

# NOTES ON NYAHEUN GRAMMAR<sup>1</sup>

John J. Davis

1. Clause nuclei
2. Peripheral tagmemes
3. Verb phrase

## 1. *Clause nuclei*

### 1.1 *Intransitive clauses*

The intransitive clause nucleus may be represented in formula as:

(+ S + P) + Peri

S - subject tagmeme filled by a noun or noun phrase.

P - predicate tagmeme filled by a verb or verb phrase of the class of verbs which cannot take an object. Peri - peripheral tagmemes (see Sec.2).

Co a pat.	My dog got lost.
Sa ru beny.	you run fast.
Sa req hoq m <sub>1</sub> an n <sub>1</sub> y	Did you go to the field today, or not?

The normal S-P ordering of the nuclear tagmemes may be interrupted by the interpolation of a peripheral tagmeme, such as the question tagmeme:

Sa k<sub>1</sub>n kuu hoq 'be. You, is it, living there?  
Sa kuu hoq Pakse k<sub>1</sub>n. Do you live at Pakse, or not?

### 1.2 *Transitive clauses*

The transitive clause may be represented in formula as:

(+ S + P + O) + Peri

P - predicate tagmeme filled by a verb or verb phrase of the class of verbs which can take an object. O - object tagmeme filled by any noun or noun phrase.

A taany kræp 'ne.	I weave that basket.
A peny čeem.	I shot the bird.
Bæm heq.	Do it!

The normal ordering of S-P-O may either be interrupted by the interpolation of a peripheral tagmeme,

Tro sa k<sub>1</sub>n ca ple hli. Your buffalo question eating  
the corn?

or permuted to O-S-P if the object tagmeme is the point of focus of the clause.

Kræp 'ne a taany. That basket I wove.

### 1.3 *Ditransitive clauses*

Ditransitive clauses are present in Nyaheun, but their basic structure is not yet clear.

1.4 *Causative clauses*

The causative clause may be expressed in formula as:

( + Cr + Cv + IS + P + O/∅ ) + Peri

Cr - causer tagmeme filled by a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase. Cv - causative tagmeme filled by the morpheme 'mi. IS - intermediate subject tagmeme filled by a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase, becoming the actor or performer of the predicate action. P - predicate tagmeme filled by a verb phrase, either of a transitive or intransitive type. ∅ - empty object tagmeme in the presence of an intransitive verb in the predicate tagmeme.

A 'mi sa rəq. I cause you to go. (I send you.)

Crəəp 'mi a bəəm. He cause me to do.

A 'mi sa rəq hoom hoq I cause you to go bathe at the daak nyrəh. creek.

1.5 *Adjectival complement clauses*

The adjectival complement clause does not have a predicate, but has an adjectival equative functioning like a verb. This clause type may be expressed in formula as:

( + S + AC ) + Peri

AC - adjectival complement tagmeme filled by an adjectival phrase.

Krək tih. The cow is big.

Krək 'nə tih riik That cow is big and fat. matmaat.

1.6 *Equative clauses*

The equative clause may be represented in formula as:

( + S + Cop + NC ) + Peri

Cop - copula tagmeme filled by copulas such as *muuy hnii* 'one kind'. NC - noun complement tagmeme filled by a noun or noun phrase which is in complement to the noun phrase of the subject tagmeme.

Hnge wan can. Tomorrow is Monday.

'Ləəng 'nə 'ləəng k(ar. This wood is kiar wood.

Yaq mat waal muuy hnii Elder big eyes is the same as kl(a. tiger.

1.7 *Clause fragments*

Clause fragments, although consisting of only one noun, adjective, locative, verb, negative or question marker are a very frequent meaningful part of Nyaheun speech. Normally fragment clauses are either questions or solicited answers to questions.

Toy. Where?

Miny. Never!

'Mah 'nə What is that?

A common greeting is a combination of two clause fragments:

1st speaker: əən jiq. No hurt? (Are you well?)

2nd speaker: əən. No. (Yes I'm well.)

