

## Event cancellation in Burmese

Atsuhiko Kato (Osaka University)

### 1. Introduction

Ikegami (1981: 266-67) argued that while sentence (1) is acceptable in Japanese, sentence (2) is not acceptable in English.

- (1) *Moyasita keredo, moenakatta.* [Japanese]  
 burned(vt) although did.not.burn(vi)  
 ‘(I) burned (it), but (it) didn’t burn.’ (Ikegami 1981:266)
- (2) *\*I burned it, but it didn't burn.*

In (1), although the verb *moyasu* is in the past tense, it does not entail the expected result (i.e., something burns). Thus, in Japanese, verbs do not always entail the realization of the result contained in their meaning. This phenomenon is called event cancellation, and it has been discussed by a number of scholars (cf. Miyajima 1985, Ikegami 1985, Kageyama 1996, Tsujimura 2003, Yamakawa 2004, and Sato 2005). A similar phenomenon is observed in Burmese.

In Japanese, we should notice that the degree to which event cancellation is acceptable can differ considerably depending on the verb. Ikegami (1981) argues that (3) is unacceptable.

- (3) *\*Kare o korosita keredo, sinanakatta.* [Japanese]  
 he ACC killed although did.not.die  
 ‘(I) killed him, but (he) didn't die.’

Miyajima (1985) has conducted a survey on this issue, and says that judgment on acceptability differs considerably from speaker to speaker.

In Burmese, event cancellation is even more natural than it is in Japanese. In (4) and (5), the result of the action stated in the first sentence is negated in the second sentence.<sup>1</sup> These examples are natural in Burmese.

- (4) *mí εô=dè. dà=bèmə mə-làun=bú*  
 fire burn(vi)=REAL this=though NEG-burn(vt.)=NEG  
 ‘(I) burnt (it). But (it) didn't burn.’

---

<sup>1</sup> In Burmese, when the main clause verb is negated, the verb is prefixed with *mă-* and be followed by the particle =*phú*/=*bú*. With many of the Burmese particles that begin with a voiceless consonant, the first consonant (aside from consonants that follow a glottal stop) is replaced by its voiced counterpart. Particle =*phú*/=*bú* is one such example. In this paper, whenever such particles are cited, both voiceless and voice forms are shown before and after slashes respectively. The Burmese transcription here follows Kato (2013).

- (5)  $t\ddot{u}=g\grave{o}$   $t\ddot{a}^?=\grave{t}\grave{e}$ .  $d\grave{a}=b\grave{e}m\acute{e}$   $m\check{a}-\grave{t}\grave{e}=b\acute{u}$   
 3sg=KO kill=REAL this=though NEG-die=NEG  
 ‘(I) killed (him). But (he) didn't die.’

Furthermore, Burmese also allows the following type of event cancellation, where the action itself appears to be negated.

- (6)  $th\hat{a}=d\grave{e}$ .  $d\grave{a}=b\grave{e}m\acute{e}$   $th\hat{a}=l\acute{o}$   $m\check{a}-y\hat{a}=b\acute{u}$   
 stand.up=REAL this=though stand.up=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) stood up. But (I) couldn't stand up.’

Event cancellation in Burmese shown in (4) and (5) has already been pointed out by Thin Aye Aye Ko (2002: 124-125), but the condition that enables the cancellation is still unknown. There also appears to be no preceding studies that have discussed the phenomenon seen in (6), where the action itself is negated. In this paper, I argue that the reason why the type of event cancellation shown in (4), (5), and (6) is possible is because of the semantic property of volitional verbs in Burmese.

## 2. Classification of verbs

Before discussing event cancellation, it is necessary to classify Burmese verbs.<sup>2</sup>

### (a) Lexical aspect (activity vs. achievement vs. stative)

First, Burmese verbs can be classified based on lexical aspect, as shown in Figure 1. Verbs can be classed as either dynamic verbs or stative verbs (cf. Wheatley 1982: 61-62, 86). Dynamic verbs represent Vendler (1967)'s activities, accomplishments, and achievements, and stative verbs represent states. One way to judge between dynamic verbs and stative verbs is to see whether a verb co-occurring with the realis particle  $=\grave{t}\grave{e}/=d\grave{e}$  can represent a situation that is continuously occurring at the time of utterance. For example, in the case of *hlâ* ‘beautiful’, *hlâ=dê* can represent the meaning ‘(It) is beautiful’, and so it is a stative verb. On the other hand, in the case of *kâ* ‘dance’, *kâ=dê* represents the meaning ‘(He) danced’, and so it is a dynamic verb.

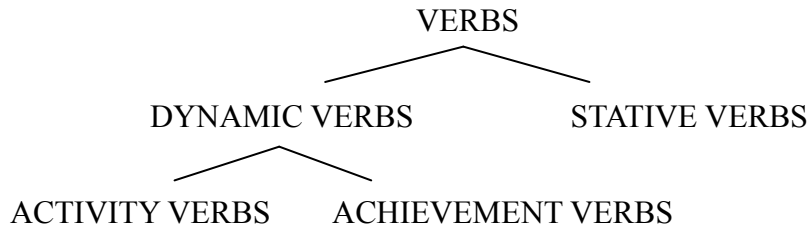


Figure 1: A classification of Burmese verbs

<sup>2</sup> Enfield (2007: 242) provide a valuable reference regarding the classification of verbs in Southeast Asian languages. See also Myint Soe (1999: 239-295) for a detailed classification of Burmese verbs. I used a classification similar to that of the present paper in my Pwo Karen grammar (Kato 2004).

