

5 *The verb ‘give’ as a causativiser in colloquial Burmese*¹

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1 Introduction

It is widely known that many lexical verbs are also used as functional words in Burmese. Used as functional words, some of these verbs precede the main verb, and some follow. A few verbs can both precede and follow the main verb. For example, when preceding the main verb, the verb ကြည့် တဲ့ ‘look’ has an adverbial function meaning something like ‘with discretion, carefully’; when it follows the head-verb, it means ‘try to [verb]’.

The verb ပေး pé ‘give’ also has functional usages. Following the head verb, its function is benefactive (or applicative), as in (1), or else it denotes the ‘destination of action’, as in (2) (the opposite direction, with လူ့ jù ‘take’ is shown in (3)). It can also have a transitive/causative meaning, as in (4).

- (1) ကျွန်တော် ခင်ဗျားအတွက်/အစား/ကို ဖတ်ပေးမယ်။
təənò kʰinbjá.ʔətweʔ/ʔəsá/gò pʰaʔ.pé.dɛ̃
I you.for/on behalf of/to read.pé.IRR
‘I will read it for/on behalf of/to you.’
- (2) သူ့အဖေ တက္ကသိုလ်မှာ အင်္ဂလိပ်စာ သင်ပေးတယ်။
θy.ʔəpʰè tɛʔkəθò.mà ʔingəleiʔ.sà θin.pé.dɛ̃
his.father university.in English.language learn.give.REAL
‘His father teaches English at university.’
- (3) သူ့သမီး တက္ကသိုလ်မှာ အင်္ဂလိပ်စာ သင်ယူတယ်။
θy.ʔəpʰè tɛʔkəθò.mà ʔingəleiʔ.sà θin.jù.dɛ̃
his.daughter university.in English.language learn.take.REAL
‘His daughter learns English at university.’

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- (4) အမေ သမီးကို ဂျပန်ဝတ်စုံ ဝတ်ပေးတယ်။
 ʔəmè θəmí.gò dzəpàn.wuʔsòun wuʔ.pé.dè
 mother daughter.OBJ Japan.clothing wear.pé.REAL
 ‘The mother helps her daughter to put on her Japanese dress.’

In the examples (1)–(4) in functional use, the verb ပေး pé ‘give’ always follows the head verb, having one of the three meanings outlined above. However, I will describe here a further usage of ပေး pé, preceding the head verb and with ‘causative’ meaning, as in (5).

- (5) သူ့ကို ပေးဝင်တယ်။
 θú.gò pé.wìn.dè
 he.OBJ pé.enter.REAL
 ‘He/she was allowed in.’

There is some evidence that this is a recent phenomenon, reported, to my knowledge, for the first time by Kato (1998). I can find no published references to ပေး pé which pre-date this. Soe (1999) does not list ပေး pé as a pre-head versatile causativiser, again suggesting that the grammaticalisation of causative ပေး pé is recent. I have been told by older speakers of Burmese that this construction is not pure Burmese, but despite this, I want to describe it for two reasons. Firstly, it seems that many people have already accepted the causative ပေး pé construction and make habitual use of it – perhaps unconsciously. Secondly, it is possible that causative ပေး pé is an example of recent grammaticalisation in Burmese. In this short article, I will provide various examples of causative ပေး pé, and consider its syntactic and semantic features.

2 Predicate structure

Before proceeding further, I will outline briefly the structure of verbal predicates in Burmese. Okell (1969) regards all analysable (complex) verbs as compounds, which he classifies as ordinary, pre-verb and auxiliary compounds (Okell 1969:24–25). Okell’s classification and terminology will be adopted in this article. According to Okell and Allott (2001), causative ပေး pé is common pre-verb. As for Okell’s definition, pre-verb compounds can be paraphrased with complex sentences using the subordinate clause marker ပြီး pí, as in (6) and (7). I will refer to verbs separated from the preceding causative ပေး pé as main ‘head’ verbs, without attempting a precise definition of ‘head’.

- (6) ဆက်လုပ်တယ်။
 sʰɛʔ.louʔ.tè
 continue.do.REAL
 ‘(He) continues to do.’
- (7) ဆက်ပြီး လုပ်တယ်။
 sʰɛʔ.pí louʔ.tè
 continue.SUBORD do.REAL
 ‘(He) continues to do.’

