

# Causatives in Lai<sup>1</sup>

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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

hprɪŋ	be full	dʒə-hprɪŋ	fill something
su	be awake	dʒə-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'
krwanj	'be left out'	khrwanj	'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'
lwinj	'be broadcast, blown away'	hlwinj	'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	'be submerged'	hnats	'submerge, sink'
(nac)		(hnac)	
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'
n̄i light'	'be alight'	hn̄i	'touch with flame,
n̄wat	'be bent over, bow down'	hn̄wat	'bend over'
pi	'be pressed'	phi	'press, compress'
pre	'be torn, gape open'	phre	'tear (tr.)'
pre	'be undone, solved'	phre	'undo, answer, unravel'
pran̄	'be full'	phran̄	'fill'
pyak	'be spoilt'	phyak	'spoil'
prat	'be cut, broken'	phran̄	'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'
pwan̄	'be open'	phwan̄	'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	'be reduced, slack'	hro	'reduce, slacken'
(lyo)		(hlyo)	
kyai	'be wide'	khye	'widen'
n̄i	'be even, matching'	hn̄i	'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 / \ /

dò	'drink'
dè	'come to rest'
mò	'see'
mè	'taste good'
nà	'hurt, be sore'

## Causative / mid /

tò	'give to drink'
tè	'put down'
mò	'show'
mè	'well cooked, ripe'
na	'be cured'

## Simplex / ^ /

câ	'eat'
nô	'be awake'
dû	'dig'

## Causative / - /

ca	'feed'
nò	'awaken, rouse'
tu	'bury (as a corpse)'

## Simplex / \ ? /

lè?	'lick, eat'
vè?	'wear'
vè?	'hide(oneself)'
tò?	'catch fire'
yí?	'sleep'

## Causative / ' /

lé	'feed an animal'
fí	'clothe, dress someone'
fá	'hide something'
tú	'set fire, kindle'
ĩ	'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. <sup>2</sup>	astray
peʔ	inv.	fall off

phew	inv.	exclude
pheʔ	inv.	trip

pit	pi?	clog up	phit	phi?	block
pok	po?	become open	phok	pho?	open
poj	po?ŋ	come loose	phoŋ	pho?ŋ	loosen
po?y	inv.	fall off	pho?y	inv.	untie
puur	inv.	uprooted	phuur	inv.	uproot
tlaa	tlaak	fall	thlaak	thlaak	drop
tlaaw	inv.	disappear	thlaaw	inv.	lose
tlay	inv.	become free	thlay	inv.	wean
tlee	tleet	spill	thlee	thleet	cause to spill
tleek	tle?	rip off (int)	thleek	thle?	tear off (tr)
tleer	inv.	split (int)	thleer	inv.	split (tr)
tlooŋ	tlo?ŋ	unloose	thlooŋ	thlo?ŋ	cause to unloose
thluu	thluuk	fall	thluu	thluuk	cause to fall
thlum	inv.	wear off	thlum	inv.	consume
to?l	inv.	slide down	tho?l	inv.	cause to slide
tsat	tso?	disconnected	tshat	tsha?	sever
tsim	tsi?m	erode	tshim	tshi?m	cause to erode
tek	te?	spread out	thek	the?	scatter (tr)
tet	te?	wear out	thet	the?	dismantle
tjaw	inv.	disperse (int)	thiaw	inv.	disperse
tjil (tr)	tjil	fall (fruit)	thil	thi?l	cause to fall
tum	tu?m	descend	thum	thu?m	bring down
daj	dan	be separate	---	tan	cut
kaaj	ka?ŋ	burn (int)	khaaj	kha?ŋ	set fire
kiak	kia?	break (int)	khiak	khia?	break (tr)
kuar	kua?r	have holes	khuar	khua?r	dig
kuay	inv.	break (int)	khuay	inv.	break (tr)
maan	inv.	become crushed	---	hmaan	crush (tr)
mer	me?r	turn	---	hme?r	twist
mit	mi?	light out	hmit	hmi?	extinguish
mot	mo?	become pieces	hmot	hmo?	break up (tr)

neem	inv.	soft	hneem	hneʔm	comfort
---	neʔr	entwine (int)	---	hneʔr	entwine (tr), stir
low	loʔw	disappear	hlow	hloʔw	wipe
laaw	inv.	alarm (int)	hlaaw	hlaʔw	alarm (tr)
luut	luʔ	enter	hluʔ	---	insert
ril	riʔl	roll	hril	hriʔl	cause to roll
rook	roʔ	break down	hrook	hroʔ	destroy

### 3. Suffixal Causation in Lai.

If we accept Payne's requirement that a morphological causative be productive (1996:178), the Lai suffixal causative marker *-ter* is a morphological causative.<sup>3</sup> This morphological causative suffix can express either causation, permission, or request, depending on the context. For example,

- (1) ka luŋ ʔa ka roʔ-ter  
 1POS heart 3SG.S 1SG.O break down-CAUS  
 he causes to break down my heart  
 (He makes me disappointed)<sup>4</sup>.
- (2) ʔa ka kal-ter.  
 3SG.S 1SG.O go-CAUS  
 he let me go / he causes me to go / he asks me to go.

This causative suffix requires a form II verb stem, because the form II verb stem is the unmarked form for transitive constructions and subordinate clauses<sup>5</sup>. For example, (3b) and (4b) are ungrammatical because they are transitive constructions and they should have the form II verb stem.

- (3a) CeuMang niʔ Nihu ʔa tliik-ter  
 Name AGT Name 3SG.S. run II-CAUS  
 CeuMang let / causes Nihu to run.

