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MONGSEN AO

META

- **Ao is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by 170 000 people (1991 Census of India)**
 - **Mongsen is one of two major dialects of Ao**
 - **40% Mongsen first: 68 000 people**
- **Variety described in the book: Mangmetong Mongsen**
 - **In Mangmetong village of Mokokchung district**
 - **Spoken by about 2000 people**
- **Highly agglutinating**
- **Latin script as written standard, Ao Bible**

LOCATION

- Linguistically highly diverse region
- Majority language in Mokokchung district in the state of Nagaland, India



PHONOLOGY

- Syllable: (C₁) V (G) (C₂) T
 - 3 tones marked by accents
- 27 consonant phonemes, 5 vowel phonemes

WORD CLASSES

- Open classes: verbs and nouns
- Closed classes:
 - ... (regulars)
 - Case marking clitics
 - Adverbs, 4 in number: 2 *agains*, *much*, and *once*

VERBS

- Discontinuous past tense negative marker
 - *mə̌-wa-la* (*NEG-go-NEG.PST*) ‘didn’t go’
- Tense, aspect, modality inflection
- Valency-modifying morphology
 - Causative marker
 - Reciprocal/collective suffix
- Predicate clause-final neutrally

ADJECTIVES

- No underived adjective
- Property adjectives formed with stative verbs
 - tǎ-hlǎŋ (NZP-be.long) ‘long’
- Emotion adjectives with underived intransitive verbs
 - pǎla (be.happy.PST) ‘was happy’

TRANSITIVITY

- Transitive verbs may occur with only O argument
 1. Patientive ambitransitive verbs, or
 2. Antecedent mention of A
 - Some verbs function as agentive ambitransitives, much rarer than patientives
 - No formal marking in any one
- Core case marking not necessary in transitives

VERBS *CONT*

- Reduplication
 - Intensified meanings on stative verbs
 - Durative meanings on activity verbs
- No passive voice formally
 - Pragmatics help

NOUNS

- **Function as heads of noun phrases**
- **Prototypical nouns refer to entities with physical existence**
- **Abstract nouns derived from verbs**

CLAUSE STRUCTURE

- Verbless clauses exist.
 - *kə tənij pəntánmunla*. ‘My name is Bendangmongla.’
 - *kə*: 1SG.POSS
 - *tə-nij*: RL-name
 - *pəntánmun-la*: PN-F
- Noun phrases freely omitted if referents are pragmatically recoverable
 - Only obligatory constituent of a verbal clause: predicate

CONSTITUENT ORDER

- **Default verb position: clause-final**
 - Verb arguments postposed as afterthought only
- **Default order: AOV**
 - OAV if O is higher in pragmatic relevance
 - No special marking of O, maybe topic particle
- **Constituent order unreliable to determine grammatical functions due to**
 - Frequent noun phrase ellipsis,
 - Ambitransitive verbs, and
 - Pragmatically motivated ordering of clausal constituents

CASE MARKING

- **Phrase-final clitics**
- **One core case marking clitic: agentive $n\theta$**
 - If behavior is expected of A (norm), no need for the marker
- **Not consistent with nom-acc, erg-abs, split-S, fluid-S**
 - **split-S: one set of S_a , another set of S_o**
 - **fluid-S: sets are not fixed; no language shown to be fully fluid**
- **See examples 5.20-3 (p 156-7)**
- **Fluid-S marking in intransitive verbs of states or activities not normally controlled by an animate referent, but could be controlled, e.g. cry, sneeze**
 - **When not controlled, no agentive marker; if on purpose, yes**
- **See example 5.33 (p 166)**

CASE MARKING *CONT*

- Core: agentive
- Oblique: instrumental, dative, benefactive, comitative, allative, ablative, locative

RELATIVIZATION

- Headed relative clauses with general nominalizer *-pà?*
 - See examples 6.35-6 (p 219-20)
 - Restrictive (pre-head) vs non-restrictive *sometimes*
 - Only locative noun heads in pre-head position, due to natural restriction

VERB CLASSES

- Unmarked (verb root): past tense
- Directional motion verbs: went up/down/across, etc.
 - See Figure 8.1 (p 281)
- Both core arguments may be omitted in transitives
 - See example 8.4 (p 283), zero anaphora
- Mismatch between semantic and syntactic valence common due to zero anaphora and ambitransitivity
 - Ambitransitivity differs from ellipsis, occurring without antecedents
- Ditransitive not identified as a class
 - See example 8.7 (p 284)

VERBAL MORPHOLOGY

- **Predominantly suffixing**
 - **1 prefix, root, 9 suffixing positions (see p 289)**
 - **Not all suffixes in a set order but semantic restrictions always deterministic**
 - **Restrictions make sure no predicate gets all 11 positions**

REFERENCE

- Coupe, A.R. A Grammar of Mongsen Ao. Mouton de Gruyter, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110198522>.