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The Akha Connection
A preliminary discussion.

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In this paper, I'll look into the various ways in which Akha connect words, clauses and sentences, and will also see whether it is possible - or needed - to set up a special wordclass 'conjunctions'.

In Akha, as is true for so many languages in the East- and Southeast Asian area, verbs are easily stringed together in a verb concatenation, or verbs in series (see Hansson 1985). The condition is that the verbal event must be only one with regard to acting persons, affected object, time and place, i.e. the verb concatenation describes one single state or action. The Akha concatenation is heavily right-bounded, i.e. the versatile verbs connecting to the verb-head, are always placed after the verb-head. A verb or verbal auxiliary may be restricted as to its concatenability, i.e. whether it may only occur as verb-head, only as verb-head and in the first post-head position (restricted versatile verb), as verb-head and also in several post-head positions (non-restricted versatile verb), not as verb-head but in many post-head positions (non-restricted post-head auxiliary) or in only the first post-head position (restricted post-head auxiliary), and finally pre-head verbal auxiliaries (only 4 words). The verbal auxiliaries don't fulfill the criteria for verbhood as they are bound to a verb in order to surface. The internal order of the post-head auxiliaries shows that the more abstract the meaning, the farther away from the verb-head it is placed. The negation is placed in front of the concatenation and can't interfere inside it. Some examples:

òq	í	mòq	lá
Vh	Vv	Vaux	Vv
return	go	want	start
start to want to go back			

bi	pjaq	kha	lèq	phà
auxV	Vh	Vv	Vaux	Vv
cause	pick	down	to	ought

ought to cause them to pick down to me

mà dja djí tjhø
 Neg. Vh Vv Vaux
 not tell all able
 can't tell it all

khú xòq làq kəq djí
 Vh Vaux Vaux Vv Vv
 call back to arrive all
 all have been called back and arrived

ja bi djó ĭ
 auxV auxV Vh Vv
 must cause stay go
 must cause to go to stay

Verb concatenation is a very frequent feature of the Akha language. Almost equally frequent though is a construction type where several verbs and/or concatenations are interspaced with the verb particle ó, marking a sequence of events. The agent must be the same for this chain of verbs, but the object can be different:

àjòq já-ŋɛ ĭ ó tjhé kha ó òq lá ó hò dzà dzà ó...
 he field go VP rice plant VP return VP rice eat VP

He went to the fields and planted rice and returned and ate and...

If there is a change of agent/subject or of scenery, náa 'when, and then' is used:

mə-hý hóə mə-njǐ njàq tjhà-ø lé hím thà ó ø ø ø é ø náa
 PN and PN two slingshot prepare keep VP come P when

xhà-dzé ø ø ø náa...
 eagle come when

Məhý and Mənjǐ, the two, kept slingshots ready and when it came, when the eagle came...

bəq kha ó tjàq ó dzà dèq náa, jò phu jò tjhaŋ
 shoot down VP cook VP eat full then another village walk

tjhaŋ é phá í ñà djé
P further go SP FP

They shot it down, cooked it and ate their fill and then they further went walking to another village.

náa relates to a group of words that always are - or at least can be - followed by a pause, may follow a verbal predicate as well as a nominal predicate, and by replacing a sentence particle clearly relate two sentences to each other.

àjòq àkhà mé	he is an Akha (mé = sentence particle)
náa	if he is an Akha, when the case is...
mĩã	if he is an Akha...
lɔ-ním-à	if he was an Akha (but he isn't)...
mĩɛ	as he is an Akha...
xòqì	although he is an Akha...

náa has in non-past tense the meaning 'if/when', depending on context, in past always 'when'. *mĩã*, on the contrary, always has a conditional meaning, never a temporal one. *lɔ-ním-à* implies that something happened or not in contrast to what is stated: if you hadn't come - but you did, if you had come - but you didn't. See examples below .

