THE SYNTAX OF DEIXIS IN LAI

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Lai has a set of four deictic particles:

- **hi**: this, near me 485
- **kha**: that, near you 973
- **khi**: that, over there (visible) 43
- **cu**: that, over there (not visible) 1994

A rough characterization of their meaning\(^2\) is given, together with a count of tokens of each in a Lai text\(^3\) of substantial length. Our task in this paper is to explore the syntactic contexts in which they are found.

The most frequent context in which a deictic particle is found is following a noun phrase. Examples (1) to (6) illustrate the simplest type of noun phrase, consisting of a single noun.

(1) **mi hi**
    ‘these people’ (14: 15; 22: 23)

(2) **mi kha**
    ‘people’ (6: 2, 3; 9: 25, 32; 10: 21; 14: 23; 23: 13; 27: 64)

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2 These meanings follow Barnes (1998). As he shows, the deictic particles may function to contrast things referred to in a discourse, or to relate them to the speech context. Though his discussion leaves some unanswered questions, we do not attempt to pursue semantic or pragmatic issues further here.

3 This paper is based on an examination of the distribution of deictic particles in the Lai translation of the gospel according to Matthew, in *Lai Baibal Thiang*, 1978. Examples accompanied by a chapter and verse citation (the great majority) are taken from that text. It would be preferable to base such studies as this on original Lai texts rather than translations; at the present time, the Bible is the only extended text which is both carefully prepared and readily available. We include detailed counts of the occurrences of deictic particles in this text for those who may be interested, but attach no great significance to them.
(3) \textit{mi cu}  
‘people’ (3: 5; 12: 12; 14: 19; 15: 11, 18)

(4) \textit{vawlei hi}  
‘the world’ (13: 38)

(5) \textit{vawlei kha}  
‘soil’ (13: 5; 27: 51)

(6) \textit{vawlei cu}  
‘the earth’ (5: 35)

Two Lai nouns are illustrated: \textit{mi} ‘person, human being’, and \textit{vawlei} ‘soil, ground, the earth, the world’. The English glosses given reflect the original context of each example (when an example occurs more than once the first cited is used). Lai noun phrases may be marked for plural number (see examples (19) or (20) below), but such marking is optional. Thus (1) to (3) are clearly plural in context. Lai noun phrases are not marked for definiteness, and may be understood either as definite or indefinite depending on context.

There is a sense, however, in which the final deictic particle plays a syntactic role similar to that of articles in English. It serves to close off the syntactic expansion of a noun phrase.\textsuperscript{4} Since Lai is a consistent head final language, it seems reasonable in the context of X’ Theory to assume that a deictic particle in noun phrase final position is a syntactic head which combines with an NP complement.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\hline
\text{NP} & \text{hi}
\end{array}
\]

The category D to which the deictic particles belong is called ‘determiner’ in English, where it includes articles and demonstratives, and perhaps also the genitive suffix. As noted above, Lai has no articles and the genitive construction usually has no suffix. This in Lai it may be that D represents ‘deictic’, and its projection DP ‘deictic phrase’.

Lai deictic particles occur in a variant form in the kinds of phrases illustrated in (7) to (11).

(7) \textit{mi nih hin}  
‘a person’ (16: 26)

(8) \textit{mi nih khan}  
‘people’ (9: 8; 21: 10)

\textsuperscript{4} In Van Bik (1996), the English definite article ‘the’ is glossed as \textit{cu} or \textit{kha}. 

(9) vawlei ah hin
‘on earth’ (6: 19)

(10) vawlei ah khan
‘on the ground’ (15: 35)

(11) vawlei ah khin
‘to the ground’ (4: 6)

That is, when the words nih or ah intervene between a noun phrase and a deictic particle, the latter acquires a suffix -n. Ah corresponds to English ‘in’ or ‘to’; i.e. to a locative or directional preposition. As a head final language, Lai should have postpositions rather than prepositions, and we take ah to belong to the category P. Nih is regarded by Barnes (1998) and elsewhere in the literature as the Lai ergative case marker. But ‘case marker’ seems to be a functional rather than a syntactic category; we assume that it too is a P.5

Compared to Lai, English has a semantically rich set of Ps, and therefore English prepositions often correspond to a more complex Lai structure, as illustrated in (12) and (13).

(12) vawlei cungah hin
‘on this earth’ (6: 10; 9: 6; 18: 7; 23: 9)

(13) vawlei cungah cun
‘on the earth’ (20: 25)

The word cung ‘top’ is a noun referring to a spatial relation; the noun vawlei in turn modifies cung. This is a Lai genitive construction, and these phrases might be more literally glossed as ‘on top of’. Lai has a set of ‘relational nouns’ like cung which correspond to much of the semantic content of English prepositions.

There are cases in which the suffixed form of a Lai deictic particle directly follows a noun phrase and no postposition appears.

(14) inn cun
‘from the house’ (13: 1)

(15) tlang cung khan
‘from on the mountain’ (8: 1)

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5 One of the functions of Ps (whether prepositions or postpositions) is to case mark a complement NP. Thus there may be no essential incompatibility between the two analyses. However, since nih is used with the agent phrase in passive sentences (see Bedell 1996), and can be used with objects in some causative sentences (see Bedell 1997), it cannot be considered an ergative marker in any straightforward sense.
Lai has a postposition *in* which contrasts with *ah* as a directional; it corresponds to the English preposition ‘from’. Phrases like (14) and (15) invariably express an ablative meaning; if the deictic particle is removed, *in* will appear as in (16).

(16) *inn in*

*tlang cungin*

This suggests that the suffix -n which appears in *hin, khan, khin* and *cun* in (7) through (13) originated as the postposition *in* suffixed to a deictic particle, and has been grammaticalized in current Lai. It also suggests a shift in the order of the D and P.

It seems, then that Lai differs from English in the hierarchical relation between the projections of D and P. Lai phrases like (10) or (11) correspond to what would be in English ‘*the on ground’ or ‘*the to ground’.

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      DP
     /\  
    PP / hin
   /\  
  NP /   ah
```

A count of deictic particles which follow postpositions in our text (including cases like (14) and (15) where no overt postposition appears) is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deictic Particle</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>hin</em></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>khan</em></td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>khin</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cun</em></td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These were included in the overall count given at the outset; from a quarter to a half of all occurrences of deictic particles are of this type.

In addition to their DP final position, deictic particles also appear preceding NPs and PPs, as in (17) and (18).

(17) *hi mi hi*

‘this person’ (27: 54)

(18) *cu thil cu*

‘those things’ (18: 17, 31)

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6 Lai has at least one other postposition: comitative *he* ‘with’. In Van Bik (1996), English ‘herewith’ is glossed *hi ca he hin*, and ‘therewith’ as *cu he cun*. These are to be compared with examples like (20), (38) or (40) below. The word *ca* ‘letter’ in the former is a head noun.