

Predicate-fronting and animacy in Burmese

Summary: In this work, I present novel data from fieldwork on Burmese predicate-fronting. I show that the availability of predicate-fronting in Burmese is sensitive to the animacy of the subject of the clause when the predicate moves across the subject. I argue that animate subjects and inanimate subjects are associated with different structural positions in the grammar of Burmese.

Data: Burmese has an SOV word order. A basic ditransitive clause in Burmese is given in (1). In all ditransitives here, the indirect object (IO) is in accusative case while the direct object (DO) does not receive overt case-marking.

- (1) Su-ga Aung-ko bopin pei-keh-deh.
Su-NOM Aung-ACC pen give-PAST-NFUT
'Su gave a pen to Aung.'

Burmese predicate-fronting involves the pronunciation of the verb root and its internal argument(s), if any, at the left periphery of the clause, with an inflected copy of the verb also pronounced in sentence-final position. Descriptively, I refer to arguments that appear between the two copies of the verb as "stranded". Predicate-fronting in Burmese has previously been discussed in [Ozerov & Daudey 2017](#) with reference to information and discourse structure, but syntactic constraints have not been noted.

Considering ditransitive constructions, we observe that only the IO can be stranded alone (2a) and not the DO (2b).

- (2) a. [Bopin pei-taung] Su-ga **Aung-ko** pei-keh-deh.
pen give-even Su-NOM Aung-ACC give-PAST-NFUT
b. * [Aung-ko pei-taung] Su-ga **bopin** pei-keh-deh.
Aung-ACC give-even Su-NOM pen give-PAST-NFUT
'Su even gave the pen to Aung.'

More interestingly, it turns out that subject animacy has an effect on the availability of predicate-fronting. (3) differs minimally from (2a) in the animacy of the subject. It seems that predicate-fronting is licit when the subject is animate (2a) but illicit when the subject is inanimate (3).

- (3) * [Bopin pei-taung] **saing-ga** Aung-ko pei-keh-deh.
pen give-even shop-NOM Aung-ACC give-PAST-NFUT
'The shop even gave the pen to Aung.'

However, it is not that predicate-fronting is simply incompatible with inanimate subjects. When the subject is itself at the left edge of the sentence, the verb and the DO can be fronted whether the subject is animate (*Su*) or inanimate (*saing*, 'shop').

- (4) {**Su/Saing**}-ga bopin pei-taung Aung-ko pei-keh-deh.
{Su/shop}-NOM pen give-even Aung-ACC give-PAST-NFUT
'{Su/The shop} even gave the pen to Aung.'

Here I only show ditransitives, but I will show at the talk that the effect of subject animacy is also relevant for unaccusative and unergative intransitives, transitives and derived ditransitives (causatives of transitives), in a manner predicted by the contrasts presented here.

Proposal: I propose that animate subjects can raise out of the *vP* unlike inanimate subjects that must remain in the *vP*, and that predicate-fronting is uniformly *vP*-movement in Burmese. I also propose that the IO can scramble out of the *vP* before *vP*-fronting, but the DO cannot.

Following [Landau's \(2006\)](#) and [Hein's \(2018\)](#) proposals for verb copying, I assume that the lexical verb is base-generated as the head of the VP before head-movement to *v*, then to T.

Normally, lower copies of head movement will be unpronounced, resulting in the entire verbal complex in T. However, with focus on the *vP*, a copy of the verb must be pronounced in *v* in order to host the focus particle, and the verb will also be pronounced in T to host the tense suffixes. I also assume that the highest DP in the *vP* (the subject) gets nominative case by Agree with T, whether or not it remains in that position in the final derivation.

(5) gives the schematic derivation for (2a) where predicate-fronting across an animate subject is grammatical. Here, both the animate subject and IO move out of the *vP* (5a). The *vP* is then fronted (5b).

- (5) a. [TP **Subj** [**IO** [_{*vP*} *t_{subj}* [_{*VP*} *t_{IO}* **DO V**]]=FOC] T]
 ↑
 [_{*vP*} *t_{subj}* [_{*VP*} *t_{IO}* **DO V**]]=FOC_{*i*} [TP **Subj** [**IO** *t_i*] T]
 ↑

In contrast to animate subjects, inanimate subjects necessarily stay in the *vP*. After the IO moves out of the *vP* (6a), fronting the *vP* constituent moves the subject together with the verb and DO (6b). This explains why the word order in (3), stranding the inanimate subject, is unavailable, but predicate-fronting including the inanimate subject is grammatical as in (4).

- (6) a. [TP [**IO** [_{*vP*} **Subj** [_{*VP*} *t_{IO}* **DO V**]]=FOC] T]
 ↑
 [_{*vP*} **Subj** [_{*VP*} *t_{IO}* **DO V**]]=FOC_{*i*} [TP [**IO** *t_i*] T]
 ↑

The word order in (4) with an animate subject could be due to a derivation where the subject stays in *vP* as in (6), or one where the subject moves to Spec,TP but then independently scrambles higher than the fronted *vP*.

Finally, to explain why the IO cannot be a stranded argument (2b), I tentatively suggest that the IO can scramble out of the *vP* before *vP*-fronting, but the DO cannot. A similar contrast to (2a) vs (2b) has been observed in Japanese and it has been explained by a remnant movement analysis (Tateishi 1991; Yatsushiro 1999). But such approaches do not extend to Burmese, as will be discussed at the talk.

More on the animacy effect: I show that the effect of animacy is specifically limited to grammatical subjects because of data from passives. Predicate-fronting is generally not sensitive to the animacy of internal arguments (data at talk). However, in a passive where an internal argument has been promoted to the grammatical subject, predicate-fronting is sensitive to the animacy of what is the grammatical subject and logical theme of the verb, as shown in (7).

- (7) C'icu-taung {[✓] sāya/*keq}-ga c'icu-keh-kanya-deh.
 praise-even { teacher/*cake}-NOM praise-PAST-PASS-NFUT
 ' {The teacher/*the cake} was even praised.'

Position of adjuncts: If time permits at the talk, I will give additional evidence from the word order facts with respect to adjuncts. I will discuss how (im)possible positions of high and low adverbs in the clause support the proposed analysis.

References: Hein 2018. *Verbal Fronting: Typology and Theory*, Leipzig dissertation · Landau 2006. Chain resolution in Hebrew V(P)-fronting, *Syntax* · Ozerov & Daudey 2017. Copy-verb constructions in Tibeto-Burman and beyond, *Linguistic Typology* · Tateishi 1991. *Syntax of Subjects*, UMass dissertation · Yatsushiro 1999. *Case Licensing and VP structure*, UConn dissertation