ɲɛ 'while, during the time that, when' can't follow a noun. An exception is the fixed expression *hø ɲɛ* 'at that time, lit. that while'. *xhø á* 'not yet' requires a negated verb. These two, like the ones mentioned above, replace a sentence particle connecting two sentences, and can be followed by a pause

hɔə 'and' connects two nouns only and can't be said to replace a sentence particle. It is also used to express 'or', which there is no single word for in Akha. The meaning 'or' is constructed by contrasting one negated and one non-negated form (noun, adjective or verb), sometimes with a question word added afterwords, or with the addition of 'I don't know':

djò-mjaq phɔ mà shì djò-gy phɔ mà shì, àgə phɔ mà
behind side not know front side not know which side not
shì ló
know FP

I don't know (if it was) behind the house or in front of the house, I don't know which side.

tshà ə mà shì, mà tshà ə mà shì, tshà mà tshà xòqì
right VP not know not right VP not know right not right but
ja dja mǎ
must tell SP

I don't know if it is right or not, right or not right but I must tell

thə à, djaq mà djaq ηε i, jò djó naqù ja dzà ə
that TP have not have while always get eat VP

As for those, if they have (money) or not, they always get to eat.

gaq ə hóə mà gaq ə, àshúyà shì nja ə, nó yà
cold VP and not cold VP who know VP you clf

Who knows whether they are cold or not, you!

These 8 words are, so far as I know, the only ones that might be put together in one word-class, conveniently called conjunctions. *hóə* is slightly differently defined, but it seems unnecessary to set up a one single-member word-class.

There are in Akha some other ways of expressing 'if', 'in order to, so that', 'as'. It can be by double negation, by nominalizing a verb making it an object to another verb, and be sheer context. Some examples of this:

hə lóqé mà ηó a mà shì nja á nja
this like not be SP not know SP

If it is not like this, I don't know (anything more about the story).

ja-phí mà ηó a, thì djè i mà djaq lé é lo mé lé
opium not be SP anything not have FP say P SP FP

If not for opium, we wouldn't have anything (to take when sick), they say.

ná lá ηε mà ηó à mà dó, mà ná ηε à mà dó

pain come when not be SP not smoke not pain when TP not smoke
 lé nǒ mǎi thè

FP think SP FP

if not being in pain, we don't smoke, when we aren't in pain, we
 don't smoke, we think.

á lé àshúyà mà shì lé, thì yà mó mà lé, ja-tjiq thì mó
 oh FP who not know FP one person see SP FP chicken one clf

dì sèq ə ja shà mà dzà a lé
 beat kill VP chicken meat not eat SP FP

Oh, I don't know who it was, I saw one person, she killed one
 chicken but didn't eat the meat.

Here one could imagine - and probably could insert - xǎqì: dì sèq ə
 xǎqì 'even though she killed....

àjòq da bàq àŋ ə lé bàq ó ǐ nà djé
 they father carry sell VP FP carry VP go SP FP

They went carrying their father in order to carry and sell him.

The first verb phrase is nominalized, marked by the quotative final
 particle lé, standing as an object to the second one, which states the
 purpose for the action.

jò yà naqù i-khánj bi òq ú lá ə lé é a
 everybody house cause return into come VP FP say SP

They say it in order to make everybody go back into their houses.

This same construction, with or without lé, is also used for saying: think
 that.. and similar expressions:

mà bi sjhì lé dú xǎqì...
 not let know FP think although

Even though you think that you don't let them know (that you are
 addicted)..

xhà-mε nε kòq dzà ə lé dú...
 mouth NP bite eat VP FP think

I thought that they eat biting with their mouths✓

Below I give examples of the 8 possible conjunctions in Akha:

If: *lɔ-ním-à*

1. dī lá lɔ-ním-à ja sjhǐ mε
 beat come if must die SP

If he comes to beat me, I'll must die (comes to beat me with a special stick knowing the secret about it - but he doesn't know it).

2. ɲá xòqì ny nò mà nò thà nja lɔ-ním-à, tóqlóqé xòqì mà phá
 I even think not think keep able if like that even not again

dja nja á
 tell able SP

Even I, if I couldn't remember, I wouldn't be able to go on telling like that.

3. nó mà djó lɔ-ním-à, xhǒ mì-lu ə àli ɲǒ sèq a
 you not stay if that PN NP son cry die SP

If you weren't here, that son of Milu would cry his heart out.

4. ámjòq ma lɔ-ním-à thì mó mó è lé
 monkey mother if one clf see SP FP

If it was (a question of) a monkey mother, I have seen one (but it wasn't a question of that).

If/when: *náa*

In present and future tense: 'if/when, and then' - depending on context.
 In past: 'when'.

Very common in initial position as a loose connection to what happened before: And then...

After noun: 'if it is a, then'

5. dzái jò naŋ jò átjyq gy le náa,...
further another day a little dry come when

After some days, when (the fields) had dried a bit, ...

6. ĩjàŋ jàŋ ĩ náa, jàŋ jàŋ é jàŋ náa, ìn tjìq le
fish with net go when fishing when evening come

jàá ló, ìn tjìq tjìq le náa...
SP FP evening come when

They went fishing, fishing and fishing, and then it became evening, and when it had become evening....

