

## COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF LUE SYNTAX\*

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Studies of comparative Tai syntax are rare aside from a few studies of pronouns and classifiers. There is the rather complacent belief that there are few dramatic differences in syntax between dialects. The thesis of this article is that if we consider pragmatics along with semantic-syntactic structures, important distinctions are found. The differences are subtle ones, but they have important implications for linguistic theory and our understanding of Tai dialects in general.

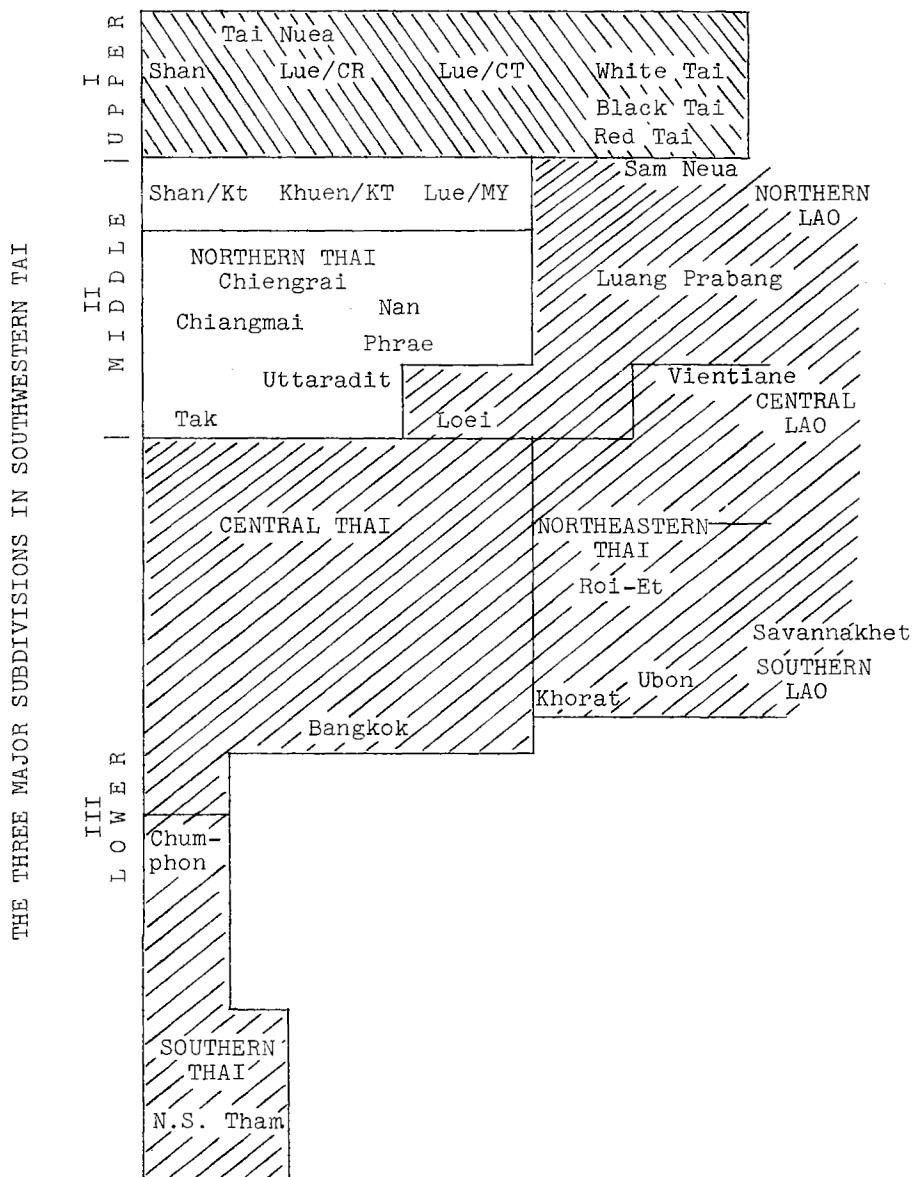
Tai-Lue, the focus of this analysis, is a Tai dialect whose centre is at Chieng Hung, in a region called Sipsong Panna in the southwestern part of Yunnan, China. It is a dialect whose phonological features overlap with neighbouring Shan to the west in Burma, with Northern Thai directly south in Thailand, and with White Tai spoken in adjacent areas of Laos and North Vietnam.

