

Parallelism in Kayah Li Discourse: Elaborate Expressions and Beyond

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Parallelism in Kayah Li Discourse: elaborate expressions and beyond

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1. Introduction. Let us define parallelism as, roughly, the binary repetition of linguistic features for rhythmic, esthetic or other expressive effect. This definition intentionally covers a very broad range of linguistic phenomena: repetition of all features of an item covers (full) reduplication, repetition of only some phonological features covers alliteration and rhyme, repetition of only semantic features covers synonym compounding and poetic/rhetorical parallelism, and so on.

Although all languages probably exhibit parallelism in some form, it has a special prominence in the linguistic area consisting of mainland Southeast Asia and China. Below are some examples from various languages of the area.

Full and partial reduplication; synonym and antonym compounds

Thai *lâp lâp tỳn tỳn* 'sleep+sleep+rouse+rouse: sleep fitfully'. Full reduplication, antonymy.

lòk luaŋ 'deceive+dupe: deceive, dupe'. Partial reduplication (alliteration), synonymy.

sya phaa 'shirt+lower.garment: clothes'. Quasi-antonymy.

Chinese 居住 *jūzhù* [tɕy|tɕuV] 'reside+dwel: live, reside, dwell'. Partial reduplication (affricates, rounded vowels), synonymy.

買賣 *máimài* 'buy+sell: business, commerce'. Antonymy.

左右 *zǔoyòu* 'left+right: approximately'. Antonymy.

4-syllable Elaborate Expressions

Thai *mũu hèt pèt kàj* 'pig+mushroom+duck+chicken: various meats'. ABCD, B and C rhyme.

Chinese 亂七八糟 *luàn qī bā zāo* 'disordered+seven+eight+wretched: all messed up'. ABCD, A-D and B-C linked semantically.

天南地北 *tiān nán dì běi* 'heaven+south+earth+north: poles apart'. ABCD, A-C and B-D quasi-antonyms.

Lahu *chi mũ chi mì* 'this+heaven+this+earth: this land of ours' (Matisoff:82). ABAC, B-C quasi-antonyms.

Larger structures

Thai *aw hǔu paj naa aw taa paj rǎj*

'take+ear+go+field+take+eye+go+dry.field: pretend not to see'

Yu Mien *diaŋ⁵ dzwei⁶ fim¹ ɲəu³, mien² dzwei⁶ ɲəu¹ tshjəu³*

'tree+beautiful+core+twist, person+beautiful+heart+mean: a beautiful tree with a twisted core; an attractive person with a mean heart' (Lombard:336).

Vietnamese *khôn ba năm đại một giờ* 'wise+one+year, stupid+one+hour: a year's wisdom can be ruined by an instant's foolishness' (Nguyen:70)

Chinese 7-syllable regulated verse of the Tang dynasty

江 jiāng KÆWNG RIVER-MOON = 風 fēng PJUWNG WIND-LANTERN = 沙 shā SRÆ SAND-HEAD = 船 chuán ZYWEN BOAT-TAIL	月 yuè ngjwot = 燈 dēng TONG LANTERN ≠ 頭 tóu DUW HEAD ≠ 尾 wěi mǐjX TAIL	去 qù khjəH AWAY FROM = 照 zhào tsyewH ILLUMINATE = 宿 sù sjuwk ROOSTING-HERON = 跳 tiào thewH JUMPING-FISH	人 rén NYIN PERSON ≠ 夜 yè yæH NIGHT ≠ 魚 yú NGJO FISH	只 [zhǐ] TSYE ONLY ≠ 欲 yù yowk WILL BE ≠ 聯 lián-quán LJEN-GJWEN SINUOUS ≠ 潑 pō-là phat-lat FLIP-FLOP	數 shù sruH A FEW ≠ 三 sān SAM THIRD ≠ 拳 quán GJWEN SINUOUS ≠ 刺 cì phat-lat FLIP-FLOP	尺 chǐ tsyhek FEET ≠ 更 gēng KÆNG WATCH ≠ 靜 jìng dzjengX STILL ≠ 鳴 míng MJÆNG SOUND
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Items in BOLDFACE are 平聲 pingshēng (level tone); others are 仄聲 zèshēng (oblique tones).

'=' indicates that items above and below it have matching tones (píng/píng or zè/zè);

'≠' indicates a píng/zè opposition.

□ encloses tonally 'free' positions. ○ encloses 'elaborate' expressions.

▣ encloses lines with syntactic and semantic parallelism.