7. mà ná náa, thì shì mà dó
not be in pain when one clf not smoke

If/when we are not in pain, we don't smoke a single pipeful.

8. dzo ĩ náa, mà bì dze nja á nja
addicted go when not throw away can SP

If/when you have become addicted, you can't throw it away

9. òq lá náa, ja dm phá, mà dm phá náa, jò gaq
return come when must wear change not wear change if feel cold
gaq

When she returns, she must change (clothes), if she doesn't change clothes, she will get cold.

10. àjòq bàq ú náa, áby phá bi dm á
she carry into when blanket further let wear SP

When she has been carried into (the coffin), they let her have a blanket on.

11. àjòq hò dzà ə kəq lá náa...

she rice eat VP arrive come when

When time comes for her to eat...

12. dzε ǐ náa, dzε mi làq ɲà djé
throw go when throw catch towards SP FP

When they went to throw (the net) they got a catch.

13. ja-tjiq dì sèq náa, ja-tjiq shà-djí mà dzà ɲa djé
chicken beat kill when chicken meat not eat SP FP

When she had killed the chicken, se didn't eat the meat.

14. náa, ɲì naŋ shím naŋ djó náa...
and then two day three day stay when

And then, when he had stayed for two or three days...

15. djí-djø náa djí-djø, tjuhú-ù-lu náa tjuhú-ù-lu
drongo then drongo barbet then barbet

If it was a drongo it was a drongo, if it was a barbet it was a barbet
(can't recall which kind of bird it was, but it was one of them).

16. àbu náa jaq-án ja pjàq á, àli náa kaq ja pjàq á
girl if spindle must carve SP boy if crossbow must carve SP

If it is a girl, then (the father) must carve a spindle, if it is a boy,
then he must carve a crossbow.

If: *mĩa*

Frequently: *tóq (lòq) é mĩa*: if it is so.

After a noun: if it is N

17. òq le lé é mĩa, ɲà pjhà nε é nè ə djè mĩa
return come FP say if my wife NP say to VP kind SP

If he says that I (should) go back, it is something said by my wife.

18. *tóqé mĩa*, òq kha le ò mĩa
so if return down come Imp. SP

If that's so, come down!

19. $\eta\grave{a}q \text{ ə } \grave{a}ma \text{ m}\grave{i}\grave{a}, \grave{l}\grave{a}q\text{-}n\grave{o} \text{ tsh}\grave{o} \text{ do}q \text{ l}\grave{a}q \text{ sh}\acute{a} \text{ \grave{e} l\acute{e} \acute{e} \eta\grave{a}$
 my NP mother if finger stick out towards please SP FP say SP

$dj\acute{e}$

FP

If you are my mother, please stick in your finger, she said.

20. $n\grave{o}q \text{ ə } \text{m}\grave{i}\grave{a}, \eta\grave{a} \text{ b}\acute{u} \text{ bi } \acute{m} \text{ dz}\grave{a} \text{ le } l\acute{e} \text{ l\acute{e} \acute{e} \eta\grave{a} \text{ dj}\acute{e}$
 your NP if my daughter let marry go SP FP say SP FP

If it is yours, I'll let my daughter marry you, he said.

While, when, during the time that...: $\eta\epsilon$

Mostly after a verb. Denotes strictly time and no condition.

Special expression: $h\acute{o} \eta\epsilon$ = at that time, while then.

21. $h\grave{o} \text{ th}\acute{i} \text{ na}\eta \text{ dz}\grave{a}\eta \text{ nja } \eta\epsilon, \text{ ja-ph}\acute{i} \text{ th}\acute{i} \text{ bj}\acute{o} \text{ m}\grave{a} \text{ dz}\grave{a}\eta \text{ nja } \acute{e}$
 rice one day starve can while opium one meal not starve able VP

$b\text{ə} \text{ l\acute{e}}$

FP FP

While you are able to starve for rice for one day, you can't starve for opium for a moment.

22. $h\grave{o} \text{ m}\acute{e}q \text{ \eta\epsilon } \text{ma-b}\acute{i} \text{ m}\grave{a} \text{ do}q \text{ le } a$
 rice hungry while tear not appear come SP

While being hungry for rice, tears don't come out.

