

# An Analytical Study of the Burmese Aspectual System of Dialects Spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar

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## Abstract

This research is part of my dissertation ‘An Analytical Study of the Burmese Aspectual System of Dialects Spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar’ for MCU and Thailand Research Fund. It aims to explain the syntactic and semantic structures of pre- $V_N$  operator aspect and post- $V_N$  operator aspect. aspects of (Inthar) Dialects spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar. The Burmese aspectual system generally can be divided into two major categories: pre- $V_N$  and post- $V_N$ . According to Nicoletta, R. (2008: 19), the Burmese aspect is shown using markers bound to the main verb, whose combination constitutes the verbal complex, where most of the semantic and functional information is stored. Burmese being a verb-final language, most of the markers that pertain to the main verb follow it, linked to it and to each other by segmental and, possibly, tonal sandhi, morpho-phonological modifications known collectively as close juncture. To add an interesting view to this study, the Inthar dialect spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar has been compared with the Danubyu dialect to point out real characteristics of the Burmese aspectual system. The comparison with the Inthar dialect spoken in Danubyu demonstrates how the three bounded aspects of the two Danubyu dialects are expressed. The language contact with Inthar in Danubyu is probably pointed out as one factor by which the bounded aspects in Inthar Danubyu are distinguished from those in the Inthar dialect.

**Keywords :** Aspect, Burmese, Operator, Verbal, Semantics, Syntax, Pragmatics

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## Introduction

Aspect is a verbal category that describes how a situation is viewed in terms of its internal temporal constitution, while time relates to the temporal location of an event. The aspect indicates the temporal structure of an event, whereas time relates it to another time, often the time of speech. Additionally, this chapter mentions modality, which is another category used by speakers to describe events and is distinguished based on three parameters.

In Burmese language's system of expressing aspect and modality through various forms in the sentence. It mentions the lack of a clear grammaticalized expression for time in Burmese, though there is a related form, -ꨀ [khé], which indicates displacement in time and is used by native speakers to indicate past tense (Okell and Allott, 2001: 24-25). However, its status as a time marker is uncertain due to its origin and non-binding nature. The present study focuses only on describing the aspectual system of Burmese and suggests further research to determine whether the language exhibits signs of a temporal category since it is traditionally considered tenseless.

In Burmese, aspect, modality, and other pragmatic details are expressed through markers attached to the main verb, forming the verbal complex where significant semantic and functional information is contained. As Burmese is a verb-final language, most markers related to the main verb appear after it and are connected to each other through segmental and tonal changes known as close juncture. Some aspectual markers may be prefixed to the main verb, and in such instances, they assimilate with the consonant at the beginning of the main verb without being affected by juncture (Comrie, 1985).

The other factor that contributes to the analysis of aspectual markers in Burmese, focuses on their position relative to the main verb and other grammatical markers in the verbal complex. To gain insights, the text suggests comparing Burmese with Lahu, a Tibeto-Burman language from the

Loloish branch, which shares significant similarities with Burmese. Lahu demonstrates ease in combining verbs and function forms derived from verbs to form a coherent verbal complex. As Matisoff says:

*Lahu verb concatenation is of considerable interest for its own sake, but this phenomenon also raises some very general questions concerning the interrelationships of semantics and syntax. Specifically, there is a well-defined class of cases where the evidence indicates that it is the inherent semantic features of individual verbs that actually determine the structural descriptions of con-catenations. (Matisoff, 1973)*

An illustration showcasing the structural flexibility of the verbal complex in Burmese is presented below:

- |     |     |                           |                   |
|-----|-----|---------------------------|-------------------|
| (1) | (a) | တစ်ရံ့ရောအခါ              | စံကင်း-ရွာ=မှာ    |
|     |     | təyã yə ək <sup>h</sup> à | sã kī-ywà= mə     |
|     |     | once upon a time          | Sankin-village=AT |
|     |     | လူငယ်လေး-တစ်ယောက်         | ရှိ-တယ်           |
|     |     | lù nɛ̀ léi- tí? = yau?    | ʃi= tɛ            |
|     |     | Boy-1=CLASS               | be=REAL           |

*‘Once upon a time, in the village of Sankin, there was a boy (called Min That Naung)’*

- |     |  |  |                    |
|-----|--|--|--------------------|
| (b) | မောင်မျိုးက  | မိဘ=များ=ရဲ့   | လယ်-အလုပ်-မှာ      |
|     | maʊ myó=ká   | mj <sub>2</sub> ba <sub>2</sub> = myá= ye <sub>2</sub> | lè-əlɔʊ? - mə      |
|     | Maung Myo= SUBJ  | parent = PL = POSS                                     | field-work (N)= AT |
|     | ဝိုင်း = ကူ-လုပ်ကိုင် = ပေး = လေ့ = ရှိ = တယ်၊                     |  |                    |
|     | wáí = kù- lɔʊ? kǎí = péi = lej <sub>2</sub> = ʃi <sub>2</sub> = tè |  |                    |
|     | GATHER=help-do for a living=BE=HAB=BE=REAL                         |  |                    |

*Maung Myo used to help his parents with farm work (after going to school)*

In (1a), the minimal composition of the verbal complex comprises the primary verb -ရှိ၍ [ʃi] ‘be’, followed by the clausal marker -တယ် [tɛ] indicating ‘REALIS’. This marker both concludes the sentence and designates it for assertion. In (1b), the principal verbs -ကူ [ku] ‘help’ and -လုပ်ကိုင် [loʊʔ kəi] ‘do for a living’ is marked by the bound forms -ဝိုင်း [wáɪ] signifying ‘GATHER’, -ပေး [péi] representing ‘BENEFACTIVE’, -လေ့ [léj] denoting ‘HABITUAL’, and -ရှိ၍ [ʃi] signifying ‘BE’. These forms are derived from the main verbs -ဝိုင်း [wáɪ] ‘gather around’, -ပေး [péi] meaning ‘give’, -လေ့ [léj] ‘acquire a habit’, and -ရှိ၍ [ʃi] ‘be’, respectively. These verbs are employed to express concepts that other languages convey using various grammatical methods, such as adpositional phrases for benefactive, aspectual markers for habitual and continuous, and tense/modal markers for past time reference/realis. In contrast to Lahu, Burmese distinguishes bound forms, which researchers refer to as operators, from their former main verb counterparts through the presence of close juncture.

