Transitivity and transitivity alternations in Rawang and Qiang

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1. Introduction

This paper is more about presenting phenomena and questions related to the concept of transitivity in Tibeto-Burman languages that I hope will stimulate discussion, rather than presenting strong conclusions. Sections 2 and 3 present alternative analyses of transitivity and questions about transitivity in two Tibeto-Burman languages I have worked on. In Section 4 I discuss some general issues about transitivity.

2. Rawang
2.1 Introduction

- Rawang (Rvwang [rə'wàŋ]): Tibeto-Burman language spoken in far north of Kachin State, Myanmar. Data from the Mvtwang (Mvt River) dialect.[1] (Morse 1962, 1963, 1965; LaPolla 2000, 2006, to appear a, to appear b; LaPolla & Poa 2001; LaPolla & Yang 2007).
- Verb-final, agglutinative, both head marking and dependent marking.
- Verbs can take hierarchical person marking, aspect marking, directional marking (which also marks aspect in some cases), and tense marking.
- All verbs clearly distinguished (even in citation) by their morphology in terms of what has been analysed as transitivity, and there are a number of different affixes for increasing or decreasing valency (see LaPolla 2000 on valency-changing derivations). Citation form is third person non-past affirmative/declarative:
- Intransitives: non-past affirmative/declarative particle *(ē)* alone in the non past (e.g. *ngə̄ē* 'to cry') and the intransitive past tense marker *(-ì)* in past forms (with third person argument); they can be used transitively only when they take valency-increasing morphological marking (causative, benefactive). Adjectives can take the intransitive morphology or the nominaliser *wē* in citation (e.g. *tēē ~ tēwē* 'big'), and can modify a noun in post-head position without being nominalised, but when used as predicates function the same as other intransitive verbs. Some stative intransitive verbs can take an oblique argument marked by the locative/dative marker:

(1)   *Ngà vgīsv̀ng svrēngē.*

    ngà   *vgī-sv̀ng*   *svrē-ng-ē*

    1sg   dog-LOC   afraid-1sg-N.PAST

    'I'm afraid of dogs.'

- Transitives: non-past third person object marker *(ò)* plus non-past affirmative/declarative particle *(ē)* in non-past forms (e.g. *ríòē* 'to carry (something)') and transitive past tense marker *(-à)* in past forms (with third person O arguments); can be used intransitively only when they take valency-reducing morphological marking (intransitivizing prefix, reflexive/middle marking suffix). In

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[1] The Rawang orthography (Morse 1962, 1963) is used in this paper. Most letters represent the pronunciations of English, except *i* = [i], *v* = [ə], *a* = [ɑ], *ø* = [ɯ], *q* = [ʔ], and *c* = [s]. Tones: high falling: *á,* mid: *ā,* low falling: *à.* Syllables ending in a stop consonant *(-p, -t, -q, -k)* are in the high tone. Open syllables with no tone mark are unstressed. A colon marks non-basic long vowels.

transitive clauses the agentive marker *(-í)* generally appears on the NP representing the A argument. Rawang seems to have only two ditransitive roots: *zíòē* 'give' and *v̄lòē* 'tell', and they take the same morphology as mono-transitives. All other ditransitive verbs, e.g. *dvtānòē* 'show' (< *vtānē* 'be visible') and *shvríòē* 'send' (< *ríòē* 'carry'), are derived using the causative construction.

- Ambitransitives (labile verbs): used as transitives or intransitives without morphological derivation *(á:mòē / v̄mē* 'to eat'). Both S=O type and S=A type ambitransitives. With the S=O type, (e.g. *gvyaqē* 'be broken, destroyed' ~ *gvyaqòē* 'break, destroy'), adding A argument creates causative, without the need for causative prefix. With the S=A type, as in (1), use of the intransitive vs. the transitive form marks a difference between a general or habitual situation and a particular situation respectively. <u>If the O is specific, then the transitive form must be used</u>, but if the O is non-specific, it is not necessary to use the intransitive form. If no O is understood, then usually the intransitive form is used.

