

Serial verb constructions in Burmese

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0. Sketch of Burmese grammar

0.1. Sociolinguistic situation

- language from the central valley (Irrawadi), and from the dominating ethnic
 - language with 40 millions of speakers (25-30 millions of native speakers)
 - written language from the 12th century
 - influenced by Pali (religious language) (95%) Buddhist people
 - difference between written and spoken languages (different grammatical morphemes)

“Une distinction existe entre la langue parlée – ou langue vernaculaire – et la langue écrite (ou langue littéraire). En fait, tout document écrit doit l’être en langue dite « littéraire » : discours officiels, écrits administratifs, romans, mais aussi journaux, inscriptions, panneaux de signalisation etc... Quelques exceptions à cette règle : les bandes dessinées, les interviews, les dialogues des textes littéraires et certains romans, sont écrits en langue vernaculaire.”

1.2. Burmese Language in brief

1.2.1. Phonology

- Tones (3/4 tons)

(1)	ø	/sa'/	ton bref, haut (voix craquée ?) (T1)	<i>to begin</i>
	øɔ	/sa/	ton bas et long (T2)	<i>letter</i>
	øɔ:	/sa/	ton descendant (et long) (T3)	<i>eat</i>
	øɔ̊	/sa?/	syllable atonal + glottal stop (T4)	<i>be hot</i>

- Two types of syllables in this language :
 - reduced syllables (atonal) (in bi-syllabic compounds)
 - full syllables carrying a tone

(2)	øŋɔ:	/zə -`ga/	parole
	ψθίξ	/θə -`mi/	fille

1.2.2. Morphology

- monosyllabic language
 - Polysyllables borrowed from : pali, môn, anglais

(3)	a.	ရောကါ	/'rɔ̃-ga/	illness	<	from Pali 'rogā'
		စုံကျိုး	/sɛi? -ku/	paper	<	from Mon 'cakkho'
b.		ခြွှေအရန်း ဒိုက်	/ mwe-'?εye`KhwaN + ?εi? /			(kind of bag with plastic scale)
				snake-skin (of animal) + bag		

1.2.3. Syntax

- SOV (final verb)

- (4) သနခုတ်သမား ပင်မယားက ငယ်ရွယ်ကြပါသေးတယ် ॥ [B3/28]
 θə-khoʔ-θə`ma liN-mə-`ya Ka' [ŋə-ywə] Ca' Pa `θe Tə sv
 lumberjack couple S./top be young PLUR PV.POL PV.cont. PVF.R
 [wood-cut-NMLZ]
The couple of Lumberjack, (they are) still young.

- Postpositions, and ‘modifier-head’ order (for subordinating clauses, demonstrative, genitive...).

- (5) မှည့်လွန်းတဲ့ သရက်သီး မစားနဲ့ ॥ [B2/6]
 [m̥ε' 'lwoN] Tə' θəyεʔθi mə `sa nε'
 [be ripe PV:in excess] REL:R mango NEG eat Injunction
Don't eat mangoes (which are) too ripe.

- Optional arguments.

- (6) ခြွဲအရေခံ ဒိတ် ဝယ် တယ် ॥ [A2/36]
 mwe-`ɛye`KhwaN ?εi? wε Tə
 snake-skin (of animal) bag buy PVF:R
(She) bought a ‘snake-skin’ bag un sac. (plastic bag ‘scale-d’)

- Optional case marking, often used for discursive purpose

- (7) တစ်ချိန်မှာ သူ ကျေပို နားလည်လာမှာပါ ॥ [B3/5]
 tə-chεiN Ma θu cənɔ Ko 'na-ɪs la m̥a Pa
 one-moment LOC [3SG]₁ [1SG (H.P)]₂ OBJ understand AUX:inchoat PVF:IR PV:POL.
There will be a time where he will begin to understand me.

- (8) ကောင်မလေးက ကော် တယ် । သိ လား ॥ [A2/19]
 kəNma`le Ka' tɔ Tə θi' la
 young lady TOP be clever, brilliant PVF:R know PP:QST.
(This) young lady, it is a nice girl, you know !?

