The Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal

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The Mal are a small Mon-Khmer hilltribe located in the Pua and Chiang Klang Districts of Nan Province in northern Thailand. Population for this hilltribe numbers approximately 7000 speakers. There is no official census as the Thai government considers the Mal as part of the Tin or Lua hilltribe. However, linguistically Mal is a distinct language in its own right as all Tin dialects have diverged sufficiently from each other, especially in phonology, so as to be now largely mutually unintelligible.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Protasis-Apodosis construction in the Mal language. This is a much used syntactic pattern in Mal speech and communication. The following description shall involve three dimensions of this construction. The first is a *structural* description while the second is a *functional* description, i.e. what the construction as a whole means as it is used in interpersonal communication. Indeed, both are essential for the identification and description of this construction from among the many other syntactic patterns found in the Mal language.

However, this sequence should not be construed to mean that structure is primary and function is derived from structure or that they are autonomous and unrelated. There is plenty of linguistic evidence that each is systematically related to the other, especially in the production of language. In this respect, the task in description is not the establishment of primacy or autonomy but the systematically relating of one with the other. On the other hand, linguists still live in a world of real time and space and must do scholarly writing in a linear fashion from beginning to end. Consequently, there must be an entry point into language. For this paper I have chosen as my entry point what linguists traditionally first meet in describing a language, viz. structure. Accordingly the following discussion will gradually shade from the structural to merge with the functional as the description progresses so that in the end it will be seen that both work in tandem in the construction, production and interpretation of this syntactic pattern in everyday usage.

The third dimension mentioned above is a description of a syntactic change that has occurred in Mal by way of the Protasis-Apodosis construction due to contact with the Thai language.

Data for this paper will be taken from the subdialect that I termed Mal B (Filbeck 1971, 1978).[1] This is the variety of Mal that I have spoken for many years. Most examples will be taken from texts that I recorded over thirty years ago. Another source will be the New Testament which was recently translated and published in the Mal language (also Mal B).

Definitions

The terms Protasis and Apodosis are from classical or traditional grammar. I first learned of them in college while studying Koine or New Testament Greek. After graduating and entering the field of linguistics, however, I was "cured" of using traditional terms in describing language. But the terms Protasis and Apodosis were resurrected soon after I began learning to speak and understand first Thai, then Northern Thai and finally Mal. The meanings of the terms became useful in analyzing the syntactic construction which is the subject of this paper.[2]
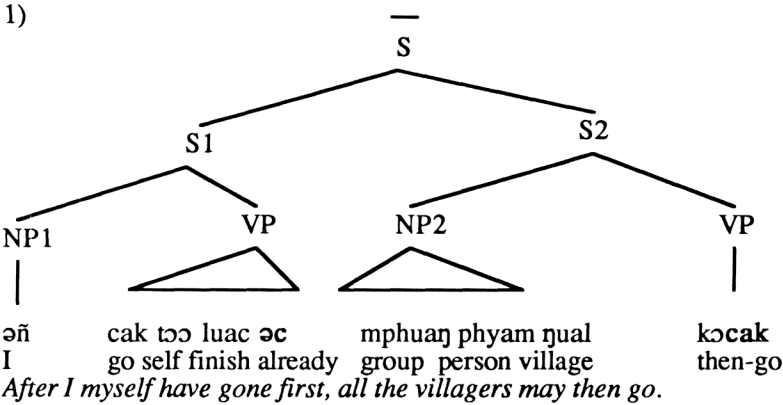
The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines Protasis and Apodosis in relation to each other; i.e. as two clauses of a single but complex sentence. Protasis is defined as the conditional or "if" clause of a sentence while Apodosis is the clause expressing the consequence. Now, while conditional-consequence is one functional reading of the Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal, it is not the main functional intent or thrust of the construction. Therefore, I will use the two terms in a more restricted linguistic application than what the above dictionary definition suggests. That is, while the terms will still refer to the two clauses of a single but complex sentence, Protasis will now refer to the first clause (as in Pro-) and Apodosis to the second clause (as in Apo-) irrespective of any functional reading. In short, Protasis and Apodosis will be used strictly as structural terms in this phase of description. A functional description of these two clauses together follows later.

The basic structural description of the Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal may be seen in the following diagram and example. (The example is taken from a text by a village shaman explaining that in order to do a ceremony properly the shaman must go first to the village shrine after which the villagers may follow.)

