ON THE SO-CALLED NOMINALIZER NAAK IN LAI (HAKHA) CHIN, WITH REMARKS UPON ITS OTHER FUNCTIONS IN CHIN LANGUAGES AND ETYMOLOGY

F. K. Lehman (F. K. L. Chit Hlaing) & Ceu Hlnu
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
<fk-lehman@uiuc.edu>

1 Introduction, the Standard Treatment of naak in Lai
In the grammatical literature on Lai Chin up till now, the suffix naak has been considered as a nominalizing suffix on verbs. For example, in much Christian literature, such as Bible translation, where the function of abstract nominalization seems to be a relatively recent extension of its more basic and traditional use. Thus,

1. ńht naak kʌ-duh lo
    sit 1sg want neg
I don’t want to sit/sitting.

In fact, however, when naak is suffixed, as in thut-naak, the sense is more ordinarily a locative or instrumental or other ‘argumentative’ nominalization. The abstract nominalization function appears then to be an extension of this other nominalization function, and we need to consider the question how it came about. Note that the Stem of a verb to which naak is suffixed is already Stem II. For example, dawnaak, ‘love’ (cf. daw ‘to love’). Stem II, (see Lehman 1996 and to appear) we have shown to be the perfective stem, i.e., already, in itself, ‘nominal’, more precisely gerundive—infinitival.

2 Daai and Cho (Southern) Chin Cognates of Lai naak
How did this extension of function arise? To see the answer, we need to start by examining the results of an interesting paper by Helga Hartmann (2000) on its cognate in the Southern Chin language, Daai (and in the closely related Cho, on which one of us, Lehman, has also worked). In Daai the cognate is itself a verb, with the usual Chin system of stem alternation (na~naak). It can be suffixed to nouns or verbs with what turns out to be an applicative sense, for example, with the noun ‘wife’ kkhyu.

2. ńkhyu-naak vai ni
    1sg-2sg wife-take must !
I must take you to wife.

Or, consider the adjectival verb ‘pleasant’, phyah/phya. It can be ‘transitivized’ by prefixing the root with k-, which is then obligatorily suffixed by naak, giving the sense of ‘love’.

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3. kah-kphya-naak ni  
   1sg pleasant-!  
   I love her indeed!

   We do not propose to go in to all the material on Daai from Hartmann’s paper, but notice that this same function also gives nouns from verbs, as when the verb ngthei, ‘to learn’ is suffixed, giving ngtheinaak, ‘lesson’. Moreover, it is also the case here that the nominalization often, as in Lai, has a more particular sense rather than purely abstract nominalization, as when the noun anghmiüpnaak, means ‘a place of darkness’ (from anghmiüp, ‘dark’). Note that if, for instance, such an expression is in a participial subordinate clause, naak takes the stem alternation form na, as in

4. nu noh pyen na lü ah-ngsuh püü  
   mother Erg scolded part 3sg quarrel part.  
   Mother having scolded [her], quarreled with her.  
   Mother scolded her and quarreled with her.

   And this is the evidence for the claim that in this language naak is indeed a full verb.

   Now, for various reasons, it seems that the Daai/Cho naak has to be treated as an ‘applicative’ verb, i.e., a verb which takes as its argument a verb or noun and produces a derived sense that ‘applies’ the argument to the base. So (2) amounts to ‘to take someone to wife’; (3) amounts to ‘to find her pleasing’, and anghmiüpnaak amounts to ‘applying darkness to some place or other. Moreover, the essentially applicative nature of naak is clearly seen in its use with nouns such as ‘heart’, mlung, where mlungnaak means precisely ‘take to heart’.

3 Lai and Central Chin nak/na as a Verb Suffix and as a Complementizer

Now, from this vantage point of comparison we can look again at the Lai use of naak.

Central—Northern Chin: takes either stem of Proto-Chin naak(k) into a stem-invariant transitive applicative; Mizo takes I, Lai takes II. As we know, for any transitive verb in these languages the ‘primary’ stem is ambiguous. On the one hand, the etymological stem is II, and arguments from clauses relativizing an object show that semantically the underlying stem is I, which serves as a stative adjectival verb. But it is II that is on the surface the primary stem, the stem used for ordinary, default declarative finite clauses.

3.1 In Lai
(a) naak is easily seen to be an applicative element serving to mark a dependency between a clause and a pro (implicit?) nominal argument or adjunct thereof, and thus essentially serves as a Complementizer, C of CP (cf. de of Chinese and i, in Burmese relative constructions). C in languages of all sorts often use other parts of speech—prepositions like for, Chinese de (‘of’, ‘s) or the i. of Burmese; that in English (demonstrative), and so on. Of course, it is no great leap from applicative verb, which is an application of a verb to an adjunct or argument DP of its clause, i.e., making the clause a dependent of the head DP, to a more general, grammaticalized affix of dependency.

