

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The Akha language has a great number of particles that play an important role in grammar. Those particles can be divided into two groups, phrase particles and sentence particles. The phrase particles may be further divided into verb particles, noun particles, adverb particles and adjective particles, which mainly function to modify the respective phrases.

The sentence particles mainly function as sentence type markers of different categories of sentences that come under three major categories: declarative, jussive and interrogative. Beside these major functions, most particles may also function as subject person marker, positive/negative marker and tense marker.

This thesis will discuss Akha sentence particles as spoken by Jerway speakers from North-eastern Myanmar, Northern Thailand, South-western Yunnan and North-western Laos. The Jerway dialect, which is regarded as the standard Akha dialect upon which written Akha is based, has more sentence particles than other Akha dialects. Some Akha dialects, which are geographically distant from the Jerway dialect, have lost some important sentence particles and this poses a major obstacle in dialect intelligibility.

1.1 General information

1.1.1 Language names

The Akha are known by a variety of exonymns in the various regions of Southeast Asia.

The Tai peoples of Shan State, Myanmar, have used the name 'I Kaw' to refer to the Akha, a contemptuous name with a feminine connotation, as some Akha take it, since they are usually neutral in inter-people-group conflicts. This was shortened to 'Kaw', a derogatory name that they are still often called. Contemporary Akha think that any name with the syllable 'Kaw' is a contemptuous reference to them. A few years ago the Akha Cultural Committee of Myanmar complained about these negative names, and 'Akha' was adopted as the new official name by the Myanmar government (Kya Heh 1999a).

Akha is officially called 'Ai Ni', or 'Za Ni', in China and included under the Hani nationality. 'Kha Kaw' is their common name in Laos and Vietnam. The Lahu and the Karen call them 'Taw Kaw'. The Akha have also been referred to by the following names (and spellings of names) in various written materials: Aini, Aka, Ak'a, Ekaw, Ekwa, Ikaw Khao, Ikho, Ikor, Khako, Kha Ko, Ko and Woni.

1.1.2 Population

The Ethnologue Grimes (2000) suggests a total population of 450,000, distributed as follows: 103,600 in China, 103,600 in Myanmar, 60,000 in Thailand, 58,000 in Laos, and 1,261 in Vietnam.¹ The most recent Akha self-estimates of population are: Total 1,230,000; China 700,000, Myanmar 400,000, Thailand 70,000, Laos 60,000 (Akha Cultural Committee of Myanmar, 1994).

It seems that population between 400,000 and 500,000 is reasonable estimate, although no adequate, comprehensive census data is available.

¹ The Ethnologue figures for China are based on a 1990 estimate, Myanmar on a 1991 estimate by United Bible Societies. Thailand on a 1998 estimate. Laos and Vietnam on a 1995 estimate by the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Hanoi.

1.1.3 Geographical distribution

The homeland of the Akha is China, in Southwest Yunnan (Xixuanbanna and Lacang Prefectures) where the great majority still live (Lewis 1984). Akha also live in Myanmar (Burma), in the eastern part of Keng Tung District in the Shan State. Smaller populations of Akha live in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son Provinces of northern Thailand, extreme northern and northwest Laos (Phongsali and adjacent areas) and northern Vietnam.

1.2 Review of relevant literature

Several linguists have made important contributions to the linguistic study of Akha dialects spoken mostly in Thailand and adjacent areas of Burma. These include Inga-Lill Hansson, Paul Lewis, David Bradley, David Whitley Dellinger, Søren Egerod and Makio Katsura. Their contributions will be summarized in two categories: phonological interpretation and grammatical description.

1.2.1 Phonology

Inga-Lill Hansson, of Lund University, Sweden, has spent more than two decades conducting extensive linguistic research among the Akha in northern Thailand (1985, 1988, 1989..). Hansson's earlier contribution was phonological comparisons of some Akha and Hani dialects. She compared Hani data with the main dialect of Akha spoken in Thailand and Myanmar based mainly on her own files from Thailand and on Lewis' (1986) data from Myanmar.