Furthermore, these verbs manifest themselves within the verbal complex in a distinctly non-random sequence. For instance:

- |     |     |           |  |
|-----|-----|-----------|--|
| (2) | (a) | ကွန်ပျူတာ | သင် = ချင် = နေ = တယ်                              |
|     |     | kũ pyù tà | θi = ʃhi = nèi = tɛ                                |
|     |     | computer  | learn = WANT = CONT = REAL                         |
|     |     |           | <i>‘[He] continued to want to learn computer’</i>  |
|     | (b) | ကွန်ပျူတာ | သင် = နေ = ချင် = တယ်                              |
|     |     | kũ pyù tà | θi = nèi = ʃhi = tɛ                                |
|     |     | computer  | learn = CONT = WANT = REAL                         |
|     |     |           | <i>‘[He] wanted to continue to learn computer’</i> |

The order of the operators, namely -ချင် [ʃhi] ‘WANT’ and -နေ [nèi] ‘CONTINUOUS’, which are derived from the main verbs -ချင် [ʃhi] ‘want’ and -နေ [nèi] ‘stay; live’, plays a crucial role in determining their function and

meaning in relation to the event structure they describe. In example (2a), the operator -ချင် [tʃɪn] ‘WANT’ has scope over the main verb -သင် [θɪ] ‘learn’, whereas -နေ [nèi] ‘CONTINUOUS’ modifies the sequence [learn-WANT], resulting in the meaning ‘continue to learn’. Conversely, in (2b), it is -နေ [nèi] ‘CONTINUOUS’ that takes scope over -သင် [θɪ] ‘learn’, while -ချင် [tʃɪn] ‘WANT’ modifies the sequence [learn-CONTINUOUS], yielding the meaning ‘want to continue to learn’. The semantics of these operators, which are derived from the semantics of their source verbs, generally determine both their order relative to the main verb and their order relative to other operators within the verbal complex. This observation aligns with Matisoff’s findings regarding Lahu, where he acknowledges the existence of what he terms ‘plural verbs’ that occur in conjunction with the main verbs of a sentence (Matisoff, 1973).

This study aims to describe the Burmese aspectual system of a dialect spoken in Danubyu Township, Myanmar. Burmese has its distinct aspectual system with interesting features. It contains many aspect markers coding different temporal meanings. It might be questionable whether the aspectual system of Burmese is one of the unique characteristics that separate operators of Burmese from other Myanmar dialect groups. To answer this question, the analysis of Burmese is compared to that of Danubyu township parts. In addition, Intha dialects spoken in Dhanubyu township, Myanmar are less studied when compared with other dialect spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar, and most of the studies of Burmese in Myanmar re those on phonology, though there are many interesting grammatical features such as analysis operator’s markers that are left out.

## Objectives of Research

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the aspectual system of Burmese in terms of the syntactic and semantic functions of aspect in Burmese.

2. To analyze if the dialects spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar have any influence on Burmese's aspectual system.

3. To illustrate the aspectual characteristics shared by Burmese that represent the areal typologies of languages Burmese in Myanmar.

## Research Methodology

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were collected from 60 respondents through the use of questionnaires, while qualitative data were gathered from 11 lecturers through open interviews. The questionnaire focused on analyzing the syntactic and semantic functions of aspects, with particular attention to common aspectual operator characteristics shared by Burmese representing language typologies in the Burmese areal context. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques.

## Results of Research

This finding analyzed explored the common aspectual characteristics found among dialects spoken in Danubyu Township representing the areal typologies of languages in Burmese, Myanmar. The subsequent sections focus on the order and function of the verbal operators, which are frequently encountered in Burmese. The study thoroughly discusses the meanings, functions, and structures of these operators, forming the core based on data collected from face-to-face interviews in Danubyu Township, Myanmar.

### 1. Results of the Pre-V<sub>N</sub> Operators

In the forthcoming sections, the researcher shall provide a concise description of several typical grammatical forms that take up the pre-V<sub>N</sub> slot in the verbal complex, i.e. the operators –မ [mə] 'NEGATIVE<sub>1</sub>', –ပြန် [pyǎ] 'RETURN', –လှမ်း [lǎ] 'REACH OUT', –တို့ [wái] 'TOGETHER' and –ပေး [péi] 'LET'.

### 1.1 Pre-V<sub>N</sub> Operators –မ [mə] ‘NEGATIVE<sub>1</sub>’ (NEG<sub>1</sub>)

In spoken Burmese, in independent clauses used to express a negative statement, the two markers within the verbal complex usually co-occur, as in the pre-V<sub>N</sub> operator –မ [mə] ‘NEGATIVE<sub>1</sub>’ (NEG<sub>1</sub>) immediately precedes the main verb and the post-V<sub>N</sub> operator –ဘူး [bú] ‘NEGATIVE<sub>2</sub>’ (NEG<sub>2</sub>) is located at the end of the clause, showing complementary distribution with other operators that identify clausal categories, such as status and illocutionary force. Okell and Allott argue that “... –ဘူး [bú] in itself carries no negative meaning: it only marks the conclusion of a negative statement” (Okell & Allott, 2001). Thus, –မ [mə] ‘NEG<sub>1</sub>’ carries the heaviest semantic load, identifying the type of negation as external, encompassing the entire proposition under its scope. It is worth noting that in RRG, external negation belongs to the category of status operators, alongside epistemic modality and categories like realis/irrealis. Burmese is interesting because while status operators (as well as all clausal operators) usually follow the main verb and have scope over all the forms to their left, including the entire clause, –မ [mə] ‘NEG<sub>1</sub>’ precedes the main verb and yet retains scope over the entire clause.

