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The Verb Phrase in Méréy

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Abbreviations

1p	First person plural
3s	Third person singular
Adj	Adjective marker
Ant	Anterior
Ben	Benefactive
Det	Determiner
Dir	Directional
DO	Direct Object
Dual	Dual
Excl	Exclusive
Fut	Future
Hab	Habitual
Inc	Incompletive
Incl	Inclusive
Inf	Infinitive
IO	Indirect Object
Neg	Negative
NP	Noun Phrase
Part	Participle
Cpl	Completive
Pl	Plural
Pr	Progressive
Rel	Relativizer
S	Subject
Sbj	Subjunctive
Sub	Subordinator
Top	Topic marker
VI	Valency increaser

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1 Introduction

This paper presents a concise description of the verb phrase in Mery. It builds on previous research carried out by Alan Boydell (2000).

The Verb Phrase is defined as those elements that are structurally dependant on the verb, but not including the verb's phrasal complements. In Mery these occur syntactically between the verb and its phrasal complements. The relevant elements include markers of tense, aspect, mode, person, number, voice, direction and destination, along with pronouns or agreement markers for the direct and indirect objects.

Mery is a language spoken in the *arrondissement* of Méri, Diamaré department in Far North province. It is classified in the Ethnologue as Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, Biu-Mandara, A, A.5 and as Biu-Mandara, North, North-West, A10, Meri by Gravina (2005). The Mery people live mostly in and around the town of Méri, and on the slopes of the mountain *La Lanterne de Méri*, with its distinctive rocky summit. The number of Mery speakers in this area is around 10,000 (Ethnologue), with significant communities in Maroua and other cities in Cameroon.

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2 The Verb Root

The verb root is defined by six components:

- i) A base of one to four consonants
- ii) An optional underlying /a/ vowel occurring between two consonants in the consonantal base.
- iii) An optional underlying /a/ vowel following the final consonant.
- iv) An optional underlying /a/ vowel preceding the initial consonant.
- v) An optional prosody of palatalization or labialization, but not both.
- vi) Underlying tone

The verbs are cited using a segmental phonemic orthography, rather than a more abstract underlying form. The voiced and voiceless lateral fricatives are written 'zl' and 'sl' respectively. Tone is only marked where it is relevant to the point under discussion.

We shall examine each of these components in detail.

2.1 The Consonantal Base

The consonantal base may consist of one to four consonants.

- (1) **One consonant**
- | | |
|----|---------------------|
| da | 'cook' |
| fa | 'play (flute etc.)' |
- Two consonants**
- | | |
|------|---------|
| gəs | 'catch' |
| həba | 'wait' |
- Three consonants**
- | | |
|---------|----------|
| kərah | 'refuse' |
| ŋgərawa | 'tear' |

Four consonants (Only three are so far attested.)

bədəŋwal	‘push (a rock)’
kərkasla	‘coagulate’
zlələmbad	‘cross (two things, e.g. sticks)’

2.2 The Base /a/ Vowel

Only one underlying /a/ vowel need to be specified in the verb root. In common with all morphemes in Merey, if an underlying /a/ occurs in a morpheme, all following vowels will also be underlying /a/. Thus it is necessary only to specify the position of the first base /a/ vowel in order to know the underlying vowels of a word.

(2)	/bəbəl/	[bəbəl]	‘to make noise’
	/bəlaŋ/	[bəlaŋ]	‘to crawl’
	/handər/	[handər]	‘to snore’

There is one apparent exception to this rule amongst the verbs so far attested. This is the verb *ndzahəre* ‘to sleep’. This verb is formed as a compound of *ndza* ‘sit, rest’ and *həre* ‘sleep’, but functions as a single word. Cf Mbuko *njak ahan* ‘to sleep’, which is two words.

2.3 The Final /a/ Vowel

Verbs may also have a final underlying /a/ vowel.

