A semantic study of deictic auxiliaries in Burmese

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1. Introduction

The grammaticalization of motion verbs into deictic auxiliaries is a common phenomenon in Tibeto-Burman languages. DeLancey (1985) notes that this is a cyclic process, the directive category being regularly reinvented in the Tibeto-Burman languages, and almost as regularly lost again. This paper will explicate the semantics of two sets of deictic auxiliaries in Burmese. The first set comprises *swà*[1] which is related to the verb 'go', and *la*, which is related to the verb 'come'. The second set comprises *lok*, related to the verb 'follow, accompany', and *khái*, which is of uncertain origin. Burmese allows verbs to be freely concatenated and this has led to an extensive system of versatile verbs (cf. Matisoff 1969; Smeall 1975) that can be classified according to varying degrees of grammaticalization. The degree of grammaticalization is largely determined by the semantics of the interaction between the auxiliary and the main verb. In the case of deictic auxiliaries like *la* and *swà*, which are synchronically attested as main verbs, the degree to which they are metaphorically extended depends on the semantics of their interaction with various categories of verbs. This synchronic continuum in the degree of grammaticalization is due to the semantic stability of their meanings as main verbs.

As auxiliaries, *swà* and *la* have developed beyond marking direction into the domain of aspect. *Swà* has developed a perfective aspectual sense from its meaning of *departure from a deictic center*. *La*, on the other hand, has developed an aspect of 'progression towards completion' from its meaning of *motion towards a deictic center*. In many, but not all examples, I have glossed *la* as 'becoming', indicating a progression towards (the completion of) a state. Similarly, from its basic meaning of 'follow, accompany', *lok* has developed an aspectual sense beyond that of displacement from a deictic center into the metaphorical notion of 'going ahead and doing something', which, in most uses, functions to give permission or ask for confirmation. Although the origin of *khái* is uncertain and not dealt with in this paper, it falls neatly into the paradigm, in opposition to *lok* and as the counterpart of *la* 'come'. As with *la*, *khái* indicates motion towards a deictic center. Unlike *la*, *khái* conveys a greater

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[1] The system of transliteration used in this paper represents standard Burmese orthography. The clear level tone (<PLB Tone *1) is left unmarked (e.g. *la*); the heavy breathy tone (<PLB Tone *2) is marked by a grave accent (e.g. *swà*); and the creaky tone (<PLB Tone *3) is indicated by an acute accent (e.g. *khái*).

sense of displacement, forcing the further displacement of an argument in some uses (e.g. in combination with *rawk* 'reach').

2. *La* and *swà*

Since *la* and *swà* are deictically specified, the parameters of deixis (see DeLancey 1980) are relevant in investigating their metaphorical extensions. The deictic orientation of motion that *la* and *swà* specify comprises a two term system as in English: *la* 'come' indicating motion either towards the speaker or the hearer (SAL, Speech Act Location) and *swà* 'go' indicating motion away (from the speaker or the hearer) in some other direction.

As in English, *la* 'come' treats both Speech Act Participants (SAP) as equals, where the speaker as well as the hearer may equally be treated as the deictic center towards which motion is directed (cf. DeLancey 1980).

1. *dì-né ma la nái*
   today NEG come IMP
   'Don't come today.'   (speaker=deictic center)

2. *kyá-naw la khái may*
   I   come AUX IRR
   'I will come.'   (hearer=deictic center)

Motion towards either SAP by a third person is expressed with *la* whereas motion by either SAP towards a third person is expressed with *swà*.

3. *màng chì ko su la pè may*
   you   AT TO he/she come give IRR
   'He/she will come and give (it) to you.'

4. *ngá chì ko su má la bù*
   I   AT TO he NEG come NEG
   'He didn't come to me.'

5. *sú chì ko swà*
   he AT TO² go
   '(You) go to him.'

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2 *ko*, glossed as 'to', indicates destination and is the same as the morpheme used to mark objects, as opposed to *ká*, glossed as 'from', which indicates origin and is the same as the morpheme used to mark subjects.

6.   *sú chi kò   swà may*
      he AT OBJ go   IRR
      '(I) will go to him.'