The two markers usually co-occur within the verbal complex in spoken Burmese when used to express a negative statement in independent clauses, as in (U Thein Soe, 2023):

- (3) နောက် = ရက်                      မ = ရ = နိုင် = ဘူး  
 nau? = ye?                              mə = ra = nǎi = bú  
 next = day                                NEG<sup>1</sup> = get = CAN = NEG<sup>2</sup>  
 ‘[They] will not be able to do [it] next day’

In literary Burmese and in specific structural environments, the clausal post-V<sub>N</sub> operator –ဘူး [bú] ‘NEG<sub>2</sub>’ is not used (U Myo Thant, 2023):

- (4) နောက် = ရက်                      မ = လုပ် = နိုင်  
 nau? = ye?                              mə = lou? = nǎi  
 next = day                                NEG<sup>1</sup> = do = CAN  
 ‘[They] will not be able to do [it] next day.’

In disyllabic verbal compounds of the type  $[W]_V$  and  $[N = V]_V$ , if the verbal root is monosyllabic,  $-\text{m}\text{ə}$   $[\text{m}\text{ə}]$  ‘NEG<sub>1</sub>’ will immediately precede it. However, its position may vary according to the structural type of the verb it attaches to. The preferred option is to have  $-\text{m}\text{ə}$   $[\text{m}\text{ə}]$  ‘NEG<sub>1</sub>’ directly mark the verbal form, since it is precisely the latter that is being negated.

- (5) Disyllabic compound  $[V = V]_V$  (Daw Hnin Ye, 2023):  
 $\text{m}\text{ə} = [V - V]_V$  (also  $\text{m}\text{ə} = V - \text{m}\text{ə} = V$ )
- (a)  $\text{m}\text{ə} = \text{ပြုကျင့်} < \text{ပြု} [\text{pyu}]$  ‘practice’ +  $\text{ကျင့်} [\text{kyi}]$  ‘carry on  
 commit’  
 $\text{m}\text{ə} = \text{pyu} \sim \text{kyi}$   
 ‘not carry out’
- (b)  $\text{m}\text{ə} = \text{ပြု} - \text{m}\text{ə} = \text{ကျင့်}$  ( $\text{m}\text{ə} = V - \text{m}\text{ə} = V$ )  
 $\text{m}\text{ə} = \text{pyu} - \text{m}\text{ə} = \text{kyi}$   
 NEG<sub>1</sub> = practice - NEG<sub>1</sub> = carry no the commit  
 ‘not carry out’
- (6)  $[N = V]_V$   
 $N - \text{m}\text{ə} = V$  (exceptionally  $\text{m}\text{ə} - N = V$ )
- (a)  $\text{နှုတ်} - \text{m}\text{ə} = \text{ဆက်}$   
 $\text{ɴʊʊʔ} - \text{m}\text{ə} = \text{s}^h\text{e}ʔ$   
 mouth - NEG<sub>1</sub> = join  
 ‘not greet’
- (b)  $\text{m}\text{ə} = \text{နှုတ်} = \text{ဆက်}$   
 $\text{m}\text{ə} = \text{ɴʊʊʔ} = \text{s}^h\text{e}ʔ$   
 NEG<sub>1</sub> = mouth - join  
 ‘Not greet’

Between the two verbs in series, the placement of  $-\text{m}\text{ə}$   $[\text{m}\text{ə}]$  ‘NEG<sub>1</sub>’ in serial verb constructions is typical, while only on rare occasions can it be found prefixed to the verbs in question (Daw Hin Ye, 2023).

- (7)  $[V_1 - V_2]$   
 $V_1 = \text{မ} - V_2$  (exceptionally  $\text{မ} = V_1 - V_2$ )
- (a) ဆင်း = မ - သောက်  
 $s^h\eta = m\text{ə} - \text{θaʊ}ʔ$   
 descend = NEG<sub>1</sub> - drink  
 ‘not go down and drink’
- (b) မ = ဆင်း - သောက် ( $\text{မ} = V_1 - V_2$ )  
 $m\text{ə} = s^h\eta - \text{θaʊ}ʔ$   
 NEG<sub>1</sub> = descend - drink  
 ‘not ho down and drink’

In Burmese, serialised verb constructions follow strict nuclear patterns, representing singular, indivisible complex events. Even though the particle  $-\text{မ}$  [ $m\text{ə}$ ] ‘NEG<sub>1</sub>’ can be inserted between the consecutive verbs in the serialisation, its negation applies to both verbs and consequently to the entire event, not just the predicate it is attached to. When verbs are accompanied by operators, the negation typically targets the operators, though less frequently it affects the verbs themselves (U Thein Soe, 2023):

- (8)  $[V = \text{Post-}V_N]$   
 $\text{မ} = V = \text{Post-}V_N$  (less common  $V = \text{မ} = \text{Post-}V_N$ )
- (a) မ = ယူ = သွား  
 $m\text{ə} = ju = \text{θwá}$   
 NEG<sub>1</sub> = take = GO  
 ‘not take away’
- (b) ယူ = မ = သွား  
 $ju = m\text{ə} = \text{θwá}$   
 take = NEG<sub>1</sub> = GO  
 ‘not take away’

The presence of the negative marker in the latter example obstructs the close juncture onto the post- $V_N$  operator  $-\text{သွား}$  [ $\text{θwá}$ ] ‘GO’.

### 1.2 The Pre-V<sub>N</sub> Operator -ပြန် [pyǎ] ‘RETURN’

The full verb -ပြန် [pyǎ] can convey aspectual meanings, which display subtle yet distinct differences when used pre- or post-verbally. When employed before the main verb, it primarily expresses the resumption of an activity or state, for instance:

- (9) ထိုင် = ရာ = ကနေ                      ပြန် = ထ = လိုက် = တယ်  
 t<sup>h</sup>ǎi = yà = ganèi                      pyǎ = t<sup>h</sup>ǎ = lai? = tɛ  
 sit = place = FROM                      RETURN = get up = FOLLOW = REAL  
*‘He gets up again from his seated position’* (U Thein Soe, 2023)

### 1.3 The Pre-V<sub>N</sub> Operator -လှမ်း [lǎ] ‘REACH OUT’

The grammaticalised form of the main verb -လှမ်း [lǎ] ‘reach out; hand something to somebody; be far’ is the pre-V<sub>N</sub> operator -လှမ်း [lǎ] ‘REACH OUT’.

