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## Scope in Kuki-Chin Questions

George Bedell, Ph. D.

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The examples in this paper illustrate the syntactic structure of questions in three Kuki-Chin languages: Lai, primarily spoken in Hakha and Thantlang townships, Chin State, Myanmar; Mizo, primarily spoken in Mizoram State, India; and K'cho, primarily spoken in Mindat township, Chin State, Myanmar. Lai and Mizo are closely related Central Kuki-Chin languages, and K'cho is a less closely related Southern Kuki-Chin language. There is a brief glance at two Northern Kuki-Chin languages. Examples followed by numbers in parentheses are taken from translations of the Gospel according to Matthew in each language. Lai and Mizo are cited in their standard orthographies as these appear in the translations. K'cho does not have a generally accepted orthography, and examples are adapted from *Màtheiù* 2001. I am grateful to Kee Shein Mang for help with the K'cho examples, and to Goh Deih Lun for help with the Mizo examples.

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**Polar Questions.** The sentences in (1) illustrate polar (yes-no) questions.

- (1) (Lai)        [*Hihi ka tuah khawh tiah*] *nan zum maw?*  
      (Mizo)     [*Hei hi ti theiin*] *mi ring em?*  
      (K'cho)   [*Sin cu ka ci hnging khai ah*] *nani zùm ci ang?*  
                  'Do you believe [I can do this]?' (9:28)

The Mizo version in (1) has a different structure from the Lai and K'cho versions, and corresponds to English 'do you believe me able to do this?'. But Mizo allows a syntactically parallel construction as in (1').

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(1) (Mizo) *Hei hi ka ti thei tih in ring em?*

The agreement systems in Lai, Mizo and K'cho are described in Bedell (1998), (2001b), and (2008), respectively. The last word in each sentence in (1) is a question particle, which does not appear in corresponding statements, as in (2).

(2) (Lai) *[Hihi na tuah khawh tiah] kan zum.*  
(Mizo) *[Hei hi ti theiin] kan ring che.*  
(K'cho) *[Sin cu na ci hnging khai ah] kani zùm ci.*  
(2') (Mizo) *Hei hi i ti thei tih kan ring.*  
'We believe [you can do this].'

The Lai particle *maw*, the Mizo particle *em* and the K'cho particle *ang*, though not obviously cognate, play the same role in their respective languages. The same might be said for other words; for example Lai *khawh*, Mizo *thei* and K'cho *hnging* are all verbal particles with a potential meaning corresponding to English 'can'.

**Identification Questions.** The sentences in (3) and (4) illustrate identification (wh) questions containing interrogative words. As in (1), the three languages have different words playing parallel roles.

(3) (Lai) *Ahodah a ngan bik?*  
(Mizo) *Tunge ropui ber ang le?*  
(K'cho) *A u ang a ng'vái pí?*  
'Who is the greatest?' (18: 1)

In (3), the Lai word *ahodah*, the Mizo word *tunge* and K'cho *a u ang* all request the identification of a person, and correspond to English 'who?'. That *ahodah* and *tunge* are written as single words, while *a u ang* is written as a three-word phrase may be no more than orthographic convention.

(4) (Lai) *Zei cu dah a biapi deuh?*  
(Mizo) *Engnge ropui zâwk?*  
(K'cho) *A i ang a bä tu bà?*  
'Which is greater?' (23:19)

Similarly in (4), the Mizo word *engnge* and the K'cho word *a i ang* request the identification of a non-human thing, and correspond to English 'what?'. The Lai sentence in (4) illustrates a further feature of these interrogatives. In *zei cu dah*, the deictic particle *cu* occurs inside *zeidah*, which is the Lai parallel to *engnge* or *a i ang*. Each interrogative word in (3) and (4) consists of two parts which may enclose additional words. The *a* in *a u* and *a i* is the same morpheme, which is not strictly required though usually present. Jordan (1969; p. 1) calls it a 'facultative affix'. We have nothing better to say about it at this point.

(5) (Lai) *aho ... dah*  
(Mizo) *tu ... nge*  
(K'cho) *a u ... ang*  
'who'

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(Lai)	<i>zei ... dah</i>
(Mizo)	<i>eng ... nge</i>
(K'cho)	<i>a i ... ang</i> 'what'

One interesting difference is that in K'cho, the yes-no question particle *ang* also appears as the second part of interrogative words and phrases, while in Lai and Mizo these are distinct: *maw* versus *dah*, and *em* versus *nge*.