(3)	ndala	‘to cease (illness, rain)’	cf. ndal	‘to annoy’
	təma	‘to accept, take’	cf. təm	‘to hold’

Mono-consonantal verbs present a particular problem. The final vowel of a mono-consonantal verb cannot be discerned from the isolation form of the verb, or any other context where the verb occurs before a pause. In pre-pausal environment the final vowel will be realised as underlying /a/. To identify the underlying vowel is it necessary to set the verb in a mid-phrase environment, where the following word begins with a consonant.

(4)	na	zə	nəkar
	1sAcc exceed you		
	‘I exceed you’		

Thus in this case the root of the verb ‘exceed’ is /zə/.

2.4 The Initial /a/ Vowel

Certain Merey verbs and nouns have an underlying initial /a/ vowel. This vowel is normally unrealised. The only circumstances in which its presence can be observed are those in which a prefix ending with /ə/ is placed before the root. In these cases the prefix vowel is realised as underlying /a/.

In the verb morphology there are three prefixes that end with underlying /ə/, namely the 3sAnt prefix *kə*, the 3pCpl prefix *tə*, and the infinitive prefix *mə*.

Table 1

Root	Infinitive	Gloss
(a)təma	matəme	to accept
təma	mətəme	to escape
(a)zal	mazele	to exceed
zal	məzele	to call

The initial /a/ vowel will be shown on the verb root in parentheses.

As can be seen from the above examples, the existence of an initial /a/ vowel does not require all following vowels to be /a/.

2.5 Prosody

Monomorphemic words in Merey may carry prosodies of palatalization or labialization. These prosodies have the effect of altering the quality of the vowels in the word. The palatalization prosody fronts the vowels, and the labialization prosody causes back-rounding of the vowels. In situations where the two prosodies are both active, the vowels become front-rounded.

The majority of Merey verbs do not carry a prosody. A small but significant number carry the palatalization prosody, and a smaller number carry the labialization prosody. No verbs so far attested carry both prosodies, though there are words in other lexical categories that carry both prosodies.

There is one minimal pair in the lexicon

- (5) la 'dig'
le 'be beautiful'

The palatalized verbs so far attested are:

- (6) de 'go'
dze 'lose'
ge 'do'
lətse 'get up'
ndisl 'arrive'
ndzəkɪt 'resemble'
pəɖeke 'wake up'
tətɪk 'teach, learn'
tsəne 'understand'
tsɪk 'speak'
weɖeh 'dig up'
ye 'go'
ze 'exceed'
ze 'smell'

The palatalization prosody can be identified from the presence of a front vowel in the verb root.

With the labialization prosody the situation is less clear, as the presence of a back rounded vowel may be due to the influence of a labialized back consonant. Thus the underlying form of ‘annoy’ may be /dzəguɪ/ or /dzəgwəɪ/. In some circumstances it is possible to determine the cause of back rounded vowels:

- i) When no back consonant is present, the back rounded vowel must be due to the labialization prosody.
- ii) If the back consonant is the final segment of the root, and is preceded by /ə/, then this /ə/ will be realised as [u] and the labialization of the back consonant is no longer apparent. However, when the infinitive suffix –e is added the labialization becomes apparent:
 /zəzəkʷ/ [zəzək] /mazəzəkʷe/ [mazəzək^we] ‘to rest’
- iii) Otherwise there is no systematic way of discerning the cause of back rounded vowels.

The labialisation and palatalisation prosodies do not spread onto suffixes

- (7) /zəzur/ ‘notice’ ka zəzurama ‘we (dual) noticed’
 /tsik/ ‘speak’ a tsikawa ‘he (hab) spoke’

A few verbs appear to violate the rule of vowel harmony.

- (8) dɔdɔ ‘be wrinkled’
 dɔle ‘pray’

In these cases the back rounded vowel comes from an underlying \w\ that has become vocalized. I.e. /dɔwɔ/ → /dɔdɔ/.

2.6 Underlying tone

Verbs carry a single underlying tone, either High, Mid or Low (H, M or L). Verbs with underlying M are the most common, and verbs with underlying H are rare.