When *la* or *swà* precede another verb, they retain their full lexical meaning. Verbs that follow the head either retain their lexical meaning or undergo varying degrees of grammaticalization, which is determined by their semantics. Thus, in *la cà tay* '(He) came and ate' ("come eat RLS") and *swà pràw may* '(I) will go talk (to him)' ("go talk IRR"), the initial position ensures that *la* and *swà* will invariably retain their full lexical meanings. It is when either *la* or *swà* follows another verb that they undergo metaphoric extension or semantic bleaching. The semantics of these verbs in their grammaticalized uses are dependent on their interaction with the meaning of the main verb. For the purpose of explicating the differences in the degree of grammaticalization, main verbs have been categorized as either 'action', 'motion' or 'stative'. For the purpose of making clearer the difference between *la* and *swà*, stative verbs in Burmese have been further categorized into those that 'undergo progress' as opposed to those that do not.

2.1 Action verbs with *la* and *swà*. When following verbs that refer to concrete actions, *la* and *swà* retain their full lexical meaning. This is a case of what has been called by Matisoff (1969, 1973) simple "nonce concatenation", i.e. 'an unmarked sequence of verbs in which neither has a grammaticalized function' (cf. DeLancey 1991).

7.   *su thámàng cà   la   tay*
      he rice   eat come RLS
      'He ate rice (and came).'

8.   *meri thámàng khyak swà tay*
      Mary rice   cook go   RLS
      'Mary cooked rice (and left).'

However, with 'utterance verbs', that do not refer purely to concrete actions, the meaning of *la* has been metaphorically extended to express a gradual approach towards the completion of a state of affairs where there is a perception of some (usually social) difficulty in bringing up a matter:

9.   *su mè la   tay*
      she ask come RLS
      'She has brought herself to ask the question' (in the context of some difficulty or problem).

10. *su mè la   prì*
    he ask come PUNC
    'He is beginning to ask' (about a matter which is embarrassing to
    bring up, e.g. a long-forgotten debt).

When *swà* combines with utterance verbs, it retains its lexical meaning of
departing from the SAL:

11. *su pràw swà tay*
    she say go RLS
    'She said (something)' (and is now no longer at the SAL).

2.2 Motion verbs with *la* and *swà*. Following motion verbs, *la* and *swà* add a
deictic specification. They specify motion either towards or away from a deictic
center (cf. DeLancey 1991a):

12. *nghak tac kawng sac-pang paw ká   praM swà tay*
    bird   one CLF   tree   on   FROM fly   go   RLS
    'A bird flew away from the tree.'

13. *nghak tac kawng sac-pang paw ko praM la   tay*
    bird   one CLF   tree   on   TO fly   come RLS
    'A bird flew towards the tree.'

With motion involving SAP's, *la* orients motion towards the deictic center,
which is either the speaker or hearer or a terminal point where both the
speaker and the hearer will be located. The deictic center is the hearer in (14):

14. *nga prè la   da   nái màng lup ne   da   rap*
    I   run come NMLZ AND you do PROG NMLZ stop
    'Stop what you're doing when I run towards you!'

In (15), the deictic center is displaced from the SAL to a terminal point where
both SAP's will meet:

15. *màng kyàwng ko kà   màwng la*
    you school TO car drive come
    'You drive and come to school (where I'll be).'

On the other hand, *swà* orients the motion away from the SAL. That is,
the terminal point is not the other SAP, but rather some other point outside of
the SAL:

16. *nga gu   thài   wang swà may*
    I   cave   inside enter go   IRR
    'I will enter the cave' (away from SAL).

17. *màng kyàwng ko kà   màwng swà*
    you school TO car drive   go
    'You drive and go to school.' (away from SAL and in contrast to 15,
    where the speaker will not be)

2.3 Stative verbs with *la* and *swà*. A metaphorical extension takes place
when *la* and *swà* are used with stative verbs. With a stative verb like *ne*
'stay/live', *swà* adds a sense of finality. This sense of finality is derived from its
meaning of departure, of motion away from a deictic center. The deictic center
in this case, would be a location or a state:

18. *su di mha ne   swà tay*
    he this LOC live go   RLS
    'He lived here' (and no longer does)

In contrast, the counterpart of (18), *su di mha ne la tay* is ungrammatical.
However, the '*ne la*' combination occurs in a nominalized clause which is an
argument of a matrix verb:

19. *su di mha ne   la   da   kra   pri*
    he this LOC live come NMLZ be-of-some-length-of-time PUNC
    'He has lived/has been living here for some time.'

In contrast to *su di mha ne da kra pri* (which simply means 'He has lived here
for some time'), (19) conveys an extremely subtle difference in meaning. It is as
if the person in question were in the process of living, attributing to him a
tentativeness, a non-finality as to his choice of residence.

