

THE POWER OF PĀḲI GRAMMAR

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Abstract

In most languages of the world, the sequence of words that appears in sentences has to conform to a fixed pattern as a basic grammatical requirement. This happens to be the case especially in non-inflectional languages. Therefore, the leading linguists of the world, especially those in Europe and the U.S., regard the sequence of words in sentences as one of the most important principles of grammar in their theories. In a highly inflectional language like PāḲi, however, the grammar is so precise and systematic that the notion of the correct sequence of words is negligible to a great extent. In PāḲi, all lexical units that appear in sentences, except the indeclinable, have to be in appropriate grammatical agreements in terms of number, gender and case with their relevant unit or units in the sentence. This inflectional nature of the PāḲi language challenges the theoretical notion of the fixed sequence of units in sentences. This paper demonstrates that the highly inflectional nature of grammar serves as the power of language in PāḲi, not only in pieces of prose such as the ‘Suttas’, but also in the lyrics of the verses (*‘gāthās’*) as well.

Keywords: PāḲi, Language, Grammar, Sequence, Tagmemic model

Introduction

One of many grammatical features that play an important role in almost all linguistic theories is the order of words that appear in sentences. In the tagmemic model of grammar within the framework of general structural linguistics, the sequence of words in sentences is one of the four basic notions that underlie the rationale of the entire theory. These four notions can be explained as initially described by Kenneth Pike (1960) and further developed by Elson & Pickett (1962) and also by Cook (1968). The first notion is that there is such a thing as the principle of linguistic level whereby any syntactic unit is made up of a sequence of smaller syntactic units. In practical language analysis, it implies that sentences are made up of a sequence of clauses, clauses of phrases, phrases of words, and words of morphemes. This is generally recognized as the notion of levels in languages.

The second notion is that within a language, smaller syntactic units can combine together to form a larger syntactic unit. In the larger syntactic unit, there is the restriction of order, that is, the smaller unit must conform to the right order of appearance in the larger unit. In simple practical terms, it is the stipulation that subject is to come before the verb, and the verb is to appear before the object and so on. This notion is generally recognized as the notion of the order of units or constituents in a structure.

The third notion is that each smaller unit can be identified by two aspects. One aspect is that it can be identified by the way it is constructed internally (as a combination of units), and the other aspect is that it can be identified by the function or the role it plays at the higher level. For instance, a noun phrase can be firstly identified by the way the words are combined within it, and secondly by its function either as the subject or the object of the clause. This notion is recognized as the notion of internal structural and function.

The fourth notion is that within the internal structure of a unit, some members are obligatory in the sense that they are absolutely necessary for the structure and some are optional in the sense that they are not absolutely necessary for the structure. For instance, in a sentence like ‘The cat killed the mouse in the barn.’, ‘the cat’ as the subject and ‘the mouse’ as the object are absolutely necessary for the structure, whereas ‘in the barn’ as a prepositional phrase is not

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absolutely necessary and therefore can be left out, and the remainder can stand as a grammatical sentence by itself. This notion is recognized as the notion of obligation and optionality.

The main objective of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the fact that the grammar of Pāḷi as a highly inflectional language is so systematic, precise and powerful that it can challenge the validity of the second of the above four notions. In other words, the objective of the present paper is to ascertain that in a highly inflectional language such as Pāḷi, the theoretical notion of the restriction of the sequence of members in an internal structure of a unit is almost non-applicable at the sentence and clause levels, and hence it pales into insignificance.

With this theoretical concern in mind, i.e., the necessity or otherwise of the sequence of units in a structure, it will be in order to present a brief overview of the general sequence of words in sentences in the English and Myanmar languages with which the readers in Myanmar are familiar.

The sequence of units in the sentences of the English language

In terms of a basic general principle with regard to the order of words in sentences with transitive verbs, most languages of the world can be classified under two categories, namely, the SVO languages and the SOV languages, where ‘S’ signifies a subject, ‘V’ a verb and ‘O’ an object. It is generally recognized that the English language is an SVO language where subjects appear before verbs and verbs appear before objects. It is not unusual, however, for a reader to encounter a sentence in English where the verb appears before the subject. But such sentences do appear from time to time or very occasionally only in written English and they do not appear in speaking. As the primary concern of linguistics is the way in which languages are spoken, linguists generally accept the English language as an SVO language.

