

### A post-suppositional account of associative plurals in Burmese

I investigate the interpretation of the plural morphemes *dwe* and *dó* in Colloquial Burmese, based on original fieldwork. I report on a reading of plural expressions—where the named individuals in a conjunction of associative plurals internally satisfy their plurality requirements—which I call the *internal plural reading* and which has not been previously observed in the literature. I argue that the availability of this reading motivates a post-suppositional analysis for the semantics of associative *dó*.

Burmese plural morphemes: Colloquial Burmese has two plural morphemes. The general plural *dwe* combines with common nouns, as in (1). The associative plural *dó* can combine with animate common nouns and proper names, as in (2).

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| <p>(1) Nga=gá pàndhì-<b>dwe</b>=go weh-géh-deh.<br/>         1=NOM apple-PL=ACC buy-PAST-NFUT<br/>         ‘I bought apples.’<br/>         ✗ if the speaker bought only one apple.</p> | <p>(2) Hlahla-<b>dó</b> la-géh-deh.<br/>         Hlahla-ASSOC come-PAST-NFUT<br/>         ‘Hlahla and her associate(s) came.’<br/>         ✗ if only Hlahla came.</p> |
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The referent of N-*dwe* has to be a plural individual, each atom of which satisfies the description of the nominal head. Thus, (1) means that the speaker bought multiple apples, and is infelicitous if they only bought one apple. As for (2), the referent of *Hlahla-dó* includes Hlahla and other individuals that need not fit the description of the overt nominal host *Hlahla*: they are merely required to be associated to the nominal in some way, e.g. their family, friends, co-workers. The interpretation of *dó* thus resembles that of other associative plurals crosslinguistically; see e.g. [den Besten \(1996\)](#); [Moravcsik \(2003\)](#); [Nakanishi and Tomioka \(2004\)](#); [Smith \(2020\)](#).

The internal plural reading: An important data point for the precise semantics of the associative plural *dó* comes from the interpretation of the bare conjunction “NP-*dó* NP-*dó*” as in (3). (3) is felicitous where Hlahla and Aung were the only people who came, as long as Hlahla and Aung are themselves in a salient social relationship. I refer to this as the *internal plural reading*, the intuition being that the multiplicity inferences of the plural expression are satisfied internally by the named individuals.

- (3) **Hlahla-dó Aun-dó** la-géh-deh.  
 Hlahla-ASSOC Aung-ASSOC come-ASP-NFUT  
 ‘Hlahla and Aung (and their associates) came.’ / ✓ if only Hlahla and Aung came.

This contrasts from the behaviour of a conjunction of *dwe*-plurals, “NP-*dwe* NP-*dwe*”: (4) is infelicitous in a context where the speaker only bought one apple and one orange.

- (4) Nga=gá pàndhì-**dwe leinmawdhì-dwe** weh-géh-deh.  
 1=NOM apple-PL orange-PL buy-ASP-NFUT  
 ‘I bought apples and oranges.’ / ✗ if the speaker only bought one apple and one orange.

A post-suppositional account: I analyse the contribution of *dó* as a post-supposition to account for the reading in (3). Post-suppositions are tests on the output context, evaluated after the at-issue update. [Brasoveanu and Szabolcsi \(2013\)](#) adopt post-suppositions to explain what they refer to as symmetrical A-TOO B-TOO constructions found in Hungarian, Japanese, Russian etc. Taking Japanese as an example, the use of the additive focus particle *mo* such as in (5a) normally gives rise to a requirement that someone other than A ran away. The sentence in (5b), however, does not have a requirement that someone else other than A and B ran away.

The basic insight of [Brasoveanu and Szabolcsi 2013](#) is that A and B in (5b) satisfy the requirements imposed by each other's *mo*'s. This means that the requirements of the *mo*'s in (5b)—that someone else rather than its host ran away—are checked simultaneously after the assertion as a post-supposition.

My proposal is that the multiplicity inference of Burmese *dó* is likewise a post-supposition. Formally, I adopt [Smith 2020](#)'s notion of an “associate set,” where  $ASET(z)$  is the set containing  $z$  as well as sums of  $z$  with those standing in a contextually salient social relationship with  $z$ , e.g.  $z$ 's friends or family. (6) exemplifies this for the individual *Hlahla*.

(6)  $ASET(Hlahla) = \{Hlahla, Hlahla \oplus Aung, Hlahla \oplus MauMau \dots\}$

The meaning of (2) is given in (7). The assertion, as in (7a), is that *Hlahla* came. The post-supposition of *dó* requires that a plural individual in *Hlahla*'s association set came.

(7) *Hlahla-dó came.*

a. assertion:  $COME(Hlahla)$

b. post-sup:  $\exists x[x \in ASET(Hlahla) \wedge \neg ATOM(x) \wedge COME(x)]$

The assertion and post-supposition together convey the speaker's claim that *Hlahla* and at least one associate came.

The meaning of the complex plural (3) is represented in (8). Here, the assertion is that *Hlahla* came and *Aung* came. In the post-supposition, the requirements are that there is a non-atomic associative group of *Hlahla* that came, as well as a non-atomic associative group of *Aung* that came. Because these requirements are evaluated after the at-issue update, there is no additional requirement that anyone else came, as long as *Hlahla* and *Aung* are in a social relationship.

(8) *Hlahla-dó Aung-dó came.*

a. assertion:  $COME(Hlahla) \wedge COME(Aung)$

b. post-sup:  $\exists x[x \in ASET(HH) \wedge \neg ATOM(x) \wedge COME(x)] \wedge \exists y[y \in ASET(A) \wedge \neg ATOM(y) \wedge COME(y)]$

There is no internal reading with the general plural *dwe* in (4) because an apple atom does not contribute towards the multiplicity inference of oranges, and vice versa.

Cross-linguistic comparison: The availability of this internal plural reading has to my knowledge never before been described in the literature. For example, the Japanese associative plural *tachi* does not permit the internal plural reading in a similar conjoined plural construction, as shown in (9). I propose that the multiplicity requirement of Japanese *tachi* is itself part of the assertion, rather than a post-supposition.

(9) Taro-tachi to Hanako-tachi -ga kita.

Taro-ASSOC and Hanako-ASSOC -NOM came

‘Taro, Hanako, and their associates came.’ / ✗ if only Taro and Hanako came.

In the talk, I will offer a compositional semantics for both *dó* and *dwe* and present further evidence for my post-suppositional account of *dó* from its interaction with other scope-bearing operators. I also compare the behavior of *dó* to the additive particle *-le* ‘also’ and argue that *dó* is not simply an additive focus particle.

(5) a. A-mo hashitta.  
A-also ran  
‘A, too, ran away.’

b. **A-mo B-mo** hashitta.  
A-also B-also ran  
‘A as well as B ran away.’

([Brasoveanu and Szabolcsi, 2013: 55](#))

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