- (10) ရေဘူး = ကို                      ကျွန်တော် = ဆီ                      လှမ်း = လိုက် = ပါ။  
 jɛi bu. = ko                      tʃü dɔ = s<sup>h</sup>i                      lǎ = lai? = pà  
 water bottle = OBJ                      I = PLACE                      reach.out = FOLLOW = POL  
*‘Please, hand the water bottle over to me’* (Aung Kyaw Paing, 2023)

When grammaticalised, the core pre-V<sub>N</sub> operator -လှမ်း [lǎ] ‘REACH OUT’ indicates activities directed towards entities that are somehow displaced from the Actor. For example:

- (11) ပြည့်စုံ = က                      ကျောင်း = ထဲ = မှ                      နေ = ပြီး။  
 pjísòɔ = ka                      tʃáɔ = t<sup>h</sup>é = mǎ                      nèi = pyí  
 Pay Sone = SUBJ                      school = INSIDE = FROM                      stay = PFV  
 ကျောင်းသား = တို့ = ကို                      လှမ်း = ကြည့် = နေ = လေ = တယ်  
 tʃáɔ ðá = to = ko                      lǎ = tʃü = nèi = lèi = tɛ  
 student = PL = OBJ                      REACH.OUT = see = CONT = EU = REAL  
*‘Pay Sone looked at the students from the school’* (Daw Hnin

Ye, 2023)

### 1.4 The Pre-V<sub>N</sub> Operator –ဝိုင်း[wáĩ] ‘TOGETHER’

The main verb –ဝိုင်း [wáĩ] which means ‘gather around’ gives rise to the core operator –ဝိုင်း [wáĩ] ‘TOGETHER’, as in:

- (12) ရွာ = ကို                      စစ်သား = များ = က                      ဝိုင်း = ထား = တယ်  
 jwa = ko                      siʔ θá = mja: = ka                      wáĩ = t<sup>h</sup>á = te  
 village = OBJ    soldier = PL = SUBJ    gather.around = RES = REAL  
*‘The soldiers gathered around the village’ (U Myo Thant, 2023)*

The event is marked as performed collectively by some of the entities participating in the speech act by the operator –ဝိုင်း [wáĩ] which means ‘TOGETHER’, as in the following:

- (13) ပြည့်စုံ = က                      စာသင် = ရ = ခြင်း-အပြင်  
 p̥j̥s̥ò̥ = ka                      sà θī = já = t̥ʰi- əpyĩ  
 Pay Sone = SUBJ                      learn = GET = DEV = outside  
 မိဘ = များ = ရဲ့                      လယ်-အလုပ် = မှာ  
 mi ba = mja: = jé                      ɛ- əloʊʔ = mə  
 parent = PL = POSS                      field-work(N) = AT  
 ဝိုင်း = ကူ-လုပ်ကိုင် = ပေး = လေ့ = ရှိ = လေ = တယ်  
 wáĩ = ku- loʊʔkãĩ = péi = lej = ʃ̥ = lèi = te  
 TOGETHER = help-do.for.a.livng = BEN = HAB = BE = EU = REAL  
*‘Pay Sone used to help his parents in farm work after going to school’ (Daw Hnin Ye, 2023)*

The reading ‘gather around and help’ gets ruled out in this example due to the presence of a close juncture between the operator and the main verb, along with its context of occurrence.

### 1.5 The Pre-V<sub>N</sub> Operator –ပေး [péi] ‘LET’

Derived from the main verb –ပေး [péi] ‘give,’ the clausal pre-V<sub>N</sub> operator –ပေး [péi] ‘LET’ marks permission. For example:

- (14) တစ် = လ = ထက်                      ပေး = မ = လုပ် = တော့ = ဘူး၊  
 တိ? = လှ = တစ်?                      ပဲ = မ = လှ? = တံ = ဝှံ  
 1 = month = OVER                      LET = NEG<sub>1</sub> = work = FINAL = NEG<sub>2</sub>

*'[They] don't allow [the Mon girls] to work for more than a month' (Maung Khant Nyi, 2023)*

In addition, it may mark causation, as in:

- (15) ခြေအိတ်                      ပေး = မ = ချွတ် = ပါ = နဲ့၊  
 ဖျံ့?                      ပဲ = မ = ဖျံ့? = ပဲ = နေ  
 socks                      LET = NEG<sub>1</sub> = take.off = POL = NEG.IMP

*'Let him not take his socks off' (Daw Phyu Phyu Thant, 2023)*

The clausal post-V<sub>N</sub> operator -စေ [sèi] 'CAUSE' conveys a stronger request compared to the one represented by the alternative, which indicates a less firm demand in:

- (16) ခြေအိတ်                      မ = ချွတ် = ပါ = စေ = နဲ့၊  
 ဖျံ့?                      မ = ဖျံ့? = ပဲ = စေ = နေ  
 socks                      NEG<sub>1</sub> = take.off = POL = CAUSE = NEG.IMP

*'Don't make him take his socks off'*

Although native speakers perceive the two sentences (13) and (14) as conveying the same meaning, they differ in their illocutionary force. In fact, the two operators may co-occur to convey an even stronger request, as in:

- (17) ခြေအိတ်                      ပေး = မ = ချွတ် = ပါ = စေ = နဲ့၊  
 ဖျံ့?                      ပဲ = မ = ဖျံ့? = ပဲ = စေ = နေ  
 socks                      LET = NEG<sub>1</sub> = = POL = CAUSE = NEG.IMP

*'Don't make him take his socks off (very strong request)'*

## 2. Results of the Post-V<sub>N</sub> Operators

Within this section, the reading public found a comprehensive outline detailing the significance and role of the most frequently used post-

verb nucleus ( $V_N$ ) operators. These grammatical operators come after the primary verb in the verbal complex. They are categorized into three distinct groups based on their scope (nuclear, core, and clausal) and meaning. It's important to note that a handful of operators might extend their influence over various levels of the clause, contingent upon their functions.