1.2.4. Verbal Phrase

1.2.4.1. No agreement in the verbal phrase

- no grammatical category of person (=> and no ‘agreement’)
- optional plurality marking

- (9) a. စား တယ် ॥ [C]
 `sa Tə
 eat PVF:R
{ I / you / she / we... } eat(s)
- b. နေ တိုင် သမီး အများ၍ စား တယ်။ [C]
 ne-TaiN θə`mi ?ə-`mya-`Ci `sa Tə
 day-every daughter a lot eat PVF:R
Every day, daughter eat(s) a lot. <=>{ I / you / she } eat(s) a lot.

- (10) a. စား ကြ တယ် ॥ [C]
 `sa Ca' Tə
 manger PV:plur. PVF:R
*{*I / *you... they / we / you... } eat.*

b.	မင်္ဂလာက အမေတို့၏ ခဲ့တဲ့အဆဲကို နားလည်ဗျားလား။	[B2/11]				
`miN-To'	Ka'	?əme-To'	'shε	Tε'	?ə-'shε	Ko
2P-PLUR.	S./TOP	mother-PLUR.	swear	REL:R	NMLZ.-swear (insult)OBJ	
`na-lε	<u>Ca'</u>	yε'	'la			
understand	<u>PV:plur.</u>	PVF:R.QST	PP:QST			

*Do you understand in what I was swearing?
(litt. Do you understand the insults that I (from the class of the mother persons) I was saying, don't you ?!*

=> concept of ‘coolness’ of a language’ (Bisang 1995:143sq) with reference to the use of ‘empty/no pronouns’ and **indeterminateness** of the verbs with regard to TAM and valency

=> relevant for Burmese

1.2.4.2 Prototypical VP

- Verbal phrase is made with at least one verbal lexical item (*invariable*) and one **final verbal particle** (PVF).

[(AUX)	V	(AUX/ PV)	PVF] _{sv}
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- (11) a. ... လင်မယားဟာ သစ်ခုတ်ဖို့ တောင်ကို တစ်ခုပေါ်ကို ရောက်လာခဲ့ကြတယ် ။
- ...lin-mə-`ya θi? Kho? Pho' təN.`koN tə-khu Pɔ Ko
...couple wood cut SUB:purp hill.mound one-CLF upon DIR.
- [yɔ? la Khe' Ca' Tε]_{sv}
arrive come PV:spt. PV:plur. PVF
[Once,] a couple [of lumberjacks very poor] arrived on the hill to cut some wood.
- b. ရောက်တယ် ။
- [yɔ? Tε]_{sv}
arrive PVF
(They) arrived / have arrived.

=> the PVF is the only obligatory grammatical morpheme; the others verbal morphemes are optional.

1. Aim and origin of the study of serial verb constructions

- Recent works on Burmese language : Allott (1965)
Okell (1969)
Bernot (1980)
Wheatley (1982)
Bernot & al (2001)
Allot &. Okell (2001)

- (1) Disagreement on verbal morphemes
- (2) Sequence of verbs with identical surface form but with different under-laying structures

(12) တန်နေ့မှာ ဆင်းရဲပြီး ထုတိုင်းအနံပါ ရတဲ့ လူငယ်တစ်ယောက်ဟာ ...

tə ne' Ma 'shiN-'ye 'pyi thoN 'ThaiN ?a' na'
one day LOC be poor SUB. be silly be idiot be stupid be ignorant
poN ya' Tε' lu-ηε tə-γω? ha...
SUB get REL:R man-be young one-CLF(hum) TOP.
One day, a young man, who was really poor and moreover who seemed really idiot [arrived at the wealthy man's place...]

(13) ဦးဖြူစွင်ဘာ ခပ်ဝေးဝေးတန်နေရာကို ပြောင်းရွှေ့နေထိုင်ခဲ့တယ်။

'uphyusiN ha kha?-`we-'we tə neya Ko
U Phyu Sin TOP rather-be far (x 2) one place OBJ

'pyəN-ʃwe'ne-ThaiN Khe' Tε
to move out to live PV:spt PVF:R.
U Phyu Sin moved out to live in a far-off place.

(14) ... ပြောဆိုနေကြတဲ့ စကားကို ပုန်းနေတဲ့ ဦးဖြူစွင်က ဗြားသွားတယ်။

... 'pyə sho ne Ca' Tε' Sə'Ka Ko (...)
... talk say stay/PROG. PV:plur. REL:R words OBJ (...)