It is possible in written English to place the verb before the subject under special circumstances which are usually the objects of discussion only in the study of stylistics in literature, and these objects of discussion are not the concerns of the principal area of linguistics proper such as syntax. In addition, even in written English, these VS sentences where the verb appears before the subject are written only when there is a unit or a structure, either a participle or a phrase or a clause preceding the verb.

For instance, the reader can find the following clauses and sentences where verb precedes the subject in William Somerset Maugham’s “The Summing Up”. (Heron Books, Geneva and London, 1967; p. 18.)

S1. The view was splendid over the plain, and in the distance was Paris.

S2. There was a road down to the river and by the river lay a little village.

In S1, the Verb-Subject structure ‘was Paris’ is possible because of the existence of the clause ‘The view was splendid over the plain’, and also the phrase ‘and in the distance’ preceding it.

In S2, the Verb-Subject structure ‘was a road’ is possible because of the existence of ‘there’ preceding ‘was’.

In S2 again, the Verb-Subject structure ‘lay a little village’ is possible because of the existence of the phrase ‘by the river’ preceding it.

For a further instance the reader can view the two following sentences in the third column of page 657 of the Micropaedia, Vol.II., the New Encyclopedia Britannica, Fifteenth Edition, 1985, under the entry ‘Burma’.

S3. Next in importance are other grains, groundnuts, pulses and cotton.

S4. Among non-metallic minerals were limestone, salt, barite, gypsum and jadeite.

In these two sentences (S3 and S4) the underlined VS structures are possible because of the existence of the prepositional phrases before them.

However, even in written English the occurrences of such structures are very rare. In the five columns of nearly two pages under ‘Burma’ in the Encyclopedia quoted above, these examples are the only two of the kind the reader can find under the same entry. This signifies that the usage of such structures is very rare even in written English. With regard to the notion of word order in sentences with transitive verbs, linguists therefore regard the English language as an SVO language. However, if we leave the object slot out in view of the existence of intransitive sentences (e.g., ‘Mary smiles. ‘John came’.) where there is no object, the English language has to be regarded as an SV and SOV language.

The sequence of units in the Myanmar language

In the Myanmar language, however, as the positions of subjects and objects in sentences with transitive verbs are interchangeable, the Myanmar language must be regarded as both SOV and OSV. For instance, the two types of sentences, (a) and (b) given below are acceptable as grammatical in the Myanmar language. (The Myanmar script is Romanized in line with the method used in Okell, 1969, in the following sentences in square brackets.)

(a_{1.1}) သဟမ္ပတိဗြဟ္မာ က ဗုဒ္ဓကို တောင်းပန်တယ်။
 [thahampati brhamaka bou[?]dakou taunpante.
 “Sahampati Brhamā requested the Buddha.”

(a_{1.2}) ဗုဒ္ဓကို သဟမ္ပတိဗြဟ္မာ က တောင်းပန်တယ်။
 [bou[?]dakou thahampati brhamaka taunpante.]
 “Sahampati Brhamā requested the Buddha.”

(a_{2.1}) ဝိဇ္ဇုဗမင်းသား ကပိလဝတ်ပြည်ကို မီးတိုက်တယ်။
 [witatupamintha ka[?]pilawu[?]pyikou mitai[?]te.]
 “Prince Viṭaṭūpa burned Kappilavatthu.”

(a_{2.2}) ကပိလဝတ်ပြည်ကို ဝိဇ္ဇုဗမင်းသား မီးတိုက်တယ်။
 [ka[?]pilawu[?]pyikou witatupamintha mitai[?]te.]
 “Prince Viṭaṭūpa burned Kappilavatthu.”

The type (a) sentences demonstrate that the linear positions of subjects and objects are interchangeable because of the existence of the subject marker ‘က’ and the object marker ‘ကို’.

- (b₁) ဂျာအေး သူ့အမေ ရိုက်တယ်။ [ja-ei thu-amei yai[?] te]
- (b₂) လျှောမွေးလေး ကြောင်ကိုက်တယ်။ [hyomweilei caun kai[?]-te]
- (b₃) မောင်အေး ဆရာစော ရိုက်တယ်။ [maunei hsayaso yai[?]-te]
- (b₄) မအေး ခွေးကိုက်တယ်။ [ma-ei hkwei kai[?]-te]
- (b₅) ဆရာစော မောင်အေး ရိုက်တယ်။ [hsayaso maunei yai[?]-te]

The type (b) sentences demonstrate that object can come before the subject without the object marker ‘ကို’, and the subject can follow it without the subject marker ‘တ’, because of the context or the meaning of the subjects and the verbs.

