

LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC CAUSATIVES IN LAI¹

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Lai has two types of causative construction, as illustrated by examples (1) and (2).²

- (1) *Ni Hu nih lo a khangh.*
'Ni Hu set fire to the field.'

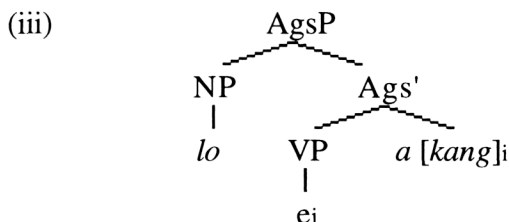
- (2) *Ni Hu nih lo a kanghter.*
'Ni Hu made/let the field burn.'

The construction in (1) we will call the 'lexical' causative, and that in (2) the 'syntactic' causative. Both appear semantically causative with respect to a sentence like (3).

- (3) *Lo a kang.* 'The field burned.'

But (1) and (2) do not have the same meaning. (1) is a statement of direct causation; in this sentence, Ni Hu personally and deliberately set the fire. (2) by contrast covers a variety of indirect causation types. Thus if Ni Hu accidentally set the fire, asked someone else to set the fire, or if lightning caused the fire and Ni Hu merely failed to put it out, (2) would be an appropriate report, but not (1).

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

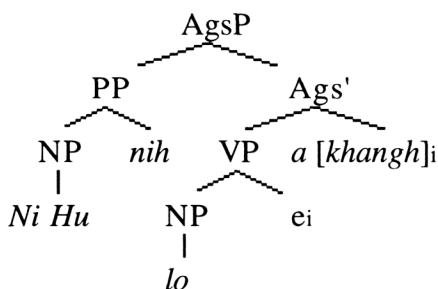


That is, the word (or perhaps prefix) *a* in (3) is a subject agree-

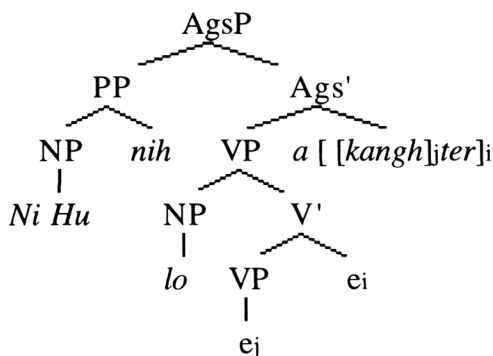
ment marker which is the syntactic head of a Lai finite clause. In this sentence it agrees in person and number (third singular) with the subject *lo* 'field'. The intransitive verb *kang* 'burn' is attached to the head *a*, and co-indexed with its 'original' position, head of the verbal predicate (VP).³

We take the corresponding syntactic structures of (1) and (2) to be something like (i) and (ii) respectively.

(i)



(ii)



(i) differs from (iii) in containing the transitive verb *khangh* 'set fire to' in place of the intransitive *kang*. In (1), *a* thus shows agreement not with *lo*, which is the object, but with *Ni Hu nih*, the subject of the sentence. In Lai transitive sentences the subject is accompanied by the postposition *nih* 'by', while the object, like the subject of an intransitive sentence, is not. Transitive sentences like (1) show the same attachment of the verb to the agreement marker as intransitive sentences like (3). In (ii), there is an additional syntactic level not present in (iii) or (i). The suffix *-ter* 'make/let', like *khangh*, is syntactically a transitive verb, co-indexed with the head position of a second VP. Here the verb *kangh* 'burn' is attached to *-ter*, and the result

kanghter 'make/let burn' in turn attached to *a*. In (2) as in (1), *a* shows agreement with *Ni Hu nih* and not with *lo*.⁴

There is a morphological relation between the verb *khangh* in (1) and *kangh* in (2), which is realized as aspiration of the initial velar stop versus its absence. But not every Lai verb has a corresponding direct causative analogous to *khangh* in relation to *kangh*. Of those that do, there are other phonological differences between the related verbs. And the exact difference in meaning may vary. This morphological relation has no syntactic reflection; so far as the syntax is concerned, *khangh* and *kangh* are simply different verbs, and their relation to one another (including their meaning) is to be described as part of the morphological apparatus in the lexicon. Some verbs come in pairs of this sort, and others do not, idiosyncratically. Lai speakers must learn each independently. By contrast, the relationship between *kanghter* and *kangh* is both productive and regular: virtually any Lai verb, whether transitive or intransitive, may be suffixed with *-ter*, and the meaning of the resulting compound is predictable from the meaning of the base verb. This does not mean that the suffixation of *-ter* is not also a morphological process; in fact we assume that it is. But the resulting verb *kanghter* differs from *khangh* in the syntactic positions in which it may appear: in particular it requires a double predicate of the sort illustrated in (ii), and could not replace *khangh* in (i). By the same token, *khangh* could not replace *kanghter* in (ii).

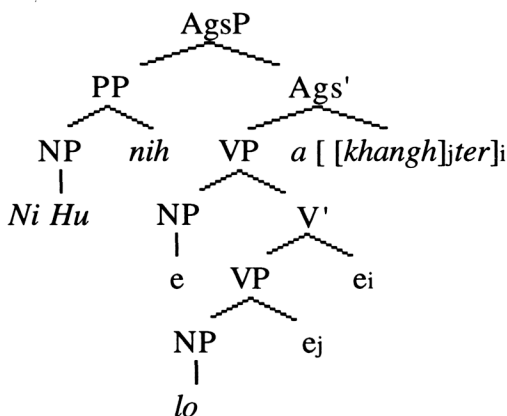
It is possible to have both types of causative in a single sentence, as in (4).

- (4) *Ni Hu nih lo a khanghter.*
'Ni Hu made/let him/her set fire to the field.'

In (4) as in (1) and (2), *a* marks agreement with the subject *Ni Hu nih*, and the sentence is transitive, so that *nih* is required. But unlike (1) or (2), (4) implies the involvement of a second, unmentioned person. In (1) and (2), *Ni Hu* is the agent of burning the field, but in (4) the other person is understood to have this role. *Ni Hu* is rather the agent of another act: causing this person to burn the field. Furthermore the general meaning of this expanded agency resembles that in (2) rather than that in (1) in covering indirect as well as direct causation. The structure given in (iv) represents a combination of those in (i) and (ii); it

differs from (ii) in that the transitive structure of (i) replaces the intransitive structure of (iii) as the complement of the causative verb (or suffix) *-ter*. In (iv), the empty NP represents the unmentioned person, which serves as the subject of the verb *khangh*.

(iv)



It is quite possible to mention the covert person in sentence (4): the 'causee' as it is often called. In (5) this person is identified as *Ceu Mang*.

- (5) *Ni Hu nih Ceu Mang lo a khanghter.*
'Ni Hu made/let *Ceu Mang* set fire to the field.'

In case the causee is non-third person, an overt object agreement marker is required, and the corresponding pronoun generally not present. In sentence (6) this agreement marker is *ka*.

- (6) *Ni Hu nih lo a ka khanghter.*
'Ni Hu made/let me set fire to the field.'

In general the agreement system for causees in sentences like (4) in which a transitive verb appears with *-ter* is identical to the system of object agreement with any transitive verb. It is not apparent in (4) or (5) because there is no overt agreement with third person singular objects. The syntactic structure of (6) will thus be something like (vi). Here we have to distinguish the object agreement marker (Ago) and its projections from the subject agreement marker (Ags) and its projections. The empty NPs in (vi) must be first person singular; in a suitably contrastive context the pronoun *keimah* 'I' could be located in the higher one.