There is a correlation between the verb tone and the existence of an initial or a final vowel. Only verbs with an initial vowel may have underlying L. Verbs without an initial vowel can either be M or H. Verbs with a final vowel are either L or H. The following table shows the possible combinations.

Table 2

	Initial V	No initial V
Final V	L	H
No final V	L, M, H	M

The underlying tone of the verb root can be seen in the completive aspect:

- (9) L nà ləp ‘I wrapped’
 nà pələ ‘I untied’
 nà kərəh ‘I refused’
- M nā kəɔf ‘I hit’
 nā səkəm ‘I bought’
 nā bəŋgəb ‘I lifted’
- H nà həb ‘I broke’
 nà bərə ‘I washed’
 nà wútsədə ‘I caused to shine’

3 The Structure of the Verb Phrase

The overall structure of the verb phrase is as follows:

(Prog) (S-TAM) (Fut) Verb-Hab-S-IO-Dir-Imp (DO) (VI) (PP) (Dest)

4 Person and Number

Merey distinguishes eight combinations of person and number: 1s, 2s, 3s, 1pExcl, 1pDual, 1pIncl, 2p, 3p. The 1p exclusive does not have a regular subject prefix, and may be a newer feature in the language. In many cases it is marked in the same way as 1pDual, even though the dual form always has an inclusive connotation.

4.1 Subject

4.1.1 Subject pronouns

Although not part of the verb phrase, the subject pronouns are given here for completeness.

Table 3

1s	niŋ
2s	nəkar
3s	nəŋgeye
1pExcl	nəmay
1pDual	nəmay
1pIncl	nəkway
2p	nəkurom
3p	nəteye

4.1.2 Subject prefixes and agreement

Subject person and number are marked on the verb by a combination of a prefix and a suffix. Suffixes are used with 1pDual, 1pIncl and 2p. The 3s and 3p prefixes have different forms for different aspects. 3s has *a* for completive, *ma* for incompletive and subjunctive, and *kə* for anterior. 3p has *tə* for completive and *ta* elsewhere.

Table 4

		kəɗ 'kill' (anterior)
1s	na V	nà kóɗ
2s	ka V	kà kóɗ
3s	a, ma, kə V	kə kóɗ
1pExcl	nəmaa V	nəməa kóɗ
1pDual	ka V-ama	kà kóɗámá
1pIncl	ka V-akwa	kà kóɗákwa
2p	ka V-um	kà kóɗúm
3p	ta, tə V	tà kóɗ

4.2 Direct object

Direct object pronouns are marked as particles within the verb phrase. They are not affixed to the verb. They can co-occur with the noun phrase when the direct object is the thematic participant (see example (10) below). The 3sDO pronoun is often omitted with verbs that are inherently transitive.

The direct object pronouns are as follows:

Table 5

1s	ga
2s	kar
3s	na, ŋgay
1pExcl	may
1pDual	may
1pIncl	kway
2p	kurom
3p	ta, tay

(10) A pakw **na** kulpəpa a bəra mə gər.
 3sCpl take_off 3sDO hat to outside in head
 “He took off his hat.”

(11) Ka tsada **ga** na, kemey ?
 2s insult 1sDO Top why
 “Why did you insult me?”

4.3 Indirect object

The indirect object agreement suffixes are obligatory in verbs with an indirect object. They may appear in conjunction with, or instead of, the noun phrase to which they refer. When no noun phrase is included the markers thus act as bound indirect object pronouns.

The indirect object suffixes are as follows:

Table 6

1s	-iŋ
2s	-aka
3s	-ay
1pExcl	-amay
1pDual	-amay
1pIncl	-akway
2p	-akum
3p	-atay

(12) A gwada**y** a bəba ŋgay
 3sCpl say-3sIO to father his
 “He said to his father”

- (13) Mbəlum ma vəl**akiye** adəma.
 God 3sInc give-2sIO-Inc inside
 “God will give you [your wealth] back.”

4.4 Benefactive

The benefactive is marked in the same way as the indirect object. The two cannot co-occur in the verb phrase. If both are required, the benefactive is expressed as a prepositional phrase outside the verb phrase.

- (14) Bəre neheye ta nas**ij** ha daw ga.
 monkey these 3pAnt spoil-1sIO VI millet my
 “These monkeys have spoiled my millet for me.”

4.5 Prepositional pronouns

The prepositional pronouns equivalent to a prepositional phrase headed by *ka* ‘on’ are placed within the verb phrase. Other prepositions do not have equivalent pronominal forms and are never moved to within the verb phrase.

The pronouns are as follows:

Table 7

1s	fagaya
2s	fakaya
3s	faya
1pExcl	famaya
1pDual	famaya
1pIncl	fakwaya
2p	fakwama
3p	fataya

- (15) Təmum naha **fagay** abəra
 Pull-2p to^there on^me outside
 “Pull me out!”

- (16) A zla **faya** mbəl aye.
 3sCpl take on^him skin the
 “She took the skin from him.”

5 Aspect

5.1 Major aspects

We will divide the aspects into major and secondary aspects. The major aspects are Completive, Incompletive and Anterior. The secondary aspects – Progressive and Habitual – are formed using one of the major aspects as a base.

5.1.1 Completive

Completive aspect is the least marked of the aspects in Merey. The completive aspect carries no suffixation. The subject prefix has an underlying /a/ vowel, except for in the 3p, where the prefix is /tə/. However, if the verb has an underlying prefix vowel, this prefix will be realised as /ta/. The 3s prefix is /a/.

Table 8

	ge ‘do’	kəḏ ‘kill’	zal ‘call’	səkəm ‘buy’	lawara ‘encircle’
1s	na ge	na kəḏ	na zal	na səkəm	na lawara
2s	ka ge	ka kəḏ	ka zal	ka səkəm	ka lawara
3s	a ge	a kəḏ	a zal	a səkəm	a lawara
1pEx	nəmaa ge	nəmaa kəḏ	nəmaa zal	nəmaa səkəm	nəmaa lawara
1pDual	ka gama	ka kəḏama	ka zalama	ka səkəmama	ka lawarama
1pInc	ka gakwa	ka kəḏakwa	ka zalakwa	ka səkəmakwa	ka lawarakwa
2p	ka gum	ka kəḏum	ka zalum	ka səkəmunum	ka lawarum
3p	tə ge	tə kəḏ	tə zal	ta səkəm	tə lawara

The completive is unmarked for tone. The verb and prefix carry the underlying tone of the verb, except for H verbs where the prefix carries a low tone. In the 3s and 3p, the tone on the prefix is high for L and M verbs and mid for H verbs. For mono-consonantal M verbs the tone becomes high on the verb, and remains mid on the prefix.

- (17) L nà kəràh ‘I refused’
 á kəràh ‘He refused’
 M nā fətsāḏ ‘I cut (millet)’
 á fətsāḏ ‘He cut (millet)’
 H nà bára ‘I washed’
 ā bára ‘He washed’
 1M nā dā ‘I cooked’
 ā dá ‘He cooked’

5.1.2 Incompletive

The incompletive aspect is used for actions that are not complete at the current discourse time. It covers semantic areas including past imperfective, present imperfective and all future actions, but does not include past habitual actions. Incompletive aspect is marked with the suffix /-iye/. The 3s subject prefix is /ma/. The subject prefix always has an underlying /a/ vowel. The prosody of this suffix does not spread onto the verb root.

Table 9

	ge ‘do’	kəḏ ‘kill’	zal ‘call’	səkəm ‘buy’	lawara ‘encircle’
1s	ne giye	na kəḏiye	na zaliye	na səkəmiye	na lawariye
2s	ka giye	ka kəḏiye	ka zaliye	ka səkəmiye	ka lawariye
3s	ma giye	ma kəḏiye	ma zaliye	ma səkəmiye	ma lawariye
1pEx	nəmaa giye	nəmaa kəḏiye	nəmaa zaliye	nəmaa səkəmiye	nəmaa lawariye
1pDual	ka gamaye	ka kəḏamaye	ka zalamaye	ka səkəmamaye	ka lawaramiye
1pInc	ka gakwaye	ka kəḏakwaye	ka zalakwaye	ka səkəmakwaye	ka lawarakwiye
2p	ka gumeye	ka kəḏumeye	ka zalumeye	ka səkəmunumeye	ka lawarumeye
3p	ta giye	ta kəḏiye	ta zaliye	ta səkəmiye	ta lawariye

(21)	L	nà zə̀bà	‘I have looked’
		ká zə̀bà	‘He has looked’
	M	nà tər̄ə̀ts	‘I have cut off’
		ká tər̄ə̀ts	‘He has cut off’
	H	nà tápá	‘I have stuck’
		kə̀ tápá	‘He has stuck’
	1	nà kə̀d	‘I have hit’
		kə̀ kə̀d	‘He has hit’

5.2 Secondary aspects

5.2.1 Progressive

The progressive aspect is based on the incompletive aspect. It is marked by the particle *fāya* ‘on it’. This is placed after the subject noun phrase or pronoun (if present) and before the verb prefix. The progressive is used for both past and present actions.

(22) Ndo hay **fāya** ta diye tə gay i biy.
 man Pl Prog 3plnc go-1nc with home of chief
 “The men were going to the chief’s house.”

(23) Wak **fāya** ma tuwiye ma zləget
 goat Prog 3s1nc cry-1nc in enclosure
 “The goat was crying in the enclosure.”

5.2.2 Past Habitual

The past habitual aspect is based on the completive aspect. It is marked by the suffix *-awa*.

(24) Dəvar a gəs**awa** wak .
 leopard 3sCpl catch-Hab goat
 “The leopard used to catch goats.”

(25) A g**awa** guvah mə mahəmba.
 3sCpl do-Hab field on mountain
 “He used to cultivate on the mountain.”

(26) Tə hən**awa** mə dəma.
 3p sleep-Hab in inside
 “They used to sleep inside”

6 Mood

6.1 Indicative

The indicative mood has no specific marking. It is distinguished from the subjunctive by the tone of the subject prefix, and from the imperative by the presence of the subject prefix.

- (27) **Ta** **səkəm** ha sla.
3pCpl buy VI cow.
“They bought a cow.”

- (28) **Tə** **həl** naha gugumaŋ tay hay tebiye.
3pCpl gather there cotton their Pl all
“They gathered and took there all their cotton.”

6.2 Subjunctive

In common with the incompletive aspect, the subjunctive is marked by a high tone on the subject prefix, the 3s prefix is *ma*, the verb root carries the underlying tone, and in 3s the prefix tone is low for L verbs, and mid for M and H verbs. Unlike the incompletive however, the subjunctive carries no suffix.

In the orthography used in the examples, the subjunctive is marked by a circumflex on the prefix.

The subjunctive is used in three different circumstances. Firstly it is used as a mitigated imperative, jussive or hortative:

- (29) **Kâ** **tuwum** bay.
2pSbj cry-2p Neg
“Don’t cry (pl)!”

- (30) Mbəlum **mâ** **pa** fakaya ŋgama.
God 3sSbj put on_you blessing
“May God bless you(s)!”

Secondly, it is used following the conjunctions *ada* and *hərwi ada*, meaning ‘in order that’:

- (31) Na maw ada **nâ** **fa** way.
1sCpl return so_that 1sSbj play thing
“I came back in order to play something (music).”

Thirdly, the subjunctive is used following verbs of volition:

- (32) wu kurre a say ka neŋgeye **mâ** **təra** na, ...
thing first 3sCpl want on him 3sSbj become Top
“The first thing he want him to become is...”