(c_{1.1}) သာဒုတ် မိန့်ကြိုက်တယ်။ [thadou[?] minu cai[?]-te]

(c_{1.2}) မိန့် သာဒုတ်ကြိုက်တယ်။ [minu thadou[?] Cai[?]-te]

(c_{2.1}) သာဒုတ် မိန့်ရိုက်တယ်။ [thadou[?] minu yai[?]te]

(c_{2.2}) မိန့် သာဒုတ်ရိုက်တယ်။ [minu thadou[?] yai[?]te]

In the c₁ sentences the listener is more likely to understand the first word, a proper noun, of the sentence, to be the subject because of the meaning of the verb (ကြိုက်တယ်), though both sentences can be regarded as ambiguous in the strict sense of grammaticality. In the c₂ sentences, however, it is certainly unclear as to who the subject is and who the object is. But such an ambiguity of word order can be controlled by the case markers such as ‘တ’ and ‘ကို’ as mentioned earlier.

The primary point of argument in this discussion is that the Myanmar language must be regarded both as an SOV and an OSV language, and the identification of ‘S’ and ‘O’ is made possible in this situation with the help of case markers; and the secondary point of argument is that these SOV and OSV sequences are the basic principle of the structure of active voice sentences in the Myanmar language. However, as is the case in the English language discussed at the end of Section 1.3, if we leave the object slot (O) out in recognition of the existence of intransitive sentences [(e.g., ခင်ခင် (S) လှတယ် (V) “Khin Khin is beautiful.” and မောင်မောင် (S) လာတယ် (V) “Maung Maung came.”], the Myanmar language has to be regarded as an SV language.

The sequence of words in sentences in the Pāli language

The purpose of this section is to discuss the word order of the sentences in the Pāli language in two literary modes, namely, the basic prose mode and the poetic Gāthā “ဂါထာ” mode.

The basic normal prose mode of the Pāli language

In the basic prose mode of Pāli literature, either canonical or non-canonical, the basic general principle of word order in sentences is mainly SV, that is, the subject precedes the verb in a clause or a sentence.

e.g. *Bhikkhavo ’ti Buddho(S) bikkhū āmantesi(V)*.

“Oh Monks! Buddha addressed the monks.”

Bhadantet ’ti bhikkhu(S) bhagavato paccassosum(V).

“Yes! Your Reverence!, monks replied to the Buddha.” [In the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna and many other Suttas.]

Pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ (S) udapādi (V), ñāṇaṃ (S) udapādi (V), paññā(S) udapādi(V), vijjā(S) udapādi (V), āloka(V) udapādi(V). [From the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta]

“In the realizations of the Truth which were unheard of in the past, vision appeared, knowledge appeared, wisdom appeared, intuition appeared and enlightenment appeared. This feature of clauses ending in a verb is more prominent in *Anādara* and *Bhāvalakkhaṇā* sentences

where the first clause ends in the PPA (Present Participle Active) form taking either a Genitive case marker or a Locative case marker, which are generally described as Genitive and Locative Absolute Constructions. (See Daw Khin Thein and U Kyaw Shein’s Basic Pali Grammar, 1969; p.129). The following examples below clarify this statement.

e.g., *Mātāpitūsu rudantesu putto pabbaji(V)*.

“While the parents were lamenting the son renounced the world.”

Dārakassa rudantassa pitā pakkamati (V).

“While the boy is weeping the father departs.”

This grammatical feature can also be observed in sentences where the first clause ends in a gerundial form usually with the suffix ‘tvā’.

e.g., *Brhāmaṇo(S) bhagavantaṃ abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ aṭṭhāsi(V)*.

“The Brhamana sat down in an appropriate place after paying obeisance to the Buddha.”

Aññātara devatā (S) bhagavantaṃ upasaṅkamitvā gāthāya ajjhabhāsi(V).

“Having approached the Buddha, a certain deity spoke (to the Buddha) in verses.”

In these examples, as indicated by the abbreviations (‘S’) and (‘V’), the subjects precede the verbs appearing at the end of the sentences. However, this kind of simple word order is merely a nominal and formal grammatical procedure and it is not necessary to adhere to it under all circumstances as in the English language.