Dynamic verbs can be further divided into activity verbs, which represent activities or accomplishments, and achievement verbs, which represent achievements. When activity verbs co-occur with the verb modifier =*nè* (progressive aspect), they do not represent the resulting state and only represent continuing action. However, when achievement verbs co-occur with =*nè*, they may represent continuing action, but they can also represent resulting state. For example, *kâ=nè=dè* (dance=PROG=REAL) “(He) is dancing” and *yai?nè=dè* (strike=PROG=REAL) “(He) is striking (something)” only represent continuing action and do not represent resulting state. Therefore, *kâ* “dance” and *yai?* “strike” are activity verbs. However, *pye?nè=dè*, in which the verb *pye?* “break” is used, has two meanings. One meaning is “in the process of breaking” (a continuing action), and another meaning is “in a continuous state of being broken.” Since *pye?* can represent a resulting state, it is classified as an achievement verb.

#### (b) Volitional vs. non-volitional

On top of lexical aspect, all Burmese verbs can, as pointed out by Kato (2010), be classified according to volitionality, as either volitional verbs or non-volitional verbs.<sup>3</sup> Volitional verbs represent situations that involve volition, and non-volitional verbs represent situations that do not involve volition. In Burmese, this distinction is highly clear. For example, the sentence *mê=dè* (forget=REAL) “I forgot (it)” always means that the speaker has involuntarily forgotten something, and it can never represent a situation where the speaker “forgets on purpose”. One way to test whether a verb is volitional or non-volitional is to check and see whether or not it co-occurs with the verb modifier =*wè* “be apt to V, be easy to V” (Okell & Allot 2001:301-302). As in the case of *mê=lwè=dè* “be apt to forget,” non-volitional verbs co-occur with =*wè*, whereas volitional verbs do not.

#### (c) Transitive vs. intransitive

In this paper, I add a further classification, i.e., transitive or intransitive. The classification is based on whether or not the verb can co-occur with a noun phrase that can be cliticized with the particle =*kò/=gò*. The particle =*kò/=gò* is used to indicate object-like nouns<sup>4</sup> denoting such as patient, theme, recipient, and goal. I have shown some examples below. Note that this particle is not necessary if the preceding noun is not human.

---

<sup>3</sup> There is a link between lexical aspect and volitionality. The proportion of volitional verbs progressively decreases in the order of ‘action’, ‘achievement’, and ‘stative’. In a list of basic Burmese verbs (all 401) that I created based on the Hattori (1957):

- Among all 202 activity verbs, 185 volitional (91.6%) and 17 non-volitional (8.4%).
- Among all 71 achievement verbs, 12 volitional (16.9%) and 59 non-volitional (83.0%).
- Among all 128 stative verbs, 1 volitional (0.7%) and 127 non-volitional(99.2%).)

<sup>4</sup> As pointed out by Sawada (1995), it is difficult in Burmese to syntactically define the object.

- (7) *ʔédì zǎbwé(=gò) yaiʔ=tè.*  
 that desk=KO strike=REAL  
 ‘(I) struck that desk.’
- (8) *ʔédì ɲá(=gò) hluʔ=tè.*  
 that fish=KO set.free=REAL  
 ‘(I) set that fish free.’
- (9) *mâhlá=gò sàʔouʔ pé=dè.*  
 (personal.name)=KO book give=REAL  
 ‘(I) gave a book to Ma Hla.’
- (10) *ʔédì myô(=gò) ɬwá=dè.*  
 that town=KO go=REAL  
 ‘(I) went to that town.’

— Examples of verbs classified according to this perspective are shown in (11). There are examples of [1] activity verbs, [2] achievement verbs, and [3] stative verbs, and each of these three categories is divided into [a] volitional verbs and [b] non-volitional verbs. Volitional verbs and non-volitional verbs are further divided into intransitive and transitive verbs.

#### (11) Classification of verbs

##### [1] activity verbs

##### [1-a] volitional

<Intransitive>: *ɛauʔ* ‘walk’, *hlouʔ* ‘move’, *khòun* ‘jump’, *ná* ‘rest’, *pyàn* ‘fly’, *pyóun* ‘smile’, *pyé* ‘run; run away’, *twá* ‘crawl’, *yè kú* ‘swim’, *yì* ‘laugh’

