Distributional properties of causative verbs in some Mon-Khmer languages

Mark J. ALVES
University of Hawaii

1. Introduction

Many, if not all, of the languages of the Mon-Khmer branch of Austroasiatic share a class of verbs that can be identified by two main properties: (1) a word-initial /pa-/ presyllable (though there are numerous phonological variants, as discussed below) and (2) semantic properties indicating that another actor, other than the subject, is being caused to do something or be in some condition. Most previous studies of these verbs in individual Mon-Khmer languages, with a few exceptions discussed below, have focused primarily on these two characteristics with less focus on syntactic properties. Many studies provided little or no data to demonstrate how these causative verbs are used in sentences. It must be admitted that for a few Mon-Khmer languages, causative verbs are simply transitive verbs, and no more need be said. However, a survey of these Mon-Khmer subgroups suggests that more in the way of syntactic possibilities and constraints are involved in many understudied languages. The point of this paper is to demonstrate some syntactic subtypes and variation of causative verbs in Mon-Khmer languages.

The Mon-Khmer language group has as many as ten branches (Parkin 1991) and a total of several dozen languages. This study is based on about 20 Mon-Khmer languages coming from nine branches of Mon-Khmer. The studies of these languages vary significantly in terms of the depth of description, so in some cases, little can be said about causative verbs in certain languages. Members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics have provided some of the most in-depth studies of syntactic properties of verbs (Gradin 1970 on Jeh, Watson 1966 on Pacoh, Thomas 1969 on Chrau). Some publications in Vietnam from the late 1990s (especially Nguyễn Văn Lợi 1995 on Ruc, Hoàng Văn Ma and Tạ Văn Thông 1998 on Bru, and Nguyễn Hữu Hoành and Nguyễn Văn Lợi 1998 on Katu) have also included a significant amount of syntactic data.

This paper consists of five sections. After this introduction, the range of phonological forms of Mon-Khmer causative verbs is listed, with a brief discussion of the morphological derivational processes involved. After that section, the

syntactic concepts used in this study are summarized. Next, ten causative verb subtypes are described, with examples taken from representative languages. Finally, there are some concluding thoughts on the data.

2.   Semantic and phonological properties

The causative verbs are naturally causative in their semantic function, and little more has been added to this matter in studies. However, as noted by Svantesson (1983:section 6.2), in Kammu/Khmu, these verbs can be semantically intentional, as opposed to biverbal forms (i.e., 'do/make' verbs plus another verb complement), which may be unintentional, focus on the result, and are not necessarily achieved. Table 1 contains examples of verbs and their causative counterparts in several Mon-Khmer languages.

The phonological forms are better documented. As mentioned, the word form considered most common to Mon-Khmer causative verbs is the /pa-/ presyllable, though in fact, there are many other allomorphs. The shape /pVn-/ may prove of note for historical studies, especially considering the hypothesis that this presyllable is derived from the abilitative/receptive verb */ban/ seen in some Mon-Khmer languages, such as Khmer (Haiman 1999).[1] The allophonic variation seen in Table 2 is in part due to natural phonological reduction as well as interaction with other morphological material, such as the /-r-/ form seen in reciprocal verbs in such geographically diverse languages as Pacoh (Vietnam) and Palaung (Myanmar). Some of these presyllables have final nasals. The vowels in these presyllables tend to be minimally distinctive, central vowels, such as /ə/ or /ɨ/, perhaps due to their position in unstressed syllables, as Mon-Khmer languages generally have syllable-final stress in bisyllabic words. The initial consonants are most often the labials /p/ and /b/, though /t/ and glottal stop are also seen. This variation highlights the irregularity seen in lexical derivation.

Table 1. Causative verbs in some Mon-Khmer languages

Language	MK Branch	Non-causative	Causative
Pacoh	Katuic (East Central)	ca: 'to eat'	pa.ca: 'to cause to eat/to feed'
Khasi	*Khasic* (India)	ba:m 'to eat'	pinba:m 'to cause to eat/to feed'
		nep 'to be straight'	pinnep 'to straighten'

Sre	Bahnaric (Southeast)	saŋ 'to be straight' dùh 'to fall'	bəsaŋ 'to straighten' tənduh 'to cause to fall'
Temiar	*Aslian* (Malaysia)	cā/ 'to eat' səŋ 'to be trapped'	bərcā/ 'to cause to eat/to feed' tərsəŋ 'to cause to be trapped/to trap'
Ruc	*Vietic* (Northeast)	tɯng^4 'to stand' lôon^2 'to enter'	patɯng^4 'to cause to stand' palôon^2 'to cause to enter/put in'
Khmer	*Khmeric* (Cambodia)	ŋuːt 'to bathe oneself' caɲ 'defeated'	pʰŋoːt 'to bathe someone' pʰcaɲ 'to defeat'
Mlabri	*Khmuic* (North Central)	bɯl 'to die' hot 'to fall'	pa.bɯl 'to cause to die/kill' ba.hot 'to let fall/throw down'
Palaung	*Palaungic* (Northwest)	yạm 'to die' ēm 'to be short'	pyạm 'to kill' pạn-ēm 'to shorten'