The prose mode of expression in Pāli literature

In the actual pieces of prose in Pāli literature, especially in the Suttas, it can be observed that this kind of strict word order is not consistently followed. Therefore, there is no such thing as a strict word order and hence the subjects and verbs, or any unit of a sentence can virtually appear in any place in a sentence in prose, usually in the Suttas and commentaries. Such is the case in Pāli literature, because the grammar of Pāli as an inflectional language is very systematic and powerful. Because of the principle of agreement in case, number and gender of verbs, nouns, adjectives (or any unit in a sentence, except the indeclinables, the ‘Nipāta’ units), the meaning of the sentence is easily understood irrespective of the positions of the units in the sentence. (The indeclinable can also appear in any place in a sentence as they are not supposed to be in grammatical agreement with anything in the sentence). This statement can be illustrated in the examples, extracts from the Pāli texts, given below.

ဣဓ ဘိက္ခဝေ ဘိက္ခု အရညဂတော ဝါ ရုက္ခမူလဂတော ဝါ သုညာဂါရဂတော ဝါ နိသီဒတိ ပလ္လင်္ဂိ အာဘုဇိတွာ, ဥဇုံ ကာယံ ပဏီဓါယ, ပရိမုခံ သတိံ ဥပဋ္ဌပေတွာ။

[Please note that in this example sentence, ‘*nisidati*’, the main verb of the sentence, occurs in the middle of the sentence, not at the end, and that the Most Venerable Mahāchī Sayadaw puts a comma at the end of every gerundial phrase (except the last one) in order to signify that the gerundive forms mark the end of the clauses, but not the end of the sentence.]

Idha bhikkhave bikkhu(S) araññagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati(V) pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā, ujum kāyaṃ pañīdhāya, parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā။

[Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta]. Given below is the English translation (by the author) of the Myanmar Nissaya Translation composed by the Most Venerable Aggamahāpaṇḍita Mahāchī Sayadaw (မဟာသတိပဋ္ဌာန သုတ်၊ ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာနဂ္ဂဟ အဖွဲ့ချုပ်၊ ၁၉၈၄, .စာ၊ ၃၃-၃၆။)။

Idha = In the environment where my Teaching prevails, *Bhikkhave* = Oh monks! *Bikkhu*=the monk (who is a practitioner), *araññagato vā* = having gone to a forest grove or, *Rukkhāmūlagato vā* = having gone to the foot of a tree or, *Suññāgāragato vā* = having gone to a secluded place where there is no human habitation, *Nisīdati* = sits, *Pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā* = having assumed the crossed-legged posture, *Ujūṃ kāyaṃ paṇīdhāya* = keeping the upper part of the body in the straight upright position, *Parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* = having directed the concentration to the sense object of meditation. ||

[Please note that in this Nissaya translation into English, the first letter of every Pāli word is written in upper case in order to differentiate it from the following English translation.] The long sentence ends in the gerundive form ‘*upaṭṭhapetvā*’ as marked with the Myanmar full stop sign in the citation above. Although there are many units between the subject ‘*bhikkhu*’ and the verb ‘*nisīdati*’ which appears in the middle of the sentence (not at the end as in basic normal constructions), the meaning of the sentence is easily understood, because the subject ‘*bhikkhu*’ is in agreement with the verb ‘*nisīdati*’ in person (yoga, third person singular), case (kārika, nominative singular) and number (singular in present tense). In the same manner, the other units ‘*araññagato*’, ‘*rukkhāmūlagato*’, ‘*suññāgāragato*’, the past participle passive forms, are also in an agreement with the subject ‘*bhikkhu*’ in number, gender and case, and hence it is easily understood that they are qualifying the subject ‘*bhikkhu*’. The remaining units ‘*pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā*’, ‘*ujūṃ kāyaṃ paṇīdhāya*’, ‘*Parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*’ are also understood as the actions that take place before the action indicated by the main verb ‘*nisīdati*’, since they are gerundive (*pubbakāla*) forms, irrespective of their positions in the sentence. All of these units collectively function in grammatical cohesiveness delivering the definite unambiguous meaning of the sentence --

“Oh monks! in this environment (where my Teaching prevails), having gone to a forest grove or to the foot of a tree or to a secluded place where there is no human habitation, the (practitioner) monk (should) sit, having assumed the crossed-legged posture, keeping the upper part of the body in the straight upright position, having applied the concentration to the sense object (of meditation).