<Transitive>: *ceiʔ* ‘grind’, *chá* ‘drop’, *chauʔ* ‘frighten’, *chèin* ‘weigh’, *cheʔ* ‘cook’, *chì* ‘bind’, *chó* ‘bend’, *chuʔ* ‘take off’, *cí* ‘look’, *cò* ‘boil’, *cò* ‘fry’, *ɛà* ‘look for’, *ɛwé* ‘shift’, *hlán* ‘dry’, *hlé* ‘knock down’, *hluʔ* ‘set free’, *hmà* ‘order’, *hmaʔ* ‘mark’, *hmyín* ‘raise’, *hnó* ‘awaken’, *hnouʔ* ‘pull out’, *hɲá* ‘borrow’, *hɲiʔ* ‘squeeze’, *kā* ‘dance’, *kàin* ‘hold’, *kaiʔ* ‘bite’, *kàn* ‘kick’, *kaʔ* ‘attach’, *khauʔ* ‘fold’, *khín* ‘spread’, *khó* ‘steal’, *khò* ‘call, beckon’, *khwà* ‘peel’, *khwé* ‘split’, *kìn* ‘roast’, *kouʔ* ‘scratch’, *kùynì* ‘help’, *kú* ‘cross’, *kú* ‘cure’, *là* ‘come’ (in the case of an animate subject), *laiʔ* ‘follow’, *lèin* ‘cheat’, *louʔ* ‘do; make’, *lú* ‘rob’, *mā* ‘lift’, *mé* ‘ask’, *mí ɛò* ‘burn’, *mwé* ‘keep (animals)’, *ná thàun* ‘listen’, *nín* ‘tread on’, *páun* ‘steam’, *pé* ‘give’, *peiʔ* ‘close’, *phaʔ* ‘read’, *phí* ‘press’, *phwɛʔ* ‘conceal’, *phyè* ‘untie’, *phwín* ‘open’, *phyaʔ* ‘cut’, *phyé* ‘rip’, *phyɛʔ* ‘destroy’, *pò* ‘send’, *puʔ* ‘rub’, *pyá* ‘show’, *pyàn* ‘return’, *pyìn* ‘repair’, *pyiʔ* ‘throw’, *pyó* ‘speak, tell’, *sá* ‘eat’, *saiʔ* ‘plant’, *sáun* ‘wait for’, *shauʔ* ‘build’, *shé* ‘wash’, *shín* ‘descend’ (in the case of an animate subject), *shouʔ* ‘grasp’, *shouʔ* ‘tear’, *shù* ‘scold’, *shwé* ‘pull, drag’, *sí* ‘ride’, *sínzá* ‘consider’, *souʔ* ‘suck’, *táun* ‘ask for’, *taʔ* ‘fix’, *tɛʔ* ‘ascend’ (in the case of an animate subject), *thán* ‘carry on the shoulder’, *thá* ‘put’, *thàun* ‘stand, put up’, *thé* ‘put in’, *thó* ‘stab’, *thouʔ* ‘wrap’, *thouʔ* ‘put out’, *thùn*

‘harrow’, *tú* ‘dig’, *tún* ‘push’, *ṭa?* ‘kill’, *ṭau?* ‘drink’, *ṭè* ‘carry’, *ṭìn* ‘learn’, *ṭóun* ‘use’, *ṭou?* ‘wipe; paint’, *ṭwá* ‘go’ (in the case of an animate subject), *wá* ‘chew’, *wè* ‘buy’, *wu?* ‘wear’, *yai?* ‘strike’, *yáun* ‘sell’, *yei?* ‘reap’, *ye?* ‘weave’, *yé* ‘write’, *yì* ‘count’, *yù* ‘take’, *ṛou?* ‘cover’

[1-b] non-volitional

<Intransitive>: *cháun shó* ‘cough’, *lân* ‘be startled’, *lè* ‘revolve’, *le?* ‘flash’, *myó* ‘float’, *ṛò* ‘cry, weep’, *ṭán* ‘yawn’

<Transitive>: *cá* ‘hear’, *myìn* ‘see’, *là* ‘come’ (in the case of an inanimate subject), *làun* ‘burn’, *nàin* ‘win’, *ṭwá* ‘go’ (in the case of an inanimate subject), *ṛàn* ‘vomit’

[2] achievement verbs

[2-a] volitional

<Intransitive>: *hlé* ‘lie down’, *maṭa?* *ya?* ‘stand up straight’, *sú* ‘gather’, *thá* ‘stand up’, *thàin* ‘sit down’, *ṛei?* ‘sleep’

<Transitive>: *sá* ‘begin’, *thwe?* ‘go out’ (in the case of an inanimate subject), *wìn* ‘enter’ (in the case of an inanimate subject)

[2-b] non-volitional

<Intransitive>: *cá* ‘drop, fall’, *cân* ‘remain’, *ce?* ‘be cooked’, *có* ‘be bent’, *hṛó* ‘wither’, *ka?* ‘be attached’, *khé* ‘coagulate’, *kwà* ‘be detached’, *kwé* ‘be separated’, *lé* ‘fall down’, *myou?* ‘sink’, *nó* ‘wake up’, *néin* ‘(of fire) die out’, *pau?* ‘sprout’, *pei?* ‘close’, *pháun* ‘swell’, *pou?* ‘rot’, *phei?* ‘spill’, *pi* ‘be finished’, *pwîn* ‘open’, *pyau?* ‘disappear; be cured’, *pyân* ‘spread’, *pya?* ‘be cut off’, *pyè* ‘be loosened’, *pyé* ‘be ripped’, *pye?* ‘break’, *pyò* ‘melt’, *sou?* ‘be torn’, *tó* ‘increase’, *ṭè* ‘die’, *yó* ‘decrease’