'poN ne Tε' 'uphyusiN Ka' 'ca 'θwa Tε
hide stay/inac.cc REL:R U Phyu Sin S. hear go/AUX:perf. PVF:R.
U Phyu Sin, who was hidden, heard the words said by [the blacksmiths].

- The notion of Serial Verbs Constructions (SVC) : See Déchaine (1993),
Durie (1997) or,
Aikhenvald & Dixon (2006)

2. Serial Verbs Constructions (SVC) : theoretical reminder

2.1 Definition

Bisang (1995 : 138) : « Verb serialization is the unmarked juxtaposition of two or more verbs or verb phrases (with or without subject and/or object) each of which would also be able to form a sentence on its own. »

Déchaine (1993 : 799) : « A serial verb construction is a succession of verbs and their complements (if any) in a single clause with one subject and one tense or aspect value. »

Comrie (1995 : 25) : « Many languages have a phenomenon whereby a sentence may contain a chain of verbs, sometimes separated by other elements, such that of the verbs in the chain either only one shows the full range of tense-aspect-mood oppositions or all the verbs are required to have the same values for (some) tense-aspect-mood oppositions. »

Durie (1997 : 290) : « The archetypal serial verb construction consists of a sequence of two or more verbs which in various (rather than strong) senses, together act like a single verb. »

Aikhenvald & Dixon (2006) : « A serial verb construction is a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination or syntactic dependency of any sort. »

- Difference between clause chain (15a) and SVC (15b)

(15) a. ... ပန်းကန်းထဲ ရေထည့်လက်ဆော်ပြီး ...

... pa'Khan 'the ye the' lə? 'she 'Pyi ...
... plate inside water to put hand wash SUB:tps
... after having poured water in the plate and having washed his hands...

- b. ବନ୍ଦୀପେର୍ମୁକା । ବନ୍ଦୀପେର୍ମୁକା ଠଙ୍ଗାଲାପ୍ରତ୍ୟ ॥
 θiNbø' pø Ma θiNbø' pø Ma Sø`Ka la 'þyø Te
 boat on LOC boat on LOC words come say PVF:R.
On the boat, on the boat, (she) came to me to talk.
 (litt. ... she came to tell me some words.)

2.2. Main Features

- unique event
- tense, aspect, modality and polarity information shared
- at least one argument shared, and one subject only
- None of the verbs of the CVS can be the syntactic argument of another verb of the SVC.
- Intonation of a single phrase.
- Strong tendency of SVC to move towards grammaticalization or lexicalization.

=> can possess only some of these features -> not a uniform phenomenon

=> two main types of SVC : Symmetrical SVC
 Asymmetrical SVC (*See Aikhenvald and Dixon, 2006*)

2.3. Symmetrical SVC

The main features of a symmetrical svc are :

- open class for the verbs
- iconicity
- unitary event (See Durie 1997: 321)
 - cognitive explanation
 - Socio-cultural explanation

- (16) ଓ ଯୁଷ୍ଵା: ବି ॥
 khoN yu 'θwa Pa Ø
 stool take go PV:POL (PVF:IMP)
Take the stool away [far from me].

- (17) ଝାଃନ୍ ତ୍ରୀଥାଃବି ॥
 'sha -nε' to' 'sa Pa Ø
 salt - with touch eat PV:POL (PVF:IMP)
Soak-(it) in salt (and) eat-(it).

2.4. Asymmetrical SVC

- limited class
- semantic change
- not necessarily iconic (see Durie, 1997 : 337)

Sub-categorization of asymmetrical SVC using semantic criteria

DeLancey (1991 : 3) : "The Tibeto-Burman languages manifest a considerable range of grammaticalized verb constructions. Thus the individual and comparative study of such constructions in various Tibeto-Burman languages provides insight into diachronic processes of serialization, auxiliarization and morphologization of originally independent lexical verbs."

