

Causatives and clause union in Lai (Chin)

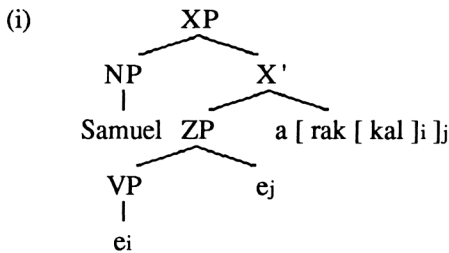
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Consider the following sentences containing the Lai (Chin)¹ intransitive verb *kal* 'go'.

(1) *Samuel a rak kal.*
Samuel went.

(2) *Ka rak kal.*
I went.

Intransitive verbs take only a subject; in (1) *Samuel* is the subject. This is consistent with the appearance of the third person singular subject agreement marker *a*.² We take the structure of (1) to be something like (i).



No overt subject appears in (2), but the subject agreement marker *ka* requires that it be first person singular. The structure of (2) will be as in (i), but with an empty subject and *ka* replacing *a*.

There is a Lai causative verb *kalter* 'make/let go', as in sentences like (3) to (8).³

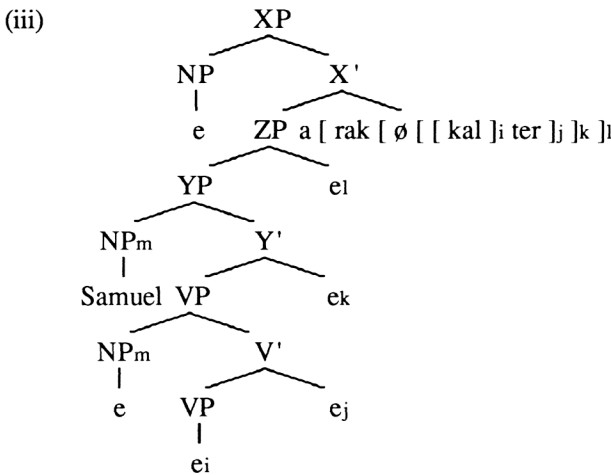
¹Lai is spoken in and around the town of Hakha, present administrative capital of Chin State, Myanmar. It is often called (Hakha) Chin in Linguistic literature. I am grateful to Rev. Samuel Ngun Ling for teaching me what I know about Lai, and to F. K. Lehman for various helpful comments and suggestions.

²The agreement system of Lai is discussed in detail in Bedell (1995).

³The meaning of the Lai causative *ter* is not sensitive to the volition of the causee. Thus it may be translated into English as 'make' or 'let', depending on the context. It is sometimes written as a separate word, i. e. *kal ter*.

- (3) *Samuel a rak kalter.*
He/she made/let Samuel go.
- (4) *Samuel ka rak kalter.*
I made/let Samuel go.
- (5) *Samuel nih a rak kalter.*
Samuel made/let him/her go.
- (6) *Samuel nih a rak ka kalter.*
Samuel made/let me go.
- (7) *?Samuel (nih) a rak i kalter.*
Samuel made/let himself go.
- (8) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah a rak i kalter.*
Samuel made/let himself go.

We take the structure of (3) to be something like (iii).