3 Examples of causative ပေး ပေး pé

In this section, I will list some examples of causative ပေး pé I have found. First, examples from Okell and Allott (2001:120–121).

- (8) တခါတလေတော့ ကောင်လေးကို ပေးမောင်းလိုက်ပါလား။
 tək^hàtəlè.dɔ̀ kàunlé.gò pé.máun.laiʔ.pà.lá
 sometimes.but boy.OBJ **pé**.drive.just.POL.Q
 'Why don't you just let the boy drive sometimes?'
- (9) တစ်နှစ်ထက် ပေးမလုပ်တော့ဘူး။
 tək^hniʔ.t^hɛʔ pé.mə.louʔ.tɔ̀.bú
 one.year.than **pé**.NEG.do.anymore.NEG
 '[We] don't allow [them] to work for more than one year.'
- (10) မောင်လေးကို မပေးနိုင်နဲ့။
 màun.lé.gò mə.pé.kàin.nɛ
 younger-brother.obj NEG.**pé**.hold.NEG/IMP
 'Don't let your younger brother touch it.'
- (11) သူ့ဆီ စာ သတ်သတ် မရေးဘူးနော်။ ဒီစာကိုသာ
 θy.s^hi sà.gò θaʔθaʔ mə.jé.bú.nò dì.sà.gò.ðà
 s/he.place letter.OBJ separately NEG.write.NEG.OK? this.letter.only
 ပေးဖတ်လိုက်ပါ။
 pé.p^haʔ.laiʔ.pà
pé.read.just.POL
 'I won't write separately to her, all right? Would you please just have her read this letter?'
- (12) စက်ဘီး မပေးစီးချင်ဘူး။
 sɛʔ.béin mə.pé.sí.dzìn.bú
 bicycle NEG.**pé**.ride.want.NEG
 'I don't want to let you ride my bike.'

The following examples were collected in Yangon from 2000 to 2002. They are described further in Okano (2002:139–140).

- (13) ကျွန်တော့်ကို ဒီအိမေး(လ်) ပေးသုံးတယ်။
 tɛəŋɔ̀.gò dì.ʔimé pé.θóun.dè
 I.OBJ this.e-mail **pé**.use.REAL
 'They let me use this e-mail [account].'
- (14) မဟာဗန္ဓုလပန်းခြံထဲကို ပေးဝင်မယ် ထင်တယ်။
 məhàbàndulə.pánɔ̀n.dé.gò pé.wìn.mè t^hin.dè
 Maha Bandula.park.inside.to **pé**.enter.IRR think.REAL
 'I think that [they] will allow us to go into Maha Bandula Park.'

- (15) ဂျပန်ဆရာက လာရင် ခင်ဗျားကို ပေးတွေ့မယ်။
 ɔ̃pàɴ.sʰəjà.ga là.jìɴ kʰəmjà.gò pé.twɛ.mè
 Japan.teacher.SUBJ come.if you.OBJ **pé.meet.IRR**
 'If the Japanese teacher comes here, I'll have you meet him.'
- (16) a. သုဇာတက နွားတစ်ထောင်ကို နွယ်ချို ပေးစားခိုင်းတယ်။
 θyʒàtə.ga nʷá.tə.tʰàun.gò nʷɛ̀tɔ̀ pé.sá.kʰáin.dɛ̀
 Sujata.SUBJ cow.one.thousand.OBJ licorice **pé.eat.order.REAL**
 'Sujata provided licorice for a hundred cows.'
- b. သုဇာတက နွားတစ်ထောင်ကို နွယ်ချို ပေးစားတယ်။
 θyʒàtə.ga nʷá.tə.tʰàun.gò nʷɛ̀tɔ̀ pé.sá.dɛ̀
 Sujata.SUBJ cow.one.thousand.obj licorice **pé.eat.REAL**
 'Sujata provided licorice for a hundred cows.'

The example (16)a is an utterance which was subsequently corrected to (16)b. Of course, we could produce a forced parsing of (16a) 'Sujata ordered a hundred cows to give and to eat licorice', though of course such an interpretation would be rejected as meaningless in any context, and so the only plausible interpretation is that of (16b). This pair of sentences sheds light on the grammaticalisation in progress.

