LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC CAUSATIVES IN LAI[1]

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Lai has two types of causative construction, as illustrated by examples (1) and (2).[2]

(1)   *Ni Hu nih lo a khangh.*
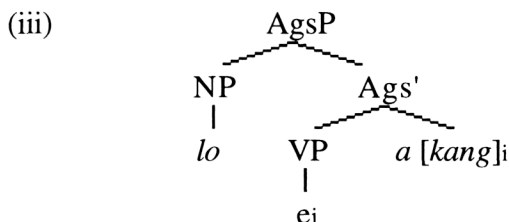   'Ni Hu set fire to the field.'

(2)   *Ni Hu nih lo a kanghter.*
            'Ni Hu made/let the field burn.'

The construction in (1) we will call the 'lexical' causative, and that in (2) the 'syntactic' causative. Both appear semantically causative with respect to a sentence like (3).

(3)   *Lo a kang.*   'The field burned.'

But (1) and (2) do not have the same meaning. (1) is a statement of direct causation; in this sentence, Ni Hu personally and deliberately set the fire. (2) by contrast covers a variety of indirect causation types. Thus if Ni Hu accidentally set the fire, asked someone else to set the fire, or if lightning caused the fire and Ni Hu merely failed to put it out, (2) would be an appropriate report, but not (1).

We take the syntactic structure of (3) to be something like (iii).

(iii)

```
                    AgsP
                ⌢⌢⌢⌢⌢⌢⌢
          NP              Ags'
          |           ⌢⌢⌢⌢⌢⌢⌢
          lo        VP       a [kang]i
                    |
                    ei
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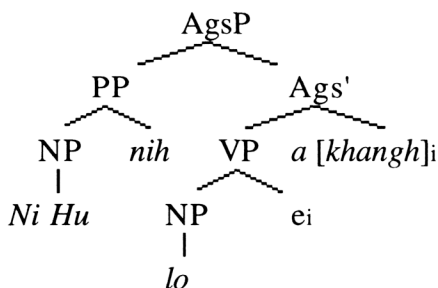
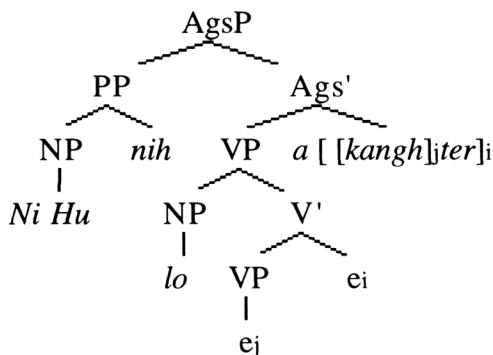That is, the word (or perhaps prefix) *a* in (3) is a subject agree-

ment marker which is the syntactic head of a Lai finite clause. In this sentence it agrees in person and number (third singular) with the subject *lo* 'field'. The intransitive verb *kang* 'burn' is attached to the head *a*, and co-indexed with its 'original' position, head of the verbal predicate (VP).[3]

  We take the corresponding syntactic structures of (1) and (2) to be something like (i) and (ii) respectively.

(i)

```
                        AgsP
                   ┌─────┴─────┐
              PP                 Ags'
           ┌───┴───┐         ┌────┴────┐
          NP    nih      VP    a [khangh]i
          │            ┌──┴──┐
        Ni Hu         NP      ei
                      │
                      lo
```

(ii)

