Causatives in Lai[1]

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1. Introduction

Lai (Hakha Chin) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Western Burma (Chin State) with a predominant SOV order. Causative constructions in this language involve a prefixial causation, i.e. an unproductive devoicing or aspiration of the initial stem of the verbs (like many other languages in Tibeto-Burman family such as Jingphaw, Burmese, Lahu etc.), and a productive causative suffix -ter. This paper analyzes both types of causative as well as their interface with each another.

2. Prefixial Causation

2.1. A Brief Survey of Some Other TB languages

In his article, "Lahu Causative Constructions: Case Hierarchies and the Morphology/Syntax Cycle in a Tibeto-Burman Perspective" Matisoff (1976:415) points out that in many languages of Tibeto-Burman, "there is convincing evidence for a Proto-TB sibilant prefix, *s-, that functioned along a broad spectrum in the causative domain as an intensifier, directionalizer, transitivizer, causativizer of the verbal idea". Matisoff notes further evidence of the old sibilant prefix in Written Tibetan. For example,

gril-ba	be twisted	sgril-ba	wind; wrap something around
khor-ba	turn around	skor-ba	surround something
riŋ-ba	be long	sriŋ-ba	extend, stretch

In Jingphaw (Kachin), that sibilant causative prefix has palatalized to šə-, varying with džə- before an aspirated or sibilant root-initial (Matisoff 1976:415ff). For example,

dam	stray	šə-dam	lead to astray
lot	free	šə-lot	set free
thum	be ended	džə-thum	end something

hpriŋ	be full	džə-hpriŋ	fill something
su	be awake	džə-su	arouse, awaken someone

In Burmese reflexes of the PTB prefixial causative *s- are seen in the devoicing or aspiration of the initial stem of some verbs. Okell lists the following pairs of simplex-causative verbs in his work on *A Reference Grammar of Colloquial Burmese* (1969:205). For comparative purposes, I took the liberty of modifying his list writing it in WB instead of modern spoken Burmese as he did.

kye	'be ground fine'	khye	'grind up'
kyak	'be cooked'	khak	'cook'
kya	'fall'	khya	'drop'
kyiu	'be broken'	khyiu	'break (in two)'
kywat	'come off'	khywat	'takeoff (clothes)'
krwe	'fall off (leaves)	khrwe	'cull, pluck'
kyan	'be narrow'	khyan	'make narrow'
krwaŋ	'be left out'	khrwaŋ	'leave out, omit'
kwa	'be split, parted'	khwa	'split,part, straddle'
kwa	'peel off'	khwa	'peel off, separate'
lan	'be turned over'	hlan	'turn over'
le	'fall over, topple'	hle	'fell, lie down'
lwat	'be free'	hlwat	'set free, liberate'
lim	'be rolled, turned'	hlim	'roll, revolve'
lat	'be bare, vacant'	hlat	'uncover'
lan	'be frightened'	hlan	'frighten'
lwiŋ	'be broadcast, blown away'	hlwiŋ	'broadcast, scatter'
mrup	'be buried'	hmrup	'bury, submerge' submerged'
mraŋ	'be high, tall'	hmraŋ	'raise, make higher'
mrok	'be raised,	hmrok	'raise, elevate'
myo	'be floating'	hmyo	'set afloat'
nats (nac)	'be submerged'	hnats (hnac)	'submerge, sink'
niu	'be awaken'	hniu	'waken'
nu	'be soft, tender'	hnu	'soften, make tender'
nim	'be low'	hnim	'make low, lower'

nwe	'be warm'	hnwe	'warm up ,heat'
nap	'be completely cooked'	hnat	'complete cooking'
ṇi light'	'be alight'	hṇi	'touch with flame,
ṇwat	'be bent over, bow down'	hṇwat	'bend over'
pi	'be pressed'	phi	'press, compress'
pre	'be torn, gape open'	phre	'tear (tr.)'
pre	'be undone, solved'	phre	'undo, answer, unravel'
praŋ	'be full'	phraŋ	'fill'
pyak	'be spoilt'	phyak	'spoil'
prat	'be cut, broken'	phraŋ	'cut, break'
pyok	'vanish'	phyok	'cause to vanish'
prut	'be detached, fall off'	phrut	'detach, pull off'
pran	'be spread out flat'	phran	'spread out flat'
pe	'break off, be chipped'	phe	'break off (a piece)'
priu	'collapse'	phriu	'demolish'
pwaŋ	'be open'	phwaŋ	'open'
pok	'be pierced, emerge'	phok	'pierce, push through'
po	'appear'	pho	'reveal'
tswat	'be damp'	tshwat	'moisten, make damp'
tsan	'be stretched out'	tshan	'stretch out straight'
tsut	'be torn, shabby'	tshut	'tear'
ro (lyo)	'be reduced, slack'	hro (hlyo)	'reduce, slacken'
kyai	'be wide'	khye	'widen'
ṇi	'be even, matching'	hṇi	'make even, match'
lan	'be turning, revolve'	hlan	'turn around'

In Lahu, the reflexes of the PTB prefixial causative *s- are seen with only about a dozen causative pairs. Matisoff explains that in Lahu "those verb-pairs [simplex-causative] fall into both voice/voiceless and several well-defined tonal categories" (1982:32ff). For example,

Simplex /\\/		Causative / mid /	
dɔ̀	'drink'	tɔ	'give to drink'
dɛ̀	'come to rest'	tɛ	'put down'
mɔ̀	'see'	mɔ	'show'
mɛ̀	'taste good'	mɛ	'well cooked, ripe'
nà	'hurt, be sore'	na	'be cured'

Simplex /ˆ/		Causative / - /	
câ	'eat'	ca	'feed'
nɔ̂	'be awake'	nɔ	'awaken, rouse'
dû	'dig'	tu	'bury (as a corpse)'

Simplex /\ ?/		Causative /´/	
lɛ̀ʔ	'lick, eat'	lɛ́	'feed an animal'
vɔ̀ʔ	'wear'	fɨ́	'clothe, dress someone'
vɔ̀ʔ	'hide(oneself)'	fá	'hide something'
tɔ̀ʔ	'catch fire'.	tú	'set fire, kindle'
yɨ̀ʔ	'sleep'	ɨ̌	'put to sleep'

2.2. Prefixial Causation in Lai

As in Lahu and Burmese, reflexes of the PTB prefixial causative *s- are seen in the devoicing or aspiration of the initial stem of certain verbs in Lai. One peculiar feature of Lai verbs is that it has syntactically governed phonological alternation of verb stems (a topic beyond the scope of this paper). Their phonological alternations are listed as form I and form II as follows:

Non-Causative (Simplex)			Causative		
Form I	Form II	Gloss	form I	form II	Gloss
pew	inv.[2]	astray	phew	inv.	exclude
peʔl	inv.	fall off	pheʔl	inv.	trip