**The Position of K'cho *ang*.** A possibly related difference between K'cho and the other two languages is illustrated in (6).

(6)	(Lai)	<i>Zeidah na duh?</i>
	(Mizo)	<i>Engnge i duh?</i>
	(K'cho)	<i>A i na ng'za hlü ci ang?</i> 'What do you want?' (Mt. 20:21)

While Lai *dah* and Mizo *nge* do not occur at the end of a question as components of interrogative words, this is the most common position of K'cho *ang*, the same position it occupies as a yes-no question particle. The K'cho sentence in (6) has a variant (7) with *ang* adjacent to *a i*.

(7)	(K'cho)	<i>A i ang na ng'zak hlü?</i>	cf. (6)
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There are two morphosyntactic differences between (6) and (7) in addition to the position of *ang*. In (6) the tense/aspect particle *ci* must appear, but may not in (7). And in (6) we see a different verb form (*ng'za hlü*) from (7) (*ng'zak hlü*) 'want'. These differences are correlated in that *ci* always occurs with *ng'za hlü* but never with *ng'zak hlü*. The K'cho form corresponding to English 'want' with a noun phrase object is apparently composed of the verb *ng'za* which by itself may mean 'hear', 'be intelligent' or 'understand' plus an auxiliary *hlü* meaning 'want', which must co-occur with a main verb.

Similarly, the K'cho sentences in (3) and (4) have variants with *ang* at the end as in (8) and (9).

(8)	(K'cho)	<i>A u ng'vái pí ci ang?</i>	cf. (3)
(9)	(K'cho)	<i>A i bā tu bà ci ang?</i>	cf. (4)

In (8) and (9), when *ang* appears at the end of the question, the tense/aspect particle *ci* must appear, just as in (6). Unlike (6) and (7), however, there is no difference in the form of the K'cho verbs *ng'vái* 'be important' or *bā* 'be noble' corresponding to that between *ng'za hlü* and *ng'zak hlü*. An additional difference appears in these examples which is not seen in (6) and (7). When the subject is third person singular, the agreement marker *a* is used before the verb when *ang* is adjacent to *a u* or *a i*, but not when *ang* is at the end of the question. Like the appearance of *ci*, this correlates with the verb form difference if there is one: *a* is always used with *ng'zak hlü* but never with *ng'za hlü*. A verb form which co-occurs with *ci* but not *a* is generally called 'stem I', while one which co-occurs with *a* but not *ci* is called 'stem II'. Many K'cho verbs and auxiliary verbs have a morphological difference, but many do not. Subject agreement particles other than

the third person singular *a*, such as the second person singular *na* in (6) and (7), occur irrespective of the verb stem form.

**Split Interrogative Phrases.** More examples of interrogative phrases incorporating other material appear in (10), (12), (13) and (16).

- (10) (Lai) *Aho nih dah cu nawl cu an pek?*  
(Mizo) *Tuinnge thu pe che?*  
(K'cho) *Cunah ana cu a u no ning pe ci ang?*  
'Who gave you the authority?' (Mt. 21:23)

In (10), the enclosed word is a postposition which marks the subject of a transitive verb in each of the three languages: Lai *nih*, Mizo *in* and K'cho *no*. That *tuinnge* is written as a single word but *aho nih dah* as a phrase may reflect merely orthographic convention.

- (11) (Lai) *Pathian nih cu nawl cu a ka pek.*  
(Mizo) *Pathian in thu mi pe.*  
(K'cho) *Cunah ana cu Khanpùghí no na pe ci.*  
'God gave me the authority'

These same words appear in their normal position in the possible answers (11).

- (12) (Lai) *Zeitindah nan ruah?*  
(Mizo) *Nangnin engtinnge in ngaih?*  
(K'cho) *Nangmí no a i ah ang nami ng'ngaih?*  
'What do you think?' (Mt. 21:28)

In (12), the enclosed word is *tin* in Lai and Mizo, which apparently does not occur except in these constructions; in K'cho, it is *ah*, a postposition which generally occurs with noun phrase modifiers, including genitives. These interrogatives often correspond to English 'how'.