David Bradley (1996), of Latrobe University, Australia, has contributed to a wider view of Akha dialects, interpreting the internal phonological relations of Akha dialects spoken in China, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, as well as their phonological relationship with other Loloish languages. In his article 'Tibeto-Burman Languages of PDR Lao' he presents 15 Akha subgroups with official names given by

the Laotian government (Kophen, Ko Chi cho, Pou Ly, Pa Na, Phou Khoua, Lou Ma, Mou chy, Oe Pa, Chy Piau, Mou toe, Py Xo, Py Lou, O Ma, Ma Mouang, Kong Sat)and nine additional smaller Akha sub-groups (Pusang, Boche, Nuki/Nuquay, Nuchi, Rala, Chapo, Mukuy and Akui). According to his report, there are 24 Akha sub-groups in PDR Laos alone!

In an earlier paper 'Akha and southern Loloish' Bradley (1977) gives a general description of Akha and Hani dialects so far studied to give an overall picture of the language subgroup in Southern China and adjacent areas in South-east Asia.

Paul Lewis, who created the most popular Akha orthography, has described Akha phonology in several articles. The descriptions he made on Akha consonants, vowels, tones, syllable formation and phonological change are important contribution to Akha linguistics.

In his article 'Tone in the Akha language' Lewis (1973) describes important features of Akha tones such as tone structure, syntactic tonal change, tone and Akha music, tone change through time, and the relation between the tones and the two classes of vowels he distinguishes as oral vowels and pharyngealized vowels. An interesting analysis made by him is that the percentage of each tone used in the spoken Akha language is: 33% high tone, 25% mid tone, 29% low tone, 4.5 % laryngealized mid tone, and 8.5 % laryngealized low tone.

Makio Katsura (1966) describes the phonology of the Alu dialect, which he mentioned as one of the Akha dialects spoken in Thailand. The phonology is similar to the Jerjaw dialect, the second largest sub-group of Akha spoken in Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. His phonology of Alu has the same quantity of tonemes as other Akha dialects. However, his interpretation of high and low tones as contour tones is interesting because all Akha dialects spoken in Mainland Southeast Asia, except the three Luma dialects spoken in Northern Lao and Southern Yunnan that have tone

similarity with the Akhui language, are rather conservative with high and low registered tones. The dialect name 'Alu' itself is not known to native Akha speakers in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

1.2.2 Grammar

Dellinger's Aspects model described Akha grammar based on Chomsky (1965). His work provides worthwhile information on the structure of Akha grammar. The description of the syntactic component, especially the role of verb particles in phrase level, is excellent whereas the descriptions on the phonological and semantic components are rather weak. Furthermore, he makes no distinction between phrase particles and sentence particles.

Segments smaller than word are omitted in his analysis. He makes the point clear that the Akha grammar is not a rigidly explicit sort of transformational grammar, rather that he has sought to couch his explanations in the framework of transformational theory (page iii). His transformational description focuses solely on the syntactic and phonological components, leaving out the semantic component. The syntactic component is divided into two parts, the base component and the transformational component. The base component itself is further divided into two parts, the categorical subcomponent and the lexicon.

While Dellinger's Akha grammar provides an excellent picture of the surface structure, it fails to describe the underlying meaning changes that come along with the changed constituent order in the surface structure.

Inga-Lill Hansson contributed worthwhile information on Akha grammar through a number of articles and presentations. In her article 'Object Verb in Akha: The ABB Structure (1996b),' she presents numerous examples of noun-verb constructions---syntactically mostly object-verb---where the verb has the same phonetic shape as the

second syllable of the preceding noun (ABB), which are sometimes referred to as cognate object constructions.

In her article 'Verb Concatenation in Akha,' Hansson (1985) describes which position the various verbs can have inside a concatenation, the semantic components involved, and the verbal auxiliaries that can intervene in the concatenation. In another article, 'The Word Order of Akha Nouns,' describes the locations of Akha nouns through recorded texts, comprising 14000 words of stories, narratives, interviews and conversations. She states that a pronoun as a subject has a tendency to be manifest as zero anaphora when not stressed or in contrast, especially in questions.

