

A GRAMMATICAL SKETCH OF NORTHERN TAI LONG SHAN

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Abstract

Current grammar descriptions of Shan varieties do not include the northern variety within the current Shan State. This article addresses this gap by providing a descriptive sketch of a northern variety of Shan, namely, northern Tai Long Shan. Primary linguistic data shows that the northern Tai Long Shan phonemic inventory consists of 5 distinct tones, 18 consonants, and 12 vowels. Sentences in this variety of Shan follow a general topic-comment structure, and clauses follow a verb-object order. Common multi-clausal structures include conjunctive constructions and adverbial constructions expressing conditional, causal, temporal, successive, and simultaneous meanings. Adverbial clauses commonly start with an adverbial to mark dependence, and they often precede the main clause. Other syntactic elements covered in this sketch are noun compounds, noun phrases, verb compounds, serial verb constructions, adjectives, adverbs, and sentence-final particles.

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1 Introduction

The Shan language belongs to the family of Tai-Kadai languages. Along with Thai, Lao, Khamti and many others, Shan belongs to the Southwestern branch of Tai (Diller 2008:1). This article describes a variety of Shan spoken in the northern part of the Shan State in Myanmar, more specifically the towns of Hsipaw, Namtu, and Lashio. The Shan living in this area refer to themselves ethnically as Tai Long, which is an autonym widely used by the Shan (Inglis 2024:172). Tai Long is also a name that corresponds to the older Shan script Lik Tai Long (in which Lik means “letters”), from which the modern Shan scripts emerged (Sai Kam Mong 2004:82). However, the Shan also refer to themselves as Tai Yai (Inglis 2024:172) or Tai Mao if they live directly along the Shweli river (Edmondson 2008:191). Hence, to ensure clarity and to facilitate future comparative work within and beyond the Shan language, I refer to this specific variety of Shan as northern Tai Long Shan (TLS hereafter).

Compared to its sister languages in the Tai language family, the Shan language has not received as much attention. One possible reason could be the intense conflict between the Shan and the Burmese, making access to the Shan territories highly risky due to the unrest (Grundy-Warr & Wong 2002:96). Edmondson (2008:185) also alluded to the difficulty of collecting linguistic data on this language for many years. Such challenges might have resulted in the limited description of the language until the last two decades.

The first of these descriptions were by Edmondson and Solnit (1997) and Edmondson (2008), whose focus was on describing and comparing the phonology of different Shan varieties. Edmondson and Solnit (1997) provided acoustic evidence of tonal pairs in the southern (Mae Hong Son and Pinlon) and northern (Mangshi, Namkhan, and Muse) varieties, and their representation and analysis were grounded in Gedney’s (1972) system of Proto-Tai tones and initials. Edmondson (2008) expanded his comparison to include more varieties of Shan, but his work was focused on documenting the sound changes across the different regions of Shan speakers, noting how these changes varied between the north and the south. These two studies are pivotal in forming our preliminary understanding of the phonology of this language, but it is important to

note that they were centered on breadth and not depth, as their goal was to draw linguistic boundaries within the Shan language, differentiating between the northern and southern varieties. Dedicated phonological descriptions for each variety of Shan (at least for the south and the north) were thus missing. The different varieties of Shan from which they sampled also did not include the specific variety of Shan explored in this article.

Perhaps recognizing the lack of documentation of the language's grammar, subsequent studies provided typological descriptions of different parts of Shan grammar, with each author exploring a specific variety of the Shan language. The most notable scholar on this language is Inglis, whose descriptions were specialized to Khamti Shan, specifically the variety spoken in Putao, Mogaung, and Namti. His publications cover basic morphemes *an*³ 'thing', *nai*¹ 'this', and *mai*² 'here' (Inglis 2014), anti-ergative constructions (Inglis 2017a), orthography (Inglis 2017b), perfectivity (Inglis 2021a), standard negation (Inglis 2021b), and illocutionary force (Inglis 2022). A basic grammar of Khamti Shan (Inglis 2024) was also recently published, providing much insight into this variety of Shan that is spoken outside the borders of the current Shan State, which is further up north from the Shan variety that this article describes.

Another scholar who has contributed to the recent documentation efforts of Shan's grammar is Moroney (2021), whose research was specific to the southern Shan variety spoken in the Shan State of Myanmar. Her dissertation provided a description of the definiteness and quantification of nouns in this Shan variety and a comparative analysis with other languages like English, Nez Perce, Yudja, and Mandarin. Since the focus of her comparison was on languages outside the Tai language family, other varieties of the Shan language, like northern TLS, were naturally left out of her work.

It is evident from the existing literature that northern TLS has not received much attention (apart from my description of its serial verb constructions (see Soh 2019)). While Inglis (2024) has already provided a typological sketch of one variety of Shan, the strong Tibeto-Burman influence in Khamti Shan, which is spoken in northern Myanmar, sets it apart from other varieties spoken within the Shan territories. A grammar sketch of a Shan variety spoken within the Shan state is still absent, which this article hopes to contribute by providing one on a northern variety. Additionally, the focus on breadth in the phonological descriptions and comparisons by Edmondson and Solnit (1997) and Edmondson (2008) of the different Shan varieties reveals the need for a dedicated section that details the phonology of the Shan language, which this article attempts to address as well.

Ultimately, this article aims to provide some understanding of the general features and characteristics of northern TLS (a variety spoken within the current Shan state).

2 Data

Data¹ (both elicited and natural) collected in 2013 and between 2016 and 2017 were used for this description. Fieldwork was conducted in Singapore with three native speakers of northern TLS who were born in the northern Shan State of Myanmar. Su is from Lashio, Va is from Hsipaw, and Sa is from Namtu. Su and Va were monks in the Theravada Buddhist monastery for the Shan in Singapore while Sa was a frequent visitor of the monastery. All recordings of the data were in audio form and speakers were recorded, with consent, in a quiet room in the monastery. Table 1 below illustrates the different types of data that were collected. Su helped with the interpreting and translating of the Pear Story recording while Va took over to assist with the transcriptions from the second half of 2016. Two to three trips were made every week to the monastery for over a year and a half.

¹ The data collected and used in this article received research ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Nanyang Technological University.

Table 1: Details of the data collected for the description of northern TLS

Data	Type of data	Duration	Information on data
<i>Modified version of Gedney's (1972) checklist</i>	Elicited	12 min 58s	For the effective transcription of northern TLS, tones were elicited through the use of a modified version of Gedney's checklist, where words from Li (1977:29–35) and Jackson et al. (2012:130) were added to the original checklist. This resulted in a list of 157 words, as compared to the original that had 64 words. Su participated in this elicitation.
<i>Staged Events Stimuli</i>	Elicited	45min 38s	This was a set of film stimuli contributed by van Staden et al. (2001) for the sake of eliciting “multi-verb constructions, event typicality, and event complexity”. 86 video clips that showed different types of activities were provided in this set, and their video lengths ranged from 5 seconds to 78 seconds. Va was shown the videos before he was asked to narrate them.
<i>The Pear Story</i>	Elicited	6min 11s	Using Wallace Chafe's six-minute ‘The Pear Story’ film (developed in 1975), Su narrated the story as he watched the film.
<i>The Frog and Crow Story</i>	Natural	3min 24s	This was a popular folktale within Hsipaw (Thibaw) Township that Va narrated in 2013. We reworked the original interpretation and transcription done in 2013 to correct for inaccuracies. The glossed text of this folktale can be found in Appendix A.
<i>Conversation</i>	Natural	16min 3s	Three participants held a conversation that lasted approximately 20 minutes. They recounted to each other a past dangerous situation they were in. Of the three participants, one of them was from Taunggyi, which is south of the Shan state, and so her portion was removed from the audio recording. Only Sa's and Su's portions were retained and transcribed.

3 Phonology

The following phonemic inventories were determined based on observations of the data collected.

3.1 Phonemes

This northern variety of Shan has eighteen consonant phonemes, ten monophthongal vowel phonemes, and two diphthongs. Tables 2 and 3 present the inventories.

Table 2: Consonant inventory of northern TLS

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive					
<i>voiceless unaspirated</i>	p	t	c	k	h
<i>voiceless aspirated</i>	p ^h	t ^h		k ^h	
Nasal	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative					
<i>unaspirated</i>		s			
<i>aspirated</i>					
Affricate		ts			
Approximant	w	l, ɹ	j		

Only voiceless stops are present in the consonant inventory of northern TLS. Fricatives and affricates are also uncommon in the system, with only one of each, and both are voiceless. Consistent with Edmondson's (2008:196) finding, these sibilants are characteristic of northern varieties of the Shan language, setting them apart from the southern varieties that have /s/ and /s^h/ instead. The absence of /f/ and the presence of /p^h/ also align with Edmondson's (2008:201) data from his speaker from Lashio, the hometown of one of my speakers. Northern TLS is one of the "few scattered residues of *ph* remaining" as Edmondson (2008:201) found that "the original /f/ has come into most areas" inhabited by the Shan, which he suggests is an indication of influences from Tai Lua of Yunnan.