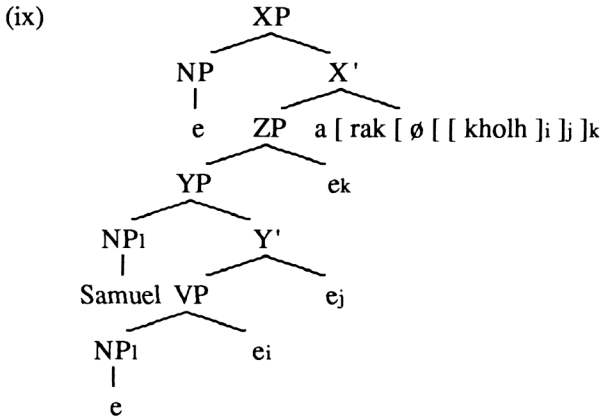
In (iii), *kalter* is morphologically decomposed into *kal* followed by *ter*. *Kal* is the same verb as in (i); syntactically it heads a VP complement of *ter*. *Ter* is syntactically a verb which takes a VP complement in addition to a subject and object, but morphologically a suffix. Its object is interpreted semantically as the subject of the VP complement. In (3) and (4), *Samuel* is this object. The agreement pattern requires that the empty subject be third person singular in (3) and first person singular in (4). *Nih* in (5) and (6) marks *Samuel* as the subject rather than the object. The agreement pattern in this case requires that the empty object be third person singular in (5), and first person singular in (6). The structure of (5) will be as in (iii), but with subject *Samuel nih* and an empty object. The structures of (4) and (6) will have *ka* replacing *a* or \emptyset . It is marginally possible to have *kalter* in a reflexive construction as in (7) or (8). In that case, the use of *nih* is optional, as is

the explicit reflexive *amah le amah* ‘him/herself’.

In spite of containing *kal* syntactically as well as morphologically, in external syntax *kalter* is virtually identical to simple transitive verbs. Compare (3) to (8) with (9) to (14), which contain the transitive verb *kholh* ‘bathe’.

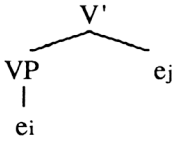
- (9) *Samuel a rak kholh.*
He/she gave Samuel a bath.
- (10) *Samuel ka rak kholh.*
I gave Samuel a bath.
- (11) *Samuel nih a rak kholh.*
Samuel gave him/her a bath.
- (12) *Samuel nih a rak ka kholh.*
Samuel gave me a bath.
- (13) *Samuel (nih) a rak i kholh.*
Samuel took a bath.
- (14) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah a rak i kholh.*
Samuel gave himself a bath.

We take the structure of (9) to be something like (ix); those of (10) to (12) differ from it precisely as those of (4) to (6) differ from (iii).



The only differences between (iii) and (ix) are first, the lexical difference of the morphologically complex *kalter* versus simple *kholh*; and second, the verb plus complement represented by (iii') within (iii) replacing the simple verb represented by ei alone in (ix).

(iii')



Similar causative constructions in other languages have posed an apparent dilemma between a morphological analysis of causative verbs which treats them using lexical rules like other cases of suffixed derivation, and a syntactic analysis which treats them using syntactic rules reducing a complex to a simplex structure. In the latter case the syntactic process has often been termed 'clause union'.⁴ In the analysis illustrated in (iii), there are both syntactic and morphological components; it simultaneously allows a morphological treatment of causative verbs and provides syntactically for their semantic properties. It may not be entirely clear whether structures like (iii) should count as complex or simplex, but in any case there is no syntactic derivation that might be literally described as 'clause union'. We will nevertheless continue to refer to it as a 'clause union' construction.

The Lai causative construction in (3) to (6) contrasts with syntactically less compact structures like (15) to (20) containing the verb *duh* 'want' accompanied by a complement clause.

- (15) *Samuel kal seh ti a rak duh.*
He/she wanted Samuel to go.
- (16) *Samuel kal seh ti ka rak duh.*
I wanted Samuel to go.
- (17) *Samuel nih kal seh ti a rak duh.*
Samuel wanted him/her to go.
- (18) *Samuel nih kal seh ti a rak ka duh.*
Samuel wanted me to go.
- (19) *Samuel (nih) kal seh ti a rak i duh.*
Samuel wanted to go.
- (20) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah kal seh ti a rak i duh.*
Samuel wanted himself to go.

We take the structure of (15) to be something like (xv).

⁴We have in mind particularly the literature dealing with causative sentences in Japanese. For recent general discussion of causative verbs and references, see Hendrick 1995.