LAO FINAL PARTICLES

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Lao has a wealth of final particles. They are one-syllable words which usually occur utterance finally but some may occur alone and a few combinations occur quite often. They seem to function in three ways: as question words, imperative words, or words of special emphasis. They may indicate something about the speaker's feelings or attitude or something about the relationship between two speakers.

Lao is comprised of many dialects. The discussion here is based on the speech of Vientiane, although there is variation among individuals as well as variation from one part of the city to another.

Phonologically the final particles differ somewhat from words in other grammatical categories. Although some follow expected phonological rules of Lao, most of them have variants of different tone and vowel length depending on emphasis or nuance of meaning. Usually there is a short, high variant contrasting with a long, high, rising-falling variant. In general, the long variant is sweeter, more beseeching, softer, or less abrupt. Since some final particles have tones on a pitch or contour not usually found in other Lao words, it is difficult to write them in Lao and know exactly what tone is intended. Although their meanings are sometimes elusive and they are subject to individual variation, the final particles are essential for competence in spoken Lao. In general, these particles are acceptable on all but the most formal speech occasions. Although the number of final particles is certainly not endless, I doubt if the following list is complete.

The transcription makes use of the following inventory. Vowels are doubled when long.
1 bô, bôô This is usually considered the "yes-no" question word rather than a final particle. It may be considered neutral as to attitude or emphasis.

lāaw sê paj bôô 'Is he going?'

2 bôô \(\uparrow\) 454 When said with this tone, the question word signals doubt. The speaker can hardly believe it.

lāaw sê paj bôô \(\uparrow\) 454 'Is he going? (I doubt it.)'

3 bôô When said alone, this means something like 'Oh, I see, is that so?'. The speaker shows he has heard what has been said.

lāaw sê paj bôô? '(You said) he is going?'

4 bôô This is probably a contraction of 'bôô huô' 'don't know'.

lāaw paj sâj bôô? 'Where he went, I don't know.'

5 dáj This serves to contradict a statement or action.

lāaw paj dáj 'He did go too!'

kin dáj '(That's for you!) Eat it!'

6 dé-dee \(\uparrow\) 454 As a question particle, this means 'and...? , what
about...?, how about...?'
1 Iâaw sì paj, câw dê 'He's going; how about you?' It is also used with the meaning 'let me remind you that..., understand that...'.
Iâaw bôô paj dê 'He didn't go, (you know).'
7 dê-dê, mê-nê As a question particle, this means 'who all, what all, etc.'.
mî phôj dê 'Who all is there?'
sâj nôg dê 'What all do you put in?'
It is also used in polite requests.
kôôl nâmtaân dê 'May I have some sugar?'
ât patuô hâj dê 'Please close the door.'
8 dê-dêe ◊ 454 This is used with expressions of encouragement, pardon, warning and others to emphasise the sincerity of the statement, or to be sure one is heard.
sôôk dî dêe ◊ 454 'Good luck, now!'
paj dê '(I'm) going, you hear?'
9 dôôk This means 'absolutely, indeed, on the contrary'.
bôô mî dôôk 'There isn't any, absolutely.'
paj jûu dôôk 'Oh, indeed I am going!'
10 hû-hûy ◊ 454 Alone this indicates puzzlement or wonder. As a question particle, it means 'I wonder, can you tell me'.
Iâaw paj sâj hû 'I (I wonder, do you know) where he went?'
11 kô?, kô-kô? This is a question particle used to ask that a previous statement be repeated.
an dêj kô? 'What did you say (again)?'
Iâaw paj sâj kô? 'Where is it (you said) he went?'
12 kô-kôc ◊ 454 This is used to remind, turn the attention to something or bring up a previously mentioned subject.
kên khôw jûu kô 'We were eating (you see)...'
lûôj pûm kô 'Ok, about the book...'
13 ôô This usually follows a "yes-no" question and demands a definite answer.
Iâaw paj méên bôô ôô 'He went. Am I right or not?'
câw sì paj bôô ôô 'Well, are you going or not?'
14 mé, mê-mê ◊ 454 This is a request particle meaning 'go ahead with with it, don't hesitate'. It is used when the speaker urges someone to do something he wants to do but is afraid to or dares not to.
paj mê 'Go ahead go (I think you should)!'
15 ná This introduces a new subject or draws someone's attention.
sáán ná ¡éaw sí paj bó? 'In that case then, is he going?'
ná'í ná ców sí paj bó? 'Say, are you going?'

16 náa ¡ 454 This can be used to plead or beseech. It is also used
when making excuses or giving explanations.
paj náa ¡ 454, bôsí don náa ¡ 454 'Oh please come along; it won't
take that long!'
fôn tôk náa ¡ 454, cýn màa sà 'It was raining so of course I was
late.'

It may indicate that the speaker has not been immediately understood.
phũú nán náa ¡ 454, phũú suông suông náa ¡ 454 'That one, the tall
one, (don't you see!)

17 ná?–ná, ná?–ná This is sometimes used alone to indicate agreement
with what has been said, such as when something is said and one says
'Isn't it the truth!'. As a question particle, it requests agreement.
paj ná? 'Let's go all right?'
méên ná? 'That's right, huh?'

18 ná–náa ¡ 454 This means 'I wonder' and is used when asking oneself
especially after having forgotten.
láaw paj sáj náa ¡ 454 'I wonder where (he said) he was going?'

19 sá–sáa ¡ 454 This is a request particle meaning 'let it be done
or decided'. The longer variant is often used to plead. The short
variant may sound curt or impatient depending on the situation.
paj sá 'Leave!'

'Go ahead and leave. (You don't have to stay.)'
jũú sáa ¡ 454 'Oh, please stay!'

20 thá? This is a request particle meaning 'let's...'.
paj thá? 'Let's go!'

21 tĬ This is used like No. 3 'bó?' to show one has heard what has
been said.
láaw sí paj tĬ 'He's going, (you say).'

22 tĬ–tĬ– ¡ 454 This means 'surely, quite sure' but always indi-
cates some reservation or slight doubt or uncertainty.
paj tĬ 'Sure, let's go, why not. (In response to the question:
"Shall we go?")'

láaw sí paj tĬ 'He's going I'm quite sure.'
láaw sí paj tĬ– ¡ 454 'Of course he's going.'

23 tûá–tûá ¡ 454 This is a question particle meaning 'of course?'.
láaw sí paj tûá 'He's going of course?'