(2) a. *Àng pē zvtnē.*
  àng pē   zvt-ē
  3sg basket   weave-N.PAST
  'He weaves baskets.' (general or habitual sense)

  b. *À:ngí pē tiqchv̀ng za:tnòē.*
  àng-í   [pē   tiq-chv̀ng]_O   zvt-ò-ē
  3sg-AGT   basket one-CL   weave-TNP-N.PAST
  'He is weaving a basket.'

- The copula, *íē*, takes the intransitive morphology and is like other intransitive verbs in terms of person marking, tense/aspect marking, interrogative marking, applicative marking, and nominalization, but it has two arguments. The copula cannot take causative marking, the way most other intransitives can, though it can take the precative marker *(laq-),* which is a sub-type of imperative (e.g. *cílcè laq-(mò̀)-í* '(Don't) let him be a soldier'). Two other verbs that take two arguments but are always formally intransitive are *mvyǿē* 'to want, to like' and *vdáē* 'to have, own'.
- Morse (1965:346-8) analysed the appearance of the verbal suffix *-ò* in the non-past or *-à* in the past as a necessary criterion for a clause to be transitive (adapted from Morse 1965:346):

	Clause-marking suffixes	
	Transitive	Intransitive
Past	*-à*	*ì*
Non-past	*-ò*	*-Ø*

He argued that only clauses with third person O arguments were transitive ("Only action from first or second to third person, or between two third parties, is expressed as transitive action"; 1965:348), even though in clauses that do not have third person O arguments the NP representing the A argument can take the agentive marker. For Morse then, (3a) is transitive, but (3b) is intransitive (from Morse 1965:348; glosses added):

(3) a. *Ngàí àng shv̀lòē.*   b. *à:ngí ngà èshv̀lē.*

      ngà-ì   àng   shv̀l-ò-ē   àng-í   ngà   è-shv̀l-ē

      1sg-AGT 3sg   drag-TNP-N.PAST   3sg-AGT 1sg   N.1-drag-N.PAST

      'I am dragging him.'   'He is dragging me.'

- Morse (1965:349) and I both analyse reflexive/middle voice clauses, where the verb is marked by the suffix *-shì* and the actor cannot take the agentive marker, as intransitive, even when there are two noun phrases in the clause, as in (4).

(4) *Nvpè gø̄ vPuqdap taq cìlcè wáshì yàng má?*

    nv-pè   gø̄   vPuq-dap   taq   cìlcè   wá-shì   yv̀ng   má

    2-father also Jinghpaw-army.base LOC soldier do-R/M TMyrs Q

    'Was your father also a soldier in the Jinghpaw army base?' (Lit.: 'Make himself a soldier'; Interview with Bezidø, p. 33)

2.2 Transitivity harmony

A small subset of transitive verbs can be used following a main verb to mark the phase or other aspects of the action, such as *dv́n (dá:nòē)* 'be about to', *pv̀ng (pà:ngòē)* 'begin to', *mv̄n (mā:nòē)* 'continue', *mūnòē* 'be used to', *dv́ng (dá:ngòē)* 'finish'. There is also at least one ambitransitive verb that can be used as an auxiliary as well, *daqē ~ daqòē* 'be able to'. When they act as auxiliary to another verb, they have to match the transitivity of the main verb. For example, with a transitive main verb, the auxiliary simply follows that verb and the two verbs together take one set of transitive marking morphology, as in (5), where the auxiliary verb *mv̄n (mā:nòē)* 'continue' follows the transitive verb *dvkò̀mòē* 'gather (something)', and the transitive non-past marker *-ò* marks the combined predicate as transitive.

(5) *Paqzí sháò shvlē gø̄ wēdø̄ dvkǿm mā:nò!*

    [paqzí   shá-ò   shvlē]O   gø̄   wē-dø̄   [dvkò̀m[2]   mv̄n-ò]PRED

    education know-TNP   layer   also that-ADV   gather   continue-TNP

    'Continue to gather the educated ones that way!' (Karu Zong, 46.3)

If instead the main verb is intransitive, then the auxiliary verb must be intransitivised, as in (6), where the same auxiliary, *mv̄n (mā:nòē)* 'continue', is made intransitive by the reflexive/middle voice suffix *-shì* to harmonise with the intransitive verb *vløp (vløpmē)* 'enter, go/sink into':

(6) *Kādø̄ wàò nìgø̄, sòngmèdv̀m nø̄ vløp mv̄nshìē wā.*

    kā-dø̄   wà-ò   nìgø̄,   [sòngmè-dv̀m]S   nø̄   [vløp   mv̄n-shì-ē]PRED   wā

    WH-ADV do-TNP   though   needle-CL   TOP go.into continue-R/M-N.PAST HS

    'No matter how (he tried) the needle keep on going inside, it is said.' (Makangya, 6.5)

In (7), the ambitransitive verb *daqē ~ daqòē* 'be able to' is used first as an intransitive, as it follows an intransitive verb (which is intransitivised by the reflexive/middle marker *–shì* because it is reflexive), and then is used in its transitive form, as it follows a transitive verb:

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[2] There is a tone change from low to high tone on this verb when the auxiliary is added. This change occurs with some words, but not with all. It may be a type of stem formation, or a type of nominalization, as it appears when the reflexive/middle voice suffix or the benefactive suffix is added as well.

(7) *YV̄nglòng nə̄ wāshì daqē, wā; Tə̀lòng nə̄ gwə̄r daqòē, wā.*

yV̄ng-lòng nə̄ [wā-shì **daq-ē**]_{PRED} wā tə̀-lòng nə̄ [gwə̄r **daq-ò-ē**]_{PRED}   wā

long-CL   TOP do-R/M able-N.PAST HS short-CL TOP toss   able-TNP-N.PAST   HS

'Long ones can be taken for oneself; short ones can be discarded.' (Rawang proverbs, #8)

Notice we are talking here purely about morphological transitivity; as with the ambitransitives, there may be two arguments in the clause, but the clause is morphologically intransitive. Note also that this morphological intransitivity does not correspond with what in Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, §4.2) is called M-(in)transitivity, transitivity defined in terms of the number of macro-roles (which correlates with Actionsart) rather than syntactic arguments, as both the intransitive and transitive clauses have the same sort of arguments, even though in the M-transitivity view transitivity is dependent on there being an individuated O, similar to the condition for the use of the transitive form of ambitransitives.

In (8) we can see that when the main verb is intransitivised by the other intransitivising marker *(v-),* which is used here to give the sense of a reciprocal, *daqē* also has to be intransitive:

(8) *Àngní dvhə̀ nə̄ dvkū màkūí vrú kē nə̀ vshvt daqē, wā.*

àngní dvhə̀   nə̄ dvkū màkū-í   v-rú   kē   nə̀ [v-shvt   **daq-ē**]_{PRED} , wā

3dl   in.laws TOP ladle scoop-INST INTR-hit RECIP PS INTR-fight can-N.PAST   HS

'Close relatives sometimes can fight.' (Rawang proverbs #7)

The auxiliaries follow the harmony pattern even with the different forms of the ambitransitive verbs. That is, when the ambitransitive main verb is used as an intransitive, the auxiliary verb will also be intransitive*,* but if the ambitransitive main verb is used as a transitive verb, then the auxiliary will be transitive. Compare (9a-b), for example:

(9)   a.   *àng V́mdV́ngshì bə́ì*

àng [V̄m-**dV́ng-shì**   bə́-ì]_{PRED}

3sg eat-finish-R/M   PFV-INTR.PAST

'He finished eating.' (intransitive *V̄mē* 'eat')

       b.   *à:ngí V́mpàlòng V́mdV́ng bə́à*

àng-í   V́mpà-lòng   [V́m-**dV́ng** bə́-**à**]_{PRED}

3sg-AGT food-CL   eat-finish PFV-TR.PAST

'He has finished eating the food.' (transitive *V́mòē* 'eat')

The pattern is also followed when the main verb is nominalised, as in (10), where *ngaqòē* 'push over' is intransitivised by the intransitivising prefix *(v-),* and then nominalised by the purposive suffix (see LaPolla 2000 on the prefix, and LaPolla, to appear, a, on the suffix and complement structures). Because the verb is intransitive, the auxiliary must be intransitivised.

