THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF TRANSITIVIZATION IN LAI (HAKA CHIN)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper will present a description of the morphosyntax of transitivization in Lai (Haka Chin). In addition to some relatively unproductive relationships between intransitive and transitive stems reflecting historical causative morphology, there are two types of productive postverbal particle which add an argument to the valence of the verb they occur in conjunction with. One of these particle types is a straightforward causative. The other particles, which are quite copious in Lai, are markers of what have variously been called 'applicative', 'indirective', or 'advancement to object' constructions.

In the first section of the paper, I present some discussion of basic clausal relations in Lai which will be of use in interpreting the examples. Thereafter, I present the indicators of transitivization constructions, demonstrating their semantics. Then I briefly discuss their categorial status. Finally, I systematically examine the syntactic characteristics of objects in such constructions. The conclusion considers the similarities and differences between the causative construction and the applicative constructions, and briefly discusses the Lai system of applicatives in relation to those of other languages.

2.0. BASIC CLAUSAL RELATIONS

There are two aspects of Lai clause structure which must be understood from the outset in order to appreciate the effects of the language's postverbal transitivizing particles. First, Lai clauses show a split-ergative alignment. Second, Lai is what Dryer 1986 calls a 'primary object' language.

2.1. Split ergativity

The split ergativity of Lai clauses is manifested in two different ways.

In an intransitive clause, the single argument is unmarked, or occurs in conjunction with the demonstrative/discourse deictic *khaa*[1]:

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[1] *khaa* is basically a remote demonstrative, but it also functions as a discourse marker, indicating an entity which is known both to the speaker and his interlocutor (see Barnes, this issue). I refer to it and members of the same class of words as *discourse deictics*.

(1)   tsewmaŋ   (khaa)   ʔa-thii

       Tsewmang   DEIC   3S SUBJ-die$_1$

       'Tsewmang died.'

The ergative construction, exemplified in example (2),

(2)   tsewmaŋ=niʔ   thil   (khaa)   ʔa-baʔ

       Tsewmang=ERG   clothes   DEIC   3S SUBJ-hang.up$_2$

       'Tsewmang hung up the clothes.'

marks the agent with the clitic case particle =*niʔ*; the patient argument is either unmarked, or it occurs with the demonstrative/discourse deictic *khaa*.

    On the other hand, if the action is not completed or its completion is in question, transitive clauses may also exhibit a *non*-ergative construction:

(3)   tsewmaŋ   (khaa)   thil   ʔa-bat-laay

       Tsewmang   DEIC   clothes   3S SUBJ-hang.up$_1$-IRR

       'Tsewmang will hang up the clothes.'

(4)   tsewmaŋ   (khaa)   thil   ʔa-bat-moo

       Tsewmang   DEIC   clothes   3S SUBJ-hang.up$_1$-INTERR

       'Did Tsewmang hang up the clothes?'

(5)   tsewmaŋ   (khaa)   thil   ʔa-bat-law

       Tsewmang   DEIC   clothes   3S SUBJ-hang.up$_1$-NEG

       'Tsewmang did not hang up the clothes.'

where the agent and patient are both unmarked and the verb contains a different stem form.[2] The *agent* may, however, occur with *khaa* in this construction, while the patient may not. If *khaa* were positioned following the patient in examples (3), (4), or (5), the relationship understood between the two NPs would be that of possessor and possessee and not of subject and object; the subject in such case would be some unnamed third person.[3]

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[2]   Examples (3)-(5) may all occur with the ergative construction as well, with a difference, at least in some cases, in aspect.

[3]   It seems likely that the construction in examples 3-5 is historically primary, and that the ergative construction (and many of the corresponding verb stem alternations) arose from the *reanalysis of some kind of nominalization as a finite verb form. Sentences like 3-5, however,* are synchronically less frequent, and presumably do what we would expect of an antipassive: what would normally be expected to be an ergative subject is instead treated in the same way as the usual absolutive object. Discourse deictics like *khaa* gravitate towards the absolutive

When a clause is both affirmative and indicative, and its nominals display the ergative construction, what is here called 'Form II' of the verb occurs. Otherwise, 'Form I' is typically used. Thus, in example (2), which is affirmative, indicative, and displays the ergative construction, Form II is used, while in example (3), which does not have the ergative construction, Form I is used. In general, use of Form I corresponds to less transitive actions, while use of Form II corresponds to more transitive actions.[4]

A second way in which Lai's ergativity is split has to do with the morphology used to encode grammatical relations. As seen in the examples above, nominal marking shows an ergative pattern: the agents of transitives are marked in a special case, and patients of transitives and the single arguments of intransitives are treated in a different fashion (both unmarked).