2. *Peripheral tagmemes*

Peripheral tagmemes include setting temporals, duration temporals, instrument, location, question, aspect, adverbial

prepositional, final particles (exclamations), negatives, initial particles (ejaculations), and initial introducers. Aspect (condition of action) and adverbial/prepositional have not been studied out yet.

### 2.1 *Setting temporals*

Temporals are divided into two types, those which indicate the clause action setting, and those which indicate the clause action duration. Setting temporals may occur along with duration temporals clause initially, but setting temporals only very rarely occur following the clause nucleus, and then never along with another temporal.

*Naq tangkō nuan mēew wa klaang hnim bēen. Once upon a time* the cat and eagle played together.

*Kō nuan naay thaw duu muan dūny čam dūny. Long ago* Mr. Theaw was a witch-doctor for a very long time.

### 2.2 *Duration temporals*

Duration temporals relate to the verb of the nucleus and in some way modify it in relation to the duration of the action. They may appear either preceding the nucleus or following it. Temporals and instruments are never found adjacent to each other; if the temporal tagmeme occurs preceding or within the clause nucleus, the instrument tagmeme will follow the nucleus, or vice versa.

*Bəəč dūny a muan. I've been a witch-doctor a long time*

*Bəəč baan nge a čuay m(ān h). For two days already I've been planting my field.*

### 2.3 *Instrument*

The instrument tagmeme is manifested by a noun phrase normally accompanied by the morpheme *di* either preceding the instrument phrase or at the end of the clause, and answers the question "With what was the action of the predicate performed?"

*A peny čeem di hnyra. I shot the bird with the cross-bow.*

*Di 'lōong 'nē a bēem hnyraam. With this wood I make a house.*

*Həək wa hnyra 'nē a giit ruas di. This spear and crossbow I killed the elephant with.*

### 2.4 *Location*

Locatives are words or phrases which describe the location of the action of the nucleus. Very often, but not always, locatives such as *t(āq* 'below, *daq* 'at, in', *hoq* 'at, in', *n(ngq* 'up', distinguish the locative phrase.

*Bēan čuay hoq m(ān a. They are planting at my field.*  
*A nuan jjo buay truung I'll go first, hunting along meq. the way.*

*Hoq m(ān a wun pr(at u. In my field there are many bananas.*

*Jəep n(ngq a. Visit with me.*

### 2.5 *Questions*

The question tagmeme is manifested by interrogative words or phrases, often with a part of the question marker

before the clause nucleus and part after, often using words which are questions: *toy* 'where', *k<sub>1</sub>n* 'or not', combined with the final particles 'nge, hme, dah.

*Toy sa req nge.* Where are you going?

*Tro sa k<sub>1</sub>n ča ple hli.* Is it your buffalo or not eating the corn?

'Mah a bæm a dəep sa. What am I doing loving you?

'Mah sa bæm 'nge.' What are you doing?

Questions are also formed by combining the negative

*əən* with a verb, or with an adverb such as *ceh* 'finished'.

*Hap 'ne sa teč loh əən.* This blouse are you selling or not?

*Hap 'ne sa loh teč əən.* This blouse are you able to sell?

*Sa məet drək əən.* Do you want to go?

2.6 Final particles (exclamations)

Almost every utterance of normal speech is begun and ended by an ejaculation or exclamation. These seem to be the mood setters, but it is not yet clear whether they can be handled on a level higher than the clause. The most common final particle is *yəq*, which is a mild command word. It is not unlike English 'please'.

*Jəp n<sub>1</sub>ngq a yəq.* Visit with me please.

2.7 Negatives

The negative *əən* occurs before the verb, before or after the subject.

*əən jiq.* Not hurting.

*əən a loh sa.* I don't know you.

*A əən məet req.* I don't want to go.

Sometimes, possibly to strengthen the negative, a pronoun subject may be repeated between the negative and the verb.

*A əən a jiq.* No, I'm not hurting.

When a verb or predicate has already been stated in the positive, in a following negation of it the negative can stand alone, dropping the verb or predicate.

*Braang ε hyak klaang bič klə, məew duu əən.* And then the eagle got a husband, but the cat didn't.