The vowel inventory of northern TLS consists of ten monophthongs and two diphthongs (Table 3). Among the monophthongs are three front unrounded vowels and three back rounded vowels, one of each height; and four central unrounded vowels, one each for high and mid tongue heights, with the exception of the low tongue height having two vowels. The only vowel length distinction in this variety is /a/.

Table 3: Vowel inventory of northern TLS

	Front	Central	Back
High	i	ɨ	u
Mid	e	ə	o
Low	æ	a, aː	ɔ
Diphthongs	ui, ue		

While it is typical of Tai languages such as Lao (Enfield 2007:35) and Thai (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom 2005:5) to have a long vowel for each corresponding short vowel, northern TLS deviates from this pattern by having only one long vowel.

3.2 Phonotactics

Shan is a monosyllabic language, and the canonical syllable consists of an obligatory vowel and tone. The linear syllable structure is as follows:

$$(C_1) (G_1) V_1 (V_2) (C_2) \text{ } ^\text{T}$$

The consonants and vowels that appear in each slot is listed below:

C ₁ =	/p, ph, t, th, c, k, kh, h, m, n, ɲ, s, ts, l, r, j, w/
G ₁ =	/j, w/
V ₁ =	/i, ī, u, e, ə, o, æ, a, a:, ə/
V ₂ =	/i, e/
C ₂ =	/p, t, k, m, n, ɲ, j, w/
T =	any tone

The C₁ slot can be filled by all consonants. Likewise, the G₁ slot can be filled by all glides and the V₁ slot can be filled by all vowels. When V₁ is occupied by /u/, V₂ may be filled by either /i/ or /e/. Additionally, C₂ can only be filled by voiceless unaspirated stops, nasals and glides. To determine whether the phoneme occurring adjacent to the obligatory vowel is a vowel or a glide, I observed the lip shape of the Shan speakers who helped with the transcribing of the collected data when they were articulating the specific morpheme, on top of auditory observations. Auditorily, /j/ in the G₁ slot is especially clear when articulated by these Shan speakers. Table 4 below contains examples of the possible syllable types that were observed in northern TLS.

Table 4: Possible syllable types in northern TLS

V ₁ ^T	/e ⁴⁴ /	‘HON.F.INF’
V ₁ V ₂ ^T	/ue ⁴⁴ /	‘friend’
C ₁ V ₁ ^T	/sə ⁴³ /	‘t-shirt’
C ₁ V ₁ V ₂ ^T	/p ^h ui ²¹ /	‘open’
C ₁ V ₁ C ₂ ^T	/luk ⁴³ /	‘child’
C ₁ G ₁ V ₁ ^T	/kwe ⁴⁴ /	‘only’
C ₁ G ₁ V ₁ C ₂ ^T	/tjap ⁴⁴ /	‘axe’

Note: Further explanation of tone markings is offered in Section 3.3 below.

3.3 Tones

The tone categories listed in the far-left column of Figure 1 below are those of Proto-Tai, and a binary split in the original tonal system, based on the voicing nature of the initial consonants, can be observed. Using Chao’s (1930) tone letters to represent the pitch values, northern TLS has five distinct tones: low slightly falling then rising /214/, low slightly falling /21/, high slightly falling /43/, high level /44/, and high falling /52/. Unchecked syllables of northern TLS have all five tonal contrasts, while checked syllables have four tonal contrasts. The number of contrasts in both syllable types is congruent with what Edmondson (2008:194) found of northern Shan varieties.

Figure 1: Representation of northern TLS tones using Gedney’s (1972) tone box system

Initials	A	B	C	DS	DL
Voiceless fricatives					
Voiceless unaspirated stops	214	21	43	44	21
Pre-glottalised stops					
Voiced sounds	44	43	52		43

4 Constituency and syntax

The sentence structure of northern TLS is topic-comment, characteristic of mainland Southeast Asian languages, where “a topical nominal appears in initial position, external to the clause that follows but semantically connected in that it sets the scope of what is to come” (Enfield 2005:189–190). In northern TLS, it is not uncommon for a pause to immediately follow a topical noun phrase to mark it outside of the following clause.

- (1) *kon*⁴⁴ *sə*⁴³ *səm*²¹ *lə*⁴³ *kon*⁴⁴ *sə*⁴³ *lɔj*²¹⁴, *len*⁴³ *maak*²¹-*naŋ*²¹⁴
 shirt blue and person shirt red play person soccer.ball
 ‘Blue-shirt people and red-shirt people are playing soccer.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (13)]

The following clause might also start with a pronoun or the referent marker *naŋ*²¹⁴ to explicitly refer to the topical noun phrase preceding it. Example (2) demonstrates this.

- (2) *tsum*⁴⁴ *sə*⁴³ *lɔj*²¹⁴ *lə*⁴³ *tsum*⁴⁴ *sə*⁴³ *səm*²¹, *k^haw*²¹⁴ *tɔ*²¹ *kan*²¹⁴
 group shirt red and group shirt blue 3PL play COLL
 ‘The red-shirt group and blue-shirt group are playing with each other.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (57)]

Clause structure in northern TLS typically follows the verb-object order, since it is relatively common for the subject to either be elided (Example 3) or set outside of the clause to be marked as a topic (Example 1). It is characteristic of Tai languages to exhibit such a pattern (Enfield 2005:189).

- (3) Ø *sip*²¹ *t^ho*⁴⁴ *sap*^{52B}-*pin*^{44B} *man*⁴⁴ *kwa*²¹
 3SG ongoing push.bicycle bicycle 3SG go
 ‘(He) pushes his bicycle (in the direction that he was going).’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (23)]

4.1 Multi-clausal structures

4.1.1 Conjunctive

In northern TLS, commonly used conjunctions to join two clauses are *se*²¹⁴ and *he*²¹⁴ ‘and’ (Examples 4 and 5), contrastive markers *sam*⁵² and *tə*⁵² (Example 6), as well as *kɔ*⁴³ ‘also’ (Example 7). While *kɔ*⁴³ conveys a general sense of ‘also’, its actual meaning and purpose are usually contextually interpreted. This can be seen in Example (7), where its purpose is to connect and relate both clauses within the utterance, showing that the subject of the second clause does not know the result of the comparison captured in the first clause.

- (4) ...*nɔp*⁴⁴ *aw*²¹⁴ *k^het*²¹ *se*²¹⁴ *loŋ*⁴⁴ *kwa*²¹ *ti*⁴³ *him*⁴⁴ *nam*⁵² *mɔ*²¹,...
 catch take frog and descend go at near water hole
 ‘...(it) takes the frog and goes down near the well.’
 [Natural data: The frog and crow story (9)]

- (5) *aw*²¹⁴ *ho*²¹⁴ *sap*^{52B}-*pin*^{44B} *kwa*²¹ *lɔ*²¹ *na*⁴⁴, *maak*²¹-*hin*²¹⁴ *he*²¹⁴
 take head bicycle go collide meet stone and

*kam*⁴⁴ *naŋ*⁵² *aw*²¹⁴ *man*⁴⁴ *lom*⁵²-*pjæt*⁴³ *ə*⁴³ *kam*⁴⁴ *naŋ*⁵²
 time this take 3SG fall.down-throw.away yes time this
 ‘(He) causes the front of his bicycle to collide into the stone and now he falls off.’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (18)]

- (6) *an*²¹⁴ *ka*⁴⁴ *t^hjaŋ*⁴³ *lam*⁴⁴ *niŋ*⁴³ *tæ*⁵², *jaŋ*⁴³ *loŋ*⁴⁴ *hoe*⁴³ *kwaɑ*²¹,...
- CL car another CL:vehicle one CONTR push descend valley go
 ‘Another car, however, pushed its way down into the valley.’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (42)]

- (7) *lam*⁴⁴ *laaj*²¹⁴ *hjaŋ*⁴⁴ *lə*⁴⁴ *se*²¹⁴ *lam*⁴⁴ *laaj*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³
 CL:vehicle which strength over and CL:vehicle which also
*man*⁴⁴ *am*²¹ *paj*²¹ *hu*⁵² *nan*⁵² *na*²¹ *nɔ*²¹
 3SG NEG yet know that PTCL INT
 ‘Nobody knows which vehicle is stronger than the other, you know?’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (56)]

4.1.2 Adverbial clauses

An adverbial clause modifies the event or activity captured in the main clause of the sentence by providing context for the unfolding of the said event or action. In northern TLS, it often precedes the main clause, suggesting the importance and necessity of context-setting in order to connect/understand the event or action in the subsequent clause.

4.1.2.1 Conditional clauses

A conditional clause begins most often with the conditional adverbial *pɔ*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³ ‘if say’ (Example 8), though it is also possible for *pɔ*⁴⁴ ‘if’ (Example 9) to occur on its own. A conjunction (Example 9) and/or *naj*²¹⁴ (Example 8) can also mark the end of the conditional clause. Immediately following it is typically a clause that captures the result of the condition.

- (8) *pɔ*⁴³ *kaw*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵² *pɔ*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³, *man*⁴⁴, *han*²¹⁴ *p^hai*²¹⁴ *het*⁴⁴-*ti*⁴³,
 father 1SG this if say 3SG see who do-LOC
*kaw*²¹⁴, *p^hai*²¹⁴ *p^hi*⁴⁴ *kaw*²¹⁴, *naj*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³, *man*⁴⁴, *k^hin*⁴⁴ *ma*⁴⁴
 1SG who fight 1SG this.REF also 3SG return come
*tɔp*²¹-*tjen*⁴⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴, *kam*⁴⁴ *liw*²¹⁴ *jaŋ*⁵²
 retaliate return time only PFV
 ‘If my father sees someone fight me—whoever it is—he retaliates immediately.’
 [Natural data: The frog and crow story (6)]

- (9) *pɔ*⁴⁴ *pai*⁵² *khi*²¹ *hə*⁴⁴ *loŋ*²¹⁴ *tæ*⁵² *haw*⁴⁴ *kwaɑ*²¹ *khi*²¹ *hə*⁴⁴
 if wait ride boat big CONTR 1PL go ride boat
*loŋ*²¹⁴ *na*²¹
 big PTCL
 ‘However, if (we) wait to ride the big boat, we go and ride the big boat.’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (24)]

4.1.2.2 Causal adverbial constructions

A causal adverbial construction expresses the reason behind something happening, and the activity that happens is usually captured within the independent clause adjacent to it. The causal clause will occur before the main clause, and it often begins with adverbials *jon*⁵² *pɔ*⁴⁴ (Example 10) or *kɔp*⁴³ *pɔ*⁴³ (Example 11), both of which express the same meaning ‘because’. It is also common for the construction to end with the conjunctive adverbial *læ*⁴³. *læ*⁴³ carries with it a causative sense when used in conjunction with causative adverbials like in Example (10) and (11), or when a differentiated conjunctive meaning is needed within the utterance, such as in Example (12).

- (10) *jɔŋ⁵²-pə⁴⁴* *kaw²¹⁴* *laɯ⁴³* *han²¹⁴* *pə⁴³* *kaw²¹⁴* *mi⁴⁴* *him⁴⁴* *hɔm⁴⁴*
 because 1SG get see father 1SG have near together
- naj⁵²* *lə⁴³*, *kaw²¹⁴* *kʰo²¹⁴* *ə⁴³* *naj²¹⁴* *jaw⁵²*
 this CONJ 1SG laugh yes this.REF PFV
- ‘As I see my father is somewhere near here, I laugh.’
 [Natural data: *The frog and crow story (5)*]

- (11) *kəp⁴³-pə⁴³* *haw⁴⁴* *tok⁴⁴-lin⁴⁴* *lə⁴³*, *ka⁴⁴* *naj⁵²* *man⁴⁴* *am²¹*
 because 1PL drop-last CONJ car this 3SG NEG
- laɯ⁴³* *ɔk²¹* *kwaɑ²¹* *tsɔm⁴⁴* *kan²¹⁴*
 get go.out go follow COLL
- ‘As we were late, this car did not get to leave and follow (the other cars).’
 [Natural data: *Conversation on a dangerous incident (48)*]

In Example (12), two conjunctions are present: *lə⁴³*, which can carry a causative sense, and *se²¹⁴*, which is a general conjunction that can be used in many instances for a simple conjoining of clauses. In this specific construction, *lə⁴³* is used to convey causation, where the reason behind the crow taking the frog down to the well is due to its fear, as expressed in the first clause.

- (12) *kaa²¹⁴-lam²¹⁴* *kə⁴³* *ko²¹⁴* *lə⁴³*, *ɲəp⁴⁴* *aw²¹⁴* *kʰet²¹* *se²¹⁴*
 crow also afraid CONJ catch take frog and
- loŋ⁴⁴* *kwaɑ²¹* *ti⁴³* *him⁴⁴* *nam⁵²* *mɔ²¹,...*
 descend go LOC near water hole
- ‘The crow is afraid, so (it) takes the frog and goes down near a well.’
 [Natural data: *The frog and crow story (9)*]

4.1.2.3 Temporal adverbial constructions

Consecutive constructions

A consecutive construction is one that expresses the consequence of a specific act or event in a particular moment in time. This particular moment in time can refer to the past, present, or future and it is revealed through the use of the temporal adverbial *pə⁴⁴* ‘when’, which begins the clause that captures the happening of the act or event. This sets the context for the following clause that expresses the consequence of this act or event happening. Example (13) exemplifies the instance where the completion of the event is crucial for the occurrence of the consequence, which explains the appearance of the perfective marker *jaw⁵²* at the end of the clause.

- (13) *pə⁴⁴* *kaaj²¹* *kʰo²¹⁴* *jaw⁵²* *am²¹* *laɯ⁴³* *kʰi²¹* *hə⁴⁴* *jaw⁵²*
when stack bridge PFV NEG get ride boat PFV
- ‘When the bridge is built, (we) cannot ride the boat anymore.’
 [Natural data: *Conversation on a dangerous incident (11)*]

Example (14) represents instances where the completion of an event or action is not a necessary detail to be conveyed within the utterance for the consequence to be expressed.

- (14) *k^haw²¹⁴* *k^hin⁴⁴* *c^hja^{52B}* *tsi^{44B}-kan^{44B}* *waj⁵²* *wa⁴³* ***pə⁴⁴*** *ka⁴⁴*
 3PL return put rule keep say **when** car
- p^hat²¹⁴*, *k^haw⁴³* *tsaw⁵²* *kə⁴³* *te²¹⁴* *ja⁴⁴* *tsaam²¹* *nan⁵²* *na²¹*
 someone enter early also IRR meet punishment that PTCL
- ‘They revised the rules saying, “When someone’s car enters early, (he) will also face punishment.”’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (111)]

Successive constructions

Successive constructions express events that happen after each other (essentially, in succession). Adverbials *p^hək²¹* ‘after’ (Example 15) or *waaj⁴⁴* ‘after’ *se²¹⁴* ‘and’ (Example 16) start the successive adverbial clause that captures the activity just before the current one that is expressed in the following main clause. In this case, the order of clauses, where the adverbial precedes the main, seems to be motivated by the order in which the activities unfold. Moreover, the perfective marker *jaw⁵²* (which is sometimes paired with *naj²¹⁴*) frequently closes the adverbial clause when it begins with *p^hək²¹* ‘after’.

- (15) *p^hək²¹* *man⁴⁴* *lom⁵²-pjæt⁴³* *jaw⁵²* *naj²¹⁴* *man⁴⁴* *kə⁴³*,
after 3SG fall.down-throw.away **PFV** **this.REF** 3sg also
- maak²¹-maj⁵²* *an²¹⁴* *man⁴⁴* *taaj²¹* *kwa^a²¹* *tsə⁴⁴* *nan⁵²* *kə⁴³*
 fruit REL 3SG put.on go those that also
- tok⁴⁴* *mot⁴⁴* *jaw⁵²* *kam⁴⁴* *naj⁵²*
 fall all PFV time this
- ‘After he had fallen down, those fruits, which he placed on (his bicycle), have also now all fallen.’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (19)]

- (16) *waaj⁴⁴* *se²¹⁴* *khaw²¹⁴* *ək²¹* *kwa^a²¹* *ən²¹⁴* *taaj⁴⁴* *haw⁴⁴* *jaw⁵²*
after **and** 3PL go.out go lead road 1PL **PFV**
- naj²¹⁴* *he²¹⁴*, *tsaj²¹-ha²¹⁴* *pon⁵²* *haw⁴⁴* *kwa^a²¹* *sip⁴⁴* *ha⁴³*
this.REF and almost pass.by 1PL go ten five
- mi⁵²-nit⁵²* *kha⁴³-naj⁵²* *kwe⁴⁴* *naj²¹* *kaw²¹*,
 minute this.is.all only PTCL PTCL
- ‘After they left before us, only fifteen minutes had passed by when we went.’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (37)]

The use of *waaj⁴⁴* ‘after’ *se²¹⁴* ‘and’ is little more varied. Apart from appearing in the same position and used in the same way as *p^hək²¹* ‘after’, which was demonstrated in Example (16), the following example shows another instance in which *waaj⁴⁴* ‘after’ *se²¹⁴* ‘and’ is used. In this example, the demonstrative *nan⁵²* ‘that’ refers to the event that happened just prior to the woman taking hold of the cup and then drinking the sweet water in it. What had happened was that a man had taken some ice cubes and put them into that cup of sweet water and then stirred it. The use of the demonstrative is an efficient way of referring to the prior event without needing to repeat it in the adverbial clause.

- (17) *waaj*⁴⁴ *se*²¹⁴ *nan*⁵², *naaj*⁴⁴ *jiŋ*⁴⁴, *k^hin*⁴⁴ *jip*⁴⁴ *aw*²¹⁴, *sot*⁵²
 after and that female female return hold take drink
*kin*²¹⁴, *nam*⁵² *tsem*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵²
 eat water sweet that
 ‘After that, the woman takes hold of (the cup). (She) drinks that sweet water.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (78)]

Simultaneous

Simultaneous constructions capture the simultaneous unfolding of two events or actions. *p^hɔŋ*⁴⁴ ‘SIMUL’ usually occurs at the beginning of the clause (frequently accompanied by the temporal adverbial *mə*⁴³ ‘time’) to inform the reader that the event expressed in the clause is happening at the same time as the other event in the following clause. Example (18) below shows this.

- (18) *p^hɔŋ*⁴⁴ *jaam*⁴⁴ *mə*⁴³ *man*⁴⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴ *k^hin*⁴³ *k^hu*⁴³-*laaj*²¹⁴ *kwa*²¹
 SIMUL period time 3SG return ascend ladder go
*k^hin*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵² *naj*²¹⁴ *mi*⁴⁴, *kon*⁴⁴ *tsaaj*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *nij*⁴³ *naj*²¹⁴, ...
 return that this.REF have person male CL:person one this.REF
 ‘While he ascends the ladder to return to the tree, a man appears.’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (8)]

Another way in which simultaneous constructions occur is by using the demonstrative *nan*⁵² ‘that’ to refer to the event expressed in the earlier clause. Three clauses can be seen in Example (19). The first clause captures the first event, where the woman was cooking food. The second clause, which is dependent on the third clause that captures the second event, is where the temporal adverbials appear with *nan*⁵² ‘that’ to refer to the first event, conveying the simultaneous unfolding of both events. A similar strategy is seen in the successive construction above (Example 17).

- (19) *naaj*⁴⁴ *jiŋ*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵², *tik*⁵² *huŋ*²¹⁴, *taaj*⁴⁴-*kin*²¹⁴ *ju*²¹, *mə*⁴³
 female female that PROG cook food stay time
*p^hɔŋ*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵², *luŋ*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *nij*⁴³, *ma*⁴⁴ *naŋ*⁴³, *him*⁴⁴ *k^ha*²¹⁴
 SIMUL that uncle CL:person one come sit near 3PL.DUAL
 ‘That woman is cooking food. At the same time, an uncle comes and sits near them.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (37)]

4.2 Noun/Noun phrase

A noun is defined as an entity that can be modified by attributive verbs, attributive nouns, adjectives, numeral classifiers, possessor nouns, demonstratives, and a relative marker. Most of the nouns in northern TLS are monosyllabic, with some compound nouns. These nouns can exhibit one of the two following characteristics or both: (1) the combined meaning of the individual morphemes does not match the actual conveyed meaning; and (2) the order of these individual morphemes falls outside the usual order in which nouns are modified. Individual morphemes in these compound nouns are not always transparent in their meaning. A few examples are given below in Table 5.

Table 5: Polysyllabic nouns in northern TLS

Compound nouns containing individual morphemes whose meaning is transparent	Compound nouns containing at least one morpheme whose meaning is opaque
<i>taan</i> ⁴⁴ - <i>kin</i> ²¹⁴ road-eat 'food'	<i>kaa</i> ²¹⁴ - <i>lam</i> ²¹⁴ -black 'crow'
<i>maak</i> ²¹ - <i>nanj</i> ²¹⁴ CL:round-soccer.ball.material 'soccer ball'	<i>maak</i> ²¹ - <i>moj</i> ⁴³ CL:round- 'mango'

Some compound nouns are also borrowed words, which is why the individual morphemes in these nouns do not hold any meaning of their own. An example is *ki*²¹-*ta*²¹ 'guitar', which is the transliteration of the English word 'guitar'.

4.2.1 Noun phrase

A noun phrase in northern TLS often functions as an argument and is headed by a main noun with its modifiers following it. Not all modifiers will be present in a noun phrase, and they can appear in different combinations. A template that captures the most common noun phrases in northern TLS is as follows:

Noun [Attri. Verb] [Attri. Noun] [Adj] [Number + Classifier] [Demonstrative]

An attributive verb can follow the main noun to constrain the meaning expressed by that noun. For example, if the main noun is a person and the attributive verb is 'drive', the meaning is constrained to a person who drives, which essentially means 'driver'. An attributive noun such as 'car', can follow the attributive verb to further constrain the meaning to 'car driver' (Example 20).

- (20) *kon*⁴⁴ *hɔ̃*⁴³ *ka*⁴⁴ *naɲ*⁵² *an*²¹⁴ *luk*⁵² *jaan*²¹-*kuɲ*²¹ ...
 person drive car this REL get.up Yangon
 'This car driver that leaves Yangon...'
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (93)]

There are two ways to differentiate the function of the verb following a noun. The first way requires one to ascertain the plausibility of the noun executing the action expressed by the verb. Example (21) shows that *len*⁴³ 'play' cannot function as a lexical verb in this construction due to the implausibility of *paan*²¹⁴ 'event' doing the act of "playing".

- (21) *paan*²¹⁴ *len*⁴³ *maak*²¹-*nanj*²¹⁴, *sə*⁴³ *ljan*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³ *sə*⁴³ *səm*²¹,
 event play soccer.ball shirt red CONJ shirt blue

*him*²¹⁴ *kan*²¹⁴
 compete COLL
 '(This is) a soccer-playing event. (The) red shirt (individuals) and blue shirt (individuals) are competing with each other.'
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (52)]

The second way is to check the construction in which the verb occurs. A construction is clearly a noun phrase when it ends with a number and a classifier, naturally revealing the attributive function of the verb and its role in modifying the noun preceding it (Example 22).

- (22) *kon*⁴⁴ *tsaaj*⁴⁴ ***ti***⁴⁴ *maan*²¹ *ta*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *niŋ*⁴³, *aw*²¹⁴ *ki*²¹-*ta*²¹
 person male **wear** glass eye CL:person one take guitar
*man*⁴⁴ *taaj*²¹ *nə*²¹⁴ *ho*²¹⁴ *se*²¹⁴, *len*⁴³
 3SG put.on on head and play
 ‘A glasses-wearing man takes his guitar, puts (it) on (his head), and plays.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (53)]

A very similar construction can be seen in Example (23) below, but it reveals a different function of *ti*⁴⁴ ‘wear’, where it conveys the action of the “uncle” and does not modify the noun like what is shown in Example (22).

- (23) *luŋ*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *niŋ*⁴³ ***ti***⁴⁴ *maan*²¹ *ta*²¹⁴ *se*²¹⁴, *paj*²¹⁴ *taaj*⁴⁴ *len*⁴³
 uncle CL:person one **wear** glass eye and walk road play
 ‘An uncle wears glasses and strolls.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (61)]

An adjective can also follow the main noun to modify it. Multiple adjectives can occur together to provide more information about the noun (Example 24).

- (24) *ka*⁴⁴ *kɔ*²¹ *səm*²¹ *ɔn*²¹ *nan*⁵²,...
 car **plastic blue small** that
 ‘That small blue plastic car...’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (32)]

Number and classifier usually occupy positions near the end of the noun phrase, and the order in which both of them occur is relative to the number. For example, if there is only one car, the number will follow the classifier. If there is more than one car, the number will precede the classifier. Examples (25) and (26) below demonstrate the differences in their order.

- (25) *kam*⁴⁴ *naj*⁵² *mi*⁴⁴ *luk*⁴³ *ɔn*²¹ *tsaaj*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *niŋ*⁴³, ...
 time now have child small male CL:person **one**
 ‘Now there is a small boy, ...’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (11)]

- (26) *kon*⁴⁴ *tsaaj*⁴⁴ *ɔn*²¹ ***saam***²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *tsə*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵², *jɔ*⁴³-*kam*⁴⁴-*naj*⁵²
 person male small **three** CL:person those that at.this.time
*waaj*⁴⁴ *se*²¹⁴, *k^haw*²¹⁴ *tse*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵² *aw*²¹⁴, *tswaj*⁴³ *man*⁴⁴ *aw*²¹⁴
 after and 3PL those that take help 3SG take
*taaj*²¹ *nə*²¹⁴ *nan*⁵² ...
 put.on on that
 ‘After that, those three boys take hold of the basket. (They) help him take (the basket) and put (it) on that (bicycle). ...’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (22)]

Demonstratives (refer to Example 26) usually come last in a noun phrase and they also track the referent within the discourse.

4.2.2 Possession

Possession in northern TLS is expressed in this order: possessed-possessor, with no need for a particle to express possession. In Example (27) below, the possessed is the towel (expressed by *p^ha⁴³* ‘fabric’ and *tset⁵²* ‘clean’) while the possessor is the woman (expressed by the third-person pronoun *man⁴⁴*). In this instance, the pronoun closes the possessive noun phrase.

- (27) *naaj⁴⁴ jij⁴⁴ nan⁵² aw²¹⁴ p^ha⁴³ tset⁵² man⁴⁴, mjaŋ²¹ aaj⁴³ nan⁵²*
 female female that take fabric clean 3SG give HON.M.INF that
 ‘That woman takes her towel and gives (it) to that man.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (88)]

Example (28) is an instance where the possessor is not expressed through the use of a pronoun but represented by a common noun. The possessed is *kon⁴³* ‘buttocks’ and the possessor is *ka⁴⁴* ‘car’.

- (28) *pɔ⁴⁴ kwa^a tsan²¹⁴ khin⁴⁴ kwa^a jaw⁴³ saj²¹ kon⁴³ ka⁴⁴*
 when go pull.back return go push put buttocks car

lam⁴⁴ nan⁵² he²¹⁴,...
 CL:vehicle that and
 ‘When (it) pulled back and crashed into the back of that car,...’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (62)]

4.2.3 Relativization

Nouns in northern TLS can also be modified by relative clauses, and this is done by using the relative marker *an²¹⁴*. Example (29) shows a simple modification of the face towel, with information about its color provided through relativization.

- (29) *k^hin⁴⁴ aw²¹⁴ p^haen²¹ tset⁵² na⁴³ an²¹⁴ som²¹ nan⁵²,*
 return take cloth clean face REL blue that
 ‘(He) takes that face towel that is blue...’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (75)]

Example (30) represents a modification that carries more information about the noun that is being modified. The possessive construction “small boy’s hat” is modified to include information about its location, which is “near the middle of the road”.

- (30) *...lək⁴³-am²¹-le²¹ k^haw²¹⁴ k^hin⁴⁴ kwa^a han²¹⁴, maak²¹-ho²¹⁴*
 unexpectedly 3PL return go see CL:round-head

aaj⁴³ tsaaj⁴⁴ ɔn²¹ an²¹⁴ tok⁴⁴ waj⁵² him⁴⁴ kaaj²¹⁴ taaj⁴⁴
 HON.M.INF male small REL drop keep near middle road

nan⁵² jaw⁵²
 that PFV
 ‘...unexpectedly, as they were returning, (they) saw the small boy’s hat that had dropped near the middle of the road.’
 [Elicited data: The Pear Story (25)]

4.3 Verb/Verb phrase

Verbs in northern TLS are morphemes that denote actions, processes and states. They function as predicate, take arguments, can be negated, and can occur with aspect and mood markers. The negation marker comes before the verb while the mood marker precedes the negative marker. A continuous aspect marker occurs

before the verb while a perfective aspect marker follows it. Both aspect markers cannot occur together in a verb phrase as they are semantically incompatible—an activity expressed by the verb cannot be completed and ongoing at the same time. The following is a template of the verb phrase in northern TLS:

[Mood marker] [Negator] [Cont. aspect marker] **Verb** [Perfective aspect marker]

4.3.1 Compound verbs

Compound verbs in northern TLS are not very common, and they come in two forms. The first type of compound verbs consists of two individual morphemes forming such a tight unit that without each other, they cannot convey the action expressed. Individual morphemes of the second type of compound verbs hold synonymous meanings with no particular order in the unfolding of events or actions. The actions expressed by these morphemes can occur almost simultaneously as well. A few examples are given in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Compound verbs in northern TLS

Compound verbs that form an extremely tight unit	Compounds verbs that contain synonymous verbs
<i>tɔp²¹-tjen⁴⁴</i> 'retaliate'	<i>sɔk⁴³-ha²¹⁴</i> detailed.search-cursory.search 'search'
<i>nɔn⁴⁴-lap⁴⁴</i> 'fall asleep'	<i>lom⁵²-pjæt⁴³</i> 'fall.down-throw.away' 'fall down'

4.3.2 Serial verb constructions

Due to the isolating nature (little or no verbal morphology) of Tai-Kadai languages, serial verbs are very common (Payne 1997:307), and Shan, being a member of this language family, exhibits such a quality. Serial verb constructions (SVC) are characteristic of northern TLS, and two broad categories of such constructions can be found—symmetrical and asymmetrical. Symmetrical constructions only contain main lexical verbs (also known as major verbs). Such verbs are independent and can thus occur on their own and take negation. Asymmetrical constructions, on the other hand, are formed with a major verb and a minor verb that expresses a grammatical meaning that modifies the major verb preceding it. A minor verb is dependent on the major verb and cannot occur on its own. Such a dependency reveals the strength of the connection between a major verb and a minor verb, and any intervention between the two cannot happen. This also serves as a test for constructions that may resemble asymmetrical SVCs when, in fact, they are not. Naturally, a minor verb is unable to take negation on its own as well.

4.3.2.1 Symmetrical SVCs

The verb *ma⁴⁴* 'come' in Example (31) expresses the motion of travel by the boy and the direction towards which the boy is moving (in relation to the speaker). The verb *naj⁴³* 'sit' shows the next action of the boy, which is to sit. Together, they convey the full act of the boy moving towards the chair and then sitting on it.

- (31) *luk⁴³ ɔn²¹ tsaaj⁴⁴ kɔ⁵² niŋ⁴³, ma⁴⁴ naj⁴³ nɔ²¹⁴ tay²¹*
child small male CL:person one come sit on chair
'A boy comes and sits on a chair.'

[Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (51)]

4.3.2.2 Asymmetrical SVCs

Examples (32) and (33) contain asymmetrical constructions in which *ma⁴⁴* 'come' and *kwa²¹* 'go' occur as minor verbs. Both verbs are commonly used as minor verbs in SVCs, though they can also occur as major verbs. The most straightforward way of testing is to place the negative marker *am²¹* before them. If it is possible to negate them, then they would be functioning as a main verb within the construction.

In Example (32), the asymmetrical construction is found in the last clause where the dish underwent a change in its state. The major verb in this construction is *kwaj*²¹⁴ ‘break’ and the minor verb *kwaa*²¹ ‘go’ modifies the major verb by expressing the change in the dish’s state through its “breaking”.

- (32) *naaj*⁴⁴ *jiŋ*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁵² *niŋ*⁴³, *jip*⁴⁴, *ta*²¹⁴-*maat*²¹ *se*²¹⁴, *pɔj*²¹
 female female CL:person one hold long.axe and let.go
*loŋ*⁴⁴, *nə*²¹⁴ *waan*²¹, *waan*²¹ *kwaj*²¹⁴ *kwaa*²¹
 descend on dish **dish break go**
 ‘A woman holds a long axe and (she) lets go (of it) on a plate. The plate broke.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (28)]

The asymmetrical construction in Example (33) is found in its first clause. *ma*⁴⁴ ‘come’ serves as a directional marker that modifies the main verb *khin*⁴³ ‘ascend’ to inform the hearer of the direction of the path taken by the crow.

- (33) *p^ho*²¹ *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *khin*⁴⁴ *khin*⁴³ *ma*⁴⁴, *am*²¹ *laŋ*⁴³ *han*²¹⁴ *ket*²¹ *jaw*⁵²
 when crow **return ascend come** NEG get see frog PFV
 ‘When the crow returned, (it) did not manage to see the frog.’
 [Natural data: The frog and crow story (12)]

4.3.2.3 Argument-sharing

Argument-sharing is also a vital aspect of SVCs in northern TLS and at least one argument within the construction will be shared. Examples (34) and (35) each illustrate a specific case of argument-sharing in SVCs. Both cases are common constructions in northern TLS and shared arguments are in bold type.

Example (34) is an instance of an SVC with two participants, and in such constructions, both arguments within the construction are almost always shared. It is also common for the actor argument to be elided if it can be contextually retrieved. This example is also a construction within which *kwaa*²¹ ‘go’ functions as a major verb, unlike in Example (32) where it behaved as a minor verb.

- (34) *aaj*⁴³ *kɔ*⁵² *nan*⁵², *k^hin*⁴⁴ *luk*⁵² *kwaa*²¹ *naŋ*⁴³ *len*⁴³
 HON.M.INF CL:person **that** return get.up go sit play
*kɔ*⁵², *luŋ*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵²...
 CL:person **uncle that**
 ‘That guy gets up, goes and sits with that uncle,...’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (38)]

Example (35), on the other hand, shows an SVC construction that has three participants. This is more specifically known as a transfer SVC where an entity is being moved or manipulated towards a goal. The major verb *aw*²¹⁴ ‘take’ in the first part of this construction takes the woman as its actor argument while the sweet water is the theme argument. The second part of the construction has the major verbs *hi*⁴³ ‘pour’ and *saj*²¹ ‘put’ taking the woman as the actor argument and the dish as the goal argument.

- (35) *naaj*⁴⁴ *jiŋ*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵², *aw*²¹⁴ *nam*⁵² *tsem*⁴⁴ *hi*⁴³ *saj*²¹ *naŋ*⁴⁴ *waan*²¹
 female female **that** take water sweet pour put inside dish
 ‘That woman takes the sweet water and pours (it) in a cup.’
 [Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (76)]

4.4 Adjectives/adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs in northern TLS usually follow the noun or verb that they are modifying. They can also take the same form in Shan, and their function differs according to what precedes it. That is, if what

precedes is a noun, then what follows would be an adjective. If what precedes is a verb, then what follows would be an adverb. Examples (36) and (37) demonstrate this with the morpheme *jaap*²¹ ‘difficult’. It functions as an adjective in (36) and an adverb in (37).

- (36) *luk*⁵², *la*⁴³-*sjo*⁴³ *kwa*^{a21} *mu*²¹-*tsæ*⁴³ *kɔ*⁴³ *sjen*⁴³-*taanj*⁴⁴ ***jaap*²¹**,
get.up Lashio go Muse also expressway **difficult**

*sjen*⁴³-*taanj*⁴⁴ *ŋɔk*⁴⁴ *ŋɔk*⁴⁴ *ŋak*⁴⁴ *ŋak*⁴⁴ *na*²¹
expressway bend bend winding winding very

‘Leaving Lashio to go Muse—the expressway (between them) is difficult. The expressway is very bendy and winding.’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (132)]

- (37) *ta*²¹ *te*²¹⁴ *wæ*⁴³, *k^haw*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵² *k^hai*⁴³ *pon*⁵² *k^haw*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵²
for IRR move.aside 3PL this want pass.by 3PL this

*man*⁴⁴ *pon*⁵² ***jaap*²¹** *na*²¹
3SG pass.by **difficult** very

‘(Others) want to overtake them by moving aside. It is very difficult to overtake (this big car).’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (153)]

Adjectives/adverbs can also be reduplicated to express intensification, repetition or continuity. Example (38) captures the intensification of the color by reduplicating the adjective, while the reduplicated adverb in Example (39) conveys continuity in the action of riding along the road.

- (38) ... *pen*²¹⁴ *t^hoj*²¹⁴ ***k^haaw*²¹⁴** ***k^haaw*²¹⁴** *nan*⁵² *naj*²¹⁴
COP bag **white** **REDUP** that this.REF

‘(It) is that very white bag.’

[Elicited data: The Pear Story (10)]

- (39) *aw*²¹⁴ *kwa*^{a21} *k^hi*²¹ *sap*^{52B}-*pin*^{44B} *kwa*^{a21} *tsəm*⁴⁴ *taanj*⁴⁴
take go ride bicycle go follow road

***tik*⁴⁴** ***tik*⁴⁴** *kam*⁴⁴ *naj*⁵²
continue **REDUP** time this

‘(He) takes (the basket) and continues to ride (his) bicycle along the road.’

[Elicited data: The Pear Story (16)]

When multiple adjectives occur in succession to modify the head noun, a specific order governs their occurrence: material/nature, color, and then size. Example (40) demonstrates this.

- (40) *kaa*⁴⁴ ***kɔ*²¹** ***səm*²¹** ***ɔn*²¹** *nan*⁵² *k^hin*⁴³ *kwa*^{a21}, *ti*⁴³ *taanj*⁴⁴,
car **plastic** **blue** **small** that ascend go LOC road

*an*²¹⁴ *k^haw*²¹⁴ *het*⁴⁴ *waj*⁵²
REL 3PL do keep

‘That small blue plastic car ascends the road that they made.’

[Elicited data: Staged Events Stimulus (56)]

4.5 Sentence-final particles

Sentence-final particles in northern TLS are observed to occur the most often in natural discourse, as the interlocutors reveal their “(relative) epistemic stance(s) toward what is being said” (Enfield 2007:41). They tend to occupy the clause-final slot in utterances.

4.5.1 Factive particles

*na*²¹ is a rather common particle used by my participants in their conversation with each other, and it appears to function as a factive particle – one that a speaker uses to signal that their spoken content is a fact. (41) is an example of this.

- (41) ...*khaw*²¹⁴ *khin*⁴⁴ *mæ*⁴⁴ *khwak*⁴³ *taan*⁴⁴ *na*²¹
 3PL return repair extend road PTCL
 ‘They repaired and extended the roads.’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (130)]

4.5.2 Assertion particles

When a speaker would like to make an assertion of what they believe to be true, or is a fact, *nan*⁵² precedes *na*²¹, as Examples (42) and (43) show. Example (42) is participant Su’s response towards participant Sa when he made the statement in Example (41). Example (43), on the other hand, captures participant Sa sharing the antecedent to the accident he had witnessed. *nan*⁵² *na*²¹ is quite frequently used in this conversation between the two participants, and it seems that *nan*⁵² no longer functions merely as a demonstrative but works together with *na*²¹ as a means to make an assertion.

- (42) *ə*⁴³ *tsai*⁴³ *jaw*⁵², *sjen*^{43-taan}⁴⁴ *kwaan*⁴³ *it*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵² *na*²¹
 yes correct PFV expressway widen a.little that PTCL
 ‘Correct. The expressway widen a little.’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (131)]

- (43) *man*⁴⁴ *am*²¹ *paj*²¹ *jaan*²¹⁴ *kan*²¹⁴ *kaj*²¹⁴ *nan*⁵² *na*²¹, *man*⁴⁴ *tik*⁵²
 3SG NEG yet separate COLL far.away that PTCL 3SG still

*tsap*⁴⁴ *kan*²¹⁴ *nan*⁵² *na*²¹ *kaw*²¹⁴ *tik*⁵² *khai*⁴³ *pon*⁵² *mai*⁴⁴ *mai*⁴⁴
 join COLL that PTCL 1SG still want pass.by 2SG 2SG

*tik*⁵² *khai*⁴³ *pon*⁵² *kaw*²¹⁴ *man*⁴⁴ *pen*²¹⁴ *tsəŋ*^{52-nan}²¹⁴ *nan*⁵² *na*²¹
 still want pass.by 1SG 3SG COLL like.that that PTCL

‘It (they) are not yet separated far from each other. It (they) were still joined together. I still want to overtake you, you still want to overtake me. It (they) were like that.’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (52)]

If the speaker would like to be more emphatic, *ə*⁴³ ‘yes’ can follow *na*²¹ instead. *ə*⁴³ ‘yes’ is usually spoken with a slightly greater force, placing more emphasis on the morpheme in the utterance. In Example (44), participant Sa was commenting on the limitation of the speed camera installed along the expressway, where the length of the road was emphasized as the reason for the limitation.

- (44) *man*⁴⁴ *am*²¹ *paj*²¹ *phæw*²¹⁴ *laj*⁴³ *ku*^{43-ti}⁴³ *taaj*⁴⁴ *man*⁴⁴ *jaaw*⁴⁴
 3SG NEG yet arrive get everywhere road 3SG long
*næn*²¹ *na*²¹ *ə*⁴³
 very PTCL yes
 ‘It is not able to reach everywhere. Its road is very long.’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (122)]

To make a strong assertion, a speaker can combine all three morphemes at the end of the clause or sentence. Example (45) illustrates this.

- (45) *mə*⁴⁴ *tæ*⁵² *khai*⁴³ *mə*⁴⁴ *ju*²¹, *pɔ*⁴⁴ *mə*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁴³
 return.home CONTR want return.home stay when return.home also
*khi*²¹⁴ *tsai*²¹⁴ *lɔŋ*⁴³, *kwaɑ*²¹ *lɔŋ*⁴³ *paj*²¹⁴ *man*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵² *na*²¹ *ə*⁴³
 worry heart condition go condition walk 3SG that PTCL yes
 ‘However, (I) want to return home. (Even) when (I) return home, (I) worry about going in its (Myanmar’s) travelling conditions.’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (90)]

4.5.3 Interrogatives

Different interrogatives are used in northern TLS to achieve different purposes within the conversation. The interrogative *na*²¹ is one that seeks agreement (Example 46) and it can also occur with *nan*⁵² *na*²¹ to make an assertion that seeks the agreement of the participants within the conversation (Example 47).

- (46) *kon*⁴⁴ *hɔ*⁴³, *man*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁴³ *kin*²¹⁴ *law*⁴³ *tik*⁴⁴ *tik*⁴⁴ *lɔŋ*²¹⁴ *na*²¹
 person drive 3SG also eat alcohol again REDUP big INT
 ‘The driver consistently consumed a lot of alcohol right?’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (169)]
- (47) *luk*⁴³ *haw*⁴⁴ *sam*⁵² *man*⁴⁴ *khi*⁴³ *man*⁴⁴ *jew*⁴³ *nan*⁵² *na*²¹ *na*²¹
 child 1PL CONTR 3SG shit 3SG urinate that PTCL INT
 ‘Our child shits (and) urinates, you know?’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (33)]

Examples (48), (49), and (50) capture the use of the interrogative *ha*⁵², which reveals its function to be one that encodes the speaker’s uncertainty towards what is being spoken. Example (48) shows that the participant Sa is unsure about the duration of the journey that a car makes when it travels on the expressway.