In (13), the interrogatives enclose a full noun.

- (13) (Lai) *Zei sualnak dah a tuah?*  
(Mizo) *Engnge a tihsual ni?*  
(K'cho) *A i hmàkatnák bi hlèi ang?*  
'What wrong did he do?' (27:23)

In (13) the noun is head of the interrogative phrase: Lai *sualnak* and K'cho *hmàkatnák* 'wrong (action)'. The Mizo version has a different structure in which an enclosed noun is avoided. A literal gloss would be 'What is his wrongdoing?' The structure with an enclosed head noun is possible in Mizo as well, as in (14).

- (14) (Mizo) *Eng sualna nge a tih?* cf. (13)

The Mizo construction in (13) is also possible in Lai and K'cho, as in (15).

- (15) (Lai) *Zeidah a sualnak a si?* cf. (13)

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- (K'cho) *A hmàkatnák cu a i ah kia ci ang?*  
 (K'cho) *A hmàkatnák cu a i ah ang a kia?*

The K'cho copula *kia* 'be' which corresponds to Lai *si* and Mizo *ni*, takes a postpositional phrase with *ah* as complement rather than a bare noun phrase. It appears in rather formal style and may usually be omitted, as in (15').

- (15') (K'cho) *A hmàkatnák cu a i ang?*

The same applies to subsequent K'cho examples (16), (17), (20) and (21).

In (16), the enclosed noun is a genitive modifier of an interrogative head noun. A genitive noun phrase is simply juxtaposed to its head in Lai and Mizo, while in K'cho the postposition *ah* is used to link them. See Bedell 2002 for a discussion of Lai genitive constructions.

- (16) (Lai) *Aho hrinsor dah a si?*  
 (Mizo) *Tu fapa nge ni?*  
 (K'cho) *A u ah htá ah kia ci ang?*  
 'Whose son is he?' (Mt. 22:42)

In possible answers to (16), an additional noun phrase will appear, as in (17).

- (17) (Lai) *Pathian hrinsor a si.*  
 (Mizo) *Pathian fapa a ni.*  
 (K'cho) *Khanpùghí ah htá ah kia ci.*  
 'He is God's son.'

The K'cho question in (12) has an internal *ang*, while those in (10), (13) and (16) have final *ang*. In each case the other position is possible.

- (18) (K'cho) *Cunah ana cu a u no ang a ning peit?* cf. (10)  
 (19) (K'cho) *Nangmí no a i ah nami ng'ngai ci ang?* cf. (12)  
 (20) (K'cho) *A i hmàkatnák ang a bi?* cf. (13)  
 (21) (K'cho) *A u ah htá ah ang a kia?* cf. (16)

In (18), the stem II form *peit* 'give' appears, corresponding to the stem I form *pe* in (10). In (19), the stem I form *ng'ngai* 'think' appears, corresponding to the stem II form *ng'ngaih* in (12). In (20) and (21), the verbs *bi* 'do, work' and *kia* 'be' do not distinguish stem I from stem II forms in (13) or (16), but the use of the tense/aspect particle *ci* and the agreement particle *a* are consistent in all four cases with the earlier examples. It is worth noting two similarities between these K'cho structures and Mizo. Mizo also has variation in the verb stem form in questions. Like K'cho, not all verbs have the variation. Thus in the Mizo version of (12), the verb *ngaih* 'think' is the stem II form; the stem I form would be *ngai*, resembling K'cho. However, the condition governing the choice of stem form is different from K'cho: the stem I form appears in yes/no questions and in questions with an interrogative subject; the stem II form appears in questions with any interrogative other than the subject. Thus the stem choice in K'cho and Mizo is the same in (10) and (12), but different in (18) and (19). The stem II form of the Mizo verb *pe* 'give' is *pék*. Mizo also suppresses the third person singular agreement marker *a*, in examples like (3), (4),

(10), (13) and (16). This *a* does not appear in any question with an interrogative subject. Thus K'cho and Mizo both lack *a* in (10), (13) and (16), but K'cho has it in (18), (20) and (21). Note also that (17), a possible answer to (16), has it. In questions with an interrogative, Mizo lacks *a* under the same condition as K'cho: when the verb is in its stem I form. In this case, the presence of *a* signals a stem II form of those verbs which lack a morphological distinction, and its absence signals a stem I form, just as in K'cho. However, Mizo differs from K'cho in that in yes/no questions and statements, stem I verb forms are accompanied by *a*. The agreement particle *a* is also absent in a sentence like the Mizo version of (11). This is due to the presence of the object agreement *mi* 'me', and is a different matter. See Bedell 2001b for a general description of agreement in Mizo.