This kind of sentence structural mechanism can be observed in many a sentence in almost every canonical and non-canonical text of Pāli literature. Given below is a further example which demonstrates this kind of structural mechanism.

Tasmā tiha bhikkhave yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumam vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā, sabbam rūpaṃ “netam mama, nesohamasmi, na me so attā”ti evametam yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbam. [Anattalakkhana Sutta]. Given below is the English translation (by the author) of the Myanmar

Nissaya Translation composed by the Most Venerable Aggamahāpaṇḍita Laeti Sayadaw

(အနတ္တလက္ခဏ သုတ်၊ မြတ်ဆုမွန် စာပေထုတ်ဝေရေးလုပ်ငန်း၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၂၀၀၁၊ ၈၊ ၁၁၁၁-၁၁၅)။

Tasmā tiha bhikkhave = therefore, monks, *Yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ* = such an aggregate of physical forms, *Atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ* = which had occurred in the past, which occurs at present and which would occur in the future, *Ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā* = whether internally within one’s own body or externally outside one’s own body, *Oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumam vā* = whether it be rough or subtle, *Hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā* = whether it be ignoble or noble, *Yaṃ dūre santike vā* = whether it be near or far afield, (*Atthi* = there exists).

Sabbam rūpaṃ = the aggregate of all these physical entities, *Daṭṭhabbam* = should be viewed, *Evametam yathābhūtaṃ* = only in the way as it really is, *Sammappaññāya* = through the knowledge gained from the *vipassanā* meditative insight (with the understanding that), *Sabbam rūpaṃ* = the aggregate of all these physical entities, “*Netam mama = Na etaṃ mama* = this physical form is not my own possession, *Nesohamasmi = Na eso ahaṃ asmi* = not what I am, *Na me so*

attā'ti = (that) this aggregate of physical forms is not under the control of my own will.”

The first observation that should be made in this long Pāli sentence is that it ends with the word ‘*daṭṭhabbam*’ (‘should be viewed’) which is a passive form with the ‘*kita*’ suffix ‘-*tabba*’, -*kiicca kita*’. Please see Daw Khin Thein and U Kyaw Shein (1969), p.129 for this construction and there is no main verb to end the clause or the sentence, as in the constructions of basic simple sentences demonstrated in the beginning of this paper, or as in the sentence cited earlier from the Mahasatipatthāna Sutta. This situation is rather awkward in Myanmar grammar and therefore the Venerable Laeti Sayadaw inserts the main verb ‘*atthi* = there exists’ in the middle of the sentence in his *Nissaya* translation. (See pp.111 – 115 of the Sayadaw’s *Nissaya* in (လယ်တီ ဝတ်ရွတ်စဉ် ဝေါင်းချုပ်.)

In this sentence the first clause ends in ‘*Santike vā*’, and the Syadaw puts a ‘*ုဒ်ငဝ်*’ which is the equivalent of a comma, after it. In this clause ending in ‘*Santike vā*’, the subject is ‘*rūpaṃ*’ and all the units qualifying it (namely, ‘*atitānāgatapaccuppannaṃ*’ ‘*olārikaṃ*’ ‘*sukhumaṃ*’ ‘*hīnaṃ*’ ‘*panitaṃ*’), are in agreement with it in number, gender and case. The two remaining units, ‘*ajjhataṃ*’ and ‘*bhahiddha*’ are used as adverbs in this context. In the remaining construction (*sabbaṃ rūpaṃ “netam mama, nesohamasmi, na me so attā”ti evametam yathabhūtaṃ samappaññāya daṭṭhabbam*), ‘*sabbaṃ rūpaṃ evametam yathabhūtaṃ samappaññāya daṭṭhabbam*’ is the main clause and the construction in the double inverted commas, represented by the dotted line here, (“*netam mama, nesohasmi, na me so attā’ti*”) is reported speech marked by ‘-*ti*’ in the end, and it has three sub-clauses (“*na etam mama*, this is not my own”, “*na eso aham asmi*, this is not the way I am”, “*na me so atta*, this is not under the control of my own will”) each with its own subject and predicate. Therefore, all these grammatical features working collectively provide the unambiguous cohesive grammar and meaning given below.

