Issues in writing a grammatical sketch in Tiddim Chin

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1. About the Tiddim Chin language
Tiddim Chin (ISO693-3: tdm) is a Tibeto-Burman language (Kuki-Chin branch) spoken in northwest Myanmar (Chin state) and northeast India (Mizoram state and Manipur state). It is spoken as a lingua franca in the northern part of Chin state (Myanmar). Most of the Tiddim Chin speakers on the side of Myanmar can also speak Burmese, the official and educational language of the Union of Myanmar. The total number of its speakers is estimated about 344,000, according to Grimes ed. (1996: 717).

From a typological point of view, Tiddim Chin is a verb-final language (Word order: AOVt or SVi1) like many other Tibeto-Burman languages (except Karenic languages). Tiddim Chin has an absolutive or ergative case marking system, and the grammatical relation between verb and arguments are represented by the enclitics.

Its phonological system2 is rather simple compared with the other Chin languages. The syllable structure of Tiddim Chin can be represented as (C)V(C)/T (C: Consonant, V: Vowel, T: Tone). Tiddim Chin (except its complex sound symbols) has 19 consonants / p, t, k, ?, pʰ, tʰ, b, d, g, c [ʨ], s, x, h, v, m, n, ŋ, ŋ, l, f, l, 10 single vowels / a, a:, e, e: [ɛ:], i, i:, o, o: [ɔ:], u, u:/, 16 diphthongs / iu [iʊ], ia [iə], ei [ei], e:i [ɛi], eu [ɛu], e:u [ɛːu], ai [ai], a:i [ai], au [au], a:u [a:u], ou [ou], oi [oi], o:i [ɔ:i], ui [ui], u:i [u:i], ua [ua]/, 4 triphthongs / iai [iæ], iau [iau], uai [uai], uau [uau] /.

2 The syllable structure of Tiddim Chin can be represented as (C) V (C) / T (C: Consonant, V: Vowel, T: Tone). Tiddim Chin (except its complex sound symbols) has 19 consonants / p, t, k, ?, pʰ, tʰ, b, d, g, c [ʨ], s, x, h, v, m, n, ŋ, ŋ, l, f, l, 10 single vowels / a, a:, e, e: [ɛ:], i, i:, o, o: [ɔ:], u, u:/, 16 diphthongs / iu [iʊ], ia [iə], ei [ei], e:i [ɛi], eu [ɛu], e:u [ɛːu], ai [ai], a:i [ai], au [au], a:u [a:u], ou [ou], oi [oi], o:i [ɔ:i], ui [ui], u:i [u:i], ua [ua]/, 4 triphthongs / iai [iæ], iau [iau], uai [uai], uau [uau] /.
languages, however, it has three distinctive tones, and tone sandhi occurs when each tone comes together in a phrase. Morphologically speaking, each Tiddim Chin verb has two stems, referred to as Form I (basic stem) and Form II (derived stem). This verb stem alternation is not linked in any simple way to a single parameter of variation such as tense, aspect, and mood. Form II stems occur in certain transitive and subordinate clauses.

Tiddim Chin has its own orthography developed by an American priest during the early part of the 20th century. This orthography has been used extensively among the speakers. Henderson (1965) noted that the written style differs from the colloquial style in Tiddim Chin.

2. Why did I choose Tiddim Chin?
In this section, I will go over the rational behind why I started to write the reference grammar of Tiddim Chin. In my undergraduate degree, I majored in Burmese (Myanmar) language at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. At that time, I was captivated by the idea of backpacking (travelling), so I travelled a lot, exploring in Myanmar on school holidays. Travelling around the country, I noticed that there are many different kinds of languages spoken in Myanmar, and I found that many of the minority languages have not been described in a linguistic approach. Since then, I came to have a personal interest in researching any one of these minority languages and publishing my findings.

A Tibeto-Burman researcher in Japan indicated to me that there are relatively few reference grammar books on northern Chin languages, such as Tiddim Chin, and advised me to conduct research into Tiddim Chin. I also read an article (Nishida 1989: 995) stating that linguistic studies into Chin languages are still at an initial stage, although investigating Chin languages would play an important role in the studies of Tibeto-Burman languages. This is why I have decided to write its reference grammar.