Still another dialect of Lue is spoken at Moeng Yong, Burma. In terms of tonal splits and minor phonological features, it is identical to Tai-Khuen of Kentung, Burma and the Thai dialects of Northern Thailand. For a clear picture of these relationships, a suggested alignment of dialects in Southwestern Tai appears on the following page.

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## SUGGESTED ALIGNMENT OF DIALECTS IN SOUTHWESTERN TAI



The general shape of the tones of Chieng Rung are shown in the following diagram using both a system of numbered tones and their description in words along with the scheme used often in phonological description of Chinese tones. In the latter system, a pitch level of 5 is high and 1 is low; 3 would be in the mid range.

	*A	*B	*C	*D-long	*D-short
*vl (yin)	1 high-level └ 55	2 mid-rising └ 35	3 low, glot., slt. rise └ 13	=2	=1
*vd (yang)	4 fall-ing √	5 mid-level └	6 low, level, slt. rise └	=5	=5
	Smooth Syllables			Checked Syllables	

In this matrix, the maximum number of six tones are found on the smooth syllables. The tones on the checked syllables are matched up with their nearest counterparts in the class of smooth syllables. As explained elsewhere, the tones of the smooth and checked are conditioned by different variables so that they stand in complementary distribution. The tones shown here, then, are phonemic, not phonetic. In some works, e.g. Purnell (1963), it is not always clear whether the tones which are enumerated are phonemic or not. Closer examination reveals that the seven tones of Northern Thai, for example, are phonetic; only six can be isolated on free syllables.

The data on which the comparative study of Tai syntax comes is based on a variety of sources. One is my own study of orally composed chanted narratives called /khap<sup>1</sup> lɔ̃<sup>6</sup>/ 'to sing in the Lue manner'. This material, referred to later, is that of two male singers: an older man of about 60 (Text I) and a younger man of about 40 (Text II). Otherwise the data are from my field notes or those of others whose names are cited.

Particular attention will be paid to utterance final particles. Definite underlying semantic-syntactic differences exist and form a marked communication boundary between dialects despite innocent-looking minor surface changes in lexical shapes.

The negative and the negative interrogative (question particles) are the most outstanding illustrations of special aspects of Lue syntax that shall be dealt with. In addition, comment will be made concerning the semantic-syntactic contrast involving word change between Siamese and Lue use of '*can*' vs. '*to be able to*'. Finally, discourse level syntactic functioning of pronouns and particles which punctuate clause and paragraph divisions in the Lue narrative will be discussed.

#### A. Interrogative forms

Lue questions and related responses entail presuppositions that do not exactly parallel either Siamese or Northern Thai usage. The word order is, for the most part, the same: question particles are utterance final. It is best to examine some of the Lue rules on their own terms before making any comparisons with other dialects.

##### (1) -aa<sup>5</sup>, -aa<sup>4</sup>

The first particle, -aa<sup>5</sup>, is used in interrogative utterances that call for information, i.e. the usual yes-no type of question. It is used in structures that do not have other question words such as wh-forms: '*what, where, why, how*', etc. Where the Lue equivalent of the English wh-forms appears, the tone of the question particle changes from tone 5 (mid level) to tone 4 (mid falling). Some examples are:

(a) dii<sup>1</sup> -aa<sup>5</sup>  
good Q-Pt.  
'Is it good?'

(b) pin<sup>1</sup> kun<sup>4</sup> tii<sup>5</sup> nay<sup>1</sup> -aa<sup>4</sup>  
be person place where Q-Pt.  
'Where are you from?'