6.3 Imperative

The imperative is formed by the omission of the subject prefix. Imperative forms exist for 2s, 1pDual, 1pIncl and 2p.

- (33) **Do** a gay i Madaf mə Gemzek.
go-Dir to house of Madaf in Gemzek
“Go to Madaf’s house in Gemzek.”
- (34) **kəḏakwa** na !
kill-1pIncl 3sDO
“Let’s (incl) kill it!”
- (35) **Tənum** naha fagay abəra !
pull-2p to^there on^me outside
“Pull (pl) me out!”

7 Tense

The only tense marked in Merey is the future.

7.1 Future

The future tense marker in Merey is *ta*. It can be used with either the incompletive, the subjunctive, or with the infinitive. It is not used obligatorily – the incompletive may be used if the context makes the timing clear (see example (13)).

- (36) Na **ta** gəsiye na hiyeṅ.
1sInc Fut catch-Inc 3sDO squirrel
“I am going to catch a squirrel.”
- (37) Ka **ta** həbiye mə dəma.
2sInc Fut guard-Inc in inside
“You will look after [him] inside.”

8 Valency-changing devices

There are a number of ways in Merey to either lower the valency of a verb, or to increase it, or else to create forms where subject and object are linked.

8.1 Impersonal

The impersonal form reduces the valency by eliminating the semantic agent. In Merey the 3p is used for impersonal forms of verbs.

- (38) **Ta** kəḏ ga.
3pCpl hit 1sDO
“Someone hit me./I have been hit.”

8.2 Reflexive

The reflexive is formed by using the word *bo* ‘body’ as the direct object of the verb.

- (39) na dəs na.
1sCpl cut 3sDO
“I cut it.”

- (40) na dəs **bo**.
1sCpl cut body
“I cut myself.”

8.3 Reciprocal

Reciprocals are formed using the word *bo* ‘body’ as the indirect object.

- (41) Ta tsik me **a bo**.
3pCpl say word at body
“They spoke to each other.”

- (42) Ta ge mbəlak **a bo**.
3pCpl do wound at body
“They harmed each other.”

8.4 Valency Increaser

The particle *ha* modifies an intransitive verb to allow it to take a direct object.

- (43) Zaŋgwa kə pəla.
donkey 3sAnt untie
“The donkey has become untied.”

- (44) Na pəla **ha** zaŋgwa.
1sCpl untie VI donkey
“I untied the donkey”

- (45) Kalawah kə həb.
water-jar 3sAnt break
“The water jar broke.”

- (46) ŋgwas kə həb **ha** kalawah
woman 3sAnt break VI water-jar
“The woman has broken the water jar.”

There is one case where the particle *ha* gives a transitive verb a causative sense (see example (60)), but *ha* cannot be used productively to create causative forms for all transitive verbs.

Some verbs only occur with the particle *ha*, or have a different sense when *ha* is added.

dza ‘bite, cut’

dza ha ‘try’

kal ‘throw’

kal ha ‘sell’

səmək ha ‘sell’

*səmək

The particle *ha* can be preceded by a direct object pronoun.

(47) Tâ sər **kar ha** lele.
3pSbj know 2sDO VI well
“They must get to know you well.”

(48) May tay hay, na sëməkiye **tay ha**.
mother their Pl 1sImp sell-Imp 3pDO VI
“Their mothers, I will sell.”

8.5 ‘Body Part’ Verbs

Body parts, such as *me* ‘mouth’, *dəre* ‘eye’ and *bo* ‘body’ can be used as detransitivisers, turning a transitive verb into an intransitive verb.

(49) nduzl ‘unwrap (something)’
nduzl me ‘germinate’
tsik ‘say (something)’
tsik me ‘speak’
ge ‘do (something)’
ge bo ‘take place’
wa ‘give birth (to someone)’
wa bo ‘give birth’
zəba ‘look at (something)’
zəba dəre ‘(take a) look’

Often the body parts convey an idiomatic meaning.