WHB 2/15/95

In the river the moon is but a few feet from the onlooker
 The hurricane lamp shines in the night's third watch
 On the sandbar the roosting heron in sinuous stillness
 At the boat's stern the jumping fish plip-plop echoes.

poem by Du Fu (712-770), display by W.H.Baxter, free translation by DBS

Languages outside of the mainland Southeast Asia-China area

English buy now pay later; garbage in, garbage out; pots 'n pans; shoes 'n socks.

Tagalog original ang sarap, original ang sangkap 'the flavor is original, the ingredients are original' (D.Gil)

Hebrew *al tikaḥ čans, kaḥ aliens* 'don't take a chance, take Alliance [brand of tires]' (D. Gil)

I leave the reader to explore the many types and levels of parallelism in the Tang poem; note that the phonological parallelism extends to the four tones of Middle Chinese, which are for this purpose grouped into two types, one 'level' versus the three 'oblique'. Note also that the roosting heron is parallelistically opposed to the jumping fish, not only by stillness versus motion, but also by predator versus prey.

The preceding examples provide only a cursory survey of the range of parallelism in the mainland Southeast Asia-China area. The four-part structures known as Elaborate Expressions (the term was first applied by Haas (1964:xvii) to Thai) are perhaps the most distinctive, and the most characteristic of the area. The Kayah Li version of these falls into the type of parallelistic expression that is our main concern in this article.

2. Parallelism in Kayah Li. Kayah Li is a language of the Karen group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan, spoken in Kayah State of Burma and in adjacent parts of Thailand. This article deals with the Eastern dialect, as recorded by me in the vicinity of the capital of Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand.¹

Before proceeding to our main concern, I will list the various types of parallelism found in Kayah Li.

We begin with two types of simple repetition or full reduplication: first, a sentence-final morpheme of reduplication, meaning 'also, in response'.²

- (1) *vē ma ʔe kā phé thé ja ja*
 1s be.so eat COM simply pig flesh [redup]
 I ate only pork, too (as did he).

- (2) *ʔa cwá k̄ k̄*
 3 go com [redup]
 He went along too.

There are also classifier constructions of the type *pwā n̄ pwā n̄* 'every+day+every+day: every day, day in day out'.

Parallel expressions involving less-than-full repetition fall into two types.

Type 1: unstructured, derived. This type may be represented by *kék̄kék̄kwa* 'V something long so part remains'. Its two main characteristics are:

- Four-part structure with the pattern ABAC, either four full syllables (as in the above example) or two prefix+syllable pairs, e.g. *təplotəpjā* 'hurried'.
- No internal syntactic structure, hence 'unstructured'. The whole expression is either a Verb or a Verb Particle.

Of the parts ABAC, the last part C or AC is in many cases also an independent morpheme of related meaning. In *kék̄kék̄kwa*, relevant items are *kwa* 'half (Classifier)' and *kék̄kwa* 'be in half crosswise, on short axis'. This fact, plus some phonological patterning, suggests that most or all of this type can be analyzed as derivationally related to the part C morpheme; hence the description 'derived'.

Type 2: Grammatically-structured, non-derived.

This type comes in all sizes, and is the primary focus of this article. Below are a few examples indicating the range of possibilities.

disyllabic words. *h̄l* 'pants' + *ca* 'shirt' *h̄lca* 'clothes'; *súsá* 'complicated' (not analyzable)

two disyllabic compounds. *ʔeho ʔehí* 'steal+steal(cp): steal and pilfer', *ʔokhré ʔotè* 'orphaned+orphaned(cp): orphaned'

four full syllables. *h̄l le ca le* 'pants+warm+shirt+warm: warm clothes', *th̄l sú kè sá* 'water+com-+land+-plicated: country is complicated' (*th̄lkè* 'water+country: country, land'; *súsá* 'complicated')

six full syllables. *khé s̄l p̄ā s̄l p̄ð s̄l* 'shot to death, cut to death, collided to death' (256.4)

two full clauses. *m̄ð le hé ʔa domé lū ʔiplí s̄o s̄o*, *m̄ð le tā dome lū ʔimū s̄o plo* 'at evening they showed him a greenwood whip, at sundown they showed him a seedwood switch' (450.4).

Characteristics of Type 2 expressions.