1.2.3 Particles

Some information contributed by Paul W. Lewis, Inga-Lill Hansson and Søren Egerod sheds light on Akha particles. Lewis, a former missionary linguist among the Akha in Myanmar, gives a basic semantic interpretation of some particles in an unpublished paper titled 'Final Particles in Akha' (1978) and did give a basic semantic interpretation. Nonetheless, he stopped short of classifying the particles or assigning grammatical terms to them.

Inga-Lill Hansson (1996a) has written an interesting article entitled 'The Interplay Between the Verb Particle 'ə' and the Sentence Particles in Akha,' in which sentence particles (sP) and final particles (fP) are clearly contrasted with adverb particle.(aP), noun particles (nP) and verb particles (vP). Hansson and Egerod's 'Aspects of Akha Grammar,' (1976) is indeed a very interesting article that analyses the contrast between the evidential sensorial sentence particles with non-evidential sentence particles and non-sentence particles. This article also describes one system of sentence particles which distinguishes the contrasting features of 'first person prime mover – non-first person prime mover', 'past – non-past', 'expectation – non-expectation', and 'positive – negative'.

Søren Egerod's description of the bigeneric nature of the Akha verb and tone difference on the verb particle (suffix) *-ə* as tense marker in his article 'Typological Features in Akha' further describes the role of sentence particles in Akha grammar. The following elaboration in his article shows how sophisticated semantic expressions are packed up in the particles:

If we consider the relationship of the speaker (or the prime mover) to the utterance we find that the Akha system of sentence particles in each utterance takes a stand on whether it is a matter of a first move, a lead, a beginning, or not; whether it is an accord, an assertion or not; whether it is a matter of knowledge or not; and whether there is personal involvement or not... (1985:120).

Egerod presents the structural relationship of particles in concatenation, which is the most sophisticated part of Akha morphology. He also presents a good picture of phonemic representation and phonetic variation in-tonal sandhi of Akha language. He distinguishes sentence particle from the phrase particles that share identical phonetic form, a valuable contribution to Akha morphology.

1.3 The goal of this thesis

Akha sentence final particles, like those of other Yi-Burmese languages of the Tibeto-Burman language family, play a very important role in the grammar. These small dependent grammatical units not only determine whether a statement is factual, or evidential, or predictive, or conjecture, but also disclose the attitude and emotion of the speaker.

This thesis is part of a larger effort to understand the role of particles in Akha-Hani dialects specifically, and in Yi-Burmese languages generally. The goal of this thesis is to describe the structure and function of the Akha sentence final particles as spoken by Jerway dialect speakers. This thesis will first and foremost serve a descriptive

purpose. It is hoped that this description will serve as inspiration for scholars interested in the theoretical implications of particle usage in southeast Asia.

1.4 Methodology

The data of this research is from a variety of resources such as recorded texts, observed conversation, and personal knowledge. Most of the declaratives, some of jussives and interrogatives are from selected published folktales (Lewis 1989). The remaining examples were drawn from observation of daily communication and personal knowledge since the researcher himself is a native speaker of the Jerway dialect.

Only those particles that function as sentence finals were selected for this research. The particles were then sorted into three broad categories based on sentence type: declaratives, jussives, and interrogatives. The particles that do not fit into any of these categories are analyzed in miscellaneous category.

The declaratives are analyzed in seven subcategories: statement, weak assertion, probability, possibility, appreciation, contra-expectation, and negative prediction. The jussives are analyzed in eight subcategories: command, negative imperative, mitigative, exhortative, hortative, proposal, advisory and precaution. The interrogatives are analyzed in two subcategories: Content questions and Yes-No questions.

Each particle is described in terms of its structure and function: the structure is illustrated in examples and the functions are summarized in a table which describes functional loads of of each particle in four categories such as sentence type restrictions, subject-person reference restrictions, temporal reference and polarity marking.

Particles that have similar phonetics, structure and function are carefully compared and contrasted to each other so that each particle can be thoroughly determined. Each particle is given a technical identification code number for category identification as well for easier reference in cross-sectional discussion (see Abbreviations for a description of the coding).

PAYYAP UNIVERSITY