Table 2. Allophonic variation of Mon-Khmer verbs

(single consonants)	/p-/, /pʰ-/
(consonant clusters)	/pn-/, /pr-/, /ph-/
(presyllables)	/pa-/, /pə-/, /pVn-/, /bVŋ-/, /bVr-/, /ta-/, /tVn-/, /tVr-/, /ʔa-/

Significant phonological variation is seen within languages as well as between them. Consider the four forms in Khmu (Svantesson 1983:198): (1) /p-/, (2) /pn-/, (3) /pr-/, (4) /-m-/. Moreover, the vowels in these presyllables may be /a/, /ə/, or /ɨ/.

In most cases, these verbs are derivationally related only to verbs, though in some languages, such as Katu, Khasi, and Khmu, some of the verbs are related to nouns as well. The non-causative verbs are mostly intransitive (something seen in all Mon-Khmer languages), though some are related to stative or transitive verbs. The overall tendency is to create transitive verbs regardless of the non-causative counterpart, but there are two other types seen. A locative non-causative form has a transitive and locative counterpart. If the base form is already transitive, a ditransitive verb results. Which non-causative verbs are related to causative extension verbs (verbs that take verb complements) is not predictable.

Figure 1. Derivational tendencies[2]

(1) any	→	[+trns]
(2) [+lctv]	→	[+trns, +lctv]
(3) [+trns]	→	[+trns, +crsp]

3.   Syntactic concepts considered

This section describes the syntactic concepts used for the analysis in this paper, focusing first on the definition of 'word' and case-related and lexical dependency issues. A 'word' consists of three parts: sound, meaning, and syntactic distribution (Starosta 1988). A difference in any of these three aspects marks a distinct word in the mental lexicon. A single phonological form may represent multiple lexical entries if a syntactic and/or semantic difference exists. The differentiation of words in this definition can be identified by analogical patterns. Arbitrariness in the patterns, and especially gaps in patterns, identify completely formed lexical subcategories.

The verbs considered in this paper are determined by the types of complements they take.[3] Table 3, which shows the ten subcategories identified in this study, indicates what complements each category takes. All verbs require at least a PAT complement. The three primary categories are extension verbs, which take verbs as complements; intransitive verbs, which take only PAT complements; and transitive verbs, which take AGT and PAT complements. The other three types are correspondent, locative, and mode verbs, which take COR, LOC, and MNS complements respectively. Reciprocal verbs require plural or multiple PAT complements. The verbs in this study require from one to three complements, with no more than two following verbs.

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[2]Following is a list of the common abbreviated syntactic features used in this article.

Parts of speech: N=noun, V=verb, P=preposition

Case relations: PAT=patient, AGT=agent, COR=correspondent, LOC=locative, MNS=means

Features: crsp=correspondent, cstv=causative, datv=dative, enct=enacting, lctn=locational, lctv=locative, mode=mode, rflx=reflexive, trns=transitive, xtns=extension

[3]The PAT complement is the 'subject' of intransitive verbs, but the 'object' of transitive verbs. The PAT of transitive verbs are topicalizeable, differentiating them from COR complements, which are not. The AGT is the 'subject' of transitive verbs. Locative verbs commonly take locational nouns or locational relator nouns as LOC complements, or a locational preposition may help to mark a non-locational noun. The COR is similar to an indirect object of ditransitive verbs, though these complements may also occur as complements of other classes of verbs. A dative-like preposition is used in some Mon-Khmer languages to mark these COR noun complements. Mode verbs take MNS complements and semantically denote the means by which an action occurs. Extension verbs require predicates as complements, which are always verbs (as opposed to predicate nouns) as complements of Mon-Khmer causative verbs.

Table 3. Causative Verbs Categories and Their Complements

CATEGORY	VERB	PAT	AGT	COR	LOC	MNS
1. Transitive	-	+	+	-	-	-
2. Transitive Locative	-	+	+	-	+	-
3. Transitive Correspondent	-	+	+	+	-	-
4. Transitive Mode	-	+	+	-	-	+
5. Intransitive	-	+	-	-	-	-
6. Intransitive Reciprocal	-	+	-	-	-	-
7. Intransitive Correspondent	-	+	-	+	-	-
8. Intransitive Correspondent Locative	-	+	-	+	+	-
9. Transitive Extension	+	+	-	-	-	-
10. Intransitive Correspondent Extension	+	+	-	+	-	-

4.   Forms in Mon-Khmer languages

In the following sections, the ten categories of Mon-Khmer causative verbs are briefly described and supplemented with examples[4] (containing formalized features) from representative languages. There is, of course, no way to test first hand all of these categories in all of those languages. In some cases, questions remain.

4.1 Transitive

Transitive causative verbs are seen in almost all Mon-Khmer languages, the apparent exception being Jeh, which instead uses the COR case relation to mark semantic objects (see section 4.7). Transitive verbs take AGT and PAT complements.[5] This subtype consists of two semantically based subcategories:[6] enacting (+enct) and affective/non-enacting (-enct) transitive verbs. The most

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[4]All sentence examples contain the original scripts used in the sources for these data.

[5]The PAT of transitive verbs may show a corresponding topicalized form in sentence-initial position, a common property of Southeast Asian languages, as noted in Alves 2000 in regards to Pacoh.

[6]Dorothy Thomas (1969:92) noted a similar distinction, calling the 'benefactive' form one of the order 'direct object-indirect object', and the 'referent' form one with the order 'indirect-direct'.

common type is the enacting subcategory, in which the PAT is the semantic actor of a causative verb, as in examples 1, 2, and 3 (e.g., the dog is caused to sniff). Example 4 contains an affective verb, in which the PAT is semantically the recipient of the causative action (the knife is being caused to be played with).

(Pacoh, Alves 2000: S374)   **(Chrau**, Thomas 1969:92)

1. 'I made the dog sniff.'

kɨː	pa.hɛt	ʔa.cɔː
1s	make-sniff	dog
N	V	N
AGT	+cstv	PAT
	+trns	
	+enct	

2. 'We stand the child up.'

ănh	tatao	con-se
1s	stand	child
N	V	N
AGT	+cstv	PAT
	+trns	
	+enct	

(Khmu, Svantesson 1983:6.2)   **(Pacoh**, S. Watson 1964:18)

3. 'She made the horse kick.'

nàa	pǹté?	hm̀ràŋ
she	make-kick	horse
N	V	N
AGT	+cstv	PAT
	+trns	
	+enct	

4. 'Don' t you allow-play knife.'

ʔa.kəp	ŋəh	pa.ʔaːk	ʔa.ciːu
don' t	you	allow-play	knife
V	N	V	N
+xtns	AGT	+cstv	PAT
		+trns	
		-enct	

4.2 Transitive locative

Causative verbs in this category require AGT, PAT, and LOC complements. Four Mon-Khmer languages are found to have this category: the Vietic language Ruc, the Katuic languages Pacoh and Bru, and the Bahnaric language Chrau. All of these languages are spoken within Vietnam, though whether this is significant in terms of subgrouping or language contact cannot be stated. Languages having this category use locational prepositions (indicating direction and/or location) before the LOC complements, as in examples 5 and 6.

(Bru, Hoàng Văn Ma and Tạ Văn Thông 1998:146)

5. 'He brought the firewood into the house.'

án	amut	ûih	tâng	dống
3s	bring in	firewood	in	house
N	V	N	P	N
AGT	+cstv	PAT	+lctn	LOC
	+trns			
	+lctv			

(Pacoh, Alves 2000:386)

6. `Bring the child up to the house.'

?a.ʃər	?e.?ɛːm	to?	duŋ
cause-go-up	child	to	house
V	N	P	N
+cstv	PAT	+lctn	-lctn
+trns		LOC	
+lctv			

4.3 Transitive correspondent

Transitive correspondent causative verbs require three complements: AGT (subject), PAT (object), and COR (indirect object). The COR is marked either by the position of the noun or by prepositions. There are enacting (examples 7 and 8) and non-enacting/affective subcategories (example 9). It is a relatively common category as eight Mon-Khmer languages of various sub-branches showed it.

(Pacoh, Alves 2000:382)   **(Katu**, Nguyễn Hữu Hoành 1998:240)

7. `I gave him some rice.'

kɨː	pa.caː	dɔː	dọːj
1s	make-eat	3s	rice
N	V	N	N
AGT	+cstv	COR	PAT
	+trns		
	+crsp		
	+enct		

8. 'I feed him rice.'

aku	paca	adA	avịq
1s	make eat	3s	rice
N	V	N	N
AGT	+cstv	COR	PAT
	+trns		
	+crsp		
	+enct		

Examples 7 and 8 show transitive correspondent verbs without prepositional phrases. However, this structure is rare, seen only in these two closely related Katuic languages, which are furthermore in contact with Vietnamese, a language in which this syntactic pattern is normal.