- (17) ?*ကလေးတွေကို အရင် ပေးပို့လိုက်တယ်။
 kʰəlɛ̀.dwɛ̀.gò ʔəjìɴ pé.pɔ̀.laiʔ.tɛ̀
 child.PL.OBJ before **pé.see-off.just.REAL**
 '[I asked the driver to] drop the children off first.'
 (e.g. before coming to pick us up.)

(17), an utterance I actually heard, is not acceptable to all Burmese speakers. Although it follows the syntactic pattern of causative ပေး pé, it is unacceptable possibly because there exists a bimorphemic formal register verb ပေးပို့ pé.pɔ̀ with the meaning 'send', which is applicable to things rather than people.

Although we may encounter causative ပေး pé frequently in spoken Burmese, it is less common in written forms of the language. The following examples (18) and (19) are taken from the novel ငရုပ်မှန်လျှင် စပ်လွန်မယ် ဂျော့ကလေး sa.ʔlɛ̀in.mè *If it's real chilli, then it will be hot* by Maung Thara မောင်သာရ, written in 1982 in colloquial style Burmese.

- (18) ကိုဘဦးက ရှိတုန်းကတော့ ဒီကလေးနှစ်ယောက် သစ်ပင်တက်ဖို့
 kò.bəʔú.ga ʃi.dóun.ga.dɔ̀ di.kʰəlɛ̀.ŋə.jauʔ θiʔpin.tɛʔ.pʰɔ̀
 KoBaU.SUBJ exist.time.when.but this.child.two.CLF tree.climb.PURP
- နေနေသာသာ အပင်ကအသီးကို တံချူနဲ့တောင် ပေးမစွတ်ဘူး။
 nènèθàðà ʔapìɴ.ga.ʔəθí.gò dətɔ̀.ɴɛ̀.ðaun pé.mə.sʰuʔ.pʰú
 let-alone tree.from.fruit.OBJ pole.with.even **pé.NEG.pluck.NEG**
 'When Ko Ba Oo was alive, he didn't even allow his two children to pick fruit from the tree with a pole, let alone climb up it.' (p.28)

- (19) ကုန်ကုန်ပြောရရင် သားနှစ်ယောက်ကို ဘောလုံးတောင် ပေးမကစားဘူး။
 kòungòun.pjǝ̌.jǝ̌.jìn θá.njə̌.jauʔ.kò bʰáʔlòun.dàun pé.mə.gəzá.bú
 complete.ADV^{REDUP}.tell.must.if son.two.CLF.OBJ football.even **pé**.NEG.play.NEG
 'To tell the whole story, he didn't even allow his two sons to play football.' (p.29)

Another example (20) in print is an essay by Kan Chun (1997), also written in colloquial style.

- (20) ကဲ ဒီဆောင်းပါးကို သမီးတို့ရဲ့ လူကြီးမိဘတွေကိုပါ ပေးဖတ်လိုက်ပါအုံး။
 kɛ́ dí.sʰáunbá.gò θəmí.jɛ̌ lùdʒí.mìbɔ̌.dwè.gò.bà pé.pʰaʔ.laiʔ.pà.ʔòun
 so this.article.OBJ daughter.POSS adult.parent.PL.OBJ.also **pé**.read.just.POL.further
 'So, have your your parents read [my] article as well, girls.'

Causative **ပေး**: **pé** seems to be restricted mainly to spoken Burmese, since I have found only a very few examples of it in print, and no examples of it in literary style Burmese, though Okell and Allott (2001:120) do list a formal, literary Burmese entry for causative **ပေး**: **pé**.

4 Syntactic features of causative **ပေး**: **pé**

I will now consider the syntactic features of the causative **ပေး**: **pé** construction. An analysis of the syntactic features of complex predicates in Burmese must take account of

- constituent order;
- negation;
- the possibility of paraphrasing the predicate by substituting a complex sentence using some dependent clause marker;
- ellipsis.

As mentioned above, causative **ပေး**: **pé** precedes another head verb. This position is syntactically highly independent. As with other pre-verbs, normally the negative **မ** **mə** prefixes not to causative **ပေး**: **pé** but to the head verb. Also, causative **ပေး**: **pé** can be paraphrased to form a complex sentence by using the dependent marker **ပြီး**: **pí** (see example (7) above). These phenomena are re-examined here.