Lai verbs, on the other hand, are preceded by a sequence of one or two agreement prefixes which exhibit a nominative-accusative pattern. Table 1 shows the elements in question. *A* refers to the agent argument associated with the prototypical transitive verb, *S* refers to the single argument associated with intransitive verbs, and *O* refers to the patient argument associated with prototypical transitive verbs.

	A/S	O	Reflexive object: $A_i\ O_i$
1s	ka-	-ka-	-a-
2s	na-	-ń- ~ -ʔin-	-a-
3s	ʔa-	-Ø-	-a-
1p	ka-n-	-ka-n-	-ʔii-
2p	na-n-	-ń-...-hnaa ~ -ʔin-...-hnaa	-ʔii-
3p	ʔa-n-	-Ø-...-hnaa	-ʔii-

Table 1. Verbal agreement markers.

The A/S markers for singulars are straightforward, as are the A/S markers for plurals, since the latter are simply a combination of the former and a plural element *-n-*. The marking of O is more complicated. The markers for O in the first person are the same as the markers for A and S. Third person O is zero-

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subject instead of the object. The objects in examples (3)-(5), however, are not clearly marked as oblique, which is the other typical concomitant of antipassives.

[4]   For a notionally intransitive verb, Form II occurs mostly in subordinate clauses. For example, Form II of the verb seen in example (1) would be used in a subordinate clause like *tsewmaŋ ʔa-thiʔ tsaa=ʔaʔ* . . . 'Because Tsewmang died . . .', or *tsewmaŋ ʔa-thiʔ tik=ʔaʔ* . . . 'When Tsewmang died . . .'. This is the other environment in which Form II consistently appears. Otherwise (see below), this form occurs with postverbal transitivizing particles.

marked, but in the third plural, a postverbal particle -*hnaa* indicates plurality of the object. Second person has the most complex O agreement morphology: there is allomorphy between *ʔin-* which occurs after a consonant-final (i.e., plural) A/S marker and *ń-*, which occurs following a vowel-final (i.e., singular) A/S marker. The latter allomorph involves a high tone realized on the nasal portion of the A-O combination. Again, as in the third plural, plurality of the object in the case of second person plural objects is indicated by the postverbal element -*hnaa*. If the O is coreferential with the A, there are special object markers, which can be given either a reflexive or a reciprocal interpretation (seen at right in the table). There is no distinction for person in these forms.[5]

Examples (6)-(8) demonstrate the use of some of these agreement markers:

(6)   ʔa-ń-thoʔŋ-hnaa
      3S SUBJ-2 OBJ-hit$_2$-PL OBJ
      'He hit y'all.'

(7)   ʔan-kan-thoʔŋ
      3P SUBJ-1P SUBJ-hit$_2$
      'They hit us.'

(8)   ʔan-ʔii-thooŋ
      3P SUBJ-P REFL-hit$_1$
      'They hit each other / themselves.'

The first agreement marker indicates the person and number of the subject, and is unambiguous. The second marker indicates that the object is second person (6), first person plural (7), and reflexive or reciprocal with the subject (8). In (6), the plurality of the object is indicated by the postposed particle -*hnaa*.

2.2. Primary objects

A second syntactic characteristic which will be of interest is Lai's status as a 'primary object' language. Dryer 1986 distinguishes two language types based on their treatment of the objects of bivalent and trivalent verbs. First, there are languages in which the patient of a bivalent verb and the patient of a trivalent verb are treated in the same way, and the beneficiary/recipient of a trivalent verb is singled out for special treatment of some sort. This is the sort of pattern

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5   The reflexive or reciprocal use of these prefixes is just one aspect of their use. They also have a more general use as markers of a middle voice (see Tomoko Yamashita Smith, this issue).