

# NOMINAL AUXILIARIES IN LAI<sup>1</sup>

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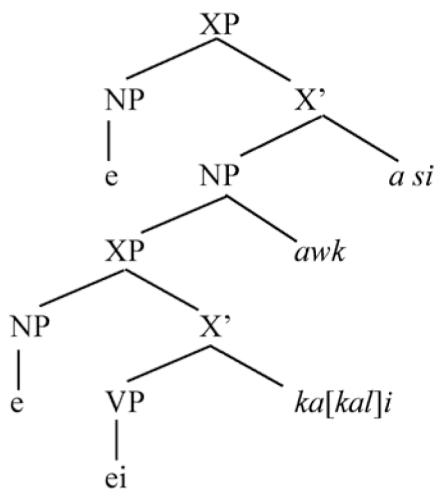
This discussion is concerned primarily with the Lai word *awk* as in (1) to (4) below. In particular, we want to determine the lexical category to which it belongs and the syntactic structure(s) in which it appears. The conclusion will be that it is a noun which functions as an auxiliary predicate.

- (1) *Ka kal awk a si.*  
(2) *Kal awk ka si.*  
'I should go.'

In (1) and (2), *awk* carries the meaning of obligation, corresponding to English 'should', 'must' or 'have to'. The preceding *ka kal* 'I go' or *kal* 'go' appear to be a sentential or verbal complement. The following *a si* 'it is' or *ka si* 'I am' are apparently the Lai copula. The verb particles *ka* and *a* mark agreement of a finite verb with its subject, respectively first and third person singular.<sup>2</sup> The construction in (1) is impersonal, with the complement marked for subject agreement, while that in (2) is personal, with the copula marked for subject agreement. There is a difference in meaning, whereby the subject is contrasted or emphasized in (2).

We take the structure of (1) to be as in (i).

(i)



<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Samuel Ngun Ling for teaching me what I know about Lai, and to Albert Ceuhlun, Kenneth Van Bik, Antony Ngun Uk and F. K. Lehman for discussion of some of the examples in the preliminary version of this paper.

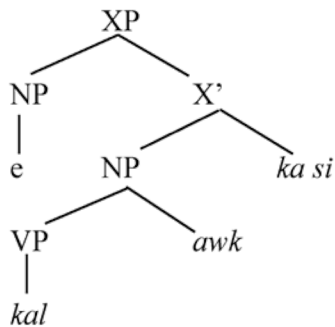
<sup>2</sup> For fuller discussion of the system of agreement in Lai, see Bedell 1998.

Mark Alves, Paul Sidwell & David Gil, eds. *SEALSVIII: papers from the 8th meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society* (1998). Canberra, Pacific Linguistics, 2007, pp.11-24.

In (i), *awk* is the head noun of a predicate noun phrase which also contains a sentential complement. Like other nouns, *awk* cannot be marked for tense/aspect or agreement and such markers appear on the copula *si*.

Similarly, we take the structure of (2) to be as in (ii).

(ii)



The difference between (i) and (ii) is that in the latter, the complement of *awk* is a VP rather than an XP. The semantic subject of *kal* in (ii) must be interpreted to be the subject of *awk*; this presumably characterizes the VP complement structure.<sup>3</sup> In (i), where *kal* has its own independent subject, the subject of *awk* must be interpreted as non-referential.

*Awk* appears in a distinct construction, illustrated by (3) and (4), where it seems to lack the meaning of obligation.<sup>4</sup>

(3) *Kal awkah ka trih.*

(4) *Kal awk ka trih.*  
'I am afraid to go.'

In these sentences, the main predicate is the verb *trih* 'be afraid' and the noun phrase headed by *awk* is a complement to it. (3) differs from (4) in the presence of the postposition *ah*, which cannot be used when *awk* is the main predicate.<sup>5</sup> Thus (5) and (6) are ungrammatical as compared with (1) and (2).

<sup>3</sup> Sentences like (2) represent a case of the clitic climbing construction as discussed in Bedell 1996a.

<sup>4</sup> Some may wish to say on semantic grounds that the *awk* in (1) and (2) is a different word from the *awk* in (3) and (4). Our position is that they are the same word, interpreted differently according to the syntactic context. The situation may be compared to English sentences like the following.

(a) John is to go.

(b) John is afraid to go.

In (a) there is a meaning associated with the infinitive which is not present in (b). English has no counterpart of Lai *awk* here, but we think it undesirable to identify the meaning in question with the copula *be* or the infinitive marker *to*. Whether *awk* is one word or two has little bearing on the issues raised here.

<sup>5</sup> The postposition *ah* is written as a suffix to certain words, including *awk* in our examples. It is however separable (see for example sentence (76) below) and syntactically a postposition.