In fact, the negative particle **မ** **mə** sometime precedes both causative **ပေး**: **pé** and the head verb. This is noted by Okell and Allott (2001), who provide some examples, (10) and (12) above. This construction may, however, not be acceptable for all speakers. It seems that speakers from Mon state do not accept sentences negated in this way (more in section 6 below on the intuition of Burmese speakers from Mon state).

A paraphrased causative **ပေး**: **pé** construction is usually considered grammatical and acceptable. However, they are difficult to find in spontaneous contexts. I was unable to obtain any examples of complex paraphrasings of causative **ပေး**: **pé** despite many attempts to elicit them from informants. Again, it seems that speakers from Mon State find such constructions completely unacceptable. I conclude that the construction is grammatically possible, but not used.

As for ellipsis, Okell (1969:30) notes that 'questions containing [complex predicates containing pre-verbs] are sometimes (but not invariably) answered with the second

member only.' He adds that this feature distinguishes pre-verbs from ordinary compounds. However, in one-word answers to questions containing causative **ပေး**: *pé* constructions, it is not the pre-verb **ပေး**: *pé* which is ellided, but the other verb. Compare (21) and (22):

- | | | | |
|------|--|---|---|
| (21) | ဆက်လုပ်မလား။
s ^h ɛʔ.louʔ.mə.lá
continue.do.IRR.Q
'Will you carry on doing [it]?' | လုပ်မယ်။
louʔ.mè
do.IRR
'Yes, I will.' | ?ဆက်မယ်။
ʔs ^h ɛʔ.mè
?continue.IRR
'?Yes, I will.' |
| (22) | ပေးလုပ်မလား။
pé.louʔ.mə.lá
pé .do.IRR.Q
'Will you allow me to do [it]?' | *လုပ်မယ်။
*louʔ.mè
*do.IRR
*'Yes, I will.' | ပေးမယ်။
pé.mè
pé .IRR
'Yes, I will.' |

We can account for this apparent anomaly by noting that the causativiser cannot be ellided because it changes valency. In causative constructions, the subject of the embedded clause (the subject of V) is assigned the object case marker **ကို** *kò* and another noun appears as the subject of the matrix clause. If **ပေး**: *pé* is omitted, the sentence would become ungrammatical because the matrix predicate no longer satisfies its argument structure.

5 Semantics of causative **ပေး**: *pé*

Burmese has, traditionally, two grammatical forms to express causative meaning. These are **စေ** *sè* and **ခိုင်း**: *k'háin*. These two are, of course, different not only in meaning but also in syntactic category. Here we shall consider only their meanings.

Okano (1994) described the characteristics of **စေ** *sè* as follows: if the subject NP is *animate*, it does not intentionally obstruct the occurrence of the event expressed by the verb; if the subject NP is *inanimate*, it is the cause of the occurrence of the event expressed by V.

If the subject of the verbal predicate containing **စေ** *sè* is animate – typically human – it is difficult to say that the event is caused directly or intentionally by the subject. Moreover, in modern use **စေ** *sè* is not used alone, but rather is usually accompanied by other modal auxiliaries such as **ချင်** *tsh'in* 'want', or **ရ** *ja* 'must'. Okell and Allott (2001:120) note that [verb]**စေ** *sè* is being superseded in colloquial Burmese by **ပေး**: *pé* [verb] and by [verb]-**ခွင့်ပြု** *k'hwǎn.pjǔ* 'give someone permission to [verb]'. Note that both **ပေး**: *pé* [verb] and [verb]-**ခွင့်ပြု** *k'hwǎn.pjǔ* typically have human subjects. If the subject is inanimate, then the verbal predicate is more transitive rather than causative.

In the case of [verb]**ခိုင်း**: *k'háin* causatives, the subject intentionally approaches the causee to get something done. Here **ခိုင်း**: *k'háin* preserves much of its full lexical meaning 'order' or 'put to work' – usually by word of mouth. In other words, **ခိုင်း**: *k'háin* is a compulsive causative, while **စေ** *sè* implies approval.

There is a further difference between **စေ** *sè* and **ခိုင်း**: *k'háin*. When it occurs with realis verb sentence marker **တယ်** *tè*, **စေ** *sè* entails realisation of the event expressed by the verb, while V, while **ခိုင်း**: *k'háin* does not.