(10)   *VngaqlV́m dV́nshìē.*

v-ngaq-lV́m   dV́n-shì-ē

INTR-push-PUR about.to-R/M-N.PAST

'(It) seems like (it) is about to fall down.'

In the Austronesian language Saliba (Margetts 1999:102-105;118) we find a similar phenomenon of transitivity harmony, though in this case the valency is increased, in two different ways. In certain serial verb structures, if V_1 is transitive, and V_2 is intransitive, V_2 must be causativised to make it transitive so that the two verbs have the same subject, as in (11) (Margetts 1999: 118):

(11) *ye-kabi-he-keno-Ø*
    3sg-touch/make-CAUS-lie/sleep-3sg.O
    'he threw him down'

In certain other serial constructions there is also transitivisation, but it is achieved using the applicative marker, as in (12), where the stem *namwa* 'good, properly' takes the applicative suffix to match the transitivity of the main verb (Margetts 2005:75):

(12) *ye-hekata-namwa-namwa-i-gai*
    3sg-CAUS-learn-REDUP-good-APPL-1EXCL.O
    'She teaches us properly.'

A similar phenomenon is also found in some Australian languages, such as Kaythetye (Harold Koch, personal communication, July 2008) and Wambaya (Nordlinger 1999), though in the examples I know of an intransitive auxiliary is causativised to match a transitive main verb (Kaythetye), or the two verbs in certain tight serial verb constructions have to match in transitivity, such that you would say 'hit + kill' rather than 'hit + die' (Wambaya), much as the first of the two constructions discussed above in Saliba.

2.3 Discussion

One main point in writing this paper is to bring up the phenomenon of transitivity harmony for discussion, to see if other languages of the Tibeto-Burman family manifest similar phenomena. As for the motivation and historical development of this phenomenon, each language may have its own motivations and path of development. Margetts (1999:102-105) argues that transitivity harmony of the type in (11) in Saliba is driven by the same subject constraint on serial verb constructions, and only the causative marker (which adds an A) and not the applicative marker (which adds an O) can be used for this function in that construction. In Rawang that explanation does not hold, as for S=A ambitransitives there would then be no motivation for using the intransitive vs. the transitive form, as the same referent is S and A. In the Saliba serial construction where the applicative suffix is used, as in (12), the two stems must match in transitivity as they share a single grammatical object suffix. This again cannot be the explanation in Rawang, as the resulting form in Rawang is morphologically intransitive.

Much like an antipassive construction, the reflexive/middle marker causes the A of the transitive clause to become the S of an intransitive clause, generally when there is less differentiation of the A from the O, as in reflexives and middles (see Kemmer 1993, LaPolla 2004). In the case of transitivity harmony, intransitivising the auxiliary in this way would be necessary when there is a less-differentiated or non-salient O, or when there is no O at all, as the transitive morphology would imply a specific, differentiated O, and thereby confuse the listener if no such O existed.

I think the explanation for why only the reflexive/middle voice marker is used to intransitivise the verb, and not the unmarked intransitiviser (the prefix *v-,* seen in (10)) is on the one hand that the

reflexive/middle marker allows a second noun phrase to appear in the clause, whereas the intransitivising prefix does not, and on the other hand that intransitives marked with the reflexive/middle marker as opposed to the intransitivising prefix imply that the action was volitional. For example, the word *tv́l (tá:lòē)* 'to roll (something)' with the intransitivising prefix becomes *vtv̄lē* '(of something) to roll (unintentionally)', whereas with the reflexive/middle suffix, it becomes *tv́lshìē* 'to roll oneself (i.e. intentionally)'. So in the case of the auxiliary verbs meaning 'start', 'continue', 'finish', etc., the reflexive/middle suffix may be used because of this sense of volitionality.

2.4 Questions on transitivity in Rawang

1. How should transitivity be defined in Rawang? Why?

2. It seems one of the analyses assumes a dependency between the individuality of the O and transitivity; the other one assumes a dependency between person and transitivity. How might our choice here influence our general understanding of transitivity?