Therefore monks, there exists such an aggregate of physical forms, which had occurred in the past, which occurs at present and which would occur in the future, either internally within one’s own body or externally outside one’s own body, whether it be rough or subtle, whether it be ignoble or noble, whether it be near or far afield. The aggregate of all these physical entities should be viewed only in the way as it really is, through the knowledge gained from the *Vipassanā* meditative insight with the understanding that “this physical form is not my own possession, it is not what I am, it is not under the control of my own will.”

And thus, however long the sentence is, however complicated it seems in its outward appearance, however the sequence of words is arranged, the reader with a proper knowledge of the Grammar has no problem whatsoever to understand it, because of the precise, concise and powerful nature of the grammar. This true nature of the grammar of Pāli clearly signifies that the theoretical notion of fixed pattern of sequences in sentences is not entirely relevant or applicable to the Pāli language.

The lyrical mode in Pāli verses

This mode of structural mechanism generated by the power of grammar, which more or less ignores the formal practice of ‘compliance with normal word order in sentences’, is much more prevalent in Pāli ‘verses – the ‘*gāthā*’. Hence the power of grammar provides the ‘*gāthā*’ composers with convenient facility, which can be regarded as the poetic license. This situation results in the sentences, lyrics of the verses, with no verb to end the sentence in a conventional manner, or with no subject as the topic of the sentence and clauses and so on, although the lyric is grammatical and clearly understood without any ambiguity. This scenario is the prominent feature in the collections of verses like Dhammapada in Pāli literature. The examples given below clearly support this statement.

*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoṣeṭṭhā manomayā,
Manasāce paduṭṭhena, bhāsati vā karoti vā,
tato naṃ dukkhamanveti cakkamva vahato padaṃ. [Yamakavagga,
Dhammapada]*

In the first line, a sentence, the subject is ‘*Dhamma*’, but it appears after the adjective ‘*Manopubbaṅgamā*’ in the beginning, whereas the two other adjectives ‘*manoṣeṭṭhā*’ and ‘*manomayā*’ appear after it, at the end of the sentence. So the construction appears rather distorted in view of the way in which simple normal sentences are structured in prose pieces. Moreover, there is no main verb ‘*hoti*’, the equivalent of the English verb-to-be to end the sentence. Nevertheless, the reader has no difficulty in understanding the meaning of the sentence, because all the adjectives are in grammatical agreement with the subject ‘*dhamma*’.

In the second sentence of the verse, there are two clauses (“*Manasāce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā*” and “*tato naṃ dukkhamanveti cakkamva vahato padaṃ*”). The first clause, a dependent clause, has no subject. However, the reader can understand that the first clause in this compound sentence is ‘someone’ or ‘somebody’ or a ‘person’ as signified by ‘*bhasati*’ and ‘*karoti*’, which are verbs in third person singular form. Therefore the first clause can be easily translated as “if a person speaks or behaves with an evil intention”.

The second clause has two sub-clauses, “*tato naṃ dukkhamanveti*” and “*cakkamva vahato padaṃ*”. The first sub-clause has ‘*dukkham*’ as its subject, and ‘*anveti*’ as its verb. But the second sub-clause “*cakkamva vahato padaṃ*” has ‘*cakkam*’ as its subject, though it has no verb as such. However, the reader can understand that ‘*anveti*’ serves as the verb of the second sub-clause as well, because it is in grammatical agreement with ‘*cakkam*’ in number, a singular form, as ‘*cakkam*’ is in the previous clause.

All these grammatical functions of the verse clearly signify the grammatical complexity of sentence structures, which is also the power of the grammar of the language. This kind of complexity of structures or the power of the grammar can be observed in almost every verse in *Dhammapada* and many other texts of ‘*gathās*’ in Pāli literature.

The same mode of grammatical complexity and power can be observed in the third verse of the same chapter, the *Yamakavagga*, given below. The first line is a combination of four clauses in the Verb-Object sequence without a subject, which is an irregular sequence of units in clauses and sentences.