In most of the languages considered in this study, additional prepositions are used to mark the indirect object/the correspondent, as shown in example 9.

(Temiar, Benjamin 1972)

9. `I fed the vegetables to the baby.'

?i-bɛrcã/	bər	ma	papãt
1s-make eat	vegetables	to	baby
V	N	P	N
+cstv	PAT	+datv	COR
+trns			
+crsp			
-enct			

4.4 Transitive mode

Transitive mode causative verbs require AGT, PAT, and MNS complements. Only the language Khmu/Kammu is found to have this category. An instrumental preposition is used to mark the MNS complement.

(Khmu, Svantesson 1983:6.2)

10. 'Tek fed his (own) children with eggs.'

tɛ́ɛk	pŋ́màh	kɔ̀ɔn	tèe	jʌʌ	któŋ
(name)	make-eat	child	rflx	with	eggs
N	V	N	N	P	N
AGT	+cstv	PAT	rflx	+nstr	MNS
	+trns				
	+mode				

4.5 Intransitive

This subcategory of causatives has been included primarily because it is mentioned as a category in some former studies. The problem with this subcategory is that it is not easily distinguishable from 'pro-drop' phenomena, the possibility that a complement is recoverable from the discourse context. Considering the semantic nature of causative verbs, it seems less likely that they would not take following complements. It is explicitly mentioned by Banker 1964 regarding Bahnar.

(Bahnar, J. Banker 1964:14)

11. 'Set make-out-of-order.'

Set	pohŭ
Name	ruin
N	V
PAT	+cstv
	-trns

4.6 Intransitive reciprocal

Intransitive reciprocal causative verbs take plural or multiple PAT complements. Only a few languages have this subcategory: Pacoh and Khmu and possibly Khmer and Ruc. Some languages use additional words (probably adverbs) to indicate reciprocity, as in example 13.

(Pacoh, Nguyễn Văn Lợi, Nguyễn Văn Tài, Đoàn Văn Phúc, and Phan Xuân Thành 1986:75)

12. 'We gathered together in the middle of the school.'

hɛː	pər.cuŋ	to?	ʔŋ.kiːm	triəŋ
1p	gather-recip.	at	middle	school
1ndex	2ndex	3ndex	4ndex	5ndex
N	V	P	N	N
+prnn	+cstv	+lctv	+rltr	-unit
+plrl	-trns	LOC	+lctn	COR
PAT	+rcpr			

(Bahnar, J. Banker 1964:16)

13. 'Rok and Set are sad because of each other.'

Rọk	Set	pɔɔh	dih-băl
Name	Name	sadden	recip.
N	N	V	Adv
PAT	PAT	+cstv	+rcpr
		-trns	

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4.7 Intransitive correspondent

Intransitive correspondent causative verbs require PAT and COR complements. In most cases, these verbs take dative prepositions to mark the non-dative COR noun complements, as in examples 14 and 15. Pacoh also uses a class of dative relator nouns to accomplish the same task. These are not transitive verbs since (1) the COR nouns directly follow prepositions rather than verbs and (2) they are not topicalizeable (i.e., moveable to sentence-initial position). The COR nouns are, still, the semantic recipients.

(Jeh, Gradin 1970:14-17)

14. 'He wounded me'

ĕn	pĭ	pa-chăl	lòi	au
he	do	wound	for	I
N	V	V	P	N
PAT	+xtns	+cstv	+datv	COR
		-trns		
		+crsp		

(Bahnar, J. Banker 1964:1)

15. 'Set put (it) out of order.'

set	pơhư	(hi)	kơ	sư
(name)	ruin	(part.)	to	3s
N	V	Sprt	P	N
PAT	+cstv		+datv	COR
	-trns			
	+crsp			

4.8 Intransitive correspondent locative

Intransitive correspondent locative causative verbs require PAT, COR, and LOC complements. This category is found only in the Bahnaric language Jeh. In the single example 16, the COR and LOC complements are marked by dative and locational prepositions respectively.

(Jeh, Gradin 1970:16)

16. 'He made my hand slap the child'

ẽn	pĭ	pa-tap	dòh	ti	au	pa	si' nek	kon
he	do	cause-slap	for	hand	I	at	body	child
N	V	V	P	N	N	P	N	N
PAT	+xtns	+cstv	+datv	COR		+lctn	LOC	
		-trns						
		+crsp						
		+lctv						

4.9 Extension transitive

Transitive extension causative verbs require, in addition to AGT and PAT complements, a verb complement. Three Mon-Khmer languages are found to have this category: Mon, Pacoh, and Ruc.

