THREE TYPES OF CAUSATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS
IN HAKHA LAI

Kenneth VanBik
University of California at Berkeley

1. INTRODUCTION

Hakha Lai (Chin) belongs to the Kuki-Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. It is spoken in Hakha and Thantlang towns, and their vicinity (Chin State). Lai has predominantly SOV order.

There are three kinds of causative constructions in this language, which I call s- causatives, -ʔ causatives, and -ter causatives.

S- causatives are characterized by devoicing or aspiration of the stem-initial consonant, as shown in (1):  

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Form I} & \text{Form II} & \text{Gloss} \\
\text{a. kān} & \text{kāʔ} & \text{‘burn’ (int)} \\
\text{b. mit} & \text{mīʔ} & \text{‘go out’ (light)} \\
\text{c. láw} & \text{lawʔ} & \text{‘disappear’} \\
\text{d. rīl} & \text{rīʔ} & \text{‘roll’ (int)} \\
\text{e. rōok} & \text{roʔ} & \text{‘break down’} \\
\text{f. tsat} & \text{tsaʔ} & \text{‘be severed’} \\
\text{g. tūm} & \text{tūm} & \text{‘descend’} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Form I} & \text{Form II} & \text{Gloss} \\
\text{a. khān} & \text{khāʔ} & \text{‘burn’ (tr)} \\
\text{b. hmit} & \text{hmīʔ} & \text{‘extinguish’} \\
\text{c. hlāw} & \text{hlawʔ} & \text{‘erase’} \\
\text{d. hrīl} & \text{hrīʔ} & \text{‘roll’ (tr)} \\
\text{e. hrook} & \text{hroʔ} & \text{‘destroy’} \\
\text{f. tshat} & \text{tshaʔ} & \text{‘sever’ (tr)} \\
\text{g. thrūm} & \text{thrūm} & \text{‘put down’ (tr)} \\
\end{array}
\]

The second type of causative construction involves a stem-final glottal stop, i.e. -ʔ causatives. Examples are given in (2):

---

1. I would like to thank Andreas Kathol, Jim Matisoff, Paul Kay, David Peterson, and other friends and colleagues for their advice and suggestions. A preliminary version of this paper was presented at SEALS IX (Bedell and VanBik 2000), and submitted as a Qualifying Paper, UCB 2000. Any mistakes are mine.

2. For a brief summary of the Form I / Form II distinction in Lai, see section 2 below. For a full discussion of phonological alternations between Form I and Form II in Lai, see Melnik (1998); for the syntactic distribution of Form I and Form II, see Kathol and VanBik (2002); and for Tone in Lai, see Hyman and VanBik (2002a,b).

3. Following Matisoff (1976), I use the terms ‘simplex’ and ‘causative’ to differentiate the non-causative/causative pairs.
(2) **Simplex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form I</th>
<th>Form II</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>dām</td>
<td>dām</td>
<td>‘be healthy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>ran</td>
<td>rán</td>
<td>‘be fast’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>thlum</td>
<td>thlum</td>
<td>‘sweet’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>niám</td>
<td>niám</td>
<td>‘short’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>sāan</td>
<td>sāan</td>
<td>‘high’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>saaw</td>
<td>sáaw</td>
<td>‘long’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>tooy</td>
<td>tóoy</td>
<td>‘short’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third type, -ter causative, is formed by suffixing the bound morpheme -ter to the verbs, as shown in (3):

(3) **Simplex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form I</th>
<th>Form II</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>kān</td>
<td>kān?</td>
<td>‘burn’ (int)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>mit</td>
<td>mít?</td>
<td>‘go out’ (light)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>lów</td>
<td>lów?</td>
<td>‘disappear’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>ríl</td>
<td>ríl?</td>
<td>‘roll’ (int)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>rook</td>
<td>rok?</td>
<td>‘break down’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>tsat</td>
<td>tsāʔ?</td>
<td>‘be severed’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g.</td>
<td>tlāa t</td>
<td>laak</td>
<td>‘fall’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Prima facie*, the three causative constructions of Lai in (1-3) look similar, in that they all are transitive, involve causative meaning, and appear to be systematically related to non-causative verbs as illustrated in (4-6):

(4) a. **SIMPLEX**

Boo-lún ?a-ríl.
football 3SG.S-roll.I (int)
‘The football rolled.’

b. **s- CAUSATIVE**

Boo-lún ka-hrilʔ.
football 1SG.S-roll.II (tr)
‘I rolled the football.’