```
                        AgsP
                   ┌─────┴─────┐
              PP                 Ags'
           ┌───┴───┐        ┌─────┴─────┐
          NP    nih     VP   a [ [kangh]jter]i
          │           ┌──┴──┐
        Ni Hu        NP      V'
                     │    ┌───┴───┐
                     lo  VP        ei
                         │
                         ej
```

(i) differs from (iii) in containing the transitive verb *khangh* 'set fire to' in place of the intransitive *kang*. In (1), *a* thus shows agreement not with *lo*, which is the object, but with *Ni Hu nih*, the subject of the sentence. In Lai transitive sentences the subject is accompanied by the postposition *nih* 'by', while the object, like the subject of an intransitive sentence, is not. Transitive sentences like (1) show the same attachment of the verb to the agreement marker as intransitive sentences like (3). In (ii), there is an additional syntactic level not present in (iii) or (i). The suffix-*ter* 'make/let', like *khangh*, is syntactically a transitive verb, co-indexed with the head position of a second VP. Here the verb *kangh* 'burn' is attached to -*ter*, and the result

kanghter 'make/let burn' in turn attached to *a*. In (2) as in (1), *a* shows agreement with *Ni Hu nih* and not with *lo*.[4]

There is a morphological relation between the verb *khangh* in (1) and *kangh* in (2), which is realized as aspiration of the initial velar stop versus its absence. But not every Lai verb has a corresponding direct causative analogous to *khangh* in relation to *kangh*. Of those that do, there are other phonological differences between the related verbs. And the exact difference in meaning may vary. This morphological relation has no syntactic reflection; so far as the syntax is concerned, *khangh* and *kangh* are simply different verbs, and their relation to one another (including their meaning) is to be described as part of the morphological apparatus in the lexicon. Some verbs come in pairs of this sort, and others do not, idiosyncratically. Lai speakers must learn each independently. By contrast, the relationship between *kanghter* and *kangh* is both productive and regular: virtually any Lai verb, whether transitive or intransitive, may be suffixed with *-ter*, and the meaning of the resulting compound is predictable from the meaning of the base verb. This does not mean that the suffixation of *-ter* is not also a morphological process; in fact we assume that it is. But the resulting verb *kanghter* differs from *khangh* in the syntactic positions in which it may appear: in particular it requires a double predicate of the sort illustrated in (ii), and could not replace *khangh* in (i). By the same token, *khangh* could not replace *kanghter* in (ii).
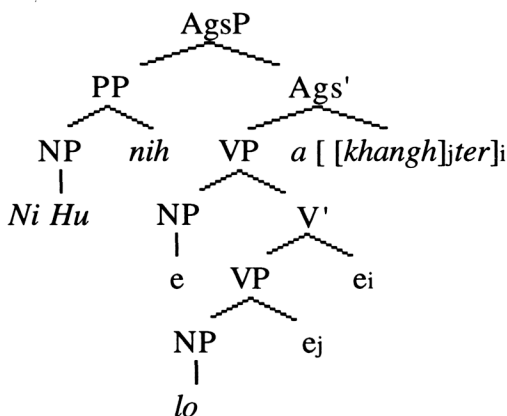
It is possible to have both types of causative in a single sentence, as in (4).

(4)   *Ni Hu nih lo a khanghter.*
          'Ni Hu made/let him/her set fire to the field.'

In (4) as in (1) and (2), *a* marks agreement with the subject *Ni Hu nih*, and the sentence is transitive, so that *nih* is required. But unlike (1) or (2), (4) implies the involvement of a second, unmentioned person. In (1) and (2), Ni Hu is the agent of burning the field, but in (4) the other person is understood to have this role. Ni Hu is rather the agent of another act: causing this person to burn the field. Furthermore the general meaning of this expanded agency resembles that in (2) rather than that in (1) in covering indirect as well as direct causation. The structure given in (iv) represents a combination of those in (i) and (ii); it

differs from (ii) in that the transitive structure of (i) replaces the intransitive structure of (iii) as the complement of the causative verb (or suffix) *-ter*. In (iv), the empty NP represents the unmentioned person, which serves as the subject of the verb *khangh*.

(iv)

```
                        AgsP
                    ┌────┴────┐
                PP            Ags'
             ┌──┴──┐       ┌───┴───┐
            NP   nih      VP   a [ [khangh]ⱼter]ᵢ
             │          ┌──┴──┐
           Ni Hu       NP    V'
                        │  ┌──┴──┐
                        e VP     eᵢ
                        ┌─┴─┐
                       NP   eⱼ
                        │
                       lo
```

It is quite possible to mention the covert person in sentence (4): the 'causee' as it is often called. In (5) this person is identified as Ceu Mang.
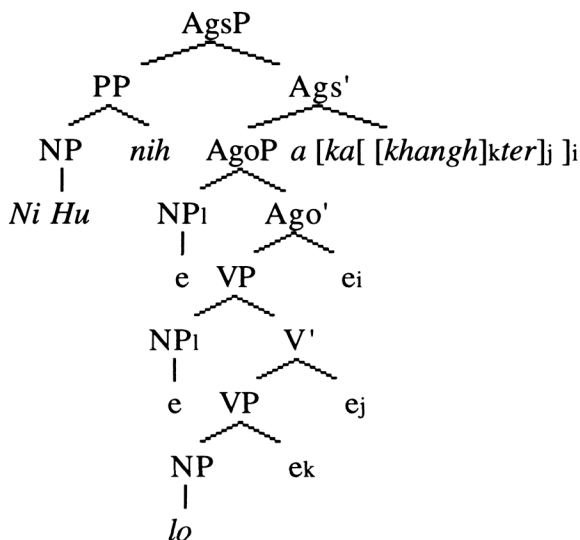
(5)   *Ni Hu nih Ceu Mang lo a khanghter.*
        'Ni Hu made/let Ceu Mang set fire to the field.'

In case the causee is non-third person, an overt object agreement marker is required, and the corresponding pronoun generally not present. In sentence (6) this agreement marker is *ka*.

(6)   *Ni Hu nih lo a ka khanghter.*
        'Ni Hu made/let me set fire to the field.'

In general the agreement system for causees in sentences like (4) in which a transitive verb appears with *-ter* is identical to the system of object agreement with any transitive verb. It is not apparent in (4) or (5) because there is no overt agreement with third person singular objects. The syntactic structure of (6) will thus be something like (vi). Here we have to distinguish the object agreement marker (Ago) and its projections from the subject agreement marker (Ags) and its projections. The empty NPs in (vi) must be first person singular; in a suitably contrastive context the pronoun *keimah* 'I' could be located in the higher one.

(vi)