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[1]There are three Mal subdialects, respectively termed Mal A, Mal B and Mal C. Mal B is the largest, i.e. containing the most speakers, of the three. In the examples from Mal B to be included in this paper, two pecularities of the script should be noted. First, Mal B has a rising tone which is signalled by a raised "ᵛ" attrached to the end of a syllable that carries the rising tone. The second is the final /-r/. This letter represents a nonsyllabic high, back unrounded vocoid . It is like /-w/ in English except that it is pronounced with flat lips as in a big smile. The reason for choosing /-r/ for this sound is that it is a phonological change from Proto-Mal */r/.
[2]All three languages have this type of syntactic construction. In fact, what is described structurally and functionally of this construction in Mal may be said for the same construction in Thai and Northern Thai as well.

1)

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                               ——
                               S
                     _____/ _____
                    /                      \
                  S1                        S2
              ___/ \___               _____/ \_____
             /         \             /             \
          NP1          VP          NP2              VP
           |          /_\          /_\              |
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əñ	cak tɔɔ luac əc	mphuaŋ phyam ŋual	kɔcak
I	go self finish already	group person village	then-go

After I myself have gone first, all the villagers may then go.

A prominent and defining characteristic of the Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal is its intonational pattern. For example, the intonation of a single clause, or simple sentence, in Mal is comprised of three degrees of stress: heavy stress, medium stress and weak stress (Filbeck 1965, 1976). Each stress contains an accompanying pitch level: high pitch with heavy stress, mid pitch with medium stress, and low pitch with weak stress. The end of a clause, i.e. the final word of a clause, carries the heavy stress and high pitch level. Various patterns of medium and weak stress occur on other words of the clause. In the Protasis-Apodosis construction, as in the above example, this pattern is modified to take into account that there are two clauses. The final word (/əc/ "already") of the first clause (S1) is stressed but the final word (/cak/ "go") of the second clause (S2) is stressed even more. This difference is displayed by printing /əc/ in large and bold letters while printing /cak/ in bold but larger letters. The greater stress and higher pitch level signal the end of this complex sentence.

The second clause of the above example also contains the marker /kɔ-/, which is translated as 'then'. Structurally this is a clitic that is attached (with very weak stress) to the word that immediately follows. It functions at this point to mark the clause as the Apodosis of the construction.[3] It is not necessary for the Apodosis clause to have such a marker but most such clauses do. There are a few other clitics that also serve to mark the Apodosis in Mal (see examples below). /kɔ-/, on the other hand, is the clitic most often used.

In the diagram above the subjects of the two clauses were tagged as NP1 and NP2 respectively. In the example the two subjects are not identical: in S1 the subject is /əñ/ 'I', while in S2 the subject is /mphuaŋ phyam ŋual/ 'villagers'. However, the two Noun Phrases of a Protasis-Apodosis construction may be coreferential, i.e. NP1 = NP2. In this case one NP slot (either the Protasis or Apodosis) is normally null or empty.

2)   a)   εε[1] pɔŋ saa əc [0₁] kɔsoʔ ɔɔk
             we eat rice already then-want to-drink
             After we have eaten we want to drink some water.

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[3]In reality, an adequate description of this clitic must take into account the broader area of Mal discourse. However, this would take us beyond the scope of this paper.

b) $[0_1]$ pɔŋ saa ɔc εε$[_1]$ kɔso$^?$ ɔɔk
   eat rice already we then-want to-drink
   After eating we want to drink some water.

In both examples above[4], the null element [0] is indexed with the same subscript as the pronoun /εε/ "we". This indicates that in both sentences [0] is interpreted as having the same reference as the pronoun.

At first blush it would appear that these two sentences offer examples of government and binding in the Mal language. In each case the overt pronoun /εε/ "we" governs the interpretation of the null or empty category. In reality, though, the instances of null elements in these two sentences must be considered as part of a much broader phenomenon in Mal, viz. empty NPs (i.e. missing subjects and objects of verbs) throughout Mal discourse. There are sentences of the same structural configuration as 2a-b above, for example, in which the null element is not bound to its nearest overt noun phrase but is governed by some other, remote antecedent. In these sentences all empty NPs are interpreted on the basis of some principle operating globally in discourse. To illustrate this, a short text containing many examples of the Protasis-Apodosis construction and missing subjects and objects has been included below. The discourse is about what the Mal do in planting and harvesting rice. All nouns (of which there are seven) and pronouns (two) are numbered. The null element [0] represents an empty NP (a missing subject or object of a verb). Each [0] moreover is numbered in order to correspond with the noun or pronoun in the discourse that governs its interpretation. Since all Mal are rice cultivators, the (slash-and-burn) agricultural procedures outlined in the text are common to the Mal hilltribe as a whole. In other words, the following text with its many empty NPs would be correctly understood and interpreted by all Mal speakers.