The main focus of this study was to analyze the post- $V_N$  operators: -နေ [nèi] 'CONTINUOUS', -လာ [là] 'COME', -သွား [θwá] 'GO', -ထား [t<sup>h</sup>á] 'RESULTATIVE', -ပြီး [pyí] 'PERFECTIVE', and -ဖြစ် [pyí] 'CURRENTLY RELEVANT STATE'. To offer readers an overall understanding, albeit not exhaustive, of the intricate Burmese operator system, I have included a concise explanation of their functions and meanings in this overview.

### 2.1 The Full Verb -နေ [nèi] 'Stay; Live'

Several examples of the relatively frequent use of the intransitive verb of location -နေ [nèi] which means “stay; live” are provided.

- (18) အဖေ      ပြန် = လာ = ပြီး                      ကျွန်တော် = တို့ = နဲ့                      နေ = တယ်။  
 əp<sup>h</sup>èi    pyǎ = là = pyí                      ʔjǔ̃ dɔ̃ = tɔ̃ = nɛ                      nèi = tɛ  
 father    RETURN = come = PFV    I [male] = PL = WITH    live = REAL

*'Father came back and lived with us'* (Min That Naung, 27 July 2023)

The semantics of the verb -နေ [nèi] 'stay; live' and its counterparts in other languages, including English, imply the presence of an animate entity (the Actor) at a particular location and its continuation there for a specific duration.

Upon initial examination, there is no difficulty in categorizing the Aktion-start type of the Burmese word -နေ [nèi] 'stay; live' as a state verb, representing a condition with minimal or no change over time (static), lacking an inherent end-point (atelic), and occurring throughout an unspecified period (non-punctual/durative).

## 2.2 The Use of -တတ် [taʔ] ‘HABITUAL’ and -လေ့ [ləj]

### ‘HABITUAL’ (HAB)

The habitual markers, -တတ် [taʔ] and -လေ့ [ləj], are derived from the base verbs -တတ် [taʔ] ‘know’ and -လေ့ [ləj] ‘practice; acquire a habit; become accustomed to’ respectively. These markers appear to be utilized interchangeably for indicating habitually, as in:

- (19) သင်းသန္တာဇော် = က                      မိဘ = များ = ကို                      ကူညီ = တတ် = တယ်၊  
 θiθãdàzà = ka                                  miɓa = myá = ko                      kù ɲi = taʔ = tɛ  
 Thin Thandar Zaw = SUBJ                      parent = PL = OBJ                      help = HAB = REAL

‘Thin Thandar Zaw usually helps her parents’ (Naing Shin Ko, 23 July 2023)

- (20) လမ်း = က                      ကျဉ်း = တော့                      ကား = ကို                      လမ်း = ထိပ် = မှာ  
 læ = ka                                  kjin: = tɔ                                  ká = ko                                  læ = tʰeiʔ = mɔ̃  
 road = SUBJ                      be.narrow = BECAUSE                      car = OBJ                      road = top = AT  
 ရပ် = ထား = ခဲ့ = လေ့ = ရှိ = တယ်၊  
 jaʔ = tʰá = kʰe = lej = ɲ = tɛ  
 stop = RES = BACK.THERE = HAB = BE = REAL

‘As it was a narrow road, we used to leave the car at the top of the road’ (Naing Shin Ko, 23 July 2023)

Furthermore, the usage of -တတ် [taʔ] in the ‘HABITUAL’ form and -နိုင် [nà] in the ‘CAN’ form alternates to express dynamic modality, a concept identified by Palmer as being ‘subject-oriented’, focusing on the subject’s ability or volition rather than the speaker’s opinions (epistemic) or attitudes (deontic) (Palmer, 1990).

## 2.3 The Use of -ပြီး [pyí] ‘PERFECTIVE’ (PFV)

The infrequent utilization of the verb -ပြီး [pyí] ‘finish’ in its complete lexical meaning is paralleled by the unusual employment, within

independent clauses, of its grammaticalized form - the nuclear post-V<sub>N</sub> operator -[ɕi: [pyi] ‘PERFECTIVE’. This operator denotes events as temporally bounded. Within this context, its occurrence is nearly exclusive with the post-V<sub>N</sub> operator -[ɕi [pyi] ‘CURRENT RELEVANT STATE’ (CRS).

- |      |                        |                    |                    |
|------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| (21) | မနက်ဖြန်               | ကျ = မှ            | ပြင် = ɕi: = မယ်   |
|      | maneʔp <sup>h</sup> yă | ʔa = mɔ̀           | pyi = pyi = mɛ     |
|      | tomorrow               | arrive = NOT.UNTIL | repair = PFV = IRR |

‘I won’t finish repairing [it] until tomorrow’ (Min That Naung, 12 July 2023)

- |      |           |                          |
|------|-----------|--------------------------|
| (22) | ငါ့ = ကား | ပြင် = ɕi: = ɕi = လား    |
|      | ŋa = ká   | pyi = pyi = pyi = lá     |
|      | my = car  | repair = PFV = CRS = INT |

‘Have you repaired/Have you finished repairing my car’ (U Myo Thant, 21 July 2023)

While originally serving as a ‘pure’ perfective marker in independent clauses, its infrequent usage has evolved into a specialized role indicating sequentiality in discourse and maintaining subject continuity within the same context. In non-final/dependent clauses, it predominantly appears after the main verb, functioning as both a perfective marker and a co-subordination indicator. For example:

- |      |       |                |               |                            |
|------|-------|----------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| (23) | နာရီ  | သံပတ်ပေး = ɕi: | စားပွဲ = ပေါ် | တင် = ထား = တယ်            |
|      | nari  | θăpaʔpéi = pyi | zəbwé = pə    | tī = t <sup>h</sup> á = tɛ |
|      | clock | wind = PFV     | table = No    | put = RES = REAL           |