The causative **ပေး**: *pé* construction is more similar in meaning to **စေ** *sè* than to **ခိုင်း**: *k'háin*. Both [verb] **စေ** *sè* and **ပေး**: *pé* [verb] express approval or permission. Basically, both

express that the causee – the subject of the main verb – has the desire to do something and the causer – the subject of ဇေး ပဲ – gives the causee permission to carry out the action. Of course this applies only when both causee and causer are human or animate. Additionally, causative ဇေး ပဲ also entails realisation of the event.

6 Additional implication of ဇေး ပဲ causative

Sometimes the causative ဇေး ပဲ construction implies its original meaning 'give'. Consider examples (11), (16) and (20). The predicates in these examples can be interpreted as 'give and [verb]'. For example, (20) could be translated 'please give your parents this article and have them read it.' In a few cases, the accomplishment of the event denoted by the verb presupposes an act of giving. For example, if someone wants to read a book you possess, he or she must ask for the book from you before reading it. The temporal order of the occurrence of the two events — in this case giving and reading — corresponds to the order of ဇေး ပဲ and the main verb in a causative ဇေး ပဲ construction. Is such a correspondence inevitable? It may be certain that the implication of giving something in causative ဇေး ပဲ construction is caused by the constituent order of the verbal predicate.

Moreover, when causative ဇေး ပဲ implies actually giving something, the meaning will become close to that of a causative ခိုင်း ကိုင် construction. The reason for this is that there is a sense that the subject actively approaches the causee to have some action accomplished — the compulsive meaning referred to above.

7 Mon influence?

The causative ဇေး ပဲ construction may have been influenced by the Burmese spoken in Mawlamyine (Moulmein), in Mon State. An expression of this kind is mentioned in the Burmese–Japanese Dictionary (Harada and Ohno 1979:262): ဇေးခိုက် ပဲ့ခိုက်? 'give.hit' is glossed as 'to allow to beat; Mawlamyine dialect, the speech of Mon people'. One of my informants, U Hla Maung, a 66-year-old from Mon State, told me the following when I questioned him on this point:

'In the 1970s and early 1980s, many necessities were smuggled over the Thai border into Mon state. Mon merchants carried these necessities to Yangon and they opened a black market at Seingyun, near today's Mingalar market. This black market was very crowded because it was almost the only way to obtain daily necessities in Yangon.'

It is suggested that Burmese may have borrowed the causative ဇေး ပဲ construction from Mawlamyine dialect Burmese, itself influenced by Mon, where the verb က ကို 'give' is a productive causativiser. If this situation is true, then this construction may have begun to appear in Yangon Burmese during the 1970s, before the 1982 stories by Maung Thara quoted above.

Is the Mon causative the source of the Burmese causative ဇေး ပဲ construction? Did the Mon construction directly influence Burmese? In my opinion, this is unlikely: Burmese speakers have associated with Mon speakers for at least a thousand years, which means it is difficult to explain why causative ဇေး ပဲ exerted its influence over Burmese only in the 1980s. One might speculate that Mon affected the Mawlamyine dialect of Burmese, and that it was this, rather than Mon, which influenced Yangon Burmese.

8 Conclusion

The causative ဇဝ: ပဲ construction is a recent development in colloquial Burmese. Causative ဇဝ: ပဲ occurs preceding the main verb in a verb phrase, and is syntactically somewhat independent. Unlike other pre-verbs, causative ဇဝ: ပဲ cannot be elided in any context; this suggests that it is absolutely vital in the construction. Semantically, causative ဇဝ: ပဲ expresses approval, and in this respect it is similar to causative ဇဝ: ဝဲ which is rarely used with human subjects and human causees. Causative ဇဝ: ပဲ sometimes implies its lexical meaning 'give'; in such cases, the verb ဇဝ: ပဲ may be interpreted twice: once with the meaning 'giving something to someone' and then again with the meaning 'asking him/her to use it'. When causative ဇဝ: ပဲ carries the meaning 'give', it is no longer similar to the causative causative ဇဝ: ဝဲ.

It remains difficult to give a full account of the grammatical status and meaning of the causative ဇဝ: ပဲ construction. Many speakers use this expression unconsciously while others do not wholly accept it as grammatical Burmese, a situation which makes it difficult to interpret consistently the judgements of informants. Nonetheless, it is worth describing this phenomenon to provoke further inquiry into Burmese syntax.