3) Planting and Harvesting Rice Among the Mal

a) ha$^?$nua$^?$ mphuaŋεε$_{[1]}$cak sɔɔm sεε$_{[2]}$ b) cak sɔɔm sεε$_{[2]}$mphuaŋεε$_{[1]}$ sε$^?$ lɔŋ ŋkii nooy
  now   group we go slash rice-field   go slash rice-field group we many person together
  Now all of us go to cut and clear rice fields.   *It's to go cut fields that we all go together.*

c) $[0_1]$ sɔɔm $[0_2]$ luac ya$^?$ta$^?$een^{v}piar^{v}thua$^?$ d) $[0_2]$ khɔh ɔc εε$_{[1]}$ khaythooc $[0_2]$
  NULL slash NULL already place there two month   NULL dry already we then-burn
  When we have completed cutting we leave the fields   *When they are dry we burn them.*
  to lie for two months.

e) $[0_1]$ thooc $[0_2]$ luac εε$_{[1]}$ khaysih $[0_2]$ f) $[0_1]$ εεm ŋkyam   g) ɔñ$_{[3]}$ khaycak sih $[0_4]$
  NULL burn NULL already we then-clear NULL   NULL make field-house   I then-go plant NULL
  After burning we then clear the fields of logs.   *We make field houses. I then plant rice.*

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[4]These two examples are not trivial or marginal to the Mal language as most linguistic examples of this genre often are when English is used in linguistic description. They are culturally relevant and were actually used to explain Mal eating behavior when I first began to learn Mal. The Mal eat glutinous rice but drink no water during meals, so there is a real desire for a drink afterwards. Functionally a drink of water after a meal also serves to make rice swell up in the stomach thus giving a feeling of fullness even when there is an insufficient amount of rice to eat.

h) $[0_1]$ sih $[0_4]$ luac $[0_1]$ aŋ ñan   i) $[0_1]$ aŋ ñan luac $\varepsilon\varepsilon_{[1]}$ khaycak ya? aŋ ŋua?$_{[4]}$leh
NULL plant NULL already NULL to-weed   NULL to-weed already we then-go place let rice sprout
After planting we weed the field.   After weeding we leave our fields alone for the rice to sprout.

j) ŋua?$_{[4]}$leh   k) ŋua?$_{[4]}$lhɨaŋ luac $\varepsilon\varepsilon_{[1]}$khaycak kiaw^V $[04]$ l) $[0]$kiaw^V ŋua? luac
rice sprout   rice ripe already we then-go harvest NULL   NULL harvest rice already
The rice sprouts. When the rice is ripe we then go harvest it. When the rice is harvested

$[04]$ khɔh luac $[0_1]$ cak nthoom $[04]$ m) $[0_1]$ nthoom $[04]$ luac $\varepsilon\varepsilon_{[1]}$ khaycak ntiet $[04]$
NULL dry already NULL go stack NULL   NULL stack NULL already we then-go thresh NULL
and is dry, we then stack it.   After it is stacked we then thresh it.

n) $[0_1]$ ntiet $[04]$ luac $\varepsilon\varepsilon_{[1]}$ kɔkhon^V $[04]$ o) $[0_1]$ khon^V $[04]$ to? ya? takiaŋ ya?taluun^V
NULL thresh NULL already we then-transport NULL NULL transport NULL come place at-house
place at-bin
After threshing is completed we transport the rice, transporting to store it at home in the bin.

p) luac $\varepsilon\varepsilon_{[1]}$ cak laa ntuuŋ$_{[5]}$ g) $[0_1]$ laa ntuuŋ$_{[5]}$ $\varepsilon\varepsilon_{[1]}$ kɔlo? tɔɔ
then we go leave field   NULL leave field we then-rest self
Then we go to close out our rice fields. On closing out the fields we can then rest ourselves.

r) $[0_1]$ ay uuy kaan^V$_{[6]}$ ma?ee
NULL no have work   what
We have no more work to do.