<Transitive>: *dóṭá phyi?* ‘get angry’, *ḍābó pau?* ‘comprehend, realize’, *ḍādí yá* ‘remember’, *mé* ‘forget’, *thi* ‘touch’, *twé* ‘find’, *yá* ‘get’, *yau?* ‘arrive’

[3] stative verbs

[3-a] volitional

<Intransitive>: *nè* ‘live, stay’

<Transitive>: no verb found

[3-b] non-volitional

<Intransitive>: *chau?* ‘dry’, *chò* ‘sweet’, *cí* ‘big’, *çè* ‘long’, *çî* ‘be, exist’, *ḍābó káun* ‘kind’, *háun* ‘old, out-of-date’, *hlâ* ‘beautiful’, *hmá* ‘wrong’, *hmàn* ‘correct’, *hmàun* ‘dark’, *hné* ‘slow’, *káun* ‘good’, *kau?* ‘crooked’, *khá* ‘bitter’, *khε?* ‘difficult’, *kwé* ‘curved’, *lé* ‘heavy’, *lèinmà* ‘clever’, *lín* ‘bright’, *lwè* ‘easy’, *mà* ‘hard, stiff’, *mai?* ‘stupid’, *mé* ‘black’, *mó* ‘tired’, *myá* ‘many’, *myân* ‘fast’, *myîn* ‘high’, *nà* ‘ache’, *nêin* ‘low’, *né* ‘few’, *nì* ‘red’, *ní* ‘near’, *niṛpa?* ‘dirty’, *pèin* ‘thin, lean’, *phyù* ‘white’, *pô* ‘light’, *pù* ‘hot’, *pyà* ‘blue’, *pyô* ‘soft’, *séin* ‘unripe’, *shó* ‘bad’, *sò* ‘wet’, *tò* ‘short’, *tò* ‘suitable; good at’, *ṭân* ‘clean’, *ṭé* ‘small’, *ṭi?* ‘new’, *wá* ‘fat’, *wé* ‘far’, *yáin* ‘rude’, *yóṭá* ‘honest’, *ṛé* ‘cold, cool’

<Transitive>: *cai?* ‘fond of’, *cau?* ‘fear’, *chi?* ‘love’, *çε?* ‘feel shy’, *hmaṛmí* ‘remember’, *lò* ‘need’, *móun* ‘hate’, *ṭi* ‘know’, *ná lè* ‘understand’, *pàin* ‘own’, *sei?* *pù* ‘worried’, *sei?* *shó* ‘angry’, *sóyèin* ‘anxious’, *ta?* ‘capable of’

### 3. Result cancellation

As shown by Cornyn and McDavid (1943), Burmese has many examples of morphologically connected causative and non-causative verb pairs. Cornyn and McDavid have shown more than 70 such examples. Examples are shown in (12):

(12)	Causative	Non-causative
	châ ‘drop’	câ ‘drop of itself’
	chau? ‘frighten’	cau? ‘fear, to be afraid (of)’
	che? ‘cook’	ce? ‘be cooked’
	chó ‘bend, break (as a stick)’	có ‘be bent’
	hlé ‘knock down’	lé ‘fall down’
	hmyîN ‘elevate’	myîN ‘high’
	hnó ‘awaken’	nó ‘awake of oneself’
	ka? ‘attach, stick’	ka? ‘be attached’
	khau? ‘fold’	kau? ‘be crooked’
	pei? ‘close’	pei? ‘close of itself’
	phwîN ‘open’	pwîN ‘open of itself’
	phyε? ‘destroy’	pyε? ‘break, be destroyed’

There are also verbs that lack a morphological connection, but correspond semantically:

(13)	Causative	Non-causative
	εô ‘burn (something)’	lâUN ‘(something) burns’
	ṭa? ‘kill’	ṭè ‘die’
	hlân ‘dry (vt)’	chau? ‘dry (vi)’

A common characteristic of causative verbs is that they are all volitional verbs. On the other hand, non-causative verbs are all non-volitional verbs.

In Burmese, it is possible to use the pairs of causative verbs and non-causative verbs shown above to create two successive sentences as shown in (14)-(19) (see also (4) and (5)). In these examples, the causative verb in the first sentence contains in its logical structure a result that is then cancelled in the second sentence.

(14)	<i>châ=dê.</i>	<i>dâ=bêmê</i>	<i>mă-câ=bú</i>
	drop(vt)=REAL	this=though	NEG-drop(vi)=NEG
	‘(I) dropped (the cup). But (it) didn't drop.’		

(15)	<i>chó=dê.</i>	<i>dâ=bêmê</i>	<i>mă-có=bú</i>
	bend(vt)=REAL	this=though	NEG-bend(vi)=NEG
	‘(I) bent (a stick). But (it) didn't bend.’		

- (16) *hlé=dè. dà=bèmê mǎ-lé=bú*  
 knock.down=REAL this=though NEG-fall.down=NEG  
 ‘(I) knocked down the tree. But (it) didn't fall down.’
- (17) *phwîn=dè. dà=bèmê mǎ-pwîn=bú*  
 open(vt)=REAL this=though NEG-open(vi.)=NEG  
 ‘(I) opened (the window). But (it) didn't open.’
- (18) *phyeʔ=tè. dà=bèmê mǎ-pyeʔ=phú*  
 destroy=REAL this=though NEG-break(vi.)=NEG  
 ‘(I) destroyed (the machine). But (it) didn't get destroyed.’
- (19) *kaʔ=tè. dà=bèmê mǎ-kaʔ=phú*  
 attach=REAL this=though NEG-attached=NEG  
 ‘(I) attached (the sticker). But (it) didn't get attached.’