Since I started my M.A. course in linguistics, I have conducted fieldworks four times in Myanmar. I have studied its phonology, morphology and syntax, mainly through elicitation (Interviews, using Burmese as a medium language). I have also recorded some monologues (folktales) and dialogues (free conversation) in Tiddim Chin to see some grammatical figures that cannot be extracted from interview data.

/e:/ and /o:/ are realized as [ɛ] and [ɔ] before the final consonant /ʔ/. Tiddim Chin also has three distinctive tonemes (“rising or high tone”, “level tone”, and “falling or low tone”).

3 As far as my investigation goes, these two styles are mainly different in verb clause structure, but they share the same phonological system, morphological process and vocabulary. My current study focuses on the colloquial style.
3. How to describe clause combining

3.1. On describing clause combining in a grammatical sketch

We will now get down to the center of the issue in writing a grammatical sketch. The problem which confronts me at present is that I do not clearly know how to describe clause combining in an effective way. Most of the chapters in my grammatical sketch focus on the structure (or form) and the function comes second. It is rather simple and easy for me to describe the structures of nominal and relative clauses, however, it is more intricate when it comes to describing clause combining.

Even in English, it may be complex when describing clause combining. In terms of function, each subordinated clause has variant markers and structures (ex. Conditional clause: if, unless, in case, or, and (inversion) ... / Reason clause: because, as, since, so, and ...), while each subordinated clause, in terms of form, has various functions.

3.2. Two major types of clause in Tiddim Chin

In Tiddim Chin, if a proclitic pronoun preposes a NP, it mainly functions as a possessor marker as in (1). If a proclitic pronoun preposes a VP, the whole clause is often interpreted as a nominal clause as in (2). Here, let me call the clause (including a verb) with a proclitic pronoun “a nominal clause (NC)”, and the one without a proclitic pronoun “a verbal clause (VC)” for convenience.

(1) à= án “his meal”
3pp= meal [POSSESSOR]

(2) ámàn tua mòu? à= né:k mù: =ṅη “I saw him eating the snack.”
3SG.ERG DEM snack 3pp= eatII seeI =1SG.RLS [NOMINAL CLAUSE]

3.3. How should I describe clause combining?

Supposedly, there are three major types of structures in preceding subordinate clauses of Tiddim Chin as shown (3) - (8) (TYPE I - III). Also, the same subordinators (morphemes) can function in various ways as shown in (5) / (7) and (6) / (8).

● TYPE I Structure: VC ( + SUB) ( + CONJ)
Function: Coordination, Conditional, Reason ...

(3) kën sàbùái hà? =ṅη =a: ámàn án huán
1SG.ERG table clearI =1SG.ERG.RLS =CONJ 3SG.ERG meal cookI
“I cleared the table, and she cooked.” [COORDINATION]

(4) kën sàbùái hà? =ṅη =a: ámàn óṅ- pʰát
1SG.ERG table clearI =1SG.ERG.RLS =CONJ 3SG.ERG DIR- praiseI
“Because I cleared the table, she praised me.” [REASON]
● TYPE II Structure: \( VC + NC \) with \( COP + SUB ( + CONJ ) \)

Function: Reason, Concessive ...

(5) tua sùtām kā= hi? =hā:ñ =a: ámā? hè? =vèt =kèi

DEM break\( ^1 \) 1\( ^{pp} \)= COP\( ^{ii} \)=SUB =CONJ 3SG angry\( ^1 \)=at all =NEG

“Although I broke it, he didn’t get angry at all” [CONCESSIONAL]

(6) tua sùtām kā= hi? =ciàŋ =a: ámā? kàp zià?zià?

DEM break\( ^1 \) 1\( ^{pp} \)= COP\( ^{ii} \)=SUB =CONJ 3SG cry\( ^1 \)=OMTP

“Because I broke it, she cried loudly.” [REASON]

● TYPE III Structure: \( NC + SUB ( + CONJ ) \)

Function: Conditional, Reason, Temporal, Concessive ...

