

## A note on Kammu perception verbs

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In this note I will describe a semantic field, perception verbs in the Austroasiatic language Kammu. I will rely heavily on the format and concepts developed by Åke Viberg (1982a) and I have also used his questionnaire (Viberg 1982b) to elicit perception verbs in Kammu.

Viberg classifies basic perception verbs in two ways, according to the five sense modalities (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell), and according to the "dynamic meaning" of the verb (activity, experience and copulative). Activity and experience are experiencer-based (have the experiencer as subject) while copulative is source-based. Activity refers to a consciously controlled process, while experience refers to a state that is not controlled. This is reflected in the fact that while activity verbs can be uttered in imperative or prohibitive form, experience verbs cannot. For instance, in Kammu the sentences sɲáɲ "Look!" or táa kmñɲ "Don't listen!" are possible, but \*kùũñ "See!" or \*táa mɛc "Don't hear!" are not.

The three dynamic meanings are exemplified for "sight" by the following sentences (Viberg 1982b):

A(ctivity): Peter looked at the birds

E(xperience): Peter saw the birds

C(opulative): Peter looked happy

Thus, fifteen basic terms are obtained. They are illustrated by the following sentences, which were translated by a Kammu informant (Kàm Ràw) from Viberg's questionnaire:

Sight:	A	Làay sɲáɲ sím Làay look bird	"Làay looked at the bird."
	E	Làay kùũñ sím Làay see bird	"Làay saw the bird."
	C	Làay mían cəə lə hrñam Làay like PTC happy	"Làay looked happy."

Hearing:	A	Làay kmñhèj síim (yàam) Làay listen bird (call)	"Làay listened to the bird (sing)."
	E	Làay məc síim (yàam) Làay perceive bird (call)	"Làay heard the bird (sing)."
	C	Làay mían càe là hrñam Làay like PTC happy	"Làay sounded happy."
Touch:	A	Làay míap téep tề Làay feel shirt RFL	"Làay felt his shirt."
	E	Làay məc klàaŋ yèt tầ kntrium cầŋ tề Làay perceive stone stay at underside foot RFL "Làay felt a stone under his foot."	
	C	téep lmèet Intrèn shirt smooth EXP	"The shirt felt smooth."
Taste:	A	Làay cìim sŋmàh Làay taste food	"Làay tasted the food."
	E	Làay məc sŋmàh cáŋ máar Làay perceive food bitter salt	"Làay tasted salt in the food."
	C	sŋmàh làm food tasty	"The food tasted good."
		sŋmàh cáŋ máar food bitter salt	"The food tasted of salt."
Smell:	A	Làay hmʔr sŋmàh Làay smell food	"Làay smelt the food."
	E	Làay məc ráaŋ sʔóŋ hʔr tầ prì Làay perceive flower tree smell in forest "Làay smelt flowers in the forest."	
	C	sŋmàh hʔr food smell-good	"The food smelt good."
		sŋmàh hʔú food stink	"The food stank."
		sŋmàh hʔr hóm food smell onion	"The food smelt of onions."

The perception verbs are summarized in the following table:

	activity	experience	copulative
sight	ɲááɲ	kúuñ	mían
hearing	kmñèŋ	mèc	mían
touch	míap	mèc	-
taste	cìim	mèc	-
smell	hmʔɪr	mèc	hʔɪr, hʔú

For activity, there are five different verbs, according to the sense involved, but for experience there are only two, one for "see" and one for the remaining four senses. The copulatives are more complicated: for "look" and "sound" the verb *mían* "(be) like" combined with the aspect particle *càə* is often used. This particle basically denotes that the speaker does not know whether the state or action denoted by the following verb takes place or not. (Thus it is often used for future tense, but this is not the case here; see also Svantesson 1984.) The meaning of the combination *mían càə* is thus something like "seem".

For touch and taste there are no specific copulative verbs, and various paraphrases are used. For smell there are two basic terms, one for "smell good" and one for "smell bad". These and other hyponyms will be described below.

### Polysemy

The dynamic meanings experience and activity are lexicalized by two different verbs for each sense modality and in no case are these two verbs morphologically related to each other. This contrasts with Vietnamese, the only Austroasiatic language in Viberg's sample where the experience verbs are formed from activity verbs by the addition of a serial verb.

Viberg has shown that there is a polysemy hierarchy within the sense modalities in different languages:

smell  
sight > hearing > touch >  
taste

This means that "a verb having a basic meaning belonging to a sense modality higher (to the left) in the hierarchy, can get an extended meaning that covers some (or all) of the sense modalities lower in the hierarchy" (Viberg 1982a:15).

As seen above, the activity verbs are lexicalized differently for each sense modality, but for experience, the verb *mèc* is used for all senses except sight. If the context allows a choice between sense modalities, *mèc* is usually interpreted as "hear", which is thus its basic meaning. Thus the Kammu data fit in with this hierarchy, as well as with Viberg's observation that polysemy is most common among the experiences. Languages with the same experience polysemy pattern as Kammu (i.e. with a separate verb for sight and with the verb for hearing extended to the remaining senses) are common in Viberg's language sample and include Hausa and Turkish.

The only perception verbs which are morphologically related in Kammu are hmʔɨr "smell (activity)" and hʔɨr "smell (copulative)". The infix -m- regularly forms causatives in Kammu (see Svantesson 1983), and the formal relation between copulative and activity verbs is the same as that between an intransitive verb and its causative; the first is constructed **patient/source - V**, and the second **agent - V - patient/source**.

### Hyponymy

Hyponyms for "look" (activity) and for "smell" (copulative) seem to be especially common, and I have collected some of these here.

For "look", the following hyponyms have been noted:

cŋkléer	"look through a hole, look into, peep"
kléer	= cŋkléer
smdíŋ	"stare at"
smíik	"glance at, spy on"
smləŋ	"look to the side"
smŋəh	"look upwards" (cf. ŋəh "bent upwards")
smʔyéé	"look with one eye" (cf. ʔyéé "one-eyed")

Many of these words have the minor syllable sm-, which in the last two cases seems to be a kind of derivational prefix.

For copulative "smell" there is no indigenous neutral verb, but one has to specify if the smell is good (hʔɨr) or bad (hʔú). The Lao loanword sáap seems to be neutral. There are several other words for different kinds of smell:

hʔɨr	"smell good"
hʔú	"smell bad"
ŋéɛl	"to stink (of animals, dirty clothes, etc.)"
pʔɨal	"to stink (of fish)"
sáap	"smell" (Lao loan)
ʔwɨas	= ŋéɛl

These words function both as verbs and as nouns (which is not very common in Kammu):

ká	pʔɨal		
fish	stink	"The fish stinks."	
ò	mèc	pʔɨal ká	
I	perceive	stench fish	"I smell the stench of fish."

### **Bibliography**

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