(Pacoh, Alves 2000:407)

17. 'Get the dog to bite the mouse.'

pa.kap	ʔa.cɔː	kap	ʔa.bil
make-bite	dog	bite	mouse
1ndex	2ndex	3ndex	4ndex
V	N	V	N
+cstv	PAT	+trns	PAT
+trns			
+xtns			

(Ruc, Nguyễn Văn Lợi 1995:78)

18. 'I put the firewood into the house.'

hô[1]	palôon[2]	kús[1]	lôon[2]	nha[2]
1s	put in	firewood	enter	house
N	V	N	V	N
AGT	+cstv	PAT		
	+trns			
	+xtns			

4.10 Extension intransitive correspondent

Intransitive correspondent extension causative verbs require PAT, COR, and verb complements. Jeh, Mon, and Pacoh are found to have this category. The reason for considering the lower noun a dependent of the upper verb (as a COR) rather than the lower one (as a PAT) is that they cannot be fronted. Were that the case, it would then be considered a PAT complement of a transitive verb. Furthermore, in Pacoh, a special class of pronouns (with the prefix /ʔa-/) is used in this position, overtly differentiating them from PAT pronouns.

(Mon, The Hypertext Grammar of the Mon Language)

19. 'I made the dog bite the child.'

ʔuə	cika	(kə)	klə	kit	kon nay
I	make	Prep.	dog	bite	child
N	V	P	N	V	N
PAT	+cstv	+datv	COR		
	+xtns				
	-trns				
	+crsp				

(Pacoh, Alves 2000: S157)

20. 'I make him drink water.'

kɨ:	pa.ŋɔːj[?]	ʔa.dɔ:	ŋɔːj[?]
I	make-drink	s/he	drink
N	V	N	V
PAT	+ cstv	COR	
	-trns		
	+crsp		
	+xtns		

5. Concluding thoughts

Certainly, more complete studies should reveal more languages containing additional verb subcategories. Though the notion of 'linguistic area' applies to Southeast Asia, and the languages in this study do show some overall typological

similarities, there is far from complete uniformity, as seen in this study, regarding the syntactic distribution of Mon-Khmer causative verbs. Perhaps more interesting than what causative verbs can do is what they cannot since that would be the real testing ground for lexically inherent syntactic constraints.

Based on general views of the nature of causative verbs, there are both expected and unexpected properties. Having transitive causative verbs is not surprising, due to the semantic nature of causative verbs. Also, not surprisingly, there are some semantico-syntactic patterns between causative verbs and their non-causative counterparts, such as intransitive/transitive and transitive/ditransitive verbs. What is more unexpected are the categories of extension verbs (those that require lower verb clauses) and the intransitive correspondent verbs (in a sense, requiring an indirect object but not a direct object).

The data presented in this paper lead to a few historical questions. Is there any effect on the subgrouping of Mon-Khmer languages? The locative causative category does appear to be primarily an Eastern Mon-Khmer category, seen in Bahnaric, Katuic, and Vietic. Whether that is a proto-Eastern Mon-Khmer innovation or the result of interlanguage contact cannot yet be determined. The transitive causative subcategory is the most widespread and is probably reconstructable for Proto-Mon-Khmer. The correspondent causative verbs, though less common, are widespread throughout Mon-Khmer. The locative category is more likely an eastern innovation. Based on an overall survey of these verbs, clearly there is a strong tendency toward the loss of these verbs both through phonological reduction as well as competition with lexical causatives, which are commonly used forms in socioeconomically dominant languages, such as Thai, Vietnamese, and varieties of Chinese. How does the causative verb form relate to the Austric hypothesis? If, as Haiman 1999 suggests, the */pa-/ form is related to the abilitative verb /baan/ (or some reflex), then the similarity in phonological form of the prefix in both Austronesian and Austroasiatic languages is an accountable coincidence. If, however, it can be shown that /baan/ is restricted to a small subgroup of Mon-Khmer languages and not proto-Mon-Khmer, then the debate still remains.

It is hoped that researchers of Mon-Khmer languages will be aware of these and similar subcategories of verbs and that a more complete picture of causative and other verbs in Mon-Khmer languages is eventually discovered before language contact with mainstream Southeast Asian languages wipes out these linguistic artifacts.

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Dept. of Applied Foreign Languages
Nan Jeon College
178 Chao-Chin Road
Yansui Town, Tainan County
TAIWAN ROC
<malves98@yahoo.com>