3. Are there any other possible explanations for the communicative motivation and historical path of development for what I have called transitivity harmony?

4. Non-agentive animate core argument (those I am assuming are core arguments) can be marked the same way as peripheral arguments. How then can we distinguish core and non-core arguments (none are obligatory in the clause)?

3. Qiang

- Tibeto-Burman language spoken in northern Sichuan (extracts from LaPolla with Huang 2003).
- Qiang has intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive verbs, plus some ambitransitive verbs.
- Transitives can be formed from intransitives, or ditransitives from transitives, by the addition of the causative suffix. There is no intransitivizing marking other than the reduplication that marks the reciprocal.
- In a transitive clause, when the actor is the topic, the noun phrase representing the actor need not take any agentive marking, and the undergoer can also be unmarked. With few exceptions, this is true regardless of whether the noun phrase representing the actor is a noun or a pronoun, or whether the referent is first, second, or third person, or whether the argument is agentive or non-agentive, and is true for all aspects. The person marking on the verb generally reflects the person and number of the actor, regardless of whether the actor is agentive or non-agentive.
- When there is marked word order, or when there is a need to emphasize the agentivity of the actor, the agentive marker *-wu* can be used after the noun phrase representing the actor, as in (13):

(13) *the:-tç*   *pi:-xsə-la*   *sum-wu*   *de-l-ji*   *ŋuə.*
  3sg-GEN   pen-three-CL   teacher-AGT   DIR-give-CSM   COPULA
  '*The teacher* gave him three pens.'

In this example, because the noun phrase representing the actor is not in the clause-initial topic position, in order to avoid ambiguity in the assignment of actor status (especially as the actor and recipient are both third-person singular referents, so person marking on the verb is of no assistance in identifying the actor), the agentive marker *-wu* must appear after *sum* 'teacher'.

If on the other hand the semantic relations are clear given the nature of the referents and the action involved, then even with marked word order the agent marking is not necessary, as in (14):

(14) *khuə-le:*   *qa*   *zə-p-ji*   *ŋuə.*
      dog-DEF:CL   1sg   DIR-buy-CSM   COPULA
      'The dog was bought by me. / It was me who bought the dog.'

The one exception to the lack of marking of the undergoer of a transitive verb is when the undergoer is animate and the noun phrase representing the actor does not have agentive marking, so there might be confusion of which referent is the actor and which is the undergoer. In this case the dative/allative marker *-ta* can be used after the noun phrase representing the undergoer to disambiguate the actor from the undergoer or emphasize the undergoer, as in the following examples:

(15) *the:* *qa-ta*   *dʑe!*
      3sg 1sg-DAT   hit
      'He is hitting me!'

(16) *khuə-le:*   *qa-ta*   *ɦa-ʁdʑe-ʂa.*
      dog-DEF:CL   1sg-DAT   DIR-bite-1sgU
      'The dog bit me.'

(17) *xʂe-le:*   *ʔũ-ta*   *ə-tə-san.*
      bull-DEF:CL   2sg-DAT   DIR-gore-2sgU
      'The bull gored you.'

There is no change in the transitivity of the clause with the use of this marking (even though it is often used to mark peripheral arguments), as its use here is purely to distinguish semantic roles. While generally it is used when the agentive marking is not used, the two markers can appear in the same clause. For example, (15) could also have the agentive marker *-wu* after the noun phrase representing the actor.

With S=O ambitransitives, adding another argument is equivalent to a causative, but use of the causative suffix *-ʐ* is also a possibility, as in (18c), but the meaning is slightly different: in (18b) the actor must be involved in the rolling, whereas in (18c) the actor may have just done something that caused the stone to roll.

(18) a. *ʐawa*   *ɦo-ɣlu.*   b. *qa* *ʐawa*   *ɦo-ɣlu-a.*
          stone   DIR-roll   1sg **stone DIR-roll-1sg
          'The stone rolled down.'   'I rolled the stone down.'

      c. *qa*   *ʐawa*   *ɦo-ɣlu-ʐ-a.*
          1sg   stone   DIR-roll-CAUS-1sg
          'I caused the stone to roll down.'