- asymmetrical SVC sub-categories :

- directional SVC (see Givón (1991 : 83), Bisang (1996 : 149), Durie (1997 : 335)).
- aspectual, modal or temporal SVC (see Givón (1991 : 83), Bisang (1996 : 150))
- "valency" SVC (Givón (1991 : 82), Bisang (1996 : 152), Durie (1997 : 333-34)).
- comparative SVC

- manner SCV

3. Criteria used to analyze Burmese verbal phrase

3.1. Irrelevancy of criteria generally used in studies on SVC

- “Agreement” (tense, person), case marking, syntactic dependence, position of the arguments are not relevant.

(18)	ဟန် ချက် တယ်။
hiN	che?
soup	cook PVF:R. {I, you, he} cook {cooked} {a, some} soup

3.2. Criteria relevant for analysis of Burmese SVC

- assimilation of initial consonants (phonological criterion)
- semantic change linked with new function of an item (semantic criteria)
- place of the negation (syntactic criteria)
- insertion of a connector between the verbs of the SVC (syntactic criteria)

3.2.1. Description of the first criterion (phonological criterion):

- Assimilation of initial consonants in context of vowel and nasal consonant (see Bernot, 1980: 19-41), (Vittrant, 2004: 94, 150), (Vittrant, 2006)

=> Limited criteria : cannot be applied in case of some groups of syllables.

(19) a.	ဆားနဲ့ တို့စားပါ။
	`sha -ne' to' `sa Pa Ø
	salt - with touch eat PV:POL (PVF:IMP)
	Soak-(it) in salt (and) eat-(it).
b.	...မစော်းစားတတ်ဘူး။
	...ma `siN `sa ta? 'Phu
	... NEG mince- eat AUX:capac. PVF:NEG
	(I) cannot imagine...
c.	ခြင်း ဟာ သို့ကေား ကို ကိုယ်စား လိုက် တယ်။
	chiNθe'-ha `θoKə'le-Kokai? `sa lai? Te
	lion-TOP lamb-OBJ bite eat AUX:term. PVF:R.
	Le lion devoured the lamb.

3.2.2 Description of the second criterion : semantic change (or semantic bleaching)

Matisoff (1991 : 403): *One of the verbs in each concatenation [SVC in our terminology] is the verb-head or « Vh ». The others (the « juxtapositorily productive » or « versatile » verbs) stand in a semantically subordinate relationship to the head [...].*

Durie (1997 : 323) : « Related to lexicalization of particular verb combinations is the tendency for particular verbs to develop distinct meanings when used in serialization »

3.2.3. Description of the third criterion : inserting an item between the components of the SVC

The insertion of the temporal subordinating morpheme ပါး /'pyi/ between the two verbs of the SVC is correlated with a semantic change in (20) but not in (21).

- (20) a. ရွှေ့တန်းက သားတစ်ယောက် မွေးစားဖူး တယ် ။

ʃe'ToN-Ka'	θa	tə-yə?	'mwe-'sa	'Phu	Tε
In the past	son	one-CLF(hum)	adopt, rise up	PV:exper.	PVF:R.
<i>In the past, (he) has adopted a son.</i>					

- b. ကြိုက် မွေးပြီး စား တယ် ။

ce?	'mwe	'pyi	'sa	Tε
chicken	give birth, rise up	SUB	eat	PVF:R.
<i>(Il) rises up some chicken and eat (them).</i>				
or	<i>(Il) rises up chicken to eat [to earn his life].</i>			

- (21) a. ရှိုက်သဟံ လိုက် ပါ ။

yai?	θa?	lai?	Pa
bite	kill	AUX:term.	PV:POL
<i>Bite-(him) and kill (him) up!</i>			

- b. ရှိုက်ပြီးသဟံ လိုက် ပါ ။

yai?	'pyi	θa?	lai?	Pa
bite	SUB:tps	kill	AUX:term.	PV:POL
<i>Bite-(him) and kill (him) up!</i>				

- Insertion of a subordinating morpheme ပါး /'pyi/ => emphasis

- (22) a. ဒီသရှုံးကို ဆားနဲ့ တို့စားပါ । အဲဒါ အရာသာ ရှို့ရှုံးတယ် ။

di	θəye?	'θi	Ko	'sha nε'	to'	'sa	Pa
DEM	mango	OBJ	salt	with	touch	eat	PV:POL

'ɛ	da	?əyəθa	po	ʃi'	Tε
DEM:anaph.	this	taste	VV:be more	have	PVF:R.