Another stative verb, that shows similar syntactic behavior in
combination with *swà* and *la*, is *thong* 'sit'. Parallelling *ne* in (18), *su di mha
thong swà tay* "he this LOC sit go RLS" means that 'He sat here (and no longer
does) / He used to sit here.' The sense of finality that *swà* contributes is
obviously derived from the absence of the subject from the scene. In contrast,
the *thong la* 'sit come' combination is ungrammatical in a simple declarative
sentence. However, as with *ne*, the *thong la* combination occurs in a
nominalized clause which is the argument of a matrix verb:

20. *su di mha thong la   da   ko má krok phù*
    he this LOC sit   come NMLZ OBJ NEG like NEG
    '(I) don't like him coming to sit here.'

In (20), *la* does not literally mean 'to come'. The semantics of *thong* 'sit' has forced *la* to take on a metaphorical meaning, implying that the person in question has 'maneuvered' himself quite inappropriately into a location where he has no right to be. Without *la*, the sentence *su di mha thong da ko má krok phù* would simply mean '(I) don't like him to sit here.'

Furthermore, the directional meaning *towards a deictic center* indicated by *la*, and *away from a deictic center* indicated by *swà* easily allow extension to non-spatial, i.e. psychological states. Cognitive states allow themselves to be conceptualized as locations (cf. DeLancey 1991b) and there are examples of many such metaphors in English, as in the examples 'going to sleep', 'going into a depression', 'falling in love'. In metaphorical extensions such as these, states are the deictic centers.

Stative verbs fall into two semantic categories: (i) those indicating states that undergo a progression towards completion or perfection, that is, processes such as 'becoming big', 'becoming unhappy', 'becoming cold'; and (ii) those indicating states that do not undergo a similar process but are conceptualized instead as either existing or not existing, e.g. 'to be asleep (or not to be asleep)' or 'to faint and be in that state (or not to faint and for that state not to exist)'.

(i) With states that are conceptualized as a gradual process, *la* indicates progress towards completion whereas *swà*, from its meaning of departure from a state, indicates completion with a sense of finality:

21.   *bok   krì   la   prì*
      belly   big   come   PUNC
      '(Her) belly is becoming big/(She) is (apparently) becoming more pregnant.'

22.   *bok   krì   swà   prì*
      belly   big   go   PUNC
      '(Her) belly has become big/(She) got pregnant.'

23.   *wàm   nàñ   la   tay*
      stomach   less   come   RLS
      'becoming unhappy'

24.   *wàm   nàñ   swà   tay*
      stomach   less   go   RLS
      'became unhappy'

25.   *ra-si   ʔè   la   tay*
      weather   cold   come   RLS
      'The weather is becoming cold.'

26. ra-si   ʔè   swà   tay
     weather   cold   go   RLS
     'The weather turned cold.'

27. thang-rhà   la   tay
     distinct   come   RLS
     'is becoming distinct'

28. thang-rhà   swà   tay
     distinct   go   RLS
     'became distinct'

The sense of completion that swà indicates, adds emphasis to the sense of perfection expressed by punctual sentences:

29. wá   swà   pri
     full   go   PUNC
     'I'm full' (after eating, meaning 'I've had enough').

In contrast, without the swà, the sentence wá pri 'I'm full' is not as emphatic.

(ii) States that are not conceptualized as undergoing a progression towards completion, i.e. states conceptualized as either existing or not existing, are compatible with swà only:

30. mé   swà   tay
     faint   go   RLS
     '(I/he) fainted/became unconscious.'

In (30), mé 'to be unconscious' is a cognitive state which either exists or does not exist. In fact, mé 'to be unconscious' cannot occur on its own in a sentence. It must either take swà or ne. As an auxiliary, ne indicates the progressive aspect[3] but mé ne tay translates into '(He) is unconscious' indicating the existence of the state in contrast to 30, which shows its occurrence. Furthermore, the auxiliary la is not possible with mé meaning 'to faint/be unconscious'. However, la is compatible with mé meaning 'to forget', which is a volitional verb. Thus, mé la tay is grammatical when it means 'I/He forgot something (and came).'

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[3] The progressive aspect of the auxiliary ne is derived from its main verb meaning of 'stay/live'.

The verb ʔɨp 'sleep' is also conceptualized as existing or not existing. *Swà* indicates entry into that state:

31. ʔɨp   swà   pri
     sleep go   PUNC
     '(The baby) has fallen asleep.'