- (48) *ka*⁴⁴ *su*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵², *man*⁴⁴ *ɔk*²¹ *ma*⁴⁴, *man*⁴⁴ *te*²¹⁴ *laj*⁴³ *hɔ*⁴³,
 car 2SG this 3SG go.out come 3SG IRR get drive
*nə*²¹⁴ *taaj*⁴⁴ *naj*⁵², *pæɪ*²¹ *naj*²¹ *ha*⁵² *sip*⁴⁴ *naj*²¹ *ha*⁵²
 on road this eight hour INT ten hour INT
 ‘(When) your car leaves, it will be on this road for eight hours? Ten hours?’
 [Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (99)]

When a speaker uses *ha*⁵², they might also be seeking clarification of the content, on top of the uncertainty they have about the content spoken, as Examples (49) and (50) will show. These are participant Su’s responses towards what participant Sa had said in the conversation. Before the question in Example (49), participant Sa was talking about the government’s attempt to install a speed camera to regulate drivers when driving along the bends of the expressway. Participant Su then asked the question in Example (49) to clarify

that the camera was installed in the car. Participant Sa responded by saying that he was incorrect, and that it was installed along the road. Participant Su then followed up with another clarifying question, which Example (50) shows, prompting participant Sa to respond by saying that the cameras were installed along the roads like in Singapore.

- (49) *ti*⁴³ *ka*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵² *ha*⁵²
 LOC car that INT

‘At the car?’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (117)]

- (50) *tsəm*⁴⁴ *taaj*⁴⁴ *ha*⁵²
 follow road INT

‘Along the road?’

[Natural data: Conversation on a dangerous incident (119)]

5 Conclusion

This description of northern TLS covers the phonology and some basic grammatical features found in this variety of Shan. Contrary to other Tai languages like Lao and Thai, northern TLS does not have a long vowel for each corresponding short vowel. The only long vowel found in this variety of Shan is /a:/. A concise summary of everything that has been covered in the earlier sections can be found in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of typological features in northern TLS

Feature	Aspects
Consonants	18
Vowels	9 short vowels, 1 long vowel, 2 diphthongs.
Tones	5
Sentence structure	Topic-Comment; Verb-Object
Clausal constructions	Conjunctive Adverbial (Conditional, Causal, Temporal, Successive, Simultaneous) Serial verb constructions
Parts of speech	Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, Classifiers, Adverbs, Sentence-final particles

Glossary

,	=	a pause
1	=	first person
2	=	second person
3	=	third person
B	=	Burmese
CL	=	classifier
COLL	=	collaborative
CONJ	=	conjunctive
CONTR	=	contrastive
DUAL	=	dual
F	=	female
H	=	honorific
IMP	=	imperative
INF	=	informal
INT	=	interrogative
M	=	male
NEG	=	negation
PFV	=	perfective aspect
PL	=	plural
PTCL	=	particle

REAL	=	realis
REF	=	referent
REL	=	relative
SIMUL	=	simultaneous
SG	=	singular

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Appendix A. Sample text: The Frog and Crow story

- (1) *mə⁴³ nəj⁵² tɛ²¹⁴ laa⁴³ ne²¹⁴ a⁵²pum²¹⁴, k^het²¹ læ⁴³ kaa²¹⁴-lam²¹⁴ nəj²¹⁴ jaw⁵²*
time this IRR talk show story frog CONJ crow this.REF PFV
'Today I will tell a frog and crow story.'
- (2) *mə⁴³ nan⁵² mi⁴⁴, k^het²¹ læ⁴³ kaa²¹⁴-lam²¹⁴, sɔŋ²¹⁴ to²¹⁴*
time that have frog CONJ crow two CL:animal
'A long time ago, there exist a frog and a crow—two animals.'
- (3) *kaa²¹⁴-lam²¹⁴ nan⁵², ɲɔp⁴⁴ k^het²¹ se²¹⁴, k^hin⁴³ kwa^a21, nə²¹⁴, muŋ⁴⁴ hən⁴⁴ ti⁴³ niŋ⁴³*
crow that catch frog and ascend go on roof house place one
'That crow catches the frog and goes up the roof of a house.'
- (4) *mə⁴³ p^hɔŋ⁴⁴ nan⁵², k^het²¹ kɔ⁴³,... k^ho²¹⁴, k^hik⁴⁴-k^hik⁴⁴ nəj²¹⁴ læ⁴³,*
time SIMUL that frog also laugh sound.of.laughter this.REF CONJ
kaa²¹⁴-lam²¹⁴ k^hin⁴⁴ t^ham²¹⁴ man⁴⁴, mai⁴⁴ k^ho²¹⁴ i⁴³-saŋ²¹⁴, mai⁴⁴ k^ho²¹⁴
crow return ask 3SG 2SG laugh what 2SG laugh
het⁴⁴-saŋ²¹⁴, nəj²¹⁴ læ⁴³, khet²¹ kɔ⁴³, tɔp²¹ wa⁴³, kaw²¹⁴ k^ho²¹⁴
why this.REF CONJ frog also reply say 1SG laugh
nəj⁵² mi⁴⁴ lɔŋ⁴³-taaŋ⁴⁴ man⁴⁴ ə⁴³
this have reason 3SG yes
'At that time, the frog is laughing like this: 'kik-kik', and the crow asks it "What are you laughing at? Why are you laughing like this? ". And the frog replies saying, "I have a reason for laughing like this.'''
- (5) *ɲɔn⁵²-pə⁴⁴ kaw²¹⁴ laj⁴³ han²¹⁴ pɔ⁴³ kaw²¹⁴ mi⁴⁴ him⁴⁴ hɔm⁴⁴ nəj⁵²*
because 1SG get see father 1SG have near together this
læ⁴³, kaw²¹⁴ k^ho²¹⁴ ə⁴³ nəj²¹⁴ jaw⁵²
CONJ 1SG laugh yes this.REF PFV
'"As I see my father is somewhere near here, I laugh.'''

- (6) *pɔ*⁴³ *kaw*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵², *pɔ*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³, *man*⁴⁴, *han*²¹⁴ *p^hai*²¹⁴ *het*⁴⁴-*ti*⁴³, *kaw*²¹⁴,
 father 1SG this if say 3SG see who do-LOC 1SG
*p^hai*²¹⁴ *p^hit*⁴⁴ *kaw*²¹⁴, *naj*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³, *man*⁴⁴, *k^hin*⁴⁴ *ma*⁴⁴ *tɔp*²¹-*tjen*⁴⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴,
 who fight 1SG this.REF also 3SG return come retaliate return
*kam*⁴⁴ *liw*²¹⁴ *jaw*⁵²
 time only PFV
 “If my father sees someone fight me—whoever it is—he retaliates immediately.”

- (7) *het*⁴⁴ *tsəŋ*⁵²-*nan*²¹⁴ *se*²¹⁴, *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³, *ko*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³, *tsaŋ*²¹
 do like.that and crow also afraid CONJ hence
*ɲɔp*⁴⁴ *aw*²¹⁴ *k^het*²¹, *paj*⁴³ *kwa*²¹ *ti*⁴³ *him*⁴⁴, *ɲɔŋ*²¹⁴ *nam*⁵², *ti*⁴³ *nij*⁴³
 catch take frog run go at near tank water place one
 ‘(The frog) does it like that and the crow is afraid, so (it) takes the frog and goes near a water tank.’

- (8) *p^ho*²¹ *kwa*²¹ *p^hæw*²¹⁴ *him*⁴⁴ *ɲɔŋ*²¹⁴ *nam*⁵² *nan*⁵² *kɔ*⁴³, *aaj*⁴³ *k^het*²¹
 when go arrive near tank water that also HON.M.INF frog
*nan*⁵² *kɔ*⁴³, *k^hin*⁴⁴ *k^ho*²¹⁴ *t^hæŋ*⁴³
 that also return laugh again
 ‘When (the crow) goes and arrives at the water tank, that frog laughs again.’

- (9.1) *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³ *k^hin*⁴⁴ *t^ham*²¹⁴ *t^hæŋ*⁴³ *wa*⁴³ *mai*⁴⁴ *k^ho*²¹⁴ *het*⁴⁴-*tsaŋ*²¹⁴,
 crow also return ask again say 2SG laugh what
*naj*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³, *k^het*²¹ *kɔ*⁴³ *wa*⁴³, *ə*⁴³, *kaw*²¹⁴ *han*²¹⁴, *pɔ*⁴³-*sip*²¹, *kaw*²¹⁴
 this.REF CONJ frog also say yes 1SG see stepfather 1SG
*mi*⁴⁴ *him*⁴⁴ *naj*⁵² *ə*⁴³, *pɔ*⁴³-*sip*²¹ *kaw*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵², *haaj*⁵² *lə*²¹⁴-*se*²¹⁴ *pɔ*⁴³
 have near this yes stepfather 1SG this brave more.than father
*kaw*²¹⁴ *jaw*⁵², *pɔ*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³ *p^hai*²¹⁴ *het*⁴⁴-*ti*⁴³, *kaw*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³, *man*⁴⁴ *te*²¹⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴
 1SG PFV if say someone do-LOC 1SG also 3SG IRR return
*tɔp*²¹-*tjen*⁴⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴, *aw*²¹⁴ *taj*²¹⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴ *jaw*⁵², *wa*⁴³ *naj*²¹⁴ *se*²¹⁴,
 retaliate return take die return PFV say this.REF and
 ‘The crow asks again, saying, “What (are) you laughing at?” And the frog says, “Yes, I see my stepfather is near here. My stepfather is braver than my father. If someone fights me, he will retaliate and cause them to die.”’

