

GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN LAI¹

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Lai has a set of pronominal particles, shown in (1), which accompany nouns and mark agreement with a preceding noun phrase.

(1)		singular	plural
	1st person	<i>ka</i>	<i>kan</i>
	2nd person	<i>na</i>	<i>nan</i>
	3rd person	<i>a</i>	<i>an</i>

These pronominal particles appear identical to the set of pro-nominal particles which accompany verbs and mark agreement with the subject.² The second and third person plural pronominal particles are illustrated in (2) and (3) accompanying a noun, and in (4) and (5) accompanying a verb.

(2) *an zal chung khan* ‘out of their bags’ (2:11)

(3) *nan zal ah* ‘in your bags’ (10: 9)

(4) *annah an kal hnuah* ‘after they went’ (2:13)

(5) *nan kal* ‘you go’ (23:15)

Such parallelism between noun phrases and clauses is not uncommon in the languages of the world; the question naturally arises as to what accounts for it.

One possibility often suggested is a parallelism in the overall syntactic organization of clauses and noun phrases. It has been argued in earlier work that subject-verb agreement markers in Lai are the syntactic heads of clauses, and the verb is attached to them, as illustrated in (v).³

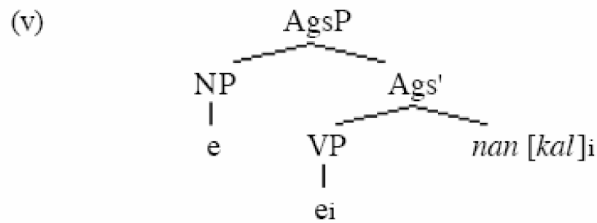
¹ Lai (often called (Hakha) Chin) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken primarily in central Chin State, Myanmar. The examples accompanied by a chapter and verse notation are taken from the Gospel according to Matthew in the 1999 Lai Bible. I am grateful to Kenneth Van Bik and Stephen Hre Kio for assistance with some points of Lai grammar.

² See Bedell (1995) for a discussion of subject-verb agreement in Lai.

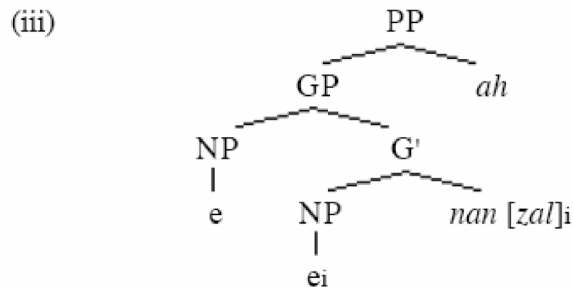
³ See the papers cited in Bedell (1999) and (2000).

Ratree Wayland, John Hartmann & Paul Sidwell, eds. *SEALSXII: papers from the 12th meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society* (2002). Canberra, Pacific Linguistics, 2007, pp.9-21.

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If phrases like (2) and (3) are parallel to those like (4) and (5), the structure of (3) might be as in (iii).



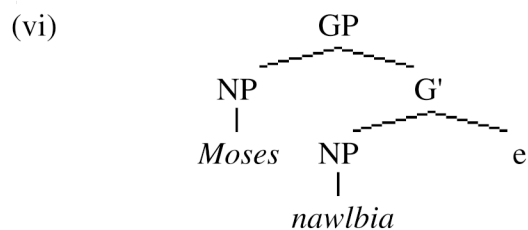
The empty NP in (v) occupies the subject position, and is understood as second person plural. The first empty NP in (iii) occupies the corresponding position; it too is understood as second person plural. *Nan* in (v) belongs to the category Ags (Subject Agreement), which is the head of this clause structure; Ags and AgsP appear as I and IP (where I represents the more general Inflection) in some versions of this terminology. *Nan* in (iii) belongs to the category G (Genitive); it too is the head of the given structure. In some versions of this terminology used for the discussion of English, G and GP appear as D and DP (where D represents the more general Determiner). In Lai, as will be argued below, the projection of G represented in (ii) is distinct from that headed by deictic elements. The meaning expressed by the pronominal particles in examples like (2) and (3) is possession, but the syntactic structure in (iii) is by no means restricted to possession. In its semantic variability also, that position resembles the subject position of a clause as in (v). The term ‘genitive’ will be used in general for the construction in (iii), to emphasize its syntactic nature, and the empty NP in (ii) will be said to occupy the genitive position.