```
                        AgsP
                   _____/_____
                  PP             Ags'
                 /\            ___/\___
             NP   nih    AgoP   a [ka[ [khangh]kter]j ]i
              |         __/\__
            Ni Hu     NP1    Ago'
                       |    __/\__
                       e   VP    ei
                          _/\_
                        NP1    V'
                         |    __/\__
                         e   VP    ej
                            _/\_
                          NP    ek
                           |
                           lo
```

In the structure of (5), *Ceu Mang* occupies the position of the empty NP in (iv). Thus the syntactic position of the causee differs, depending on whether it is third person singular (and thus whether it requires object agreement) or not.

It is also possible for the verb *kang* to have a human subject, as in (7), or for *khangh*, *kanghter* and *khanghter* to have human objects or causees, as in (8) and (9).
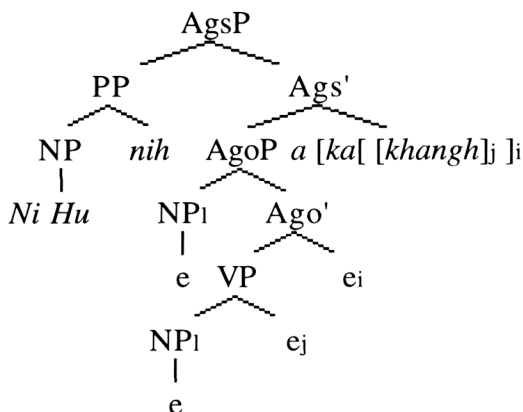
(7)   *Ka kang.*   'I burned.'

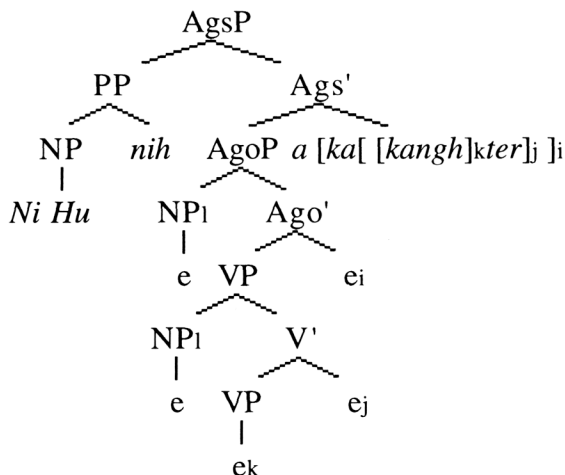(8)   *Ni Hu nih a ka khangh.*   'Ni Hu set fire to me.'

(9)   *Ni Hu nih a ka kanghter.*
        'Ni Hu made/let me burn.'

In (7), *ka* is the first person singular subject agreement marker, in the same position as a in (iii); in (8) or (9), *ka* is the first person singular object agreement marker, and appears as the head of AgoP, as in (vi). These structures will be something like (viii) and (ix).

(viii)

```
                        AgsP
                ┌────────┴────────┐
              PP                Ags'
          ┌────┴────┐      ┌──────┴──────┐
        NP    nih    AgoP  a [ka[ [khangh]ⱼ ]ᵢ
        |             ┌─────┴─────┐
      Ni Hu         NPₗ          Ago'
                     |       ┌────┴────┐
                     e      VP        eᵢ
                         ┌───┴───┐
                       NPₗ      eⱼ
                        |
                        e
```

(ix)