The existence of this phenomenon in Burmese demonstrates that the result, which is contained in the logical structure of a causative verb, is not semantically entailed, even when the verb is in the realis mood. In this paper, I will refer to this type of event cancellation as **result cancellation**. In pragmatic terms, the first sentences of these examples may imply the result. If these sentences were not followed by sentences that cancel the result, the listener would assume that the result had occurred. However, in semantic terms, the result is not expressed. If one wants to make it clear that the result has occurred, then the following type of sentence, for example, will be necessary.

- (20) *châ=lô câ=dè*  
 drop(vt)=because drop(vi)=REAL  
 ‘Because (I) dropped (it), (the cup) dropped.’

#### 4. Action cancellation

In section 3, I revealed that in Burmese, the causative verb does not entail the result. In this section, I will introduce a slightly different phenomenon. Have a look at (21). The second sentence in (21) uses the idiom *V=lô yâ* ‘it is possible to V’, which represents external ability. *yâ* is a verb that means ‘get’. The subordinate clause marker *=lô* functions as an adapter linking ‘V’ and *yâ* together. When *V=lô yâ* is negated, it appears as *V=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*.

- (21) *thâ=dè. dà=bèmê thâ=lô mǎ-yâ=bú = (6)*  
 stand.up=REAL this=though stand.up=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) stood up. But (I) couldn't stand up.’

In this example, the first sentence says ‘(I) stood up’, but the second sentence says ‘(I) couldn't stand up’. In other words, the action itself appears to be cancelled. (The *V=lô yâ* part may also be rephrased using the verb modifier *=hnàin*, which likewise indicates

external ability.)

In this paper, I refer to this type of event cancellation as *action cancellation*. Strictly speaking, however, the action itself is not cancelled in (21). The situation represented in this example could be described as follows: “I was first sitting on a chair. Then, wishing to stand up, I started getting up from the chair. However, on account of pain in my leg, I never managed to stand up straight”. Thus, the verb predicate *thâ=dê* in the first sentence represents the halfway-accomplishment of the action that the verb denotes, and *thâ=lô mǎ-yâ=bú* in the second sentence represents that the end point of the action (“standing up straight”) was never reached. In other words, what is cancelled is not the entire process of the action, but only its end point. Consequently, (21) is free of logical inconsistency. If a form that represents ability is not used, then an unacceptable utterance will result, as shown in (22).

- (22)        \**thâ=dê*.                *dâ=bêmê*        *mǎ-thâ=bú*  
               stand.up=REAL        this=though    NEG-stand.up=cNEG  
               ‘(I) stood up. But (I) didn’t stand up.’

(The question why the form that represents external ability can only negate the end point is not related to the theme of the paper, so I will not discuss it here. The important thing to understand here is the fact that the negation of the verb does not produce a logical contradiction.)

What requires attention when discussing action cancellation is the fact that this phenomenon does not come into effect with non-volitional verbs. The two verbs below *ṭê* “die” and *cá* “hear” in (23) and (24) are both non-volitional verbs. These utterances are therefore unacceptable. For action cancellation to work, the verb must be volitional. For this reason, throughout the rest of this discussion, all cases of action cancellation will involve volitional verbs.

- (23)        \**ṭê=dê*.                *dâ=bêmê*        *ṭê=lô*        *mǎ-yâ=bú*  
               die=REAL        this=though    die=LO        NEG-get=NEG  
               ‘(I) died. But (I) couldn’t die.’

- (24)        \**cá=dê*.                *dâ=bêmê*        *cá=lô*        *mǎ-yâ=bú*  
               hear=REAL        this=though    hear=LO        NEG-get=NEG  
               ‘(I) heard (the sound). But (I) couldn’t hear (it).’

In the next sections I will use various verbs as examples to show the specific situations that action cancellation can represent. In 4.1 I will give examples of intransitive verbs, and in 4.2 I will give examples of transitive verbs.

#### 4.1 Action cancellation with intransitive verbs

The situations represented by action cancellation with intransitive verbs can be categorized into at least the following three types.



[A] Case where a situation that should occur in the actor once the action represented by the verb is completed does not occur

It is possible to interpret an action cancellation as representing such a situation when the sentence has achievement verbs such as *thàin* “sit”, *hlé* “lie down”, *ʔeiʔ* “sleep”, *thâ* “stand up”. (Examples (25) and (26) could potentially represent the situations annotated below each example.)

- (25) *thàin=dè. dà=bèmê thàin=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 sit=REAL this=though sit=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) sat down. But (I) couldn’t sit down.’

Situation: “Intending to sit down on the chair, I started lowering my body down. However, on account of pain in my leg, I was unable to lower my body all the way down to the chair.”

- (26) *ʔeiʔ=tè. dà=bèmê ʔeiʔ=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 sleep=REAL this=though sleep=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) slept. But (I) couldn’t sleep.’