As we have seen, K'cho questions with interrogatives generally have two variants, one with *ang* at the end, and one with it inside the sentence in syntactic as well as semantic association with *a u* or *a i*. These variant questions are not identical in meaning: the question final position of *ang* is relatively neutral, while the internal position seems to focus the interrogation on the interrogative word (or phrase). In the case of (6) and (7), the difference resembles that between English 'what do you want?' and 'what is it you want?' respectively. It is rather difficult to find contexts in which one or the other variant is impossible, but there is in our examples one relevant case. In offering K'cho (20) as a variant of (13), we omitted the word *hlèi* which occurs in (13). In fact the question corresponding to (20) with *hlèi* is ungrammatical.

(22) (K'cho) \**A i hmàkatnák ang a bi hlèi?* cf. (20)

The reason for this is that *hlèi* is the K'cho switch reference particle, and carries an implied second clause, which must be taken as within the scope of the interrogation.

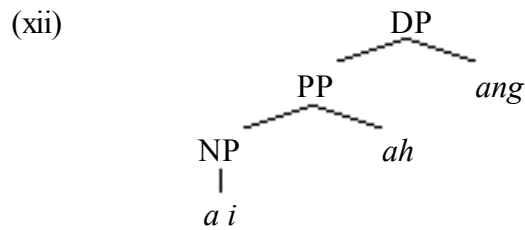
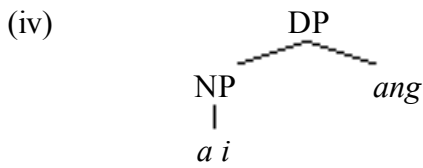
(20') (K'cho) *A i hmàkatnák bi hlèi (nami ngon hlü ci) ang?*  
'What wrong did he do (and you want to kill him)?'

For details on K'cho switch reference, see Bedell 2001c. Interestingly, it is possible to put *ang* before the clause itself, as in (20'').

(20'') (K'cho) *A i hmàkatnák bi hlèi ang (nami ngon hlü)?*

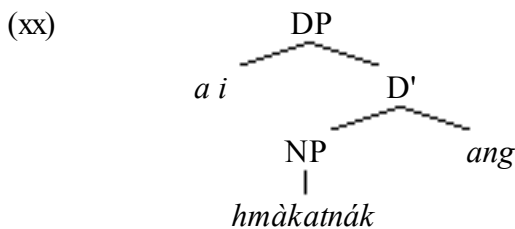
Note the usual shift to stem II in (20'') though the verb *ngon* 'kill' has no morphological change. What we cannot have is *ang* in the position in (22). The position of *ang* thus involves a kind of scope phenomenon resembling that which affects different positions of the negative in many languages, but which cannot be reproduced in Lai or Mizo.

**Interrogative Deictics.** Let us assume, following Lehman (1998), that the second element of the interrogatives in (5) is the syntactic head. That is, *a i ang* in the K'cho version of (4) has the structure (iv). Lehman takes these heads to belong to a functional category Q, projecting to a maximal QP, but the syntactic motivation to justify a categorial distinction between interrogatives and deictics seems to be insufficient in these languages. We assume that the category of Lai *dah*, Mizo *nge* and K'cho *ang* is D, the same as for the deictics as argued in Bedell (2001). These particular deictic heads include a semantic property of interrogation not shared by other members of D. In addition to a noun phrase complement as in (iv) they may also take a postpositional phrase complement as in (xii), our assumed structure for *a i ah ang* in the K'cho version of (12).