Akkocchi maṃ avadhi maṃ, ajini maṃ, ahasi me. He abused me, he harmed me, he defeated me, he stole my property. All the clauses begin with a verb, which is rather unusual in view of the normal sequence of words in Pāli prose. One other striking feature is that the clauses have no subject. Nevertheless, as all the verbs have the third person singular suffix, it is apparent that the subject is ‘he’. There is one more grammatical subtlety in the last clause “*ahasi me*”. The clause does not end in ‘*maṃ*’, a first-person singular pronoun in accusative case, as in the previous three clauses. It ends in ‘*me*’ a first-person singular pronoun in genitive (or dative, the former in this context) case, the reason being that the verb ‘*ahasi*’ has the meaning ‘to take something that belongs to someone else’ or ‘to rob’. Therefore, it is to be translated as ‘he stole my property’ or ‘he robbed me’, and this subtle meaning is given by the personal pronoun in the genitive case ‘*me*’. This verse is another example of an irregular sequence of units in clauses generated by the power of precise and systematic grammar of the Pāli language.

Such an irregular sequence of units generated by the precision and power of the grammar can be observed even in the verses that appear from time to time in the Suttas. Given below is an example from the *Samyutta Nikaya*.

1. *Kiṃ dado balado hoti, kiṃ dado hoti vaṇṇado.* Which donation is the donation of strength? Which donation is the donation of beauty?
2. *Kiṃ dado sukhado hoti, Kim dado hoti cakkhudo.* Which donation is the donation of happiness? Which donation is the donation of vision?
2. *Ko ca sabbado hoti, Tam me akkhati pucchito.* Which donation is the donation of all of these? ‘Explain it to me’, you asked.
4. *Annado balado hoti, Vatthado hoti vaṇṇado.*
Donation of food is the donation of strength. Donation of clothing is the donation of beauty.
5. *Yānado sukhado hoti, Dipado hoti cakkhudo.* Donation of a vehicle is the donation of happiness. Donation of a lamp is the donation of vision.
6. *Soca sabbado hoti, So dadāti upassayam.* He who is the donor of all of these is he who donates a monastic dwelling.
7. *Amataṃ dado ca so hoti, Yo dhammānussāsati’ti.* He who is given the *Amata-Nibbana* is he who practises the dhamma. [ādittavagga, annasutta, sagāthāvagga, Saṃyutta Nikāya, Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Edition: p.29,]

The first clauses in lines one to three, are questions. But they end with the main verb ‘*hoti*’. In the second clauses of lines one and two, though they are the answers to the questions, the main verb ‘*hoti*’ comes in the penultimate position. The first two clauses in lines four and five are stative sentences and they end with the main verb ‘*hoti*’, which is a normal sequence in prose. In the second clauses of lines four and five, however, the main verb ‘*hoti*’ appears in the penultimate position, though they are stative sentences like their preceding counterparts.

One more note-worthy feature is that the second clause in line three ends in ‘*pucchito*’, which is not a normal verb, but a past participle passive form. Nevertheless, the clause is grammatically correct and easily understandable, because past and present participle passive forms can function either as adjectives or main verbs at the end of clauses with or without the verb-to-be ‘*hoti*’ (see Daw Khin Thein and U Kyaw Shein, 1969; pp.108 and 120.)

Conclusion

Linguistic theoreticians generally regard the sequence of units in clauses and sentences as one of the most important principles of grammars of almost all languages. The structural linguists such as Kenneth Pike (1960), Elson & Pickett (1962), and W.A. Cook (1968) explain it as the principle of the sequence of units. Ferdinand De Saussure (1959), who is regarded as the founding father of modern linguistics, explains this principle in terms of the two kinds of relation of units, namely, the paradigmatic relation and the syntagmatic relation. These two kinds of relation are explained with examples from the Myanmar language by Dr. Thein Tun (2019a and 2019b). Noam Chomsky (1980, 1981 and 1982) explains this principle in terms of his government and binding theory. Nevertheless, as discussed with examples from the Pāli canonical texts, it can be verified that this principle of fixed sequence of units in languages is not entirely applicable or relevant to the Pāli language because of its precise and powerful grammar. In conclusion, the author would like to reiterate how important the Pāli Grammar is for students and scholars alike, in order to understand the modern linguistic theories and to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

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ကျော်ရှိန်၊ ဦး၊ ခင်သိန်း၊ ဒေါ်။ (၁၉၇၀) *အခြေခံပါဠိသဒ္ဒါ*၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ တက္ကသိုလ်များ စာအုပ်ထုတ်ဝေရေး ကော်မတီ။

လယ်တီဆရာတော်၊ (၂၀၀၁) *အနတ္တလက္ခဏ သုတ်*၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြတ်ဆုမွန် စာပေထုတ်ဝေရေးလုပ်ငန်း။

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