23. $\acute{i} \text{ \eta\epsilon } \grave{a}, \text{ xh}\grave{a}\text{-l}\grave{a} \text{ ə } \text{d}\grave{o}\text{-m}\acute{i} \text{ ja-tji}q \text{ ph}\grave{a}\eta \text{ \acute{a}\eta } \text{tjh}\grave{o} \text{ \acute{u} } \text{th}\grave{a}$
 go while SP tiger NP tail chicken cage NP stick into keep

$\eta\grave{a} \text{ dj}\acute{e}$

SP FP

When they went down, there was the tiger's tail sticking into the chicken cage.

24. hỏ ɲε ɲá náhà ɲε lé, ɲà ma ɲà da ná-hà ɲε lé...
that time I ask when FP my mother my father ask when FP

Not yet, not until: *mà V xhò á*

Always follows a negated verb.

25. nèq thó mà thó xhò á mà pjaq dzà nja
spirit recite not recite yet not butcher eat can

When we have not yet recited to the spirits, we can't butcher and eat.

26. hỏ ɲà mà ø xhò á, ɲá thì djè i mà dján nja
that clf not come yet I one kind P not do can

I can't do anything until he comes.

27. hỏ mà dzỳq xhò á, i-khán mà ja ú lá
that not wash yet house not must enter come

Until you have washed your feet, you can't enter the house.

As, because, reason: *mĩε, mĩε*

28. ná-hà xhò ỉ ó gà mĩε ló
listen steal go VP hear as FP

Because she had heard it, having gone to listen stealthily.

29. xhà-là nε thì poq dzà djí è tshó-hà mĩε, àtjhò án sàq dó
tiger NP once eat finish NP person as other NP shy
nja lé é ɲà djé
SP FP say SP FP

"As I am a person who has once been eaten all up by a tiger, I feel shy towards others", she said.

30. ɲá hỏ gá lá è mề thai mề án àdjé mĩε lá ø mà ɲé,

I here come VP Thailand NP what reason come VP not be

àkhà ə dɔ̃ dzɔ̃ mɔ̃q mĩɛ lá è
Akha NP word study want as come SP

I came here to Thailand for no other reason than wanting to study Akha.

31. dɔ̃ dzɔ̃ ó ne sjhà mĩɛ dja nja ó, mà dɔ̃ dzɔ̃
smoke addicted VP poor as tell able VP not smoke addicted

ó ne è, mà sjhà lɔ-ním-à, ñá djí hæ lóqé xòqì mà é nja
VP not poor if I also like this even not say able

As I am poor from being addicted I can speak, if I were not poor from being addicted, even I couldn't speak.

32. xhó γε, àdzɔ̃ mĩɛ è dzaŋ lé ó, njím phá phá
that also fool as believe go VP house further exchange

nè ñà djé le
towards SP FP FP

That one, as he was a fool, believed (what he said) and then exchanged his house with him.

Although, even if, also: xòqì

Mostly after a verb, negated or not:

Neg. + ə + xòqì: even though (you) don't V

ə + xòqì: even though (you) V

after a noun:

N xòqì: even N, also N

N xòqì + Neg + V: not even V the N

àshúyà xòqì: whoever

33. ù jé jé xòqì, mà à le à lé
rain even not wet come SP FP

Even though it rains, I don't get wet.

34. dī xòqì, mà shǐ à lé
beat even not die SP FP

Even though I did beat her, she didn't die.

35. ja-phǐ shím shì téqé mà nǎ xòqì zǎ ĭ nja ó bə lé
opium three clf only not be even buy go able VP FP FP

Even though it is not just three smokes, you can go and buy (as much as you like, not yet being addicted you still have money).

36. àshúyà xòqì, nǎ é gá nánhà ò
who even I say place listen imp.

Whoever it is, listen to what I say.

37. nǐm lòqé ho-já xòqì mà shì nja ə bə lé, áhu à djaq-yà
like now hospital even not know VP FP FP before P medicine

phú-làq dzà ə xòqì...
i.e. eat VP even

Like now, we don't even know about hospitals, before even though we ate medicine...

38. nà ma xòqì ja-phǐ dǎo mǐe, àdjé thì djé ná lá xòqì...
my mother even opium smoke as whatever pain come even

As also my mother smoke, also whatever kind of pain came...

And: hǎo

Usually between nouns but may also occur between adjectives or verbs.

39. mǎ-hý hǎo mǎ-nǐ è gá-kǎq
PN and PN NP story

The story of Mǎhý and Mǎnjǐ.

40. ná-ma hóə ba-la
sun and moon

The sun and the moon.