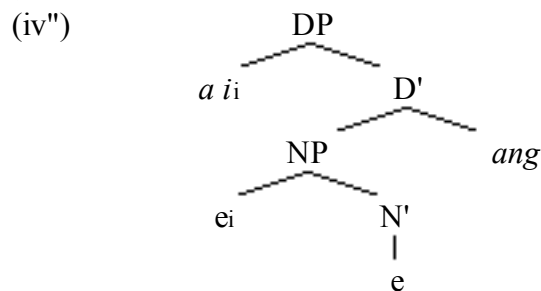
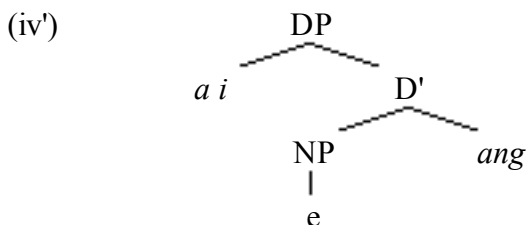


That a deictic phrase may be enclosed by an interrogative, as in Lai (4) *zei cu dah*, does not show that the interrogative heads cannot be Ds. Ordinary Ds may occasionally stack, and the structure of Lai (4) will have DP where PP is in (xii). See Bedell 2001a for more details on Lai deictic constructions.

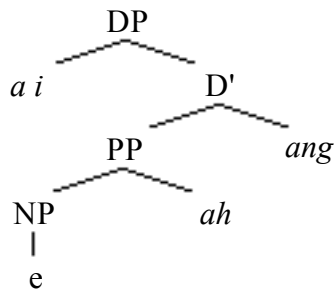
In (iv) and (xii), the first element of the interrogatives in (5) is shown as the head noun of a noun phrase either complement to the deictic *ang* or further down. But in the construction exemplified in Lai (13), Mizo (14) and K'cho (20), the head noun position is occupied by another noun, and the interrogative serves as a kind of modifier. Both Lehmann (1998) for Lai interrogatives, and Bedell (2001a) for Lai deictics, take its syntactic position to be specifier of the deictic interrogative, as shown in (xx).



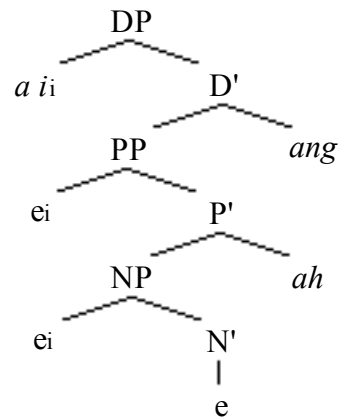
Thus these interrogative forms have the same categorial ambivalence as English 'what' as in 'what did you read?' versus 'what book?', or as English 'that' as in 'I read that' versus 'that book'. It would be possible to resolve the ambivalence by assuming that the interrogatives are always in the specifier position, and that the head noun position may be empty, as shown in (iv'). Applied to the postpositional phrase construction as in (12), an analysis like (xii') will result. In this case the semantic relation between the (initial) interrogative and the empty head noun may become problematic. Thus Bedell (2001a) suggests that (for the analogous deictic structures), there should be a chain linking the specifier positions of each intervening projection, including the noun phrase itself. Thus the structure should be as in (iv'') and (xii'').



(xii')

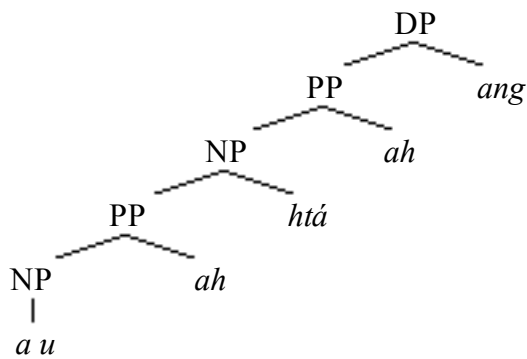


(xii'')

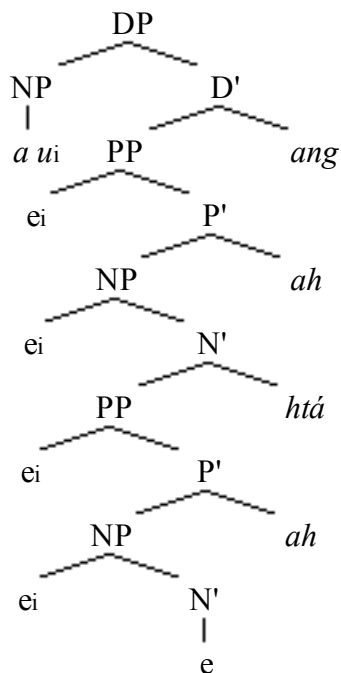


The genitive construction illustrated in Lai and Mizo (16) and K'cho (21) will allow the interpretation that the interrogative is the head noun, as in (xxi). But the alternative (xxi'') is possible in the same way as (xii'').