##### (2) -aa<sup>5</sup> vs. kaa<sup>4</sup>

The final question particle, explained above, contrasts with kaa<sup>4</sup> in that the latter is used in questions with an underlying presupposition: '*I assume that it is the case that*', or '*right?*', as glossed in the example given below. The particle kaa<sup>4</sup> is used both in the initiating question and in the expected response. The underlying presupposition can be confirmed or refuted with an affirmative or negative response. In its confirmative function, kaa<sup>4</sup> has the force of a mildly emphatic particle. The following examples are illustrative but not completely so. More data are needed.

(a) kin<sup>1</sup> kaa<sup>4</sup> (Question)  
eat, right?  
'(someone) eat, right?'

- (b) kin<sup>1</sup> kaa<sup>4</sup> (Response)  
 eat, right!  
 'Right, (someone) eats'

It is noteworthy that the constructions used for asking and for answering shown above are synonymous. Without some notion of pragmatics, performatives, or context of situation, their semantic difference could not be understood.

In Northern Thai (Purnell 1963) we find the same form and function: kǎa, kǎa. A further distinction is made between the former (mid tone) affirmative particle and the latter (low tone) emphatic particle. The interrogative function appears to parallel the use of Siamese rǎi in some contexts and chây máy in others. The mildly emphatic kaa<sup>4</sup> shared by Lue and Northern Thai mirrors the Siamese form sì.

On the other hand, the Lue question particles -aa<sup>5</sup>, -aa<sup>4</sup> do not appear to have a reflex in Northern Thai or Siamese. The Northern Thai parallel appears to be kǎo, which is roughly equivalent to Siamese máy. Northern Thai is still different from both Lue and Siamese in having bǎo, the question particle that has as its underlying presupposition the para-phrase: 'may I invite you to ...', as in, for example:

- |      |                          |     |                   |
|------|--------------------------|-----|-------------------|
| N.T. | kin bǎo                  | vs. | kin kǎo           |
|      | eat Q-Pt.                |     | eat Q-Pt.         |
|      | 'Would you like to eat?' |     | 'Are you eating?' |

It seems that even in Northern Thai, the distinction between the invitational interrogative bǎo and the informational interrogative kǎo is disappearing in favour of the former.

To return to Lue, in place of kaa<sup>4</sup> as a response particle, which might be described as a simple affirmative particle, we find the more strongly emphatic particle yaa<sup>2</sup>. At the other extreme, the most neutral particle, used simply to punctuate an utterance, is the form ɿɿ<sup>5</sup>. It is very frequently used in the Lue oral narrative, especially in the performance of the second singer. The following examples show the contrasting function between the sharply emphatic and the emotionless punctuating utterance final particles in Lue.

- (a) yuu<sup>2</sup> kaa<sup>4</sup>  
 here right?  
 '(someone) is here, right?'
- (b) yuu<sup>2</sup> yaa<sup>2</sup>  
 here Pt.-emph. affirm.  
 '(someone) is here, indeed!'
- (c) yuu<sup>2</sup> ɿɿ<sup>5</sup>  
 here Pt.-punct. affirm.  
 '(someone) is here.'

As recent debate concerning a theory of speech acts attests, there are many difficulties to be encountered in assigning an underlying performative or in formulating the most precise sets of presuppositions to the utterance we have been discussing. The case for Lue and other Tai dialects is facilitated, however, by the presence of contrasting particles. Matisoff (1973) has made the claim that particles are degenerate verbs. Further support for a verbal analysis, and even an underlying clause of presupposed information, comes from the work of Day (1966), who assigns separate clause rank (level in tagmemics) to utterance final particles in Tho, a Tai language of North Vietnam. The difficult semantics of utterance final particles remains however. The commonplace observation is that they parallel the use of intonation and stress in English. Noss (1964) rightly notes that sentence particles indicate speaker attitude, whose meaning "can be only vaguely stated, because a great deal depends upon the emotional interplay between speakers." A complete analysis of particles in Lue would be a major undertaking calling for more natural, conversational data than are found in our corpus of oral narratives.

It should be noted that Ross (1970) uses Thai (Siamese or Central Thai) in arguing for a performative verb and I-you axis in the deep structure of declarative sentences. While his basic argument is sound, his information on Thai is faulty. He states, incorrectly: "In this language, every sentence must end with the particle *kháp* or *khâ*."

Such is not the case. The appearance or non-appearance of the utterance final 'polite' particles *kháp* (masculine) and *khâ* (feminine), are optional to begin with. From what I have seen, the former is limited to Siamese and Northern Thai, the latter to Siamese. More important is that their occurrence is dependent on several interrelated contextual factors. First is the status of the speaker and hearer; second is the emotional force between them. The first parameter concerns social distance, the second psychological (phatic communion possibly). More specifically, an adult (age status) would normally never use *kháp* or *khâ* in speaking to a child or other persons of inferior social status. Likewise, when there are no constraints calling for verbal displays of deference or politeness, the 'polite particle' is not used, or when other negative emotional states would overrule its use, such as anger.

Ross uses the final particles *kháp* and *khâ* as evidence for an underlying 'I'. He labels the Thai particles "utterer agreement particles (UAP)." As indicated in the preceding discussion, statements from Day, Noss, and Matisoff can be used to show that many Thai particles are manifestations of performative verbs which have been weakened rather than deleted following Ross's rule for "Performative Deletion". Following

Noss's argument that sentence-final particles are an indicator of speaker's attitude, they would carry a perlocutionary force and hence should be classified as performative verbs in many cases. The case for particles is not always that clear, however.

In his study of Central Thai syntax, Scovel (1970) shares the opinion that the historical origins of particles must be studied before they can be understood completely. My own reaction is that the issue must be decided on synchronic evidence. Nevertheless, we can point to some limited historical information that might inspire others to make a thorough study of older historical texts.

To further complicate the picture of the 'polite' particle used by today's Siamese women, we note that there are three tonal forms, already an indication that something more complex than an 'utterer agreement particle' is involved. As we examine the three tonal shapes, the case for particles-as-performative verbs is strengthened.

#### Siamese (Central Thai):

##### A. Urban-Refined speech (being sophisticated)/Formal

- (1) mềc khăa  
mother Pt.-female-endearment-intimate: to call sm.  
'Mother, dear' (call for attention)
- (2) mii máy khá  
have Q-Pt. Pt.-female-deferential  
'Do you have any?' (I DEFER to you)
- (3) mây mii khà  
neg. have Pt.-female deferential  
'I don't have any' (I DEFER to you)

##### B. Rural, polite speech (being nice)/Informal

- (1) mềc cắa
- (2) mii máy cá
- (3) mây mii câ

From the above, we see the further division between urban-sophisticated form and rural-'nice' particles. The two overlap, depending on social setting. In rural speech, the basis of Thai society, it would be rare indeed to hear anyone use the first set of formal 'polite' particles. On the other hand, the second set of particles would often be used in an urban setting or one of less formal demands, the market for example. Also, in an urban context, a 'superior' would use the second set in addressing an 'inferior'.

As for the historical origins of the polite particles, one must rely on older historical texts. In the plays of Rama VI, a brief glance reveals the following. Both men and women used the particle *khâ*, which is limited to female use today. Moreover, the full older form seems to be *câw khâa* 'my lord'. (The form *khâa* is glossed as 'slave, I'.)

On still another level indicating probable Cambodian origins, we find in the 'Royal vocabulary' the forms *phâyâ khâ*, the utterance final polite form used by men and *phee khâ*, used by women. Both are used in addressing the King and Queen, but not the reverse.

While the female particle *khâ* might have its origins in the noun *khâa* 'slave', the male particle appears to have verbal origins. It is believed that the base is *khăo ráp* 'ask to receive'. The fact that two different likely historical sources, a noun and a verb, are indicated for the female and male polite particles confuses rather than clarifies the issue concerning their synchronic status: UAP or performative verb.

In other Tai dialects, the tendency is to use a final unisex 1st or 2nd person formal pronoun.