- (9.2) *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³ *ko*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³, *ɲɔp*⁴⁴ *aw*²¹⁴ *k^het*²¹ *se*²¹⁴ *loŋ*⁴⁴
crow also afraid CONJ catch take frog and descend
- kwa*²¹ *ti*⁴³ *him*⁴⁴ *nam*⁵² *mɔ*²¹, *kwa*²¹ *tsuk*⁴⁴ *him*⁴⁴ *nam*⁵² *mɔ*²¹ *nan*⁵²
go LOC near water hole go stand near water hole that
‘The crow is afraid, so (it) takes the frog and goes down near a well. (It) goes and stands near that well.’
- (10) *jaam*⁴⁴ *nan*²¹⁴ *aaj*⁴³ *k^het*²¹ *kɔ*⁴³ *wa*⁴³, *naŋ*²¹⁴ *kaw*²¹⁴ *naŋ*⁵², *nə*⁵²
period that HON.M.INF frog also say skin 1SG this flesh
- naŋ*²¹⁴ *naŋ*²¹⁴ *kaw*²¹⁴ *naŋ*⁵² *ken*²¹⁴-*k^hæŋ*²¹⁴ *na*²¹, *pɔ*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³ *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴
skin skin 1SG this strong very if say crow
- am*²¹ *kwa*²¹⁴ *lap*⁵² *sop*⁴⁴, *se*²¹⁴, *ma*⁴⁴ *sak*⁴⁴ *tæ*⁵², *te*²¹⁴ *am*²¹ *laj*⁴³
NEG go sharpen beak and come pierce CONTR IRR NEG get
- naŋ*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³
this.REF CONJ
‘At that time, the frog says, “My skin, my flesh, is very hard. If crow does not sharpen (its) beak and comes to pierce me, (I) will not be killed.”’
- (11) *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³, *ə*⁴³ *paɪ*⁵² *ti*⁴³ *naŋ*⁵² *kam*⁴⁴ *niŋ*⁴³ *na*⁵² *kaw*²¹⁴
crow also yes wait LOC this time one IMP 1SG
- te*²¹⁴ *kwa*²¹ *lap*⁴⁴ *sop*⁴⁴, *wa*⁴³ *naŋ*²¹⁴ *se*²¹⁴ *loŋ*⁴⁴ *kwa*²¹ *naŋ*⁴⁴ *nam*⁵²,
IRR go sharpen beak say this.REF and descend go inside water
- kwa*²¹ *lap*⁴⁴ *sop*⁴⁴ *ti*⁴³ *maak*²¹-*hin*²¹⁴
go sharpen beak at stone
‘The crow (says), “Yes, wait here for awhile! I will go sharpen my beak.” And (it) descends into the water. (It) goes and sharpens its beak at a stone.’
- (12) *p^ho*²¹ *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴ *k^hin*⁴³ *ma*⁴⁴, *am*²¹ *laj*⁴³ *han*²¹⁴ *k^het*²¹ *jaw*⁵²
when crow return ascend come NEG get see frog PFV
‘When the crow returned, (it) did not manage to see the frog.’
- (13) *k^het*²¹ *kɔ*⁴³ *wæ*²¹⁴ *tok*⁴⁴ *kwa*²¹ *naŋ*⁴⁴ *nam*⁵² *mɔ*²¹, *nan*⁵² *jaw*⁵²
frog also jump drop go inside water hole that PFV
‘The frog has jumped into that well.’
- (14) *p^ho*²¹, *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *kwa*²¹, *ɲok*⁴³ *twe*⁴⁴, *ti*⁴³ *nam*⁵² *mɔ*²¹ *nan*⁵², *laj*⁴³
when crow go stretch look at water hole that get
- han*²¹⁴ *k^het*²¹ *læ*⁴³, *aaj*⁴³ *k^het*²¹ *ə*⁴³, *k^hin*⁴³ *ma*⁴⁴ *læ*⁴³, *kaw*²¹⁴
see frog CONJ HON.M.INF frog yes ascend come CONJ 1SG

*te*²¹⁴ *aw*²¹⁴ *mai*⁴⁴ *taj*²¹⁴ *ə*⁴³ *naj*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³ *aaj*⁴³ *k^het*²¹ *kɔ*⁴³,

IRR take 2SG die yes this.REF CONJ HON.M.INF frog also

*am*²¹ *k^hin*⁴³ *ma*⁴⁴
NEG return come

‘When the crow stretches out and looks at that well, (it) sees the frog and (says), “Frog! Come up and I will cause you to die.” And the frog does not come back up.’

(15.1) *jaam*⁴⁴ *nan*²¹⁴, *aaj*⁴³ *k^het*²¹ *k^hin*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³ *haj*⁴⁴ *man*⁴⁴, *aaj*⁴³
period that HON.M.INF frog return say alone 3SG HON.M.INF

*kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *ə*³², *kaw*²¹⁴ *tsai*²¹⁴ *am*²¹ *li*²¹⁴ *tsɔm*⁴⁴ *mai*⁴⁴ *tæk*⁵² *tæk*⁵²,
crow yes 1SG heart NEG good follow 2SG very REDUP

*mai*⁴⁴ *naj*⁵² *ŋə*⁴³ *na*²¹, *pən*⁴³ *ljen*²¹⁴ *mai*⁴⁴ *kɔ*⁴³ *am*²¹⁴ *hu*⁵², *kon*⁴⁴
2SG this ignorant very others lie 2SG also NEG know person

*haw*⁴⁴ *nij*⁴³ *kɔ*⁵², *pɔ*⁴⁴ *wa*⁴³, *pon*⁵² *p^he*⁴⁴ *k^hen*²¹⁴, *pon*⁵² *lɔŋ*⁴³ *taj*²¹⁴
2PL one CL:person if say overcome danger enemy free about die

*jaw*⁵² *ta*²¹ *te*²¹⁴ *k^hin*⁴⁴ *ma*⁴⁴ *tsu*⁴⁴, *lɔŋ*⁴³ *taj*²¹⁴ *nan*⁵², *p^hai*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³
PFV for IRR return come towards about die that who also

*am*²¹ *ma*⁴⁴ *laj*⁴³,...
NEG come get

‘At that time, the frog replies to him, “Crow! I feel very sad for you. You are very stupid. Others lie to you and (you) do not know. For anyone, if (one) has been free from danger and death, no one will return to death.”’

(15.2) *kɔp*⁴³-*naj*²¹⁴ *læ*⁴³, *kaw*²¹⁴ *lɔt*⁴³ *p^he*⁴⁴ *se*²¹⁴ *jaw*⁵², *kaw*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³ *am*²¹⁴
this.is.why CONJ 1SG free danger and PFV 1SG also NEG

*kwa*²¹ *tsu*⁴⁴ *mai*⁴⁴ *laj*⁴³ *jaw*⁵², *mai*⁴⁴ *naj*⁵² *ŋə*⁴³ *na*²¹, *wa*⁴³ *tsəŋ*⁵²
go towards 2SG get PFV 2SG this ignorant very say same

*naj*²¹⁴ *se*²¹⁴, *aaj*⁴³ *k^het*²¹ *kɔ*⁴³, *lɔt*⁴³ *p^he*⁴⁴ *kwa*²¹ *se*²¹⁴ *jaw*⁵²,
this.REF and HON.M.INF frog also free danger go and PFV

‘Since I am free from danger, I did not go to you. You are very stupid.’ And the frog was free from danger.’

(15.3) *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴ *kɔ*⁴³, *k^hin*⁴⁴, *min*²¹⁴ *kwa*²¹ *tsu*⁴⁴, *ti*⁴³ *kaw*²¹ *man*⁴⁴ *nan*⁵² *jaw*⁵²
crow also return fly go towards LOC old 3SG that PFV

‘The crow flew back to its old place.’

(16) *an*²¹⁴ *naj*⁵² *pen*²¹⁴, *a*⁵²*pum*²¹⁴, *khet*²¹ *læ*⁴³, *kaa*²¹⁴-*lam*²¹⁴, *naj*²¹⁴ *jaw*⁵²
CL this COP story frog CONJ crow this.REF PFV

‘This is the story of the frog and crow.’