(xxi)



(xxi'')



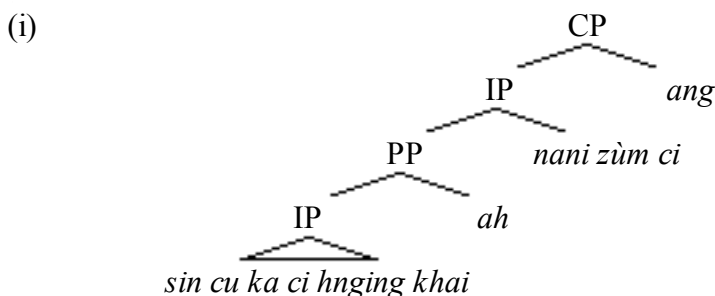


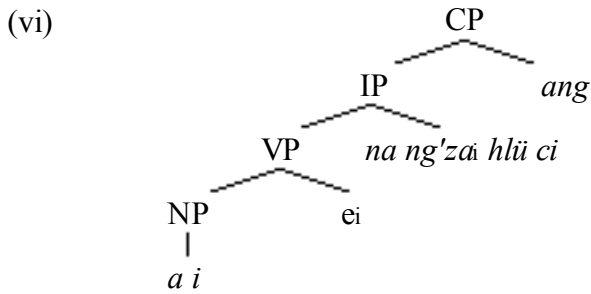
**Interrogative Complementizers.** Lehman (1998) also observes that Lai *dah*, in addition to its appearance as the second part of an interrogative, may function as an independent interrogative in Lai sentences such as those in (22) to (24). In such usage there is an (overt or implied) first conjunct with *maw*, and he suggests that the use of *maw* in examples like (1) can be explained on that basis via abbreviation.

- (23) (Lai) *A ra dingmi chu nangmah hi na si maw, asiloah mi dang dah kan zoh rih hna lai?*  
 (Mizo) *Lo kal tûra chu i ni nge, mi dang kan lo ngai ang?*  
 (K'cho) *Lo khai cu nang ang? Kã cun ung a hei kami gûn ei vai ang?*  
 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for someone else?'  
 (Mt. 11: 3)
- (24) (Lai) *Cuka ram mi hna nih cun maw, ram dang mi nih dah?*  
 (Mizo) *An fate lâkah nge, mi hrang lâkah?*  
 (K'cho) *Ami htá gùì ung ka ang? A hngei chàng gùì ung ka ang?*  
 'From their own sons, or from others?' (Mt. 17:25)
- (25) (Lai) *Pathian sinin maw a si, minung sinin dah?*  
 (Mizo) *Vâna mi thu nge, mihring thu?*  
 (K'cho) *Khanmòpí ah ka ang? K'chàng gùì ung ka ang?*  
 'Was it from heaven, or from men?' (Mt. 21:25)

Notice that Lai *maw* corresponds to Mizo *nge* rather than to Mizo *em*, and also that in K'cho both clauses appear with *ang*. These examples do not show Lai *dah* occurring unambiguously in clause final (i. e. C) position. Lai *maw*, Mizo *nge* and K'cho *ang* occur there only in (23). In (24) *maw* appears to be in DP final position, and in (25) in PP final position; in the latter case it is also clause internal. The other cases are either NP or PP final, though they are also interpretable as clauses which have undergone contextual deletion.

Again following Lehman (1998), we will assume that K'cho *ang*, when it appears in question final position (either in a yes/no question or together with an interrogative *a u* or *a i*), occupies the complementizer position, as in (i) or (vi).





Just as with deictics, some complementizers have interrogative meaning (Lai *dah*, Mizo *nge*, K'cho *ang*) and others do not. If these structures are reasonable, we can conclude that K'cho *ang* differs from Lai *maw* and Mizo *em* in being able to semantically combine with a quantifier (*a u* or *a i* in K'cho).