Lue:	<i>khoy</i> <sup>3</sup>	'I', m./fem. (inferior to sup.); polite single-word response
Lao:	<i>khan</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>oy</i>	'I' (inferior to superior); polite response word (from Roffe)
Northern Thai:	<i>căw</i>	'yes'; polite word (fem.); 'you'
	<i>khăp</i>	'yes'; man's polite word (from Purnell)

At this point, after considering both diachronic and synchronic evidence from four Tai dialects, one might conclude that utterance final particles are evidence for an underlying 'I' in a deep structure performative clause, i.e. the Ross argument. But as already pointed out, the 'polite particles' are only one set in a catalogue of many other particles which have verbal form in many cases and performative function on all occasions. It may be that the Performative Deletion rule has to be amended to read that, in the case of Tai dialects, sometimes all or only part of the whole clause is deleted leaving either an NP-subject (*khâ*) verb (*khăp*) or NP-object (*căw* 'you' Northern Thai). In any case, the combined insights of Day, Matisoff and Noss indicate that utterance final particles (one or more) are manifestations of a performative clause.

The fact remains that the presence of utterance final particles in Tai dialects and many other South-East Asian languages points to the incompletely analysed inter-relatedness of pragmatics, syntax and semantics. A broader perspective on the pragmatics of 'linguistic etiquette' (e.g. Tai particles) that seems applicable to all of South-East Asia is



found in Geertz's (1960) statement, which we use as a fitting conclusion to this segment of the discussion.

It has already been pointed out how etiquette patterns, including language, tend to be regarded by the Javanese as a kind of emotional capital which may be invested in putting others at ease. Politeness is something one directs toward others; one surrounds the other with a wall of behavioral formality which protects the stability of his inner life. Etiquette is a wall built around one's inner feelings, but it is, paradoxically, always a wall someone else builds, at least in part. He may choose to build such a wall for one or two reasons. He and the other person are at least approximate status equals and not intimate friends; and so he responds to the other's politeness to him with an equal politeness. Or the other is clearly superior, in which case he will, in deference to the other's greater spiritual refinement, build him a wall without any demand or expectation that you reciprocate.

#### B. Negative Interrogative

We begin this part of the discussion with contrasting examples from Siamese and Lue.

S: kin r̥i plaàw eat or neg.  'Did you eat (it) or not?'	Lue: kin <sup>1</sup> m̥ <sup>2</sup> kin <sup>1</sup> eat neg. eat  'Did you eat (it) or not?'
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The interesting features lie in the Siamese constructions. The Siamese r̥i by itself can function as a question particle that has as its underlying presupposition, 'I assume that you', as in:

Siamese: kin r̥i  
eat Q-Pt.  
  
'(somebody) eats/ate, I assume'

Likewise, the Siamese form plaàw can be used as a single-word response which rejects the questioners presupposition. The Lue negative m̥ (or its full form baw<sup>2</sup>) cannot be used alone in a response. The fact that the Siamese forms khráp, khâ, r̥i and plaàw function as single-word responses strengthens the argument for performative verb status for utterance final particles.

Still other differences can be found which show striking dissimilarities between Siamese and Lue syntax.

S: kin l̥ɛw r̥i yan eat already or yet  'Did you eat yet?'	Lue: kin <sup>1</sup> l̥ɛw <sup>6</sup> laa <sup>5</sup> (or laa <sup>2</sup> ) eat already Q-Pt.  'Did you eat yet?'
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While Siamese l̥ɛw and Lue l̥ɛw<sup>6</sup> 'already' point to common lexical and syntactic origins, the appearance of r̥i and yan in Siamese shows a divergence. Two other examples contrast Siamese r̥i with Lue di<sup>1</sup> 'or'.

S: ca? kin náam plaàw r̥ɬ naám chaa  
*will eat water plain or water tea*  
*'Will you drink water or tea?'*

L: di?¹ kin¹ nam⁶ kat¹ / di?¹ kin¹ nam⁶ laa⁶ -aa⁵  
*will eat water cool will eat water tea Q-Pt.*  
*'Will you drink water or tea?'*

Noticeable in the Lue citation is the absence of a conjoining device aside from pause at the syntactic boundaries between clauses.