```
                        AgsP
                ┌────────┴────────┐
              PP                Ags'
          ┌────┴────┐      ┌──────┴──────┐
        NP    nih    AgoP  a [ka[ [kangh]ₖter]ⱼ ]ᵢ
        |             ┌─────┴─────┐
      Ni Hu         NPₗ          Ago'
                     |       ┌────┴────┐
                     e      VP        eᵢ
                         ┌───┴───┐
                       NPₗ      V'
                        |    ┌───┴───┐
                        e   VP      eⱼ
                             |
                            eₖ
```

There is a morphological relation between the verb *kang* in sentences like (3) and (7), and the verb *kangh*, to which the causative *-ter* is attached in sentences like (2) and (9). Our analysis assumes they are the same verb, but in fact their form differs, the latter having a final glottal stop lacking in the former. This relationship illustrates a general phenomenon observed not only in Lai, but other Kuki-Chin languages as well. The form *kang* is often called the stem I, while *kangh* is called the stem II.[5] The most comprehensive attempt to explain Lai verb stems to date is contained in Lehman 1996. Lehman argues that the stem I versus stem II alternation depends on the presence of an external argument of the verb; in simple intransitive clauses such as

(3) there is one and the stem I form is used. This contrasts with subordinate clauses like (10) and (11) or nominalizations like (12) or (13).

(10) *lo a kangh caah*   'because the field burned'

(11) *lo a kangh ahcun*   'if the field burned'

(12) *lo a kanghnak*   'the burning of the field'

(13) *a kanghmi lo*   'the burnt field'

In these constructions, there is no external argument position; therefore the stem II is used. This form represents a 'gerundive' and the *a* here is not the subject agreement marker, but rather the third singular possessor agreement marker.

    This approach can be adapted to cover the stem variation in syntactic causatives. As shown in structure (ii) in contrast with (iii), the NP *lo* appears as the internal argument of *kangh-ter* rather than the external argument of *kangh*. Thus the stem II form is used in such causatives for the same reason as in constructions like (10) to (13). Note that the causative verb *kangh-ter* does have an external argument, namely *Ni Hu nih*. So that it should represent the stem I form. But such verbs (or alternatively *-ter*, if it is considered a verb) do not distinguish the two stem forms morphologically. Note also that in structure (ii), the noun phrase *lo* is in a VP-internal subject position with respect to *kangh*, and is understood to be involved in the event of burning in exactly the same way as when it is the external subject in (3). At the same time it is in an object position with respect to the causative verb *kanghter* (or alternatively to *-ter*), and is understood as the 'patient' of the act of causation.

    The form *kangh* also occurs in transitive (but not causative) sentences like (14).

(14) *Mei nih lo a kangh.*   'The fire burned the field.'

(14) differs from (1) in that its subject *mei nih* 'fire' is not an 'agent'; human subjects may not be used with *kangh*, and conversely, these non-agentive subjects may not be used with *khangh*.

(15)   **Ni Hu nih lo a kangh.*

(16)   *Mei nih lo a khangh.

Such non-agentive subjects may however be used also with
intransitive *kang*.

(18)   *Mei a kang.*   'The fire burned.'

Lehman's approach cannot treat *kangh* in sentences like (14) as a
stem II form; he analyzes them as derived transitives whose stem
I form resembles the stem II form of the intransitive base.[6]

There is stem alternation with transitive verbs as well,
though it does not appear in sentences like (1) versus (4). The
verb *khangh* 'burn' takes the same form in simple clauses that it
takes in lexical causatives. It is also unchanged in other con-
structions characteristic of the stem II form of intransitive verbs.

(19)   *Ni Hu nih lo a khangh caah*
              'because Ni Hu set fire to the field'

(20)   *Ni Hu nih lo a khangh ah cun*
              'if Ni Hu set fire to the field'

(21)   *Ni Hu nih lo a khanghnak*
              'the setting fire to the field by Ni Hu'

(22)   *Ni Hu nih a khanghmi lo*
              'the field set fire to by Ni Hu'

There is also the form *khang*, which differs from
khangh in the absence of the final glottal stop. It is found in
negatives like (23), in reflexives or reciprocals like (24) and