‘After winding up the clock, [he] put [it] on the table’ (U Thein Soe, July 13 2023)

## 2.4 The Use of -ထား [t<sup>h</sup>á] ‘RESULTATIVE’ (RES)

The core operator -ထား [t<sup>h</sup>á] ‘RESULTATIVE’ serves to indicate the enduring and lasting state of the Undergoer caused by the action denoted by the main verb. Simultaneously, it denotes the impact on the Undergoer, thereby redirecting attention from the initiator of the change to the entity that is affected. For example:

(24)	မယ်တော်ကြီး = က	ဦးဦး = တို့	ကြွလာ = မယ် = ကို
	mèdɔŋi = ka	ú bæzi = to	ʃwa lá = mɛ = ko
	royal.mother = SUBJ	l.monk = PL	iome = IRR = OBJ
	သိ = ပြီး	ဆွမ်း	ချက် = ထား = တယ်
	θj = pyí	s <sup>h</sup> ũ	ʃ <sup>h</sup> eʔ = t <sup>h</sup> á = tɛ
	Know = PFV	rice/food	cook = RES = REAL

*‘Royal Mother cooked a meal ready because she knew that we were coming’ (U Zaw Oo, 26 July 2023)*

## 2.5 The Use of -ခဲ့ [k<sup>h</sup>ɛ] ‘BACK THERE’ and -လိုက် [laiʔ] ‘FOLLOW’

The elusive nature of post-V<sub>N</sub> operators -ခဲ့ [k<sup>h</sup>ɛ] ‘BACK THERE’ and -လိုက် [laiʔ] ‘FOLLOW’ in Burmese is apparent despite their frequent appearance in written and spoken texts, as their definitive function remains to be assessed. Regarding -လိုက် [laiʔ] ‘FOLLOW’, Bernot proposes that it serves to indicate the attainment of the activity expressed by the main verb (Bernot Denise, 1980). Okell and Allott describe its effect as minimizing the time and effort involved in the action, a definition that may not encompass its other meanings (Okell & Allott, 2001). I briefly identify -လိုက် [laiʔ] ‘FOLLOW’ as a transitivity/volition marker in transitive clauses, a usage not noted by the aforementioned authors. Its analysis is presented in the context of the directional verbs -လာ [lá] ‘COME’ and -သွား [θwá] ‘GO’, as -လိုက် [laiʔ] ‘FOLLOW’ alternates intriguingly with -သွား [θwá] ‘GO’.

Regarding -ခဲ [k<sup>h</sup>e] ‘BACK THERE’, initially functioning as a spatial displacement marker, native speakers have adapted it to indicate temporal displacement, making it the sole bound operator signifying a tense-like category in a language otherwise devoid of tense (Bernot Denise, 1980: 225-228) and Okell and Allott seem to concur on this interpretation, acknowledging the necessity for a more precise description of these operators (Okell & Allott, 2001).

A comprehensive analysis of these operators will not be included in this study and will form part of future research.

### 2.6 The Use of -နိုင် [nài] ‘CAN’

The operator -နိုင် [nài] ‘CAN’, derived from the main verb ‘win; conquer; prevail’, functions as a post-V<sub>N</sub> modifier, conveying the meanings of ability, possibility, and permission.

Regarding ability, -နိုင် [nài] ‘CAN’ signifies dynamic modality according to Palmer. An illustration of dynamic modality in English is provided by the sentence:

(25) They can speak English

where the meaning expressed by ‘can’ is not modal. It doesn’t describe the possibility of the situation described by the sentence, but instead, it represents the potential of the subject of the sentence, as noted by Steele (Steele, 1975), and quoted by Palmer (Palmer, 1990). The following is an example in Burmese:

(26)	တောင်ပံ-တစ် = ဖတ်	ကျိုး = နေ = လို့	သူ
	taʊ bǎ = tiʔ = p <sup>h</sup> aʔ	ʃó = nèi = lõ	θù
	wing-1 = of.pair	break = CONT = BECAUSE	he
	ကောင်းကောင်း	မ = ပျံ = နိုင် = ဘူး	
	káʊkáʊ	mã = pyǎ = nài	
	well	NEG <sub>1</sub> = fly = CAN = NEG <sub>2</sub>	

‘[Bird] He can’t fly very well because he has a broken wing’ (Aung

Myint Kyaw, 23 July 2023)

In its role as a dynamic modal marker, -နိုင် [nǎi] ‘CAN’ is frequently used interchangeably with the post-V<sub>N</sub> operator -တတ် [taʔ] ‘CAN’ which also serves as a marker for habitual actions. For example:

- (27) ကရင် = စကား                      ပြော = တတ်/နိုင် = သ = လား၊  
 kəyɪ = zəgá                              pjo = taʔ/ nǎi = θa = lá  
 Kayin = Language                      speak = CAN = REAL = INT

*‘Can you speak Kayin?’*

When discussing dynamic modality, it's best to view -နိုင် [nǎi] ‘CAN’, along with -တတ် [taʔ] ‘CAN’, as operators of the nucleus. These operators do not describe specific features of the relationship between the speaker and the addressee, who are regarded as the core arguments within the modal clause. Instead, they describe the event itself.