Part of the explanation for the syntactic differences between Siamese and Lue, especially with the uniqueness of r̥ɬ in Siamese, might come from possible borrowing from Cambodian. Huffman (1973) claims that the borrowing has been in the reverse, from Thai into Cambodian. Claims for directionality aside, Siamese and Cambodian do share the following forms which do not appear in Lue. The citations are from Huffman.

Thai	Cambodian	
r̥y	r̥ɬ	'Q. pt in either/or Q's.'
lɛ́w-r̥y-jan	haay-r̥ɬ-ni	'already or not-yet'
laey	laey	'at-all'
na?	neh	'final-hortatory-particle'

Another area in which the negative and interrogative interact is with the form m̥ saŋ¹, which may be a case of idiomatic usage. We find

L: m̥ pin¹ saŋ¹  
*neg. be what/thing*  
*'Never mind'*

S: mây pen ray  
*neg. be what/thing*  
*'Never mind'*

L: kin¹ m̥-saŋ¹  
*eat what*  
*'What are you eating?'*

S: kin ʔaray  
*eat what*  
*'What are you eating?'*

The negative does not appear in the Siamese form for *'what are you eating?'*. The question is why the syllabic m̥ appears in the affirmative interrogative kin¹ m̥ saŋ¹. I suspect that the appearance of the syllabic m̥ in this latter case is a purely phonetic phenomenon with no syntactic or semantic relevance. An alternate form is kin¹ ʔii²-saŋ¹. Further evidence of the idiosyncratic nature of m̥ is that we find in Chiengkham Lue (Hartmann 1975) two similar variations for the vocative m̥¹ pɔɔ⁵, ʔii² pɔɔ⁵ *'father dear'*. In Northern Thai (Purnell 1963) we

find the same phonetic process of the intrusion of  $\eta$  in  $\eta$ impoo 'father dear',  $\eta$ imnee 'mother dear'. Further investigation would undoubtedly shed more light on the peculiar grammar of  $\eta$  saŋ<sup>1</sup>.

Some additional examples of Lue forms related to the foregoing discussion are the following ones taken from Gedney's unpublished field notes. The abbreviation R and Y stand for Lue of Chieng Rung and Moeng Yong respectively.

- (1) R yuu<sup>2</sup> baw<sup>2</sup> yuu<sup>2</sup>  
 Y yuu<sup>2</sup> -aa<sup>2</sup>  $\eta$  yuu<sup>2</sup>-aa<sup>2</sup>  
 stay Q. neg. stay Q.  
 'Is he here or not?'
- (2) Y & R  $\eta$ <sup>2</sup> dɔy<sup>3</sup> tɛɛ<sup>5</sup>  
 neg.eat pt.  
 'Haven't eaten yet'
- (3) Y & R dɔy<sup>3</sup> yaŋ<sup>4</sup>  $\eta$ <sup>2</sup> lɛw<sup>6</sup> tɛɛ<sup>5</sup>  
 eat yet neg. already pt.  
 'Haven't finished eating'

#### C. day<sup>3</sup> vs. caŋ<sup>1,5</sup> and change of word order

Here we shall point to a minor transformation. The Lue form day<sup>3</sup> 'can' has the Siamese reflex dây. On the other hand, caŋ<sup>1</sup> is synonymous with Siamese pen 'to be able, to have the skill'. However, the latter form results in a change in word order.

- S: kin dây máy  
 eat can Q-Pt.  
 'Can you eat it?'
- L: di?<sup>1</sup> kin<sup>1</sup> day<sup>3</sup> -aa<sup>5</sup>  
 will eat can Q-Pt.  
 'Can you eat it?'
- S: kin pen máy  
 eat able Q-pt.  
 'Do you know how to eat it?'
- L: caŋ<sup>1</sup> kin<sup>1</sup> -aa<sup>5</sup>  
 able eat Q-pt.  
 'Do you know how to eat it?'

The grammar of the Lue form day<sup>3</sup> is different too in that it calls for the future particle di?<sup>1</sup> as a pre-verb. The Lue form caŋ<sup>1</sup> is shared with Northern Thai.