(50) ye ka bo ‘please (lit. “go on body”)’
may bo ‘help (lit. “return body to someone”)’
da me ‘be difficult (lit. “cook mouth”)’
nay dəre ‘hate (lit. “be eye to someone”)’

9 Directionals

9.1 Directional verbs

Directional verbs are formed by the addition of the suffix *-aw*. The direction of the verb is always to ‘here’, where ‘here’ may be the location of the speaker or the centre of interest of a discourse.

- (51) Na diye mata səkə**maw** wah ka təv i Mbəzum hay.
 1sInc go-Inc for buy-Dir milk on place of Fulani Pl
 “I am going in order to buy milk at the place where the Fulani are (and bring it back).”
- (52) May ŋgay a həlay**aw** dender.
 Mother his 3sCpl gather-3sBen-Dir peanuts
 “His mother gathered peanuts for him.”
- (53) Ta tə**maw** faya bəra dəvar niye
 3p hold-Dir on-him outside leopard Det
 “They pulled out the leopard.”

9.2 Directional pronouns

In Merey there are words which act as pronouns for the destination complement of a verb. These are *haya* ‘to here’ and *naha* and *taha* ‘to there’.

The directional suffix is not used when *haya* is used. It is replaced by the suffix *-a*, but only if the verb does not carry other suffixes. Unlike the directional voice suffix *-aw*, where the motion can apply to the subject, direct object or indirect object, *haya* always applies to the motion of the direct object of the verb.

- (54) A zla **haya**.
 3sCpl take to_here
 “She brought it here.”
- (55) A zla **haya** wawa niye.
 3sCpl take to_here child Det
 “He brought the child here.”

The particle *naha* ‘to there’ can apply to the subject, direct object or indirect object.

- (56) A husa **naha** na, dem eye kə tsaḅ denderndo ka akwa.
 3sCpl reach to^there Top girl Adj 3sAnt put chick-pea on fire
 “When he arrived there, the girl had put chick-peas on to cook.”
- (57) Zlumay **naha** dem nakay a wur mətawak niye.
 take-2pS-3sIO to^there girl this to child poor Det
 “Take my daughter to that poor child.”

If there is a plural direct object, the particle takes the form *taha*.

- (58) Ta həhar **taha** bəre niye hay.
 3pCpl chase 3p-there monkey Det Pl
 “They chased the monkeys there.”
- (59) Slərama **taha** wawa may

send-1pDualS 3p-there child our(Dual)
 “Let’s send our children there.”

The particles *naha* and *taha* cannot be combined with direct object pronouns.

10 Subordinate forms

10.1 Infinitive/Nominal

The infinitive or nominal form of a verb is formed by the addition of the prefix /mə-/ and the suffix /-e/, which palatalises the vowels of the verb root. If the verb has an underlying initial /a/ vowel, the prefix takes the form /ma-/. This prefix is sometimes palatalised when spoken, but by convention is written unpalatalised.

When the infinitive carries a suffix or *ha* follows the verb, the palatalization is lost.

- | | | |
|------|-----------|------------------------------|
| (60) | məzle | ‘to take’ |
| | məzlaw | ‘to take to here (to bring)’ |
| | matəre | ‘to become’ |
| | matəra ha | ‘to make something become’ |

The infinitive or nominal form is used in a number of contexts:

10.1.1 Noun

The infinitive can be used as a noun

- | | | | |
|------|--------|----------|------------------------------------|
| (61) | məzele | ‘name’ | (from <i>zal</i> ‘call’) |
| | məhəne | ‘day’ | (from <i>həna</i> ‘lie down’) |
| | məle | ‘beauty’ | (from <i>le</i> ‘to be beautiful’) |

- | | | |
|------|----------------------|--|
| (62) | a ye a mahele | ‘he went at walk = he went for a walk’ |
| | andza məgwede | ‘like to say = in other words’ |

10.1.2 Nominal clauses

The nominal form is also used in the formation of nominal clauses.