Furthermore, -နိုင် [nǎi] ‘CAN’ is employed to mark ‘epistemic’ possibility, as exemplified in:

- (28) ရေ                      မ = ဖိတ် = နိုင် = အောင်                      ပိတ် = ထား = တယ်၊  
 jè                      ma = p<sup>h</sup>eiʔ = aʊ                      peiʔ = t<sup>h</sup>á = tɛ  
 water                      NEG<sub>1</sub> = spill = CAN = so.THAT                      cut.off = RES = REAL

*‘They cut off it so that it couldn’t spill’ (Aung Kyaw Paing, 18 July 2023)*

The expression of epistemic possibility by -နိုင် [nǎi] ‘CAN’ might explain its usage to indicate permission. According to Palmer, stating what is possible often implies that the speaker won’t object, essentially granting permission (Palmer, 1990). In this context, -နိုင် [nǎi] ‘CAN’ conveys a relatively mild form of permission, where the entity allowed to engage in a specific activity has the freedom to choose whether to do so or not. Consequently, it lacks the same strong deontic significance as -ရ [já] ‘GET’. For instance:

- (29) ဒီ နိုင်ငံ = က      အလိုရှိ = ရာ = ဝယ်      သွား = နိုင် = ပါ = တယ်၊  
 dì      nǎi ṇǎ = ka      ə̀lò ʃi = ja = wè      θwá = nǎi = pà = tɛ  
 this      country = AT      want = THING = buy      go = CAN = POL = REAL

*‘You may buy wherever you like in this country’ (U Zaw Oo, 26 July 2023)*

- (30) အသက်      ၁၈ = နှစ်      ပြည့် = သူ = တိုင်း      မဲဆန္ဒ  
 əθe?      18 = ṇi?      pyeʃ = θù = táĩ      mé s<sup>h</sup>ǎ da  
 age      18 = year      reach = he = EACH      vote (N)  
 ပေး = နိုင် = တယ်၊  
 péi = nǎi = tɛ  
 give = CAN = REAL

*Every citizen of 18 years of age can vote’ (U Ye Aung, 7 July 2023)*

In its epistemic usage, -နိုင် [nǎi] ‘CAN’ may be viewed as a status operator. This operator holds scope over the entire clause.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The study aimed to provide an overview of the aspectual system of Burmese, specifically in a dialect spoken in Danubyu, Myanmar. It focused on analyzing the syntactic and semantic functions of aspects, with particular attention to common aspectual operator characteristics shared by Burmese representing language typologies in the Burmese areal context.

According to the open interview, the analysis has brought attention to several important aspects of this system. Firstly, Burmese marks aspect with markers that typically follow the main verb, although some operators may precede it. Secondly, many of these aspect markers are derived from full lexical verbs, which still have active usage. This is a critical aspect of the discussion because these operators’ functions are explained by the combination of the inherent semantic features of their lexical sources with the inherent semantic features of the verbs they modify, ultimately influencing the structure of the verbal complex and the clause.

Thirdly, valuable insights have been gained by examining the position of aspectual operators about the main verb and other grammatical markers within the verbal complex. In most cases, the semantics of the operators determine their order concerning the main verb and other operators within the verbal complex.

The interplay between semantics, syntax, and pragmatics emerges as the most intriguing and enlightening aspect of this study. This interplay has been facilitated by adopting the descriptive approach provided by Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) (Valin & LaPoola, 1997).

However, there is much more work to be done in the future. Subsequent research should encompass a comprehensive description of the aspectual operator characteristics shared by Burmese, San Kin, Yae Pauk, and Pa Kun dialects spoken in Danubyu, Myanmar, as representative of the Burmese language typology in the region. Additionally, an analysis of the modal system and temporal reference expression should be undertaken. Furthermore, further investigation into verbal semantics is necessary to delineate the interface between lexical semantics and syntax and, consequently, the structure of events.

The full verb -ပို: [pyi], which means ‘finish; come to an end’, not only functions as the post- $V_N$  operator -ပို: [pyi] ‘PERFECTIVE’ but also appears to have served as the semantic origin for another grammatical form known as the sentential post- $V_N$  marker -ပို: [pyi] ‘CURRENTLY RELEVANT STATE’ (CRS). This particular form was the main subject of discussion in the present section.

### **The Combination -ပို:-ပို: [pyi-pyi] ‘PFV-CRS’**

The researcher noted that the infrequent presence of the post- $V_N$  operator -ပို: [pyi] ‘PERFECTIVE’ in independent clause verbal complexes paralleled the scarcity of occurrences of its lexical source, the full verb -ပို: [pyi] ‘finish; come to an end,’ in the same syntactic context. However, the researcher also anticipated that in independent clauses, it could be encountered alongside the post- $V_N$  operator -ပို: [pyi] ‘CRS’, as exemplified by:

(31) [Q: Has your brother done what his teacher told him to do today? A: Yes,]

ဒီ	ဂျာနယ်	သူ	ဖတ် = ပြီး = ပြီ
di	ဒ့à nè	θù	p <sup>h</sup> a? = pyí = pyi
this	journal	he	read = PFV = CRS

*'He's read this book [as he was told]'*

(32) ဦးလေး = ရဲ့      လယ်-ကွင်း = ထဲ = မှာ      ဒီ      ရေကန် = က

ú léi = jé	lè-kwí = t <sup>h</sup> é = mǝ	di	jè gǝ = ka
uncle = POSS	field-area = INSIDE = AT	this	pond = FROM
ပါ-ဝင် = နေ = တာ = မို့		ဦးလေး = ကို	
pà- wí = nèi = tà = mo		ú léi = ko	
be.in-enter = CONT = REAL = BECAUSE		uncle = TO	
ဝိုင်းဝန်း	ခွင့်တောင်း = ပြီး	ပြုပြင် = ဖို့	
wáí wǔ	kwǔ táu = pyí	pyu byí = p <sup>h</sup> o	
together	ask.permission = PFV	repair = TO	
ကျွန်တော် = တို့	ဆုံးဖြတ် = ပြီး = ပြီ		
ဖျခာ = to	s <sup>h</sup> óu p <sup>h</sup> ya? = pyí = pyi		
I = PL	decide = PFV = CRS		

*'We have decided to ask Uncle's permission and repair [the pond] together because this pond lies in Uncle's field' (U Thein Soe, 23 July 2023)*

(33) ကျွန်တော် = က      နံနက် = တစ်ချိန်လုံး      ကေသီ = နှင့်

ဖျခာ = ka	nǎ ne? = ti? t <sup>h</sup> èĩ lóu	kè θi = nǔ
I = SUBJ	mrning = all.the.time	Kay Thi = WITH
ဆက်သွယ် = ရန်	ကြိုးစား = ပြီး = ပြီ	
s <sup>h</sup> e? θwè = jǎ	t <sup>h</sup> ó zá = pyí = pyi	
repeatedly	say = PFV = CRS	