#### D. Pronouns

As with the particles, a grammar of pronominal usage depends on contextual factors, especially those dealing with social and situational dimensions. The first person singular is the same in Lue as in Lao, another indication of shifting cultural affinities among Lue, Shan, Lao, and Northern Thai. The form *khoy*<sup>3</sup> 'I' would be used in a formal social setting. It seems, on the basis of our limited conversational data, that the same form, *khoy*<sup>3</sup>, has the double function of final 'polite' or single-word response particle: 'yes, politely'. On a still higher level of formality, we find *khoy*<sup>3</sup> *bat*<sup>1</sup> 'I'.

On the intimate level, *kuu*<sup>5</sup> 'I' and *m+ŋ*<sup>4</sup> 'you' are used by men and women alike.

In the semi-formal context of family life and celebrations kin terms are used. Such is the case in the Lue chant (*khap*<sup>1</sup> *l+i*<sup>6</sup>). The singers use kin terms and a *nom-de-plume* in referring to themselves - usually at the beginning or ending of their participation in the event.

In Text I, the singer is the senior member and refers to himself as *poo*<sup>5</sup> 'father', *pii*<sup>5</sup> 'elder sibling' or his *nom-de-plume* *sii*<sup>1</sup> *taa*<sup>1</sup> *dam*<sup>1</sup> 'black eyes'. In Text II, the singer is a generation younger, and although a man in his late thirties, he refers to himself as *luk*<sup>5</sup> 'child, son' in the presence of the older singer. But he uses the non-kin term *pen*<sup>5</sup> 'I' that a man would use in addressing a younger woman such as his wife, whose implied social status is inferior to his own. In this particular use of *pen*<sup>5</sup> 'I' (also 'they') the younger man refers to a hypothetical woman, the female co-singer that is usually used in the chanting of the Lue tales. Such a performance, and the pronominal system, has an underlying structure of male-female dialogue (cf. Klammer 1973 for his discussion of dialogue as the basic unit of discourse).

#### E. Discourse Level Particles

Of the catalogue of particles that are found in Lue, a few deserve added comment with respect to their role in the syntax of the chanted narrative. In Text II, the younger singer's, several particles are used as oral punctuation and a stylistic device as well. Many of his lines are punctuated by a final *nii*<sup>6</sup>, *ni*<sup>-6</sup> or *le?*<sup>5</sup>. Both are lexical manifestations of a syntactic and phonological boundary. In the actual performance, this is not at all obvious to the outsider. There are no necessary phonological breaks or pauses in the course of singing. But enough cues are given to assert the existence of co-occurrent phonological, grammatical and lexical boundaries. When they do not co-incide exactly, they may be said to overlap. From the standpoint of both method and theory this is very important. In the process of analysing one's

data, cues from these three intertwining fields must be sought in the course of segmenting an otherwise continuous stream of chanted speech. My first reaction on hearing these semantically empty particles, particularly  $le?^5$ , was to remove them from the data as irrelevant. Taking the lead from the tagmemic framework, I discovered that in an oral grammar, they serve the important function of audible punctuation marking sentence boundaries or clause divisions. On a higher level, clause groups, we find phrase-length particles used to punctuate larger units:  $duu^1 le?^5 cam^1$  and  $bat^1 dew^1 van^4 nii^6$ .

We conclude this paper on Lue syntax with a final comment on the place of particles in linguistic theory. Some sort of a 'performative clause' analysis as seen in the earlier work of Ross (1970) is called for. He has argued that a performative solution is preferable to a pragmatics because the former allows for greater formality. Its mechanics are much neater, for one thing. After going to great lengths to prove the existence of a universal underlying performative clause, the suggestion seems to be that the resulting structure is more real than a pragmatics solution. A pragmatics, by comparison, is less real because it rests too many of its claims on things, to quote Ross, "in the air".

Tagmemics and Firthian theory could assume as axiomatic the presence of a speaker-hearer or I-Thou structure in the social situation and the very act of communication, the major function of language. This dialogic structure would be neither "in the air" nor in a syntactic deep structure. It is considered an empirically observable fact which need not be intuited from or argued out of the data of isolated utterances.

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