(25), and in relative clauses on the subject position, as in (26).

(23)   *Ni Hu nih lo a khang lo.*
              'Ni Hu did not set fire to the field.'

(24)   *Ni Hu aa khang.*   'Ni Hu set fire to himself.'

(25)   *Ni Hu le Ceu Mang an i khang.*
              'Ni Hu and Ceu Mang set fire to each other. '

(26)   *lo a khangmi mipa*
        'the man who set fire to the field'

Lehman attempts to account for the variation by assuming the 'suppression' or 'delinking' of the internal argument in these circumstances. His application of this idea to negatives like (23) is not convincing, but we do not see how to apply it to the causative case at all.

      As an additional example, consider the verbs *nunnem* 'be gentle' and *hnemh* 'comfort' in (27) to (34). The former is intransitive as a whole, though it might be regarded as incorporating the specified object *nun* 'life'. This *nun* in turn is the stem II form of the verb *nung* 'live'. The semantic subject of *nunnem* appears as a possessive particle with *nun* in (27).

(27)   *Ka nun a nem.*
        'I am gentle.'

The syntactic causative of *nunnem* is illustrated in (28).

(28)   *Ka nun a ka nemter.*
        'She makes me gentle.'

The verb *nunnem*, like the verb *nem* 'be soft' differentiates its stem II from stem I by tone. There is a falling tone on *nem* in (27), but a rising tone in (28).[7]

      The verb *hnemh* can be regarded as the lexical causative of *nem* or *nunnem*.

(29)   *A ka hnemh.*
        'She comforts me.'

It has the stem variant *hnem*, parallel to *khang* with respect to *khangh*, in the same circumstances.

(30)   *A ka hnem lo.*
        'She doesn't comfort me.

(31)   *Aa hnem.*
        'She comforts herself.'

(32) *Pakhat le pakhat an i hnem.*
  'They comfort each other. '

(33) *a ka hnemmi minu*
  'the woman that comforts me'

Note the contrast between (33), in which the relativized NP is the subject, and (34) where it is not.

(34) *a hnemhmi mipa*
  'the man that she comforts'

The contrast, both morphological and semantic, between *nunnem* and *hnemh* illustrates the lexical nature of the relationship more clearly than with *kang* and *khangh*.

We close this paper with some examples of *nunnem* and *hnemh* from the Lai Bible (1978).[8]

(35) *A trap a hrammi cu lunglawmmi nan va si dah!*
    Pathian nih an hnemh *hna lai.*
  Nun *a* nemmi *cu lunglawmmi nan va si dah!*
    Pathian nih aan kamhmi hna kha nan co lai.
            (Mt. 5:4-5)
    'You who mourn will be happy!
      God will comfort you.
    You who are gentle will be happy!
      You will inherit what God leaves you.'

The relative *nun a nemmi* in (35) is the stem II form.

(36) *Thruro bantuk in nan* nun *va* nem *u.* (Mt. 10:16)
    'Be gentle like doves.'

(37) *kei cu* nunnem *le toidornak lungthin a ngeimi ka si caah*
              (Mt. 11:30)
    'because I am one whose heart is gentle and
        humble'

The verb *nan nun va nem u* 'be gentle' is the stem I form, as in (27). The nominalized *nunnem* in (37) is interpreted as *nunnemnak* 'gentleness' in conjunction with *toidornak* 'humility'. It is the stem II form.

Notes

[2] These examples, and some discussion of their meaning, were given in VanBik (1999). All the examples in this paper are transcribed according to standard Lai orthography, except that we use 'tr' and 'thr' for the retroflex stops to replace the standard 't' and 'th' with a subscribed dot.

[3] For discussion of Lai agreement and more examples of these structures, see Bedell (1995) and (1996).

[4] Syntactic structures for Lai syntactic causatives with *-ter* are given in Bedell (1997). The analysis in that paper differs from this one in that here we do not assume zero object agreement for third person singulars.

[5] A survey of the phonological relations between stem I and stem II forms is provided in Kathol and VanBik (2000); they recognize seven types.

[6] Lehman does not discuss this particular example. We extrapolate from his analysis of *trap* 'cry' (which has the stem II form *trah*) and *trah* 'cry for someone'.

[7] The verb *nunnem* might be included among 'psycho-collocations' as listed in VanBik (1998). Not all varieties of Lai have tone, and it is not written in the standard orthography. See Kathol and VanBik (2000) and Olawsky and VanBik (2000).

[8] The relevant verb forms are printed in regular type; *nem* in (36) has a falling tone as in (27), and in (35) and (37) a rising tone as in (28).

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