*'I have told him the [same] word over and over again'*

- (34) ကျွန်တော် = က သူ့ = ကို ပြော = ပြီး = တဲ့ စကား = ကို  
 ʃəno = ka\_ ʃu\_ = ko pya = pyi = tɛ zəgá = ko  
 I = SUBJ he = OBJ say = PFV = REL<sub>REAL</sub>  
 ထပ်တလဲလဲ ပြော = ပြီး = ပြီ  
 tʰaʔ təlé lé pya = pyi = pyi  
 repeatedly say = PFV = CRS

*'I have told him the [same] word over and over again'*

- (35) မနှင်း = နဲ့ အမေ = တို့ လာ = ကြ = ပါ  
 maŋj̄ = nɛ əməi = to\_ là = ʃa\_ = pa  
 Ma.Hnin = AND Mother = PL come = PL = POL  
 မုန့် ဝယ် = ပြီး = ပြီ  
 mo\_ wè = pyi = pyi  
 food Buy = PFV = ERS

*'Ma Hnin, Mother, please come. I've bought the food'*

- (36) စာမျက်နှာ ဘယ်နှစ် ရွက် ရေး = ပြီး = ပြီ = လဲ  
 sàmyeʔnà bè n̄jʔ jweʔ jé = pyi = pyi = lé  
 page how.many sheet write = PFV = CRS = INT<sub>WH</sub>

*'How many pages have you written so far?'*

- (37) အရွက် နှစ်ရာ-ငါး = ဆယ် ရေး = ပြီး = ပြီ  
 əjweʔ n̄jʔja-ŋá = sʰè jé = pyi = pyi  
 page 200-5 = 10 write = PFV = CRS

*'I've written 150 pages'*

In this context, the combination -ပြီး-ပြီ [pyi-pyi] 'PFV-CRS' is observed in conjunction with causative accomplishments. These accomplishments are characterized by specific features: they are [-static], [+telic], [-punctual], [+causative], and are typically initiated by an Actor who affects an Undergoer (according to Van Valin and La Polla, 1997). The feature [+telic] can be an inherent aspect of the verb's core meaning (e.g., decide, try, buy), where

the verb's arguments, representing the goal of the activity, are obligatory components of its lexical entry. Alternatively, the same [+telic] feature can be induced in the predicate based on its contextual usage. For instance, phrases like 'read the journal and' 'write Two hundred and fifty pages' exemplify the activity verbs 'read' and 'write,' which, in this specific context, take on core arguments like 'the book' and 'Two hundred and fifty pages', signifying the endpoint or goal of the respective activities.

As mentioned elsewhere (see Chapter IV), the use of -[ြး [pyi] 'PFV' transforms these processes into punctual events, labeling them as (causative) achievements and simplifying them into single, unanalyzed objects with distinct boundaries. This transformation is derived from the Aktionsart of its source verb, the achievement verb -[ြး [pyi] 'finish; come to an end'. Therefore, -[ြး [pyi] 'PFV' can be described as an operator that alters the nature of the state of affairs from [-punctual] to [+punctual], focusing attention on the event's completion, specifically its terminal boundary (Van Valin and La Polla, 1997). The temporal relevance is then indicated by -[ြး [pyi] 'CRS', which links the existence of a well-defined event to the reality perceived by the speakers and their linguistic context. Nicoletta, R. (2008) investigated the post-VN operator -[ြး [pyi] 'PERFECTIVE', the main verb -[ြး [pyi] 'finish; come to an end' has also provided the semantic source for the post-V<sub>N</sub> Clausal operator -[ြး [pyi] 'CURRENTLY RELEVANT STATE'. This operator marks events as having attained or as being in the process of attaining their point of realisation, and it makes the result of the change relevant to the dis- course frame of the participants in the speech act at speech or reference time.

## New Body of Knowledge

When I study was six groups of aspect markers are Perfective, Imperfective, Habitual, Continuous, Non-progressive and Progressive. Perfective markers consist of [ြး [pyi] which means "finish, already", - သွား

[θwá] which means “go” and la which means “come”. Imperfective is expressed by နေ [nèi] ‘stay; live’. Habitual markers contain “mlay” or “mlan” ‘always, usually’ and le ta ‘to be accustomed to’. Contiguous can be illustrated by nei which mean “cont, stay and live”. Lastly, Non-progressive and Progressive is indicated by twe y da “meeting you. In this aspectual categorization, a clearer picture of the Burmese aspectual system is revealed. Although the aspect markers of the used the people who live in Danubyu of Myanmar. I hope you that this dissertation can help you learning Burmese language.

### **Suggestions of Research**

1) This preliminary research examines the study aimed to provide an overview of the aspectual operator system of Burmese, specifically in an Inthar dialect spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar. It focused on analyzing the syntactic and semantic functions of operator aspects, with particular attention to common aspectual operator characteristics shared by Burmese representing language typologies in the Burmese areal context. However, the primary focus is on the Inthar dialect due to the absence of a grammatical study in the Danubyu-spoken Inthar dialect in Myanmar.

2) Future researchers should include a comprehensive description of aspectual operator characteristics shared by various dialects spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar, representing the Burmese language typology in the region. It should also involve an analysis of the modal system, temporal reference expression, and further exploration of verbal semantics to elucidate the relationship between lexical semantics and syntax and the structure of events.

3) Another crucial area for future study lies in investigating the aspectual system of languages in Southeast Asia (SEA), including Hakka, Kayain, Mon, Ka Chin, Kayar, Khmer, Vietnamese, Eisan, and Thai, to compare and better understand the shared aspectual features across SEA languages. Additionally, research on areal features of SEA languages and linguistic borrowing in SEA languages should continue.

4) The researcher hopes that one can use this study as a reference for studying the Burmese aspectual system especially to give more understanding about the Burmese system of dialects spoken in Danubyu of Myanmar.

5) The researcher suggests giving more attention to understanding the syntactic and semantic structures of the pre- $V_N$  operator aspect and post- $V_N$  operator aspect.

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