There are 10 Protasis-Apodosis type sentences in the above text: c-e, h-i, j-n, q. All but one (k) have missing subjects and/or objects. Each of the other sentences, with the possible exception of two, has a null element whose interpretation is controlled by an antecedent external to the sentence, i.e. one that occurs elsewhere in the text. Even the null elements in the two sentences (i, l) that may be exceptions find more natural interpretations when considered controlled by the text as a whole instead of internally by the sentences involved.

As noted earlier, empty NPs in the Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal are part of a much broader phenomenon. In fact, in the above text fifteen of the eighteen sentences have NPs that are empty. In short, then, to describe the broader phenomenon will also describe the phenomenon of empty NPs in the Protasis-Apodosis construction as well.

From a closer investigation of the above text we can observe three principles of textual or discourse organization that intersect, which in turn allows NPs to occur empty in the Mal language. The first is the inclusion of the subject /εε/ "we" and object /sεε/ "rice field" in the first two sentences of the text. This establishes early on, as it were, a parametric setting for interpreting many empty NPs that follow throughout the text. That is, once a NP is filled (i.e. not empty), the "filler" need not be repeated in subsequent sentences (unless another has been introduced, in which case the original may need to be repeated to get back on track). But for this principle to operate correctly, it must intersect with the other two.

The second organizational principle is the content, more precisely the subject matter and environment, of the text. In this text the subject matter is about planting and harvesting rice among the Mal. The significance of the subject matter is that it

triggers the third principle, viz. it generates throughout the text highly specialized vocabulary or lexical items associated with the subject matter which, for the purpose of the above text, is about rice agriculture among the Mal. Rice, of course, is the daily staple of the Mal in northern Thailand. Their lives, including religious beliefs, revolve around rice. Consequently, the Mal language abounds with words describing in detail the many different aspects of rice agriculture (Filbeck 1973).

An interesting property of specialized vocabulary is the redundancy inherent in such words. Consider the transitive verb /sɔɔm/ in the first three sentences of the above text. Only the noun /sɛɛ/ can serve as its object. /sɔɔm/ involves the action of cutting or slashing down growth (everything from shrubs to trees) on a hillside for the expressed goal of clearing the ground for planting rice. Such a plot of ground on a hillside prepared with this purpose in mind is termed /sɛɛ/ in Mal. Now the same range of behavior of cutting, etc., can be exercised on a hillside for other purposes, in which case words other than /sɔɔm/ and /sɛɛ/ are used. In other words, when /sɔɔm/ is used, the word /sɛɛ/ is 100 percent predictable as its object. This means that the NP functioning as the object of /sɔɔm/ can be left empty without danger of being misunderdstood.

Much the same can be said for the subject of a highly specialized word as /sɔɔm/. In the third sentence there is no subject for this verb. Yet, since it is only nouns and pronouns with the feature [+human] that perform the actions involved in /sɔɔm/, and since such a pronoun with this feature has already been introduced into the text, the NP at this point may also be left empty.

The crucial role of textual subject matter in this process can be seen in sentence #3g above. There the verb /sih/ is translated with the meaning "to-plant". However, /sih/ has this meaning in Mal only within the context of rice. Otherwise, it has the more general meaning "to place-on, put-in". To be sure the two types of meanings are related (e.g. a grain of rice is placed in the ground when planted), with the one being more general while the other is more specialized. The point to remember is that it is the textual context that generates the specialized meaning which in turn allows the object NP in this sentence to be empty. Of more interest in sentence #3g is that the subject matter of the text allows this empty category (the missing object of the verb) to be interpreted as rice (see English translation) even though the overt noun for rice /ŋua²/ is not introduced until two sentences later!

To summarize: The description of missing subjects and objects in the Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal must not be restricted internally just to the construction itself, but rather be described externally in terms of the greater discourse in which they occur.[5]

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[5]The Protasis-Apodosis construction in Mal must not be confused with conjunction of two or more clauses. This could be seen, were space available, in the fact that both the Protasis and Apodosis may each consist of two or more conjoined clauses thus making them complex sentences in their own right.