Soak this mango in the salt (and) eat it. It is more tasteful.

- b. ဒီသရှုံးကို ဆားနဲ့ တို့ပြီးစားပါ ။ ဒါမှာမဟုတ်ရင် ရှိုရမ်းချဉ်တယ် ။

di	θəye?	'θi	Ko	'sha	nε'	to'	'pyi	'sa	Pa
DEM	mango	OBJ	salt	with		touch	SUB.	eat	PV:POL

da-ma'-mə-ho?-yiN	?ə'yəN	chiN	Tε
if not	very	be sour	PVF:R.

Soak this mango in the salt (and/ to) eat it. If not, it is very sour.

3.2.4. Description of the fourth criterion : place of the negation

Position of the negation marker in a SVC is known as an important criteria for Verbal Phrase analysis in South-East Asian languages. It is currently used to distinguish autonomous verbal morphemes from affixes.

See Matisoff (1991 : 393), Bjorverud (1998 : 86) for uses of this criterion in other SEA languages.

Matisoff (1991 : 393) : « This sort of development is highly typical of SEA languages in general. The pan-areal criteria for distinguishing full verbs from verb-particles are negatability [...]. »

(23) a. ... မစဉ်းစားတတ်ဘူး ||

...mə	'siN-'Sa	ta?	'Phu
... NEG	mince-eat	AUX:capac.	PVF:NEG
<i>(I) cannot imagine...</i>			

b. စဉ်းမစားတတ်ဘူး ||

... 'siN	mə	'sa	ta?	'Phu
... mince	NEG	eat	AUX:capac.	PVF:NEG
<i>(I) cannot eat (it) mincing (it).</i>				

or *(I) was not used to eat (it) mincing (it).*

(24) a. သူ ကျမကို မပြင်နိုင်.ဘူး ||

θu	cəma'	Ko	<u>mə</u>	myiN	naiN	'Phu
3SG	1SG (F.P.)	OBJ	<u>NEG</u>	see	AUX:capac.	PVF:NEG
<i>He cannot see me.</i>						

b. *သူ ကျမကို မြင် မနိုင်ဘူး ||

θu	cəma'	Ko	myiN	<u>mə</u>	naiN	'Phu
3SG	1SG (F.P.)	OBJ	see	<u>NEG</u>	to win/AUX:capac.	PVF:NEG
<i>*He cannot see me.</i>						

4. About Burmese Serial Verb Constructions (SVC)

4.1. Similarities and differences

- SVC express a **single process**,
=> monoclausality of the SVC shown in Burmese by single negation marker, single assertive morpheme (PVF).
- Open class vs. closed class.**
- Iconicity > symmetrical SVC**
- Semantic change > asymmetrical SVC.**

4.1.1. Properties of ‘true’ symmetrical SVC in Burmese

Core of features for all sub-types of symmetrical SVC :

- not a phonological unit
- semantic transparency
- independence of the verbs (open class)

BUT

- different behaviors regarding syntactic criteria (insertion of a subordinator and negation marker)
- behavior of symmetrical SVC with synonymous verbs and ‘pre-verbs’¹ is similar to lexicalized SVC behavior regarding the syntactic criteria.

4.1.2. Properties of lexicalized (symmetrical) SVC in Burmese

- phonological unit
- idiomatic meaning of the SVC
- No insertion possible (either subordinator or negation marker)

4.1.3. Properties of asymmetrical SVC in Burmese

The asymmetrical SVC do not have a lot in common.

¹ A ‘PRE-VERB’ is a verb that recurs in SVC, that appears as the first element of the SVC, and which function is to specify the process. See Allott & Okell (2001: 294), Bernot (1980 : 354 sq.), and Wheatley (1982 : 265), Vittrant (2004: 164-sq.), Vittrant (in press)

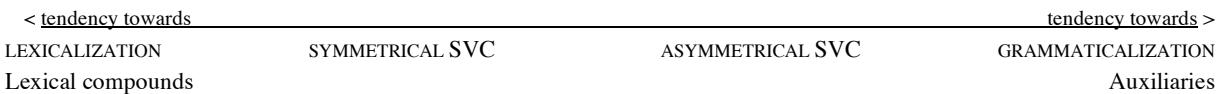
- the verbs of the SVC are not semantically independent
- subordinated verb as a modifier of the process expressed by V-head.
- limited class (syntactic or semantic) for of the subordinated verbs
- the semantic change is frequent but not systematic.
- Inconsistency of subordinating verb's position in the SVC