When ʔɨp combines with *la*, *la* retains its lexical sense since ʔɨp 'sleep' is not conceptualized as undergoing gradual progress:

32. su   ʔɨp   la   tay
     she sleep come RLS
     'She slept (and came).'[4]

The following sentence is used to express the sense of progression towards the state of sleeping:

33. ʔɨp   cá   prú   la   tay
     sleep begin do   come RLS
     '(She) is beginning to sleep.'

Verbs that express compact instantaneous events also fall into the second category since they do not undergo progression towards completion or perfection. Events like *pawk* 'to explode' either take place instantaneously or do not take place at all. With these verbs also *swà* is possible, but not *la*:

34. bùn   pawk   swà   tay
     bomb explode go   RLS
     'The bomb exploded (unexpectedly).'

In contrast, *bùn pawk tay* simply means that 'a bomb exploded'. In (34), *la* is not grammatical with *pawk* meaning 'to explode'. A parallel example is with *pawk* meaning 'to be punctured':

35. bìn   pawk   swà   tay
     tire puncture go   RLS
     'The tire's punctured.'

It is not grammatical to say *bìn pawk la tay to mean 'The tire's becoming punctured.' However, the sentence is grammatical when it is interpreted as 'came with a flat tire', where *la* retains its lexical meaning. This is a case of

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[4] This shows the difference between the auxiliary *la* and the auxiliary *ne*, which is a true progressive auxiliary. With the auxiliary *ne*, the sentence ʔɨp ne tay means '(She) is sleeping.'

simple verb concatenation, literally translating into 'The tire punctured and (he) came (drove here).'

On the other hand, when *pawk* indicates a state that is conceptualized as undergoing progression, as in *pawk* meaning 'to be crazy', it combines with both *la* and *swà*:

36. *pawk swà pri*
    crazy go PUNC
    '(He) has gone crazy'   (with a sense of finality and completion).

37. *pawk la pri*
    crazy come PUNC
    '(He) is becoming crazy' (still in the process).

3. *Lok* and *khái*

Another pair of auxiliaries that parallel *swà* and *la* are *lok* and *khái*. *Lok* is related to a main verb meaning 'to follow, accompany', whereas *khái*, of uncertain origin, is totally grammaticalized and not attested synchronically as a main verb. *Lok* is referred to as 'distal' by DeLancey (1980) and as 'non-junctive' by Allott (1965). *Khái* is referred to as 'proximal' by DeLancey and 'junctive' by Allott.

Lok, as a main verb, variously means 'follow', 'pursue,' or 'accompany':

38. *su-khò ko pú-lip twe lok   krá tay*
    thief OBJ police PLU follow PLU RLS
    'The police chased the thief.'

39. *phe-phe nái   lok   swà*
    father   WITH follow go
    'Go along with father.'

As an auxiliary, *lok* contributes the meaning of motion away from a deictic center:

40. *su kyàwng swà may. sú ko   ʔip pè lok pa*
    she school go IRR. she OBJ bag give **lok** POLITE
    'She's going to school. Please give her the bag (to take with her).'

41. *kyá-náw ko pè lok pa*
    I   OBJ give **lok** POLITE
    'Please give (it) to me' (and I will take it away).

(40) and (41) are usually used in contexts where the subject will be leaving the SAL. In other words, the direct object will 'accompany' the subject away from the SAL. Without *lok*, the sense of motion away from a deictic center is absent:

42. *kyá-náw ko   pè   pa*
     I   OBJ   give POLITE
     'Please give (it) to me.'

It is in the sense above as an exponent of deictic specification that *lok* has been described as expressing action 'away from the situation' (Cornyn 1944) and as 'action involving change of place' (Stewart 1955). Allott (1965) defines *lok* as 'carrying through with an action in a location that is not associated with the speaker's location.' She gives the example *swà yu lok* 'Go take/get something', in the context of a master sending off a servant to fetch something. However, it can be argued that the sense of displacement in her example is caused by *swà* 'go' and not so much by *lok*. Without *swà*, *yu lok* does not have any sense of displacement. In *yu lok* as well as in Allott's example of *swà yu lok* the presence of *lok* may, at the most, add a subtle difference of permission. In other words, *lok* does not express any sense of displacement. This is noted by Allott in her example *thá-màng cà lok* 'rice eat *lok*' in the context of a parent telling a child to eat up (eat away). With this example, she states that 'no connection is established between the location of the action and the speaker's location'.