Topic-Comment

The function of the Protasis-Apodosis construction in the Mal language is Topic-Comment. That is, the protasis or first clause in the construction is a topic and the apodosis or second clause is a comment about the topic. This is the meaning or usage of this construction in communication. Historically, the terms Topic-Comment have not been used at this level of grammatical description. They are usually restricted to describing the functional relationship between the subject and predicate within the sentence or clause (Gundel 1988). That is, the subject of a sentence names what the sentence is about while the predicate makes a statement about the subject. However, as will become evident below, by extending the terms to describe the functional relationship between two clauses in a complex construction as well, new insights into the structure and usage of the Mal language are forthcoming.

Topic-Comment is a highly productive function in Mal. By using the Protasis-Apodosis construction, unexpected comments can be made about a topic. Such comments can range all the way from the absurd to the profound. A pithy statement, for example, can be created on the spot for a novel observation about a topic at hand. The Topic-Comment function provides the linguistic foundation for much humor and even ridiculous statements in Mal. In short, the usage of this function in the Mal language is limited only by the agility and imagination of the speaker and listener.

In more specific terms comments on topics in Mal speech may be classified according to the vocabulary or lexicon chosen for making comments. In this manner comments may be classified into three general types, which may be termed *evaluation*, *sequencing* and *detailing* respectively. Each, moreover, may be further classified into several subtypes.

In making a comment on a topic, for example, a speaker may be making an evaluation. However, several (sub)types of evaluation are possible. First, a comment may state the *consequence* of a topic, i.e. if the action of a topic takes place then the comment gives the evaluation that a certain consequence follows. In the sentence

4)   ɔɔk   puc   sɛ⁷   kɔwiit   kli⁷
      drink liquor much then-dizzy head
      Drinking a lot of liquor makes a person drunk.

the apodosis, /kɔwiit kli⁷/ "make drunk", states the obvious results of drinking a lot of liquor. The second (sub)type is a *moral judgement* on the subject matter of the topic. In the sentence

5)   ɔɔk   puc   sɛ⁷   kɔ⁷ay   lɔ⁷
      drink liquor much then-not head
      Drinking a lot of liquor is not good.

the apodosis, /kɔ⁷ay lɔ⁷/ "not good", is a moral evaluation on the topic of drinking a lot of liquor.[6] An apodosis may also make a positive evaluation or judgement on a topic. In the New Testament, for example, the Topic-Comment function is used to translate the Beatitudes, a series of nine short pericopes or sayings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. The fifth Beatitude is translated as:

6)   ihee uuy ñiim khlɔ⁷ tia⁷ aŋ   ah   kɔ⁷at   lɔ⁷
        who   has heart   pity   give they then-live good
        Whoever has a heart of pity for others will live good.
        "Blessed are the merciful....." (Matthew 5:7)

Another type of evaluation can be seen when the comment repeats the topic, i.e. the topic is treated as an evaluation about itself.

7)   a. cak kɔcak
            go   then-go
            If it's to go, then let's do it.

        b. seh kɔseh
            lazy then-lazy
            If the guy's lazy, then he's lazy.

The repetition in such instances is an *assessment* that the topic may also be accepted as an accurate evaluation upon itself without any further comment or modification.

At this point, in anticipation of the syntactic change that shall be described below, one must resist the temptation of interpreting the protasis in sentences (4-7) as conditional "if" or even temporal "when". Cognitively in Mal the first clause in the Protasis-Apodosis construction is undifferentiated or unspecified with respect to the traditional categories of subordinate clauses as in English, e.g. condition, time, concession, etc. To be sure, the Mal protasis may be translated as a subordinate clause in English but this is because English has only the subordinate clause as the closest equivalent to this Mal construction. Consequently in English, one must make the decision of which subordinate clause should be used in translating a Topic in the Mal language. It is a decision, however, that is held in suspension in Mal.

The second major type of comment that may be made on a topic in Mal is sequencing, i.e. a topic is an action that occurs first and a comment is an action that occurs afterwards. There are two (sub)types of sequencing. The first may be termed *real time sequencing*. This is the type of sequencing found in the above text of Planting And Harvesting Rice Among The Mal. In this type the comment is not a consequence or result of previous action. Rather, a comment states what is done next given the context of the text or discourse. For example, in sentence 3k in the above text, if the rice in a field is ripe, then harvest can begin. On the other hand, if

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[6]Again, sentences (4-5) are not trivial or marginal examples. The Mal people are locally known for home brewing a potent rice wine that after only a few drinks can reduce a person to drunken and unseemly behavior. Brewing and drinking liquor and its attendant consequence on life are common topics of discussion in Mal life.

the action of the topic is not performed, the next step in the sequence (as described in the comment) cannot follow.