4.2. No clear-cut categories or a continuum

- continuum instead of fixed, discrete inventories of categories
- 4 prototypical categories to mark out the continuum

- (1) lexicalized sequence of verbs (compound verbs)
- (2) SVC symmetrical
- (3) SVC asymmetrical
- (4) sequences of verbs containing one (or more) grammaticalized verb(s) (auxiliaires)

Figure (1) : Continuum of Serial Verbs Constructions (SVC)



Durie (1997 : 291) : "There is a very strong diachronic tendency to lexicalization and grammaticalization of the meaning of serial complexes : this can involve treating the whole serial complex as a single lexical(ized) item, or 'demotion' of the meaning and grammatical status of one of the verbs to that of a modifier or case-marker."

- See also Lord (1993 : 215sq., 233), Aikhenvald (1999 : 483).

4.3. Conclusion :

- Notion of serial verb constructions was helpful for a more global approach of Burmese verbal phrase.
- No clear-cut categories but some tendencies. (See table 1)

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Abbreviations used

1(P)	first person	IR.	IRRÉALIS modality
2(P)	second person	itér.	iterative (aspect)
3(P)	third person	LOC	locative
acc	accompli (aspect)	NMZ	nominalizer
AdvER	adverbializer	perf.	perfect (acc.résult.)
ass.	assertion of speaker	perm.	permissive
AUX:	auxiliary	PLUR/plur.	plural (nominal / verbal)
capac.	capacity (modality)	POL	politeness
CLF	classifier	PP	Sentence final particle
const.	constative modality	prosp.	prospective (aspect)
SVC	Serial Verb Construction	PVF	final verbal particle
DEM.	demonstrative	PV	verbal particle
DEM:anaph.	demonstrative anaphore	R.	RÉALIS modality
DEM.dist	demonstrative(distant)	REL:R	relator marked for RÉALIS modality
dir.	directionnal	résult.	resultative (aspect)
emph.	emphasis	S.	source of the action (« ablative » or « nominative »)
excl.	exclamation	SG	singular
expér.	Marker of experience already done	SUB	subordinator
F.P.	woman speaking	spt	spacio-temporal
H.P.	man speaking	tps	temporal, tense
IMP	imperative	TOP	topic
inac.cc.	inaccompli - concomitant (progressive or stative aspect)	VV.	versatile verb (preverbal aux.)

Table (1) : Continuum of Burmese SVC and their features

Features	Lexicalized SVC	Symmetrical SVC						Asymmetrical SVC						Grammaticalized SVC	
		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Phonological Unit	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	
Insertion SUB	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
intrusive NEG	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	
external NEG	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	
Semantic change	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Semantic Subordination	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Vsub - Vh							+	+							
Vh - Vsub									+	+	+	+	+	+	
Example	/siN`Sa/ စိန္ဒာ	/swε-mε?/ စွမက	/swe-μa?/ စွမတ	/to-`sa/ တိစာ	/swε-`ye/ စွဲရေး	/po + V / ဝ	/tha? + V/ ထာ?	/V + ne/ နေ	/V + tha/ ထာ	/V + ta?/ တာ	/V + Ci/ ကြည့်	/V + Se/ စော			

Translations of the SVC (from left to right) :

/siN`Sa/ စိန္ဒာ « to think » (to mince-to eat),
 /swε-mε?/ စွမက « to hang on - to lust after»,
 /swe-μa?/ စွမတ « to hang on - to notice»,
 /to-`sa/ တိစာ « to soak - to eat»,
 /swε-`ye/ စွဲရေး « to hang on - write»,
 ဝ /po/ + V « be more V»,
 ထာ /tha?/ + V « re-do V»,
 နေ /ne/ + V « be V-ing» (inacc.cc aspect),
 ထာ /tha/ + V « to put-ASP : resultative»,
 တာ /ta?/ + V « to know -MOD : capacity»,
 ကြည့် /Ci/ + V « (to look)-to experiment V»,
 စော /Se/ + V « (to send)-make s.o. do, let V».