- a. They are of all sizes, from disyllabic words to paired clauses.
- b. Those of four syllables or more have grammatical structure. For four syllables ABCD, the first two items AB bear a grammatical relation to each other, such as Verb-Object or Modifier/Head, and that relation is repeated between the third and fourth items CD.
- c. There may or may not be phonetic parallelism.
- d. The whole expression may be nominal, verbal or clausal.

3. Place of these expressions in the grammar. Type 1 parallel expressions are lexical items, in many cases derivationally related to some base morpheme. Type 2 expressions are not derived in the usual sense, but arise from the interaction between two mechanisms:

- a. parallelism as a relation between morphemes, marked in the lexicon in the same way as the relation between nouns and their associated classifiers.
- b. parallelism as an attribute of syntactic structures.

To illustrate some of the consequences of (b), consider the following examples of special behavior of syntactic structures within the scope of parallelism.

(a) Free occurrence of Bound morphemes. *thu* 'bird' in *jò bá dō thu bá be* 'rats how.many CLF, birds how.many CLF' (B.3 below). *thu* ordinarily does not occur on its own; cf. *thu tò* 'drongo', *thu thwâ* 'bulbul', *thuú* 'bird in general' (with suffix *ú*).

(b) Intrusion of Noun into Verb Complex.

- (3) [ʔiswá *li* ʔiswá *lā* nó]_{VC} *to*
 study book study book(cp) at.all NEG
 not study at all

Ordinarily the Verb Complex cannot contain any Noun, with highly restricted exceptions. But this Verb Complex, terminated by the Verb Particle *nó*, contains two: *li* 'written matter' and *lā* the Bound couplet-partner of *li*.

The two mechanisms (a) and (b) suffice to account for the entire range of Type 2 expressions. There is no basic form from which all others are derived, i.e. the disyllabic compounds are not reduced forms of the larger expressions, and the larger expressions are not expansions of the disyllabic forms. See Solnit forthcoming for arguments for this analysis.

4. Parallelism in discourse. Although extensive study of Kayah Li discourse genres remains to be done, there is a very obvious difference between more or less ordinary conversation and narrative on one hand, and two specialized genres known as *donē* and *ŷrō*. *donē* recounts legendary history, is largely or completely memorized, contains many archaic or obscure words, and makes use of a high degree of parallelism. *ŷrō* is chanted; beyond that I can say very little and will not deal with it here.

Parallelism is highly characteristic of *donē*, but it also occurs freely in ordinary conversation. Speakers vary in the degree of parallelism they use in conversation. My impression is that older speakers use more, but I also know certain younger people who use as much as any older speaker.

We proceed to examine three examples of discourse, one from *donē* and two from conversation. The examples are displayed in a format that indicates which portions consist of parallelistic structures and which do not, with parallelistic forms on the left half of the page and non-parallelistic stretches on the right. The parallelistic structures are arranged so that each element is aligned vertically with its parallelistically-linked counterpart. Within such parallelistic structures, a stray element that lacks a parallelistically-linked counterpart is vertically aligned with a blank. Consider for example segment (A.3) below, here reproduced without glosses:

(4) *ʔe nó* *to mó du dī bō*
 ʔe nó pa to mó li jō dʌ

Here the second occurrence of *ʔe nó to* 'not eat at all' is modified by the insertion of the durative particle *pa*, which is therefore shown as corresponding to nothing on the upper line. *mó du* 'great sky' and *mó li* 'bright sky' correspond parallelistically, as do *dī bō* 'umbilical cord' and *jō dʌ* 'monkey testicle(?)'.³

Example A: *donē*. Context: long ago the sky was rooted in the earth, as a mushroom by its stem (cf. Maspero 1950:185, and Chamberlain 1993 on this motif among Tai-speaking peoples). The stem put forth fruit every day. Bachelor (and other people?) get up early every day and obtain ripe fruit to eat; Lazy Man always arrives late and finds only unripe fruit. Lazy Man is angry and decides to cut the sky stem, wanting to harm Bachelor and his people.