The second (sub)type may be termed *logical sequencing*, where the action of the topic occurs logically before the comment, whereas in real time it is the opposite. In the story called The Magic Trail, a poor man and his wife decide to go hunting the next day along a certain trail in the mountains. At this point in the story, they

8)   khooy   kɔceeᵛ   ŋkhɔʔ   eeʔᵛ
        lie-down   then-soak   milled rice   that
        At bed time they put their milled rice to soak.

In real time a person in Mal society puts milled glutinous rice in water for soaking overnight *before* lying down to go to bed. Logically, however, the time for going to bed must arrive first before rice is put to soak. In a Mal household, putting rice to soak is usually the last activity of the day before going to bed. Rice is not put to soak earlier since the longer time would make the glutinous rice grain too mushy for steaming the next morning. Therefore, the protasis, /khooy/ "to lie down", is the topic while the apodosis, /kɔceeᵛ ŋkhɔʔ/ "to soak milled rice", is the comment which states what takes place next in the logical scheme of things in Mal life.

The story goes on to tell how the couple find wild animals that magically become domesticated animals which they can raise and sell, thus making them wealthy.

The third major type of comment that can be made about a topic in Mal is termed detailing, i.e. a comment provides more details about the topic. In telling the story of his life history, a Mal man told of his marriage.

9)   et   ʔyah   kɔʔet   ʔyah   məəy   yaaŋ
        take   wife   then-take   wife   woman   divorce
        When I got married I married a divorced woman.

The apodosis gives more information about the woman he married. In a variation of this, a comment may provide the specifics of a more general topic. In a text giving instructions to children, the instructor tells about (future) adult responsibility in helping each other during rice planting time.

10)   nooy   aŋ ñan   dəə   kɔʔaŋ pleekᵛ   aŋ   plian
        together   to-weed   also   then-to hoe   to   hoe
        Also in weeding the fields together, the task is to hoe and dig out the weeds.

In this sentence the apodosis gives a more specific description of the type of activity that takes place in weeding a rice field. The protasis /aŋ ñan/ "to weed" is a general topic, while the apodosis /aŋ pleekᵛ aŋ plian/ "to hoe, to hoe"[7] details specific actions that take place in weeding.

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[7]This is an example of a couplet in Mal (see Filbeck, in press). A couplet consists of two words whose meanings are the same or synonymous. One function of couplets is to give detail or

At this point it is interesting to take note of a relationship that becomes apparent only at the text or discourse level of investigation. This relationship is the high degree of interchangeability between Topic-Comment and the relative clause in Mal. That is, in many contexts one pattern can readily be substituted for the other. To be sure, the Topic-Comment is the pattern of choice in Mal. In fact, in the recorded texts that I have on file, there is not one good example of a relative clause, while there are numerous examples of Topic-Comment. On the other hand, in translating the New Testament, the relative clauses of the source languages (in this case Thai, English and Koine Greek) were readily translated into equivalent structures in Mal. Indeed, it was this project that revealed how rich structurally and functionally the relative clause really is in Mal (Filbeck 1991).

Because of this interchangeability it was found that some relative clauses of the Thai and English translations of the New Testament were better changed to read as Topic-Comment in Mal.

11)   ñɔɔn   ihee   soop   kɔpɔɔn
        because   who   ask   then-get
        For everyone who asks receives. (Matthew 7:8)

This relationship is ultimately tied in with the widespread occurrence of missing subject and object nouns in Mal speech. More specifically, for a construction to function as a relative clause in a sentence, there must be an overt noun to modify. Structurally a relative clause cannot have an empty category to modify. Where a subject or object is missing as is often in Mal, the construction that would otherwise be a relative clause becomes the equivalent to a topic of a Topic-Comment sentence. And since missing subjects and objects are prominent features of the Mal language, it is no wonder that Topic-Comment turns up more often in speech and text.

In this case the topic can be seen to modify (as a relative clause would) a noun that occurs someplace else in the text or discourse. For example, in the above text on Planting and Harvesting Rice Among the Mal, the topic of sentence #3d is a modification of a noun in sentence #3a.

3a)   ha?nua?   mphuaŋ   ɛɛ[1]   cak   sɔɔm   sɛɛ[2)
        now   group   we   go   slash   rice-field
        Now all of us go to cut and clear rice fields.