Situation: “I lay down in bed, but I could not get to sleep.”

Example (21) also represents the following situation: “I was first sitting on a chair. Then, wishing to stand up, I started getting up from the chair. However, on account of pain in my leg, I never managed to stand up straight.”

[B] Case where the actor tenses his/her muscles in order to move his/her body, but the action itself fails to commence

When considering action cancellation, it is this category of cases that requires the most attention. This is because the action itself fails to commence. (21) above could also potentially represent the following situation: “Wishing to stand, I tensed my muscles. However, on account of pain in my leg, I could not move my leg at all, and so I could not get up from the chair”. In this situation, the actor only got as far as tensing his/her muscles, so the action itself never commenced. Here are some more examples.

- (27) *thàin=dè. dà=bèmê thàin=lô mǎ-yâ=bú* =(25)  
 sit=REAL this=though sit=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) sat down. But (I) couldn’t sit down.’

Situation: “Intending to sit in the chair, I tensed my muscles. However, on account of pain in my leg, I could not move my leg at all.”

- (28) *εauʔ=tè. dà=bèmê εauʔ=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 walk=REAL this=though walk=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) walked. But (I) couldn’t walk.’

Situation: “Intending to start walking, I tensed my muscles. However, on account of pain in my leg, I could not move my leg at all.”

- (29) *yì=dè. dà=bèmê yì=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 laugh=REAL this=though laugh=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) laughed. But (I) couldn’t laugh.’

Situation: “Intending to laugh, I tensed my muscles. However, I felt so frightened that I could not show a laughing face.”

So far, I have found the following verbs that allow such a reading: *hlou?* “move”, *thâ* “stand up”, *thàin* “sit down”, *pyé* “run”, *pyóun* ‘smile’, *εau?* “walk”, *yì* “smile”. All these verbs are intransitive verbs that represent actions that are simple and frequently performed in the daily life.

[C] Case where the period of action or volume of action is shorter/lower than expected  
 Such a reading is possible with any intransitive volitional verb. Examples:

- (30) *pyé=dè. dà=bèmê pyé=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 run=REAL this=though run=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) ran. But (I) couldn’t run.’

Situation: “I intended to run continuously for one hour. However, I became exhausted mid-way and could not run any longer.”

- (31) *khòun=dè. dà=bèmê khòun=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 jump=REAL this=though jump=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) jumped. But (I) couldn’t jump.’

Situation: “I jumped up intending to clear the fence. However, I did not jump high enough and failed to clear the fence.”

#### 4.2 Action cancellation with transitive verbs

The situations represented by action cancellation with transitive verbs can be categorized into at least the following seven types.

[A] Case where a situation or movement that should occur in the referent of the object once the action represented by the verb is completed does not occur

This reading is possible when the verb represents a physical change in the patient (for example, *khwé* “split”, *shou?* “tear”, *ché?* “cook”, *chó* “bend”, *kìn* “roast”, *tá?* “kill”, *phyé?* “break”) or movement in the patient (for example, *chá* “drop”, *chu?* “take off”, *pyi?* “throw”, *khó* “steal”, *phwîn* “open”, *tún* “push”, *tè* “carry”).

- (32) *khwé=dè. dà=bèmê khwé=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 split(vt)=REAL this=though split(vt)=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) dropped (it). But (I) couldn’t drop (it).’

Situation: “I struck a coconut intending to crack it open. However, I could not crack it open.” (no change occurs)

- (33) *châ=dê. dà=bèmê châ=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 drop(vt)=REAL this=though drop(vt)=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) dropped (it). But (I) couldn’t drop (it).’  
 Situation: “I attempted to use a stick to dislodge a painting that was mounted high up on a wall. The stick reached to the painting, but the painting did not fall down.” (no movement occurs)
- (34) *sá=dê. dà=bèmê sá=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 eat=REAL this=though eat=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) ate (it). But (I) couldn’t eat (it).’  
 Situation: “I put a fruit in my mouth, but I could not swallow it because it was too hard to chew (or because it was rotten).” (no movement occurs)
- (35) *wè=dê. dà=bèmê wè=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 buy=REAL this=though buy=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) bought (it). But (I) couldn’t buy (it).’  
 Situation: “I went to a shop to buy a book, but the book I wanted was not there, so I could not buy it.” (no movement of a book occurs)
- (36) *pyó=dê. dà=bèmê pyó=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 speak=REAL this=though speak=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) spoke (a word). But (I) couldn’t speak.’  
 Situation: “I tried to speak, but my nerves got the better of me and I became speechless.” (no movement of words or voice occurs)

[B] Case where the actor does not come into contact with the referent of the object

This reading is possible when the verb represents the action of coming into contact with the patient (for example, *yai?* “strike”, *kai?* “bite”, *kàin* “hold”, *pu?* “rub”, *kàn* “kick”).

- (37) *yai?=tê. dà=bèmê yai?=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 strike=REAL this=though strike=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) struck (it). But (I) couldn’t strike (it).’  
 Situation: “I tried to strike a monkey with a stick. However, the stick was too short to reach it.”
- (38) *kàin=dê. dà=bèmê kàin=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
 hold=REAL this=though hold=LO NEG-get=NEG  
 ‘(I) holded (it). But (I) couldn’t hold (it).’  
 Situation: “I put my hand on a kettle in order to pick it up, but it was too hot to pick up.”