PARALLELISM

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(1) *ʔa pā ʔ mós du dībō*

3 cut NS sky big umbilical.cord

pā ʔ mós li jō dʌ

cut NS sky bright monkey testicle

He cut the Great Sky's umbilical cord; he cut the Bright Sky's monkey-testicle(2) *je tə-je ʔa tū sō bō*

brandish one-CLF 3 severed three CLF

ʔa pā tə-pā ʔa tū bō sōswá təpjā dʔ mós lē

3 cut one-CLF 3 severed CLF six rebound at sky base

*With a single sweep three cords were severed; with a single cut six cords were severed; they sprang back up to the sky.**ʔo cwá cē*

exist go investigate

(3) *ʔe nós to mós du dībō*

eat at.all NEG sky big umbilical.cord

ʔe nós pa to mós li jō dʌ

eat at.all DUR NEG sky bright monkey testicle

ledē ʔe sʌ che pa

starve eat die food DUR

They went to look; they ate nothing of the Great Sky's umbilical cord; they ate nothing of the Bright Sky's monkey-testicle. They were starving.(4) *dʔ phú dí phēle*

at child unmarried unmarried

phú se ʔo pəlaə

child unmarried exist unmarried

As for the bachelor, the unmarried one

(5) *déhΛ mé mé mò phrè dō kū*

ask look look old.one aged village in

déhΛ mé mé mò bū dō chá nΛ

ask look look old.one white village nearby PTC

He asked to find out in the old one's village, he asked to find out near the white (-haired) one's village

The clear majority of this passage is in parallelistic form. Especially characteristic of the genre is the preponderance of full clauses in the parallelistic structures, although there are also smaller structures, as in segment (A.4), which is a parallelistic Topic expression followed by the parallelistic Comment clauses of (A.5). Parallels are strictly binary.

Example B. Monologue during conversation. The speaker is lamenting the poor harvest of the season just past, blaming it on the deprivations of animal pests. This section is partly a tirade, partly a plea to the pests to not damage his crops so much. It may also be construed as pronouncing a curse on the pests, which runs the risk of retaliation; hence the first segment, implying that others may caution the speaker against cursing, but he is not to be deterred.

PARALLELISM

NO PARALLELISM

(1) *ʔichō təkhé ma ʔichō me me ʔū hé*

berate PTC be.so berate don't don't they say

ʔiba ma ʔiba me me ʔū hé na

scold be.so berate don't don't they say PTC

'Don't berate,' they say, 'Don't scold either,' they say

(2) *káó: là becō*

cliff master

cho bece

mountain master

jòkhró becō

rat master

jòkhró bece

rat master

Ah.. lord of cliffs, master of mountains, lord of rats, master of rats

vē hē kúklē rùsōlē khā tō-na

1s go swidden [place] apex one-year

I worked the fields at the headwaters of Rusoleh for a year

(3) *jò bá dō*

rat how.many CLF

thu bá be tē

ma

bird how.many CLF PTC

be.so

How many rats, how many birds

(4) *hē ʔe tu*
 go eat in.group
ka ʔō pló lēkhē lū bā
 come drink piled.up PTC plurally here
they went and ate in herds, came and drank in heaps here

(5) *ʔā tōna vē lù*
 this one-year 1s luck
vē bwí
 1s merit
vē lù
 1s luck
təṛā tā pəhē ŋē
 fortune fall ahead front
This year my luck, my merit, my luck and fortune are going downhill

(6) *na be*
 year manifest
lē lī ma já já te me ní
 moon bright be.so go.and go.and PTC don't PTC
me phé ʔā tō-na ma pō á ní
 do simply this one-year be.so enough NS PTC
Next year, next time, don't do it! Do it just this year, that's enough!

(7) *dā ma ʔe dā*
 Cucurbita be.so eat Cucurbita
lù ma ʔe lù
 Momordica be.so eat Momordica
khro ma ʔe lō khro na hō
 yam be.so eat use.up yam PTC PTC
The cucumbers they ate, the melons they ate, the yams they ate up.

- (8) *dɛ kɛ̀ pè vɛ̀ ma vɛ̀ hɛ̀ phjá rɔ́*
 put leave BEN 1s be.so 1s go take PTC
ma ʔa sũre pa
 be.so 3 grueling PTC

What was left for me, I went to get it, but it was grueling.

Here parallelism is employed for eloquence, and possibly also for supernatural effect, suggested by the opening segment's allusion to others warning him against berating. Compared to Example A, the parallelistic structures include far fewer full clauses and more Noun Phrases, such as *jò bá dō thu bá be* 'how many rats, how many birds', or *vɛ̀ lù vɛ̀ bwí vɛ̀ lù tərɔ́* 'my luck, my merit, my luck and fortune'. There are also several non-binary structures, such as the last-cited (unclear whether it is three parts or four), or the three-part expression in (B.7) 'the cucumbers they ate, the melons they ate, the yams they ate up'.

Example C. Conversation. Early in the cool season, local officials have been distributing blankets and warm clothes. The speaker's husband acted as spokesman for some especially poor people seeking these handouts.