**Zo and Siyin.** To extend our account of question types in Kuki-Chin languages, consider examples (26) through (36), consisting of the same passages quoted in (1), (3), (4), (6), (10), (12), (13), (16), and (23) to (25). These translations are in two Northern Kuki-Chin languages, Zo and Siyin. Zo is often called Tedim Chin, after the township where it is spoken. Siyin is also spoken primarily in Tedim township.

- |      |         |  |                                     |
|------|---------|--|-------------------------------------|
| (26) | (Zo)    | <i>Kei, hih bang hih thei dingin nong um uh hiam?</i>                            | cf. (1)                             |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>No hong damsak thei tu in nong um uh ziam?</i>                                |                                     |
| (27) | (Zo)    | <i>Kua lian pen ahi hiam?</i>  | cf. (3)                             |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Akua lianbel ziam?</i>  |                                     |
| (28) | (Zo)    | <i>Koi manpha zaw ahi hiam?</i>  | cf. (4)                             |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Koi sia thupi zaw ziam?</i>   |                                     |
| (29) | (Zo)    | <i>Bang deih na hi hiam?</i>   | cf. (6)                             |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Bang nuam ni ziam?</i>  |                                     |
| (30) | (Zo)    | <i>Bang thuneihna tawh hihte hih na hi hiam?</i>                                 | cf. (10)                            |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Hibang nasep thei natu in bang thuneina nei ni ziam?</i>                      |                                     |
| (31) | (Zo)    | <i>Bang na ci ngaihsut uh hiam?</i>  | cf. (12)                            |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Tu in hi bangbang na ngaisun ziam?</i>  |                                     |
| (32) | (Zo)    | <i>Amah'n bang tatkhialhna nei ahi hiam?</i>                                     | cf. (13)                            |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Ahihang ama in bang khialna vawt na ziam?</i>                                 |                                     |
| (33) | (Zo)    | <i>Amah kua tapa ahi hiam?</i>   | cf. (16)                            |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>Ama sia a kua ii suan ziam?</i>   |                                     |
| (34) | (Zo)    | <i>Hong pai ding pa mah hi hiam?</i>   | Midang khatpeuh ka na lamem ding uh |
|      |         | <i>hiam?</i>   | cf. (23)                            |
|      | (Siyin) | <i>John ii 'Hong pailai tu hi, ' aci sia ni ziammaw, ngualdang khat muangmaw</i> |                                     |
|      |         | <i>laitu khu ziam?</i>   |                                     |

- (35) (Zo) *Amau tate tung hiam? Midangte tung ahi hiam?* cf. (24)  
 (Siyin) *Ngamsung mite in pia ziammaw ngamdang mite in pia ziam?*
- (36) (Zo) *Vantung pan hiam, mihing tung pan hiam?* cf. (25)  
 (Siyin) *Pathian tungpan ziammaw, mihing tungpan ziam?*

In these languages, there is a single particle which appears in both polar and identification questions (Zo *hiam* and Siyin *ziam*) and which is always clause final. The interrogatives corresponding to (5) consist of a single morpheme (*kua* 'who' and *bang* 'what'). Note also that in Siyin, *ziammaw* appears in the first conjunct in examples (34) to (36). A particle *maw* also occurs in Zo as a variant of *hiam*, though not in these particular examples. Notice also that in example (28), the interrogative which is used is *koi* 'where?' rather than *bang* 'what?'. Lai, Mizo and K'cho all have cognates of this interrogative.

In the perspective of examples (26) to (33), it appears that K'cho may represent a type of question construction intermediate between that represented by Lai and Mizo, in which the double interrogative is distinct from the yes/no question particle, and that represented by Zo and Siyin. The rather complex system found in Lai and Mizo may have developed from an original simpler system of the Zo and Siyin type via a reanalysis of a question particle as seen in examples (23) to (25) and (34) to (36) as syntactically attached to an interrogative. The situation in K'cho then represents the result of this reanalysis prior to any morphological differentiation of the reanalyzed interrogative particle and the remaining yes/no question particle. This differentiation is complete in Mizo, but only partially complete in Lai, as indicated in examples like (23) to (25).

### Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person masculine singular
S	singular
DL	dual
PL	plural
M	masculine
F	feminine
DIM	diminutive
FUT	future
IMP	imperative
NEG	negative
OBJ	object
PROX	proximate
SUBJ	subjunctive

### Bible Translations

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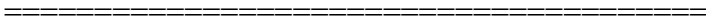
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