- | | | | | | |
|------|---------------|--------------|--------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| (63) | Məhute | dala | eye, a | da | me. |
| | | Inf-find-Inf | money | Adj | 3sCpl |
| | | | | cook | mouth |
| | | | | | ‘It is hard to find money.’ |
| (64) | Məndze | andza | i | bəba | hay na, lele. |
| | | Inf-sit-Inf | like | of father | Pl |
| | | | | Top | good |
| | | | | | ‘To live like the fathers is good.’ |

These are often used in marked focus constructions which take form NP (Top) NP.

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|-------|-----|-------|-----------|------------|-----|------------------|--------------|---|
| (65) | Wu | nakə | a | seŋ | məge | aye | na, | mətsəkure | gəna | hay. |
| | | thing | Rel | 3sCpl | want-1sIO | Inf-do-Inf | Det | Top | Inf-keep-Inf | animal |
| | | | | | | | | | | Pl |
| | | | | | | | | | | ‘The thing that I want to do is to keep animals.’ |

In focus constructions where the element in focus is the subject of the subordinated verb, the infinitive prefix *mə-* is replaced by the particle *maa*, and there is no suffix.

(66) **Maa** tsik bazlam nakay na, neŋ mahəgeye bay.
 Sub say word this Top I alone Neg
 “It is not just me that says this.”

(67) **Maa** ge mə gay kway bugum na, mey ?
 Sub do in house our(inc) today Top what
 “What is happening in our house today?”

10.1.3 With the sense of a relative clause following ‘person’ or ‘thing’

These structures are similar to relative clauses, in that a noun is modified by a clause. However, unlike true relative clauses, there is no complementizer such as *nakə*, and there is no final determiner *aye*. The function is neither identification nor attribution, but rather semantic precision, where the result functions almost as a lexical entry.

(68)	ndo məndzeke daf	‘person who tastes food’
	ndo mama bo	‘person who helps’
	wu məpe wu	‘thing put thing = seat’
	wu mənday	‘thing eat = food’
	wu mətəde yam	‘thing for drawing water’

This structure is also used with other head nouns to form the semantic equivalent of compound nouns.

(69)	gay i məge tsakala	‘house of to do price = shop’
	yam ka məbere wu hay	‘water on to wash things = washing water’

10.1.4 Following verb such as ‘to begin’, ‘to want’, ‘to be able’

The infinitive is also used in subordinate clauses following a verb, where the subject of the subordinate verb is identical with the subject of the main verb.

(70)	ta dazlay a məkəde wuway	‘they began to converse’
	a kərah mədzala ha	‘he refused to believe’
	a saka məzle dahəlay	‘you want to take a wife’
	ka mbiye faya məpəle ŋgwas	‘you can look for a wife’
	ta vəlaka tsəved’ ka məge wu	‘they gave you permission to do thing...’

10.1.5 Purpose clauses

The infinitive can also be used to denote purpose.

(71) Na yaw **mətəde** yam.
 1sCpl go-Dir Inf-draw-Inf water
 “I came to draw water.”

(72) Ti ye faya wunaka a Matakam **məzlaw**.
 3pCpl go on_him – to Mafa Inf-take-Dir

“They went to Mafa to bring back [a wife].”

The infinitive can be combined with the future particle *ta* to create a marked purpose clause.

- (73) ti ye **mata** **həbe** daw
3pCpl go Inf-Fut wait-Inf millet
‘they went in order to guard the millet’

10.2 Participle/Verbal adjective

The verbal adjective or participle is formed by prefixing the verb root with *ma-*. As with other adjectives, the verbal adjective is followed by the adjective marker *eye*.

- (74) mapala eye ‘chosen’
makula eye ‘dry’

- (75) akwa **matsa6** eye
fire Part-build Adj
‘built up fire’

11 Conclusion

This paper gives a very brief overview of the features of the Meroy verb phrase. Further research is needed, particularly on the role of tone in verb roots and on the discourse functions of the various verb forms.

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