With some verbs intransitives can be formed by reduplicating the verb to make a reciprocal, as in the following examples:

(19) a. *ʁu* 'curse'   >   *ʁuʁu*   'curse each other'
      b. *zdə* 'connect'   >   *zdəzdə*   'mutually connect'
      c. *ʁua* 'help'   >   *ʁuəʁua*   'help each other'

The verb in this construction takes one plural argument (which is possibly comprised of two conjoined noun phrases).

(20)　a.　*khumtsi ṇa χumtṣi*　　　　*quəqua-tçi.*　　　　(< quɑ)
　　　　[Khumtsi and χumtṣi]S　　fight:RECIP-3pl
　　　　'Khumtsi and χumtṣi are fighting.'

　　　b.　*thizzi　e:-wu　　e:-ta　　fa　　phifiphifi-tçi.*
　　　　3dl　[one:CL-AGT　one:CL-DAT]　clothing　tear:RECIP-3pl
　　　　'The two of them tore each other's clothes.'

Questions on transitivity in Qiang

1. In Rawang I used the presence of the agentive marker as criterial for identifying a transitive clause, but in Qiang I said having or not having the agentive or animate undergoer marking did not make a difference to transitivity. Which is a better analysis, or are both right relative to the individual languages?

2. My analysis of Rawang transitivity assumed a dependency between the individuation of the O and transitivity. In Qiang I argued that the agentive marker (which might be taken as a mark of transitivity) is used most often when the O is topical and the A is focal. Is there a relationship between what is going on in Rawang and what is going on in Qiang?

3. If adding an actor argument to an S=O ambitransitive makes the clause transitive, then what does adding the causative suffix do? Is it more transitive, or just a different type of transitive?

4. With the reciprocals, I have argued that they are intransitive, as there is generally only one direct argument, yet as can be seen in (20b), an adverbial phrase that seems to imply transitivity (it literally means 'one-agent one-patient') can be used in the clause. Should we rethink the intransitive analysis? (Compare Rawang reciprocals (LaPolla 2000), which are an inference from an overtly intransitivised clause with a dual or plural S.)

4. General discussion

There are many conceptions of transitivity (see for example, Dixon 1994, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, the traditional Tibetan conception of transitivity—Tillemans & Herforth 1989, Hopper & Thompson 1980, Halliday 1994—see LaPolla 2008 for summaries). The conceptions differ in terms of what is taken as the crucial difference between transitive and intransitive clauses: having an argument other than the actor, having an argument other than the undergoer, having an undergoer (affected O) as opposed to not having an O or having a non-referential O, having a set of features related to transitivity or intransitivity. In recent work on Atong (Tibeto-Burman; van Breugel 2008) and Iatmul (Papuan; Jendraschek 2008), it has been argued that it is not possible to distinguish transitive and intransitive clauses formally, and so transitivity in those languages is a discourse-dependent concept, as it depends solely on whether an O and an A can both be recovered from the context. Matisoff has stated (1976) that transitivity is not an important concept for understanding Lahu grammar. To what extend then can we see transitivity as a cross-linguistic phenomenon and can we have a cross-linguistic definition, or do we simply say that it must be defined for each language individually in those languages where it helps us understand the grammar?

Abbreviations

1sgU	first person singular undergoer verb suffix	LOC	locative marker (also used for dative, purpose)
A	actor of a prototypical transitive clause	N.1	non-first-person actor
ADV	adverbial marker	N.PAST	non-past marker
AGT	agentive marker	O	patient of a prototypical transitive clause
CAUS	causative marker	PFV	perfective marker
CL	classifier	pl	plural
CSM	change of state marker	PN	proper name
DAT	dative marker	PUR	purposive nominaliser
DEF	definite marker	RECIP	reciprocal marker
DIR	direction/orientation marker	R/M	reflexive/middle marker
GEN	genitive marker	S	single direct argument of an intransitive verb
HS	hearsay marker	TNP	3rd person transitive non-past marker
INTR	intransitivising prefix	TOP	topic marker
INTR.PAST	3rd person intransitive past marker	TR.PAST	transitive past marker

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