(5) a. **SIMPLEX**

Na-tún ?a-sāaŋ.
2SG.POS-height 3SG.S-high.I
‘You are tall.’ [Lit. ‘Your height is high.’]

b. **-ʔ CAUSATIVE**

Na-tún ka-ʔ-n-sāŋ? làay.
2SG.POS-height 1SG.S-2SG.O-heighten.INV FUT
‘I will make you taller.’ [Lit. ‘I will heighten your height.’]
(6) a. SIMPLEX
   Boo-lùŋ ʔa-rīl.
   football 3SG.S-roll.I (int)
   'The football rolled.'

b. -TER CAUSATIVE
   Boo-lùŋ ka-rīlʔ-ter.
   football 1SG.S-roll.II-CAUS
   'I caused the football to roll.'

However, we will see that s- causative and -ʔ causative would best be labeled as morphologically regular but unpredictable lexical causatives, while -ter causative constitutes a completely productive morphological causative.

In order to describe the causative constructions in Lai adequately, it is essential to have a brief summary of Form I / II verbal morphology, because this morphology plays an important role in every aspect of Lai syntax, including causative constructions.

2. VERBAL FORM ALTERNATION IN LAI

2.1. Form I and Form II Alternation

The examples in (1) above illustrate a morphological alternation which has been called Form I vs. Form II (Patent 1997). This alternation is arguably not linked in any straightforward way to a single parameter of variation such as tense, aspect, or transitivity. Instead the alternation appears to be conditioned by a number of lexical and constructional distinctions which may interact with each other.

In affirmative declarative root clauses, the basic pattern is that intransitive verbs exhibit Form I morphology as shown in (7A) whereas transitive verbs exhibit Form II morphology as illustrated in (7B)⁴:

(7A) INTRANSITIVE
      Ni Hu 3SG.S-run.I
      'Ni Hu ran.'

   b. Ka-pàa ʔa-ʔit.
      1SG.POS-father 3SG.S-sleep.I
      'My father slept.'

⁴ Under certain conditions, a notionally transitive verb can occur with Form I even in affirmative root clauses. However, as Bickel (2000:9) notes, there are constructions that are notionally transitive but nevertheless count as intransitive from the perspective of the grammar.
(7B) TRANSITIVE

   Ni Hu ERG pig 3SG.S-kill.II
   ‘Ni Hu killed the pig.’

   1SG.POS-mother ERG food 3SG.S-cook.II
   ‘My mother cooked a meal.’

There are some overriding factors in the syntax of Form I and Form II alternation. The presence of negative marker láw, imperative marker tua?, or yes/no question marker máa uniformly require Form I morphology regardless of the (in)transitivity of the verb, as shown in (8):

(8) a. NEGATIVE
   Ni Hu ni? vok ?a-that láw.
   Ni Hu ERG pig 3SG.S-kill.I NEG
   ‘Ni Hu did not kill the pig.’

b. IMPERATIVE
   ròol tshúan tua?!
   food cook.I IMP
   ‘(Please) cook a meal!’

c. Yes/No QUESTION
   Ni Hu ni? vok ?a-that máa?
   Ni Hu ERG pig 3SG.S-kill.I QST
   ‘Did Ni Hu kill the pig?’

In adverbial subordinate clauses, Form II morphology is required. This construction overrides any Form I requirements stemming from the status of the verbs as intransitive. Cf. (9):

(9) SUBORDINATE

   Ni Hu ERG pig 3SG.S-kill.II NEG when
   ‘When Ni Hu did not kill the pig...’

b. Ni Hu ?a-tliik láw tsàa?-a?...
   Ni Hu 3SG.S-run.II NEG because
   ‘Because Ni Hu did not run...’