- (3b) \*Ceumang ni? Nihu ?a tlii-ter.  
 Name AGT Name 3SG.S. run I-CAUS  
*Ceumang let / cause Nihu to run.*
- (4a) Zisuh ni? ti-lij ?a da?y-ter  
 Jesus AGT water-gathering 3SG.S quiet II-CAUS  
 Jesus made the pond quiet / Jesus silenced the pond  
 (raging water in the pond).
- (4b) \*Zisuh ni? ti-lij ?a daay-ter  
 Jesus AGT water-gathering 3SG.S quiet I-CAUS  
 Jesus made the pond quiet / Jesus silenced the pond  
 (raging water in the pond).

The fact that the form II verb stem is required for the causative suffix *-ter* makes it clear that its syntactic function is to increase the verb valence (see Payne 1997:186ff), much like the applicative markers such as *piak* for the benefactive, *pi* for the comitative, *taak* for the relinquitive, etc. (for a detailed treatment of applicatives in Lai, see Peterson 1998).

### 3.1. The Interface of the Prefixial Causative and *-ter*.

Since the suffixal causative *-ter*<sup>6</sup> is productive, it can be suffixed to both simplex (non-causative) and causative verbs. For example,

Non-causative (simplex)      With causative suffix

form I    form II

kaaj    ka?ŋ    burn (int)    ka?ŋ-ter    cause to burn (int)

Causative

Form I    Form II

khaaj    kha?ŋ    set fire      kha?ŋ-ter    cause someone to set fire

When the causative suffix is added to a simplex verb, the causation is indirect. For example, in (5), the agent Nihu does not need to be directly involved in the field being burnt.

- (5) Nihu ni? low ?a ka?ŋ-ter  
 Name AGT field 3SG.S. burn II -CAUS  
 Nihu caused the field to burn.

However, with the prefixial causative verbs, the causation is direct. For example, in (6), the agent Nihu is personally (and intentionally) involved in burning the field, i.e., the agent is directly involved in setting the fire (see Payne 1997:181ff for a discussion of direct and indirect causation).

- (6) Nihu ni? low ?a kha?ŋ.  
 Name AGT field 3SG.S. set fire II  
 Nihu set fire to the field.

When *-ter* is suffixed to prefixial causative verbs, there is both an increased verb valence and direct causation, as in (7).

- (7) Nihu ni? low ?a ka kha?ŋ-ter.  
 Name AGT field 3SG.S. 1SG.O set fire II -CAUS  
 Nihu made / asked me to set fire the field.

### 3.2. The Interface of the ‘Passive’ with *-ter*.

As George Bedell first observed in “Passives and Clefts in Lai” (1996) there is a particular syntactic structure which seems to emphasize the object in Lai sentences. For example, in (8a) the emphasis is on the subject whereas in (8b) the emphasis is on the object.

- (8a) LianMaŋ ni? Par-?iaŋ ?a hna?m.  
 Name AGT Name 3SG.S kiss II  
 Lian Mang kissed Par Iang.

- (8b) Par-?iaŋ tsuu LianMaŋ ni? hna?m ?a sii.  
 Name TOP Name AGT kiss II 3SG.S COP



Par Iang is kissed by Lian Mang  
(lit. As for Par Iang, she is kissed by Lian Mang).

In (8b) the object is the focus of the sentence. For that reason, Bedell called (8b) a 'cleft' construction. If we want to add causative suffix to the verb 'kiss' in (8b), the result would be a valence increasing operation, as in (9).

- (9) Par-ʔianʔ tsuu LianManʔ niʔ hnaʔm-ter ʔa sii.  
 Name TOP Name AGT kiss II-CAUS 3SG.S CO  
 As for Par Iang, Lian Mang asked/caused (someone)  
 to kiss her.

In reading (9), it is important to note that in Lai the third person singular object is not marked. For example, in (10a) and (10b) the first and second person object are marked in the sentence, but in (10c) the third person object is not.

- (10a) tii ʔa ka dinʔ = he gives me a drink  
 water 3SG.S 1SG.O give water, II
- (10b) tii ʔa -n dinʔ = he gives you a drink  
 water 3SG.S 2SG.O give water, II
- (10c) tii ʔa --- dinʔ = he gives him a drink  
 water 3SG.S give water, II

#### 4. Conclusion.

In dealing with a topic as complex as causatives and causation it is very difficult, if not impossible, to cover all the interactions between causatives and every construction in a language. Thus, in this paper, there are vast domains of syntactic structure left unexplored. This paper attempts to clarify the prefixial causative and its historical source in TB as well as the suffixial causative and its interaction with other syntactic structures. This work attempts to cover the structure of the two basic causative constructions in Lai and their interaction. It also deals with important questions about the syntactic function of verbal alternations in Lai.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This paper was written with the financial support of: National Science Foundation, Division of Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Linguistics, Grant No. SBR-9808952; National Endowment for the Humanities, Division of Research Programs, Grant No. PA-23353-99.

I would like to thank Prof. James A. Matisoff and other friends and colleagues for their advice and suggestions. The mistakes are mine.

<sup>2</sup>Inv. = invariant.

<sup>3</sup>Peterson (1998:95) called the suffix *-ter* a post verbal particle. I would prefer to call it a causative suffix as it is not phonologically independent.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of such psycho-collocations in Lai, see VanBik (1998).

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed analysis of form I and form II stems, see Kathol and VanBik (forthcoming), "Form and Function: Verbal Alternation in Lai".

<sup>6</sup>This *ter-* 'causative' suffix derives from a full verb meaning 'to send' (Thurgood 1983).

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