- | PARALLELISM | NO PARALLELISM |
|-------------|---|
| (1) | <i>hú lú pé sī, phéɔ́ sī,</i>
like L. mute and.them P. and.them
<i>thérú pé nɔ́ ma</i>
T. mute PTC be.so |

Ones like Mute Lü, Phe'a, Mute Thehru

- (2) *kəjɛ̀ m̀ò ʔo to*
 person mother exist NEG
phɛ̀ ʔo to
 father exist NEG

People without mother or father

(3) *kəjē* *ʔo* *khre*

person exist orphaned

ʔo *tè*

exist orphaned(cp)

ʔo *lʔ*

exist extra

ʔo *kl̩*

exist extra(cp)

ʔū *hé* *ɲà* *ʔa* *nʌ*

3i say BEN 3 PTC

People who are orphaned, outcast, abandoned; he spoke on their behalf

(4) *ʔū* *dá* *kā* *ʔa* *nʌ* *ʔa* *ré* *já*

3i give COM 3 PTC 3 good NS

and they [officials] gave them [poor people] things, it was good

(5) *ʔā* *ma* *ʔū* *bé* *to*

this be.so 3i have.resources NEG

ʔū *chiū* *to* *ʔū* *ʔovī* *đī*

3i have.resources(cp) NEG 3i be.out.of cooked.rice

This is those without resources, with no wherewithal, without food

(6) *ʔū* *phri* *bé* *ʔū* *hʌ*

3i buy have.resources they pants

ʔū *ca* *to* *já* *hé* *ɲè* *ʔū* *nʌ*

3i shirt NEG go.and speak BEN 3i PTC

They don't have the means to buy clothes; he spoke on their behalf

As in the preceding example of conversation, fewer of the parallelistic structures here cover a full clause; also clauses in general are shorter than in the *donē* example A. The parallelistic structures of segments (2) and (3) are simply a list of possible descriptions of the category of people in question. Unlike example B, there are no three-part parallel structures; all are binary.

Finally we may note that parallelism is not confined to monologues. Here is an exchange from the same conversation excerpted in Example C, with the interlocutors notated (K) and (P): (K) *ʔū* *dá* *ré* *lʔs* *ma* *bése* *ʔo* *to* *to* *nʌ* (P) *ŋ*, *ʔū* *síjɔ* *rʌ* *ʔa* *rʌ*, *ʔa* *bése* *ré* *kā* *to* ... (K) *ʔū* *twà* *ʔū* *ré* *nʌ* *hō* *ʔū* *já* *dá* *ɲé* *cè*, *ʔū*

mé cè ?ũ ré ?u twà '(K) Who they give better to is the blind. (P) Mm, they care for them, the ones with bad eyes/faces ... (K) Good-looking ones, they might not give them anything, they might not pay much attention to the good-looking ones.' The highlighted expressions combine *?ũ* 'they', *twà* 'beautiful', and *ré* 'good', in two different orders, to mean 'good-looking ones'.

5. Conclusions. Parallelism is native to all levels of linguistic structure in Kayah Li. Grammatically, it reaches from word formation to text level. In discourse, all genres evince it, although in different form and to different degrees. One of the distinguishing marks of the *donē* genre is its high frequency of long clauses in binary parallelism. Conversation for its part has a varying frequency of parallel expressions, which include fewer full clauses and more Noun Phrases.

¹Further details on Kayah Li grammar and dialectology may be found in Solnit forthcoming. My research on Kayah Li was supported by two Fulbright research grants, and by a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship.

²The transcription has IPA values. Tone marks, exemplified with the vowel /a/, are *ā* mid level, *a* (no mark) low level, *á* high level, *à* low falling. Low level and high level end with glottal stop before pause, low falling ends with creaky voice. Abbreviations used in glosses are: BEN = benefactive, CLF = classifier, COM = comitative, cp = couplet-partner (occurs only in parallel expressions), DUR = durative, i = indefinite, NEG = negative, NS = new situation, p = plural, PTC = unspecified particle, s = singular.

³The actual meaning of this expression remains unclear. *da* is also 'egg', but 'testicle', as a body part, would be more appropriate in parallelism with 'umbilical cord'. Unfortunately I was unable to question the actual narrator of this *donē* about this point; the gloss 'monkey testicle' was provided by a different informant. This sort of semantic uncertainty is typical of the *donē* and *ʔirō* (song) genres.

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