[C] Case where the actor does not arrive at the destination

This reading is possible when the verb represents movement (for example, *ḡwá* “go”,

*là* “come”, *pyàn* “return”, *tɛ?* “ascend”, *shín* “descend”).

- (39) *tʷá=dè. dà=bèmê tʷá=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
go=REAL this=though go=LO NEG-get=NEG  
'(I) went. But (I) couldn't go.'

Situation: “I left my house to go to the office, but the route was closed off on account of roadworks, so I never made it to the office.”

[D] Case where the referent of the object does not appear

This reading is possible when the object represents a physical entity that is created by the action denoted by the verb (for example, *tú* “dig”, *lou?* “make”, *yɛ?* “weave”, *shau?* “build”).

- (40) *tú=dè. dà=bèmê tú=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
dig=REAL this=though dig=LO NEG-get=NEG  
'(I) dug (a hole). But (I) couldn't dig (one).'

Situation: “I dug soil in order to make a hole, but the soil was too hard and I could not make the hole.”

[E] Case where the actor cannot perceive the referent of the object

This reading is possible when the verb represents perception (for example, *cí* “look”, *ná thàun* “listen”).

- (41) *cí=dè. dà=bèmê cí=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
look=REAL this=though look=LO NEG-get=NEG  
'(I) looked at (it). But (I) couldn't look at (it).'

Situation: “I opened my eyes, but it was too dark to see.”

[F] Case where an act that the actor expects the referent of the object to perform is not performed

This reading is possible when the verb represents an action that cannot be accomplished unless the object, which is living entity, voluntarily does something (for example, *pé* “give”, *yáun* “sell”, *pyâ* “show”, *táun* “ask for”). Example (42) could potentially represent the following situation: “I tried to give my friend a present, but he did not take it”.

- (42) *pé=dè. dà=bèmê pé=lô mǎ-yâ=bú*  
give=REAL this=though give=LO NEG-get=NEG  
'(I) gave (it). But (I) couldn't give (it).'

Situation: “I tried to give my friend a present, but he did not take it.”

The same situation can be represented by other verbs too. *yáun* “sell”: “I tried to sell it to a customer, but he did not buy it”; *pyâ* “show”: “I tried to show my friend a photograph, but he did not look at it”; *táun* “ask for”: “I asked my friend for money, but

he did not give me any.”

[G] Case where the period or volume of action is shorter/lower than expected

This reading is possible with any transitive volitional verb. Example (43) could potentially represent the following situation: “I tried to keep eating for one hour, but I gave up before an hour had passed”. It could also represent the following situation: “I tried to eat a mango, but it was so large that I could not eat it all”.

- (43)      *sá=dê.*      *dà=bêmê*      *sá=lô*      *mă-yâ=bú*      =(48)  
eat=REAL    this=though    eat=LO    NEG-get=NEG  
'(I) ate (it). But (I) couldn't eat (it).'

#### 4.3 The essence of action cancellation

As we have seen, action cancellation represents a situation where some action represented by a volitional verb was partially performed, but never reached its end point. Thus, it follows that volitional verbs in Burmese do not semantically entail the reaching of the end point. It is interesting to note that, as in the case of 4.1[B], there are cases where the action itself is regarded as the end point, and it is cancelled.

Now, let us compare result cancellation and action cancellation.

- (44)    a.    *châ=dê.*      *dà=bêmê*      *châ=lô*      *mă-yâ=bú*      =(33)  
drop(vt)=REAL    this=though    drop(vt)=LO    NEG-get=NEG  
'(I) dropped (it). But (I) couldn't drop (it).'
- b.    *châ=dê.*      *dà=bêmê*      *mă-câ=bú*      =(14)  
drop(vt)=REAL    this=though    NEG-drop(vi)=NEG  
'(I) dropped (the cup). But (it) didn't drop.'

In the example of action cancellation shown in (44a), the speaker tried to drop an object, but the object did not fall. In other words, the situation that this utterance represents is by and large the same as the example of result cancellation shown in (44b). In view of this fact, we can consider the result cancellation shown in Section 3 to be essentially the same phenomenon as action cancellation. Both result cancellation and action cancellation are phenomena that stem from the fact that Burmese volitional verbs do not semantically entail the reaching of the end point.

## 5. Conclusion

Event cancellation in Burmese is a distinctive characteristic that is generally observed in volitional verbs. Result cancellation is essentially the same phenomenon as action cancellation, and they both stem from the fact that Burmese volitional verbs do not entail the reaching of the end point. What is particularly interesting is the fact that, as in 4.1[B], there are also cases of event cancellation where the action itself is regarded as the end point, and it is cancelled.

Result cancellation is reported to exist in other languages beside Japanese such as Chinese (Tai 1984) and Tamil (Talmy 1991). In addition, I have pointed out in Kato

(1996) the existence of action cancellation in Pwo Karen, a neighboring language to Burmese. Regarding Thai, Thepkanjana and Uehara (2009) point out that result cancellation occurs in verb serialization. It is apparent that result cancellation and action cancellation are widely used across East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia albeit with some language-based variance. I would therefore argue that this phenomenon may well be a type of areal feature.

