions to introduce the last head. In a series of transitive verb phrases involving a common object, Mnong 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 Mnong 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 Trans-
fer 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 rules
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 *dǒi* '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 Mnong 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 construct-
ions with *carry* are next.

Finally, the Motion verb *leo*, first in constructions
where it can substitute for Deposit verbs, then in construc-
tions 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