There are some metaphorical uses that indicate the path that *lok* followed in developing metaphoric extensions from its deictic sense 'to follow':

43. *kálè   ko   ?á-lo má   lok nái*
     child OBJ   desire NEG **lok** NEG
     'Don't spoil the child'
     (from the more literal "Don't follow the desires of the child").

44. *cit   ?á-lo lok tay*
     mind desire **lok** RLS
     '(He) indulges himself'
     (from the more literal "to follow the mind's desires").

This explains the difference between *Cà* 'Eat!' and *Cà lok* which has a subtle additional sense of 'giving permission', translating into 'Go ahead and eat.' This can be used in a context where the speaker indicates to the addressee that he need not wait for him to eat. The same subtle difference can be seen in the examples below:

45. *kyá-naw swà rá   má-là*
    I   go   GET QUES
    'Must I go?'

(45) is a straightforward question, where there is no uncertainty in the speaker's mind as to the appropriateness of the action. However, with *lok*, it becomes more than simply a question. *Kyá-naw swà lok rá má-là* is used when there is some uncertainty in the mind of the speaker as to whether he should go. Depending on the context, the sentence could variously mean 'Would you like me to go?' or 'Do you think (it's a good idea that) I should go?'. In the metaphoric extensions of *lok*, the common theme is that of giving permission or agreeing, or of requesting confirmation when there is some uncertainty in the mind of the speaker. It can be argued that these metaphoric extensions have resulted from the use of *lok* in sentences meaning 'to follow one's mind, one's desires or inclinations'. It is when one is uncertain about the appropriateness of following a course of action that one asks for confirmation. In Burmese, *lok* subtly expresses this sense of uncertainty when a speaker asks for confirmation about a course of action to be undertaken.

To recapitulate, *lok* in the imperative indicates permission or agreement, generally translating into 'Go ahead and do something.' The imperative *lok* is also appropriate in contexts where the event in question takes place in a location different from the SAL, as in *thá-màng cà lok pa* 'Go ahead and eat (Don't wait for me).' When the speaker is present at the location of the event, there is a further metaphoric extension since the sense of spatial displacement is blocked; thus we have Allott's example of *thá-màng cà lok* in the context of a parent telling a child 'to eat up (eat away)'. Here, the deictic sense of *lok* meaning 'to go ahead and eat' is interpreted metaphorically to function as an exhortation. When there is no spatial displacement, the difference that *lok* makes is quite subtle. Without *lok*, the sentence below is a straightforward invitation:

46. *cà   pa   ʔùM*
    eat POL AUX
    'Please eat.'

With *lok*, as in *cà lok pa ʔùM*, there are two uses: (i) when the speaker feels that the addressee is hesitant, which is similar to Allott's interpretation; and (ii) when the speaker wishes to indicate that the act of eating should be completed first, usually before turning to other matters. The English translation 'to go ahead and eat' would serve quite well for both uses, being the primitive from which metaphoric extensions are made.

Lok does not occur with stative verbs in declarative sentences, since verbs like *uá* 'fat', *lhá* 'pretty' and *pu* 'hot' do not involve the notion of spatial dislocation. However, there is an exclamatory construction with *lok* which is compatible with 'action' as well as 'stative' verbs:

47. thámàng cà   lok tha
    rice   eat **lok** NMLZ
    '(You) eat so much!'

In (47), it can be argued that the sense of 'eating a lot' is derived from the primitive sense of 'going ahead' from a deictic center, a metaphoric extension in the sense of 'following one's mind or inclination'. The same construction is used with a stative verb below:

48. ne wang da   lhá   lok tha
    sun enter NMLZ pretty **lok** NMLZ
    'The sunset is so pretty!'

Khái, the counterpart of *la*, specifies motion towards a deictic center, which could be either the speaker or hearer. This deictic specification can be seen with motion verbs. In the sentence below, the deictic center is the speaker:

49. ngá chi ko lhrawk khái
    I   at   TO walk   **khái**
    'Walk towards me.'

With action verbs, the event occurs in a location different from that of the deictic center. In the sentence below, the deictic center is the hearer:

50. nga thámàng khyak khái tay
    I   rice   cook **khái** RLS
    'I cooked rice (and came).'

With a third person agent, the deictic center is the speaker, as in the example below:

51. su piza cà khái tay
    she pizza eat **khái** RLS
    'She ate pizza (before she came).'