### Acknowledgments

I thank U Shwe Pyi Soe, Daw Htet Htet, Ma Aye Mya Thandar who helped me as native speakers of Burmese by judging the acceptability of Burmese sentences.

### Abbreviations

ACC - accusative; KA - the case particle =*kâ*/=*gâ* ‘agent (subject); source’; KO - the case particle =*kò*/=*gò* ‘patient; theme; recipient; goal’; LO - the subordinate clause marker =*lô*; NEG - negation; PI - the particle =*pi*/=*bi* indicating a perfect-like meaning; PROG - progressive; REAL - realis modality; TOP - topic; V - verb; vi - intransitive verb; vt - transitive verb

### References

- Cornyn W. S. and R. I. McDavid, Jr. 1943. Causatives in Burmese. *Studies in Linguistics* 1(18). 1–6.
- Enfield, N. J. 2007. *A Grammar of Lao*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hattori, Shiro, ed. 1957. *Kisogoi Tyōsahyō*. Tokyo: Department of Linguistics, University of Tokyo.
- Ikegami, Yoshihiko. 1981. “*Suru*” to “*Naru*” no Gengogaku: *Gengo to Bunka no Taiporoji e no Shiron*. Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten.
- Ikegami, Yoshihiko. 1985. ‘Activity’ - ‘accomplishment’ - ‘achievement’ – A language that can’t say ‘I burned it, but it didn’t burn’ and one that can. In Adam Makkai and Alan K. Melby (eds.) *Linguistics and Philosophy. Essays in Honor of Rulon S. Wells*. 265-304. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kageyama, Taro. 1996. *Dōshi Imiron: gengo to ninchi no setten*. Tokyo: Kuroshio.
- Kato, Atsuhiko. 1996. Pōkarengo (tōbu hogen) no dōshirenzoku ni okeru shudōshi ni tsuite [On head verbs of serial verb constructions in Pwo Karen]" *Gengo Kenkyu* (Journal of the Linguistic Society of Japan) 113. 31-61.
- Kato, Atsuhiko. 2004. *Pōkarengo Bunpō* [A Pwo Karen Grammar]. PhD dissertation, University of Tokyo.
- Kato, Atsuhiko. 2010. Birumago no ‘ue’ o arawasu meishi no kōchishiteki yōhō ni tsuite [On the postposition-like usage of a Burmese noun that means ‘on’]. *Journal of the Research Institute for World Languages, Osaka University* 4. 31-54.
- Kato, Atsuhiko. 2013. Mermaid construction in Burmese. In Tasaku Tsunoda (ed.) *Adnominal Clauses and the ‘Mermaid Construction’: Grammaticalization of Nouns* [NINJAL Collaborative Research Project Reports 13-01], pp. 419-463. Tachikawa, Japan: National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics.

- Miyajima, Tatsuo. 1985. "Doa o aketa ga, akanakatta": doshi no imi ni okeru <kekkasei>. *Keiryō Kokugogaku (Mathematical Linguistics)* 14(8). 335-353.
- Myint Soe. 1999. *A Grammar of Burmese*. PhD dissertation, University of Oregon.
- Okell, John. 1969. *A Reference Grammar of Colloquial Burmese*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Okell, John and Anna Allott. 2001. *Burmese/Myanmar Dictionary of Grammatical Forms*. Richmond & Surrey: Curzon Press.
- Sato, Takuzo. 2005. *Jidoshibun to Tadoshibun no Imiron*. Tokyo: Kasama Shoin.
- Sawada, Hideo. 1995. On the usages and functions of particles -kou/-ka. in colloquial Burmese. In Yoshio Nishi, James A. Matisoff, and Yasuhiko Nagano (eds.) *New Horizons in Tibeto-Burman Morphosyntax*. Senri Ethnological Studies no. 41. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology. 153-187.
- Tai, James H-Y. 1984. Verbs and times in Chinese: Vendler's four categories. *Papers from the Parasession on Lexical Semantics, Chicago Linguistic Society*, 289-296.
- Talmy, Leonard. 1991. Path to realization: a typology of event conflation. *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*. 480-519.
- Thepkanjana, Kingkarn and Satoshi Uehara. 2009. Resultative constructions with "implied-result" and "entailed-result" verbs in Thai and English: a contrastive study. *Linguistics* 47(3). 589-618.
- Thin Aye Aye Ko. 2002. *Gendai Kogo Birumago ni okeru Goikozo to Imitokucho: Birumago to Nihongo no Taisho no Kantan kara*. Kobe: Kobe University dissertation.
- Tsujimura, Natsuko. 2003. Event cancellation and telicity. In William McClure (ed.), *Japanese/Korean Linguistics, Volume 12*, 388-399. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Vendler. 1967. *Linguistics in Philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Yamakawa, Futoshi. 2004. Iwayuru nihongo no Event Cancellation ni tsuite. *Nihon Gengogakkai Dai 128-kai Taikai Yokoshu*. 227-232.
- Wheatley, K. Julian. 1982. *Burmese: A Grammatical Sketch*. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley dissertation.