In (6) and (7), the genitive position is filled with a noun phrase.

(6) *Moses nawlbia* ‘the law of Moses’ (7:12)

(7) *profet hna cawnpiaknak* ‘the teachings of the prophets’ (7:12)

That is, the structure of (6) is something like (vi).



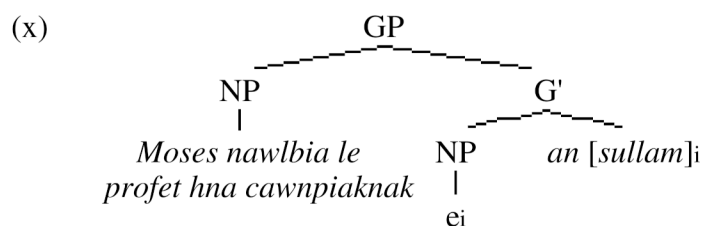
Thus (6) and (7) have a different structure than the semantically parallel (8) and (9).

(8) *a nawlbia* ‘his law’

(9) *an cawnpiaknak* ‘their teachings’

Particles like *a* and *an* have very different syntactic properties from noun phrases like *Moses* and *profet hna* ‘the prophets’. The difference is clear in examples where both a particle and a noun phrase co-occur, as in (10).

(10) *Moses nawlbia le profet hna cawnpiaknak an sullam* (7:12)
 ‘the meaning of the law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets’



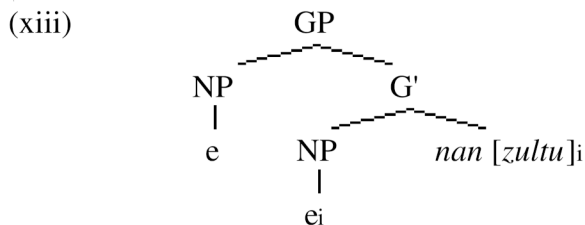
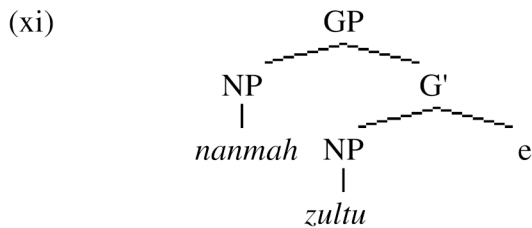
Pronouns represent a special case of noun phrases, and they may appear in the genitive position, as in (11) and (12).

(11) *nanmah zultu* ‘your disciple(s)’ (12:27)

(12) *anmah zultu tlawmpal hna* ‘a few of their disciples’ (22:16)

The structure of (11) is parallel to (vi), and quite different from that of (13) parallel to (iii), despite their similarity in meaning.

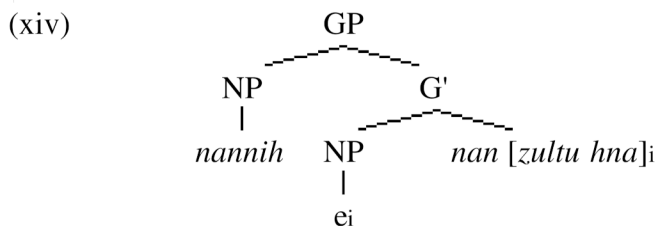
(13) *nan zultu* ‘your disciple(s)’



Again, this is clear from examples like (14) in which a pronoun in the genitive position and the corresponding pronominal particle co-occur.

(14) *nannah nan zultu hna* ‘your disciples’ (12:27)

The structure of (14) is parallel to (x).



An additional argument showing clearly the distinct syntactic status of genitive particles and noun phrases, even though they are usually adjacent as in (10) or (14), comes from conjunction. Phrases like (15) are potentially ambiguous.

(15) *Uk Ceu le keimah pa* ‘Uk Ceu’s and my father’
 ‘Uk Ceu and my father’

In the first reading, the conjunction involves Uk Ceu and keimah ‘I’; the structure will be as in (xv).