In the examples above, the subject is displaced from the scene of the main verbal event towards a deictic center. In other words, *khái* indicates that

someone did something somewhere prior to beginning the trajectory towards where the speaker and/or hearer would be. However, when *khái* is used with the verb *ne* 'stay', the meaning of *ne* does not allow its subject to be displaced:

52. *meri yu-gyàng mha ne khái tay*
    Mary Eugene LOC stay **khái** RLS
    'Mary remained in Eugene (while I moved on).'

Although I have referred to *khái* as the counterpart of *la* 'come', the examples below indicate their differences:

53. *su làm lhrawk la tay*
    she road walk come RLS
    'She came walking.'

54. *su làm lhrawk khái tay*
    she road walk **khái** RLS
    'She walked here.'

The difference is that only (53) can be used for the historical present. In contrast, (54) cannot be used for the historical present, since the sense of displacement that *khái* contributes has been metaphorically extended even further, to indicate the perfective aspect.

The perfective aspect is further illustrated in the example below:

55. *su báma pri ko rawk khái tay*
    she Burma country TO reach **khái** RLS
    'She has been to Burma.'

In (55) above, the subject is no longer in Burma. The use of *khái* has displaced her from the scene of the main verbal event indicated by *rawk* 'reach'. In contrast, *la* does not cause the subject to be displaced from the scene of the main verbal event:

56. *su báma pri ko rawk la tay*
    she Burma country TO reach come RLS
    'She arrived in/came to Burma' (to the speaker's surprise). [5]

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[5] Without *la*, the sentence *su báma pri ko rawk tay* means 'She reached/visited Burma.' The presence of *la* in (56) indicates that the speaker was not expecting her to come. *Su di-né rawk tay* simply means 'She arrived today.' and *su di-né la tay* simply means 'She came today.' But *su di-né rawk la tay* subtly indicates surprise on the part of the speaker, as if the person in question were to have come and 'arrived' against the expectations of the speaker.

4. Conclusion.

When the motion verbs *la* 'come' and *swà* 'go' grammaticalized into deictic auxiliaries, they developed beyond marking direction. However, the extent to which these semantic extensions have developed depends on the semantics of their interaction with various categories of verbs. The semantics of 'purely physical and perceptible' action verbs force *la* and *swà* to retain their full lexical meanings. With motion verbs that leave a trajectory, *la* and *swà* add a deictic specification. It is the category of stative verbs that allow *la* and *swà* to develop fully into the aspectual domain. Conceptualizing states, either physical or psychological, as locations has allowed *la*, whose trajectory is directed towards a location, to take on an aspect of 'progression towards completion', distinct from that of the 'progressive' *ne*. In the case of Burmese, I have categorized states into (i) those that undergo progression towards completion and (ii) those that lack this sense of progression, that is, they either exist or do not exist. This distinction is useful to show the difference between *la* and *swà*.

Swà, in contrast to *la*, indicates departure from a location. I have shown that in combination with action verbs, departure is subsequent to completion of the action. As with *la*, the meanings of stative verbs allow *swà* to develop beyond the specification of direction. *Swà* adds a perfective aspect when used with stative verbs, because departure from a state usually implies an end to that state. Since *swà* has this sense of completion, it is compatible with verbs that express compact, instantaneous events. On the other hand, compact, instantaneous events are incompatible with *la*, which has developed an aspect of progress towards completion.

Lok and *khái* are semantically similar to *swà* and *la*. The verb *lok*, meaning 'follow, accompany', indicates motion away from a deictic center. Although the auxiliary *lok* is the counterpart of *swà*, the semantics of *lok* have allowed it to metaphorically develop further than *swà*. With motion as well as action verbs, *lok* expresses the notion of 'going ahead and doing something', unlike *swà*, which largely retains its lexical meaning. With a ditransitive verb like *pè* 'give', *lok* displaces the direct object whereas *swà* displaces the subject.

The origin of *khái* is obscure and is not within the scope of this paper. However, its semantics have enabled it to fit into a paradigm, standing in opposition to *lok* and forming with it a pair that is the counterpart of *la* and *swà*. When the speaker is the subject, the auxiliary *khái* displaces the speaker towards the hearer, subsequent to the main verbal event. When the hearer is the verbal subject, the auxiliary *khái* displaces the hearer towards the speaker subsequent to the main verbal event. With the verb *rawk* 'reach', *khái* further displaces the subject subsequent to its 'reaching' a certain place, translating into 'has been to a certain place'.

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