3b)   [0₂]   khɔh   ɔc   ɛɛ[1]   khaythooc [0₂]
        NULL   dry   already   we   then-burn NULL
        When the fields are dry we burn them.

These two sentences may be combined into an equivalent sentence containing a relative clause.

12)   ɛɛ   khaythooc sɛɛ   ee   khɔh   ɔc
        we   then-burn rice-field   which   dry   already
        We next burn off rice fields that are dry.

be more specific about a topic. In this instance the Protasis-Apodosis construction and couplets neatly fuse together into a single communicative function in the Mal language.

A syntatic change

Mal syntax has undergone a change because of contact with the Thai language, especially the Northern Thai dialect spoken in Nan Province along the border with Laos. While the Thai language (and dialects) has the Protasis-Apodosis construction the same as Mal, Thai also has another two-clause construction where the first clause is a subordinate clause and the second is the main clause. The subordinate clause is marked by words such as "if", "when", "because", etc. The main clause may also be marked by the clitic /kɔ-/. This added feature of Thai syntax has had an impact on Mal as well.

For example, the Thai marker words for subordination are borrowed intact by Mal speakers and attached as loanwords to the first clause of the Protasis-Apodosis construction. Stucturally this has the effect of making an additional syntactic pattern available in Mal, thus producing a change in the total syntactic picture of the Mal language. Functionally these loanwords have the effect of making specific and definite what is unspecific and indefinite in the topic, as can be seen in the following examples.

13) a. Conditional
         kan   ɛɛ   mphaa   maal   kɔlɔ?
         if   we   feed   soul   then-good
         It is good if we sacrifice and feed the soul.

     b. Temporal
         ñaam   sɔɔm   kɔsɔɔm
         when   slash   then-slash
         When its time to slash a hillside for a rice field, then go do it.

     c. Causal
         ñɔɔn   aw   ay   pɔɔn   ɛɛm   sɛɛ   khwan   kɔ?ay
         because   father   not   did   do   rice-field   child   then-not

         uuy   saa   pɔŋ
         have   rice   eat
         Because the father did not plant any rice, his children do not have rice to eat.

The loanwords /kan/ "if", /ñaam/ "when" and /ñɔɔn/ "because" in the above examples, are words borrowed from the Northern Thai dialect. But because of improved education and mass communication, these words are now being replaced both in Mal and Northern Thai by the equivalent words in Standard Thai, e.g. /thâa/ "if", /m̂iaˆ/ "when" and /phrɔ?/ "because".

Concession as a subordinate clause in Mal is more problematic. Northern Thai loanwords are still used to turn a protasis into a subordinate clause. However, these words are used with a semantic extension to include concession that is not normally found for the same words in Northern Thai. Two words are borrowed for concession in Mal, /tiŋ/ "even (emphatic)" and /thɛɛmᵛ/ "extra". The first loanword is used more often.

14)   tiŋ   nam   cak   kɔ²ay   pɔɔn   thoon   ma²ee
       even he   go   then-not   did   buy   what
       Even though he went, he did not buy anything.

Conclusion

The relationship of structure to function has had its ups and downs in scientific descriptions. There have been periods in linguistics, for example, when function was considered illegitimate in the structural description of language. While this did not stop all linguists from utilizing functional notions in describing language, it often brought them harsh criticism for doing so. Fortunately the pendulum has swung back.

With the (re)introduction of functional descriptions as legitimate dimensions of linguistic analysis, it is seen that the totality of linguistic structure adds up to something more than just the sum of its individual parts. This is true of the Protasis-Apodosis construction in the Mal language. This construction consists of two sentences joined by a single intonational pattern. When these parts occur together they add up to Topic-Comment.

Currently there are two ways of portraying these functional dimensions in linguistic description. One way is to assign an *argument* or Theta-role to a construction as a whole. If a linguistic description takes structure as its entry point, such an assignment is a natural way of accounting for the functional reading of a construction. In this case, the Topic-Comment would be assigned as the function of the Protasis-Apodosis construction. The second way is to select the function (e.g. Topic-Comment) as an entry point and describe the (Protasis-Apodosis) structure as the grammaticalization of the function.

In either case it must be remembered that both structure and function work in tandem in the production of language. It is this interaction between sturcture and function that must also be displayed in order to achieve a more complete linguistic description of language.

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