(b) In Lai naak serves also as a valence-changing applicative verbal suffix proper, and unlike the Daai/Cho (co)verb, it cannot attach to nouns, only to verbs. This no doubt
was its first grammaticalization in the development in Lai and other Central Chin languages from the situation still represented in Southern Chin. Thus,

5. mah mawtaw kha Chicago-ah ka kalnaak cang that car that to lsg.go perf
I have taken that car to go to Chicago.

6. mah fung khan ar ka-thah that stick that-obl chicken lsg.kill
I killed the chicken with that stick.

6'. mah fung kha ar ka-thahnaak
I ‘took and killed’ the chicken with the stick.
(I took the stick to kill the chicken.)

Note here that in (6) fung (stick) is an adjunct, as seen by the oblique inflection of the demonstrative; in (6’) it is an argument, which is what we mean by saying that the co-verb naak changes the valence of even the transitive verb thah (to kill). Note also that naak is invariant as to the verb stem it attaches to, regardless of valence-changing, even though, in general, changing the argument structure of a verb (especially a transitive verb) results in a change from Stem I to Stem II.

7. mah fung kha ar ka thahnaak tik-ah
when I take and kill a chicken ...

Note also that the place where naak in Lai has previously been treated as just a ‘nominalizer’, it is indeed a variety of dependency marker/complimentizer, and that in such cases in fact the affixation even to an intransitive verb does not actually change its valence or argument structure. Thus, consider

8. a kal-naak
lsg go –

Depending upon discourse context this can mean, for instance,

8’. the ‘time’ of his going

(essentially application of the act of going to a particular time/event—a pseudo event-nominalization, perhaps; or, more usually

8”. his goal-object of going

We generalize this as follows, keeping in mind that this language is a Free Empty Category language in the sense of Yan Huang (2000), namely, that the default, non-focus/non-contrastive form of a pronoun (see now Ceu Hlun, this volume) is zero-form or pro, and that ‘one/it’ is almost never focused, even in English.
9. \[ a- [[kak][IP naak][CP] pro][DP] \]

where \(pro\) is to be understood or imagined with the verb, in this case with \(kal\), ‘to go’. Hence it means, in generalized form, ‘his “one” of going’.

So much for \(naak\) being a ‘nominalizing particle’, and we easily see that the first element, clitic \(a\)- (third person singular agreement form) is not the subject agreement here at all, in as much as it need not be used here at all. For, \(kal-naak\) all alone can mean ‘going’ in the sense of anyone’s ‘time/goal/event of going’ (see now Bedell, this volume for the proper syntax of such clitic prefixes, which serve sometimes to mark argument agreement on finite verbs, sometimes as possessives (as in this instance).

4 Conclusions and Further Considerations

A number of remarks, observations, and questions remain. First of all it is clear that the road to the Lai use of \(naak\) has involved successive grammaticalization from a stage represented by the Daai/Cho \(nu/naak\). The earlier stage has to have been the conversion of this originally independent verb into a ‘particle’, an invariant form verbal applicative suffix that is essentially an argument valence changing particle. The second stage has been more recent and seems to have been its further conversion into a genitive-dependency particle (a ‘relativizer’) in Complementizer position, Lai showing both results today. In the latter function, note that there is no overt adjunct to refer to, and in particular this is so for the more recent use as a purely abstract nominalizer, applying to only the event referred to by the verb, whilst in the former function it applies the verb to a specifiable argument of that verb.

Demonstrating this direction of development is easy. It is the fact that, of the Daai/Chin verb’s two Stem forms, Central Chin languages have chosen, perhaps arbitrarily, one or the other for its invariant particle function: \(naak\) in Lai, \(na\) in Mizo and Laizo.

Note now that in its two functions in Lai, \(naak\) takes two distinct syntactic positions, and this is shown by the fact that the verb, in the first function, where \(naak\) seems directly suffixed to it, takes Stem I invariably, appropriately to its being used the verb of a declarative clause, whereas, when \(naak\) is a complementizer, the verb is a gerund and hence, appropriately, is in Stem II.

Then, it has to be pointed out that the category of ‘relativizer’ is of course not a true category of syntax. It is a species of complementizer. That some complementizers relate a clause/verb/predicate to a clausal head whilst others relate it to a nominal head is uncontroversial. And that complementizers with different such relational functions may employ elements from different ‘parts of speech’ is well attested. For instance, in English the that complementizer is clearly derived from the demonstrative ‘that’, and it relates a subordinate clause directly to a higher clause, though also relating a finite clause to a nominal head (I said that...The fact that...). With non-finite complement clauses one uses for clearly a preposition by origin (‘waiting for him to go…’); the preposition of is used if the head to which the clause is a complement is itself a nominal (the fact of his going).

So, that in Lai, that in the first instance a verbal derivational suffix goes on later to appear in Comp need not be surprising. Nor need one be surprised to find that in Lai different complementizers are used for, respectively, propositional complement clauses (\(tih\)—a \(kal tih\) an \(ti\) ‘They say that he is going’) and for non-gerundive relative clauses (mi ‘one’, otherwise a pronominal form—a-kal \(mi\) tlangoa ‘the young man that goes’).