

# Aspects of Rumai grammar

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Rumai is a variety of Palaung, an Austroasiatic language of the Western Palaungic branch. There are two other varieties so far mentioned in the linguistic literature, namely Shwe and Ruching. Rumai is spoken by about 160 000 people, mainly in Northern Shan State in Myanmar, but also in adjacent regions of Yunnan, China.

About Rumai, there is only few information in the linguistic literature, so the purpose of my dissertation is to show some aspects of the grammar of the language. The papers will be a basis for typological comparisons with other languages, but also part of a comprehensive grammar of Rumai to be written later.

The material for the corpus was collected on several fieldtrips in Myanmar, mainly in Mandalay with several consultants, but also in a Rumai village near Nam Hkam and in Lashio, both in Northern Shan State. There are recorded texts from questionnaires, picture stories, interviews and conversations and written texts like short stories and a phrase book Rumai-Shwe-Burmese-English. For the analysis, about 2500 sentences from these texts have so far been glossed in Toolbox (according to the Leipzig glossing rules) and current typological literature (e.g. Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013) is used to make the descriptions and examples as comparable as possible with descriptions of other languages. The topics of the papers are “Verbal affixes”, “Negation”, “Secondary verbs” and “Grammatical relations”, they are briefly introduced in the following:

The **verbal affixes** in Rumai belong to different grammatical domains, as can be seen in table 1:

**Table 1:** Verbal affixes in Rumai

Affix(es)	Meaning	Source	Domain
<i>gi:j-</i>	imperfective	<i>gɔ̃:j</i> ‘stay’	aspectual
<i>ʔuN-</i>	durative	<i>ʔu:n</i> ‘keep’	
<i>ʔə-</i>	inceptive	-	
<i>hɔ̃j-</i>	new situation	<i>hɔ̃j</i> ‘finish’	
<i>tʌm-</i>	experiential	-	
<i>nʌŋ-</i>	irrealis	-	modality
<i>siŋ-</i>	desiderative	-	
<i>bu:- / ʔa:w- / -maʔ</i>	negative	-	negation
<i>ɲjʌm-</i>	‘not yet’	(‘dilatatory, stiff’)	
<i>k<sup>h</sup>u:-</i>	prohibitive	-	
<i>kə- / laj-</i>	reciprocal	- / <i>lâ:j</i> ‘take’	reciprocal

(Weymuth 2018: 88)

The affixes are always adjacent to a verb or another verbal affix and they are never stressed.

**Negation** is expressed by five verbal affixes (see Table 1) with different distributions. While *ʔa:w-* and *-maʔ* only occur in independent clauses, *bu:-* (the main negator in dependent clauses) and *ɲjʌm-* are used in independent as well as in dependent clauses. The suffix *-maʔ* originally was simply an emphasis marker, but today it is also used as the only negative marker in a negative clause.

**Secondary verbs** in Rumai may be pre- or post-verbal, some of them are shown in table 2:

**Table 2: Secondary verbs in Rumai**

Verb	Lexical meaning	Position	Function	Domain
<i>hò:j</i>	'finish'		new situation	
<i>câ:m</i>	'arrive'	post-verbal	"completion"	aspectual
<i>ʔû:n</i>	'keep'		durative	
<i>deəh</i>	'come'	post-verbal	"past"/direction	"temporal" directional
<i>lo</i>	'need'		obligation	
<i>bε</i>	'can'	pre-verbal	possibility	modality
<i>bʂn</i>	'get'		possibility/ permission	
<i>dεh</i>	'give'	pre-verbal	causative	valency

There are, among others, syntactic differences between the pre- and the post-verbal secondary verbs. The pre-verbal ones are the syntactic main verb of the clause, they are separated from the semantic main verb and usually take the verbal affixes, like *bʂn* 'get' in example (1). The semantic main verb may be preceded by the complementizer *lʌʔ*.

- (1) *mâj ʔaw-bʂn-maʔ lʌʔ hâ:w pʌʔ plô:j*  
 2SG NEG-get-NEG COMP go LOC festival  
 'You cannot go to the festival.'

The post-verbal secondary verbs (2) are dependent from the main verb and cannot take their own affixes.

- (2) *ʔʌw ʔaw-ʔʂh-deəh-maʔ pʌŋ dʌh mâj*  
 1SG NEG-buy-come-NEG NML say 2SG  
 'I did not buy what you asked me.'

There are several questions, especially with which (semantic) main verbs the secondary verbs can be used, and which verbal affixes the pre-verbal ones can take.

**Grammatical relations** are expressed by constituent order and by two grammatical morphemes, namely:

Oblique *tʌʔ*

- G arguments
- P and T arguments in verb-initial dependent clauses
- P arguments with certain verbs

Locative *pʌʔ*

- Adjuncts
- S and P arguments 'a place where one Vs'

Constituent order in independent clauses is mainly SV/AVP and in dependent clauses it is mainly VS/VAP. The oblique *tʌʔ* is used to mark the G argument in ditransitive clauses (3), but also the P and T arguments in verb-initial dependent clauses (4):

(3) *ʔân dɛh kəbjok laʔ tɔʔ ʔâw*  
 3SG give shirt blue OBL 1SG  
 'He gave me a blue shirt.'

(4) *kʰaj dɛh ʔâw tɔʔ pôm tɔʔ bɔwpʰûŋ ʔâw ʔân pjɔ kʰâj*  
 time give 1SG OBL rice OBL friend 1SG 3SG happy very  
 'When I gave rice to my friend, he was very happy.'

Besides of its use as a simple locative marker (1), *pɔʔ* also occurs in constructions with the meaning 'a place where one Vs':

(5) *jê hâ:w pɔʔ kʰà ʔi*  
 1PL.EXCL go LOC marry others  
 'We go to the wedding of other people (the place where others marry).'

Although the paper "Verbal affixes in Rumai, Palaung" already appeared last year, all the topics are still work in progress regarding the comprehensive grammar of Rumai and there are many questions to be cleared.

### Schedule

Paper	Deadline
Verbal affixes in Rumai, Palaung	Appeared 2018 in JSEALS
Negation	First draft submitted on 30.10.2019
Secondary verbs	31.01.2020
Grammatical relations	31.03.2020
Whole thesis including introduction and conclusion	31.08.2020

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