2.8 Initial particles (ejaculations)

Ejaculations are probably features of the sentence level rather than of the clause level, but for now we will handle them here. They normally occur clause initially, but they may appear finally in some instances. There are various emotional contexts which elicit various ejaculations, as *keet* surprise, *soq mat* anger, *y<sub>1</sub>aq* or *h<sub>1</sub>aq* mildly derogatory.

*Keet,* 'mah lot 'ne loh Oh, how can that truck be so big!

*Soq mat, a əən a t<sub>1</sub>.* (Mild oath), I didn't see it.

*Y<sub>1</sub>aq, muny sa b<sub>1</sub>h.* Hey, when did you get back?

2.9 Initial introducer

Introducers, the words and phrases which form the grammatical 'glue' for holding a narrative together, probably belong on a higher level than the clause, but

will be treated here for now. They appear far more frequently in a narrative than in normal speech.

Braang ε hyak klaang bič klɔ. And then the eagle got a husband.

Ceh ε klaang bic kuan klaang ngony bæm wiak. And then, as soon as the eagle had her child, she wanted to go to work.

### 3. *Verb phrase*

Many of the verb-related modifiers and conditioners have been dealt with on the clause level by various peripheral tagmemes, leaving the predicate tagmeme filled by one of five types of verbs: simple, compound, interrupted, repeated, or intentional.

#### 3.1 *Simple verbs*

Simple verbs are the minimal form which may fill the predicate slot, and are of two types, one which can take an object (transitive), and the other which cannot (intransitive). They may be conditioned by words occurring in the aspect peripheral tagmeme slot, or negated by negatives, or modified by adverbials/prepositions.

Toy sa req. Where are you going?

A ruat hap. I buy a blouse.

əən a ləh sa. I don't know you.

#### 3.2 *Compound verbs*

Compound verbs are strings of two or three verbs of equal status, that is they can all equally function in isolation as simple or main verbs, but are all important in the string to convey the exact meaning of the verb.

A req ssaay. I go fishing.

A req ruat teč. I go to buy and sell.

A trə čuat nar nnəng. I got pierced by the horn of a catfish.

Sa mmat rəng wiak a You take care of my things.  
yoq.

#### 3.3 *Interrupted verbs*

For adding 'color' to their speech the Nyaheun often use verb doublets which are of nearly the same meaning, often interrupted by the repeated subject. We could call these verbs "poetic" instead of interrupted. The initial noun or pronoun of the subject or object of the verb is optional.

Me ggən a drək a req hoq n(ngq) kr(ɔ)m. They carried me as I went I went on my way to the sky.

A nyeh a wun sina cawq phaɣ mi bun. I am I am indeed the secretary of the god.

Təq kahiing čreh a t(ɰ) a tat. When the rat bites I break I break.

#### 3.4 *Repeated verbs*

For emphasis or for poetic rhythm the same verb is repeated, with a different noun or pronoun in the object or subject slot. In the case of a compound verb only the second, or main verb, is repeated.

Me pləq ʒəuu krɪm ʒəuu brəh. He *revealed* the plan of the sky *revealed* the plan of the earth.

Trii rəq dang hɔ'ɔ dang nna. Wife went to seek stew food.

Me ʒək trii ʒək klɔ pak pɪt. She *took* wife *took* husband behind his back. (She committed adultery.)

### 3.5 *Intentional verbals*

Intentional verbals such as *ngony* 'want', *məət* 'like', *ʒəuu* 'plan' precede the simple main verb and add the dimension of intention to the verb. In normal speech nothing may be interposed between the intentional and main verb, but for poetic rhythm this may occasionally happen.

A əən məət rəq. I don't *want* to go.

A *ngony* bič kuan u. I *want* to have many children.

Ny iny a ʒəuu rəq tɪaq pakse. Today I *plan* to go to Pakse.

## FOOTNOTES

1. This is an initial sketch of Nyaheun grammar, written at an S.I.L. workshop at Nhatrang, October 1969. Since only one and a half weeks were available for this study, it is in no way exhaustive, nor is it complete, but rather should serve only as a guide for future study, and as a method of preserving this initial data. It is based on several years' residence and study in the Boloven area of Laos.