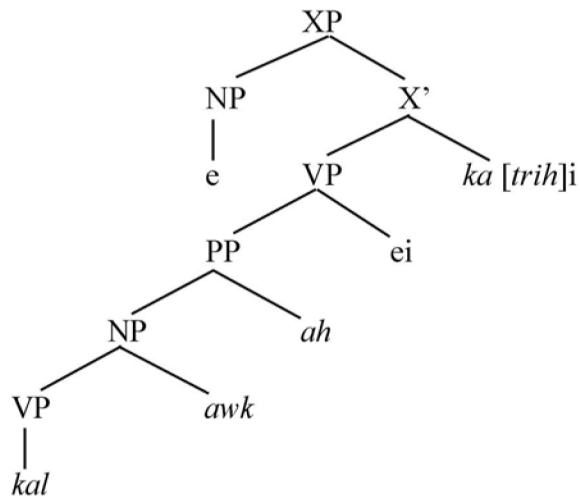
(5) \**Ka kal awkah a si.*

(6) \**Kal awkah ka si.*

The possibility of *ah* provides additional evidence for the nominal nature of *awk*, since the complement of a postposition is typically a noun phrase.

We take the structure of (3) to be as in (iii).

(iii)



The noun phrase *kal awk* in (iii) is syntactically identical to that in (ii); since *awk* is not a predicate in (iii) it has no subject associated with it, and its subject is interpreted to be the subject of the main verb *trih*. The structure of (4) is the same as (iii), except that no postpositional phrase (and therefore no postposition *ah*) is present; here the complement of *trih* is a noun phrase.

The construction in (3) and (4) differs from (1) and (2) in a second respect: there is no impersonal variant. Sentences (7) and (8) are grammatical, but interpreted as having two distinct referential subjects, one for *kal* and one for *trih*.

(7) *Ka kal awkah a trih.*

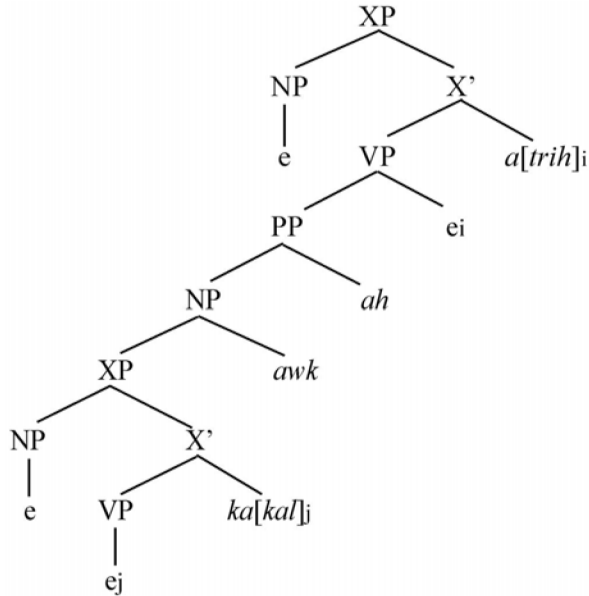
(8) *Ka kal awk a trih.*

‘He/she is afraid I will go.’

This is clearly necessary, since unlike the copula *si*, *trih* is an independent predicate and must have a referential subject.

We take the structure of (7) to be as in (vii).

(vii)



In (vii), the noun phrase *ka kal awk* is syntactically identical to that in (i); as with (4), the structure of (8) differs from (vii) in the absence of PP over it.

In sentences (1) through (8), the verb *kal* of the complement is intransitive. But transitive verbs may equally appear in this position, as illustrated in (9) to (16) for *awk* as a predicate.

- (9) *Kan chawnh awk a si.*  
 (10) *In chawnh awk ka si.*  
 (11) *Ka chawnh awk na si.*  
 (12) *Chawnh awk kan si.*  
 ‘I must speak to you.’

- (13) *Na ka bawmh awk a si.*  
 (14) \**Ka bawmh awk na si.*  
 (15) *Na bawmh awk ka si.*  
 (16) *Bawmh awk na ka si.*  
 ‘You must help me.’

(9) through (16) are parallel to (1) and (2) except that the verbs *chawnh* ‘speak’ and *bawmh* ‘help’ take an object in addition to a subject.

(9) and (13) are impersonal, with the complement verb marked for both subject and object agreement. *Kan* marks a first person singular subject simultaneously with a second person singular object. *Na* marks a second person singular subject and *ka* a first person singular object; in this case the two arguments are marked independently.<sup>6</sup> As shown by (10), (11) and (15) either the subject or object may appear as the subject of the copula in the personal construction. As in the case of (1) versus (2), these choices signal differences in contrast or emphasis. The ungrammaticality of (14) follows from the interpretation of *ka*

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 2.