(7) tua kā= sùktàp =hā:ñ =a: kā= puà? kū:l á= hi =ve:

DEM 1\( ^{pp} \)= break\( ^1 \)=SUB =CONJ 1\( ^{pp} \)= repair\( ^{ii} \)=need\( ^1 \) =3 = COP\( ^{ii} \)=PTCL

“Because I broke it, I had to repair it.” [REASON]

(8) tua kā= sùktàp =ciàn =a: sēk zāŋ =zē:l =in

DEM 1\( ^{pp} \)= break\( ^1 \)=SUB =CONJ hammer use\( ^1 \)=often =1SGRLS

“When I break it, I often use a hammer.” [TEMPORAL]

Table 1 The structures of a clause combining in Tiddim Chin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordination</th>
<th>TYPE I</th>
<th>TYPE II</th>
<th>TYPE III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subordination</td>
<td>Conditional(^5), Reason etc.</td>
<td>TYPE I</td>
<td>TYPE II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessive etc.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>TYPE II</td>
<td>TYPE III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporal etc.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>TYPE III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The grammar sketch is different from the comprehensive grammar review in that the volume (number of pages) is limited and restricted. I could come up with three possible ways to describe clause combining so far, but I do not know which to choose. Table 2 summarizes the three ways to describe clause combining in Tiddim Chin.

(A) may be the most loyal to the Tiddim Chin language in that the linguists do not have to re-interpret its language and describe the lanugage as it is, but at the same time,

\(^4\) \( VC \) and \( NC \) with \( COP \) in this structure are closely bound prosodically and syntactically.

\(^5\) The examples of the conditional clauses are shown below.

(A) tua sùtām =lè:cìn ámā? á= hè? suák =inté? “If you break it, he’ll get angry.”

that break\( ^2 \)=SUB.2SG\( ^{pp} \) 3SG 3\( ^{pp} \)= angry\( ^{ii} \)=born\( ^1 \)=3SGIRR [TYPE II]


that break\( ^2 \)= COP\( ^{ii} \)=SUB 3SG 3\( ^{pp} \)= angry\( ^{ii} \)=born\( ^1 \)=3SGIRR [TYPE II]


that 2\( ^{pp} \)= break\( ^1 \)=SUB 3SG 3\( ^{pp} \)= angry\( ^{ii} \)=born\( ^1 \)=3SGIRR [TYPE III]

\(^6\) The example is omitted here.
by using all the peculiar terms such as “=ciáŋ clause” and “=há:ŋ clause”, it may confuse readers who know little about the language.

(B) focuses on the structure so it is easy to understand how the clause structure is related with other types of clauses that I described in other sections. However, the functions are described here and there and the readers go to and fro.

(C) may be the most ideal for many of the learners and some of the linguists, because it is easy for the learners to look up the usages, and also attractive to some of the linguists who are interested in comparing the language with other languages.

In either case, the concrete target of readers includes linguists. This may be the problem that every language could have, but at the same time, this is one of the major issues in writing a grammatical sketch of Tiddim Chin. Which one would you choose, (A), (B), or (C)?

Table 2 Three ways to describe a clause combining in Tiddim Chin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A) Morphological level</th>
<th>(B) Syntactic level</th>
<th>(C) Functional level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. =ciáŋ clause</td>
<td>1. Type I clause</td>
<td>1. Conditional clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. =há:ŋ clause</td>
<td>2. Type II clause</td>
<td>2. Reason clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. =leʔ clause</td>
<td>3. Type III clause</td>
<td>3. Temporal clauses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>1st person</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2nd person</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>3rd person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONJ</td>
<td>conjunction</td>
<td>COP</td>
<td>copula</td>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>demonstrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIR</td>
<td>directional prefix</td>
<td>EP</td>
<td>enclitic pronoun</td>
<td>ERG</td>
<td>ergative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRR</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>nominal clause</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>noun phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMTP</td>
<td>onomatopoeia</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>proclitic pronoun</td>
<td>PTCL</td>
<td>particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLS</td>
<td>realis</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>SUB</td>
<td>subordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>verbal clause</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>verb phrase</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Form I (verb stem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Form II (verb stem)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>affix boundary</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>clitic boundary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES

