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Causatives in Lai and Mizo

George Bedell, Ph. D.

Lai and Mizo are Tibeto-Burman languages primarily spoken in neighboring and overlapping areas of Chin State, Myanmar and Mizoram State, India. Both belong to the Central subgroup of Kuki-Chin; they are thus closely related, but not mutually intelligible. Most of the differences which impede intelligibility are lexical and relatively easily overcome on continued exposure. The primary examples below are taken from four translations of the Gospel according to Matthew. Those marked 'a' are from *Pathian Lehkhabu Thianghlim* (God's Holy Book), the standard Mizo version. Those marked 'b' are from the common language revision (same title) published in 2008. Those marked 'c' are from Lai Baibal Thiang (the Holy Bible in Lai), the standard Lai version, as revised in 1999 (principal translator David Van Bik). Those marked 'd' are from Khamtu Bawipa Jesuh Khrih Biahren Thar (the New Testament of the Savior Lord Jesus Christ), published in 2002 (principal translator James Sangawi). Examples are cited in the original orthography; the numbers indicate chapter and verse in Matthew. The standard orthographies of Lai and Mizo are almost identical. Lai c, ch and hng correspond to Mizo ch, chh and ngh. Mizo represents some long vowels with a circumflex accent, while Lai occasionally uses a doubled vowel letter. Our examples use tr and thr for the retroflex stops, represented in both standard orthographies as t and th with a subscribed dot. Both orthographies represent a syllable final glottal stop with the letter h, and neither represents tone. An earlier version of this paper, entitled 'Causatives in Mizo', was presented to the 36th ICSTLL, Melbourne, 2003.

The - $t\hat{i}r$ causative in Mizo. Sentence (1) contains a Mizo causative verb ($l\hat{a}k$ chhuah $t\hat{i}r$ 'let take out') formed by suffixing - $t\hat{i}r$ to another verb.

- (1) a I mit ata hmawlh tê tak tê kha mi lâk chhuahtîr rawh, (7:4)
 - b *I mita thil tê tak tê awm kha mi lâk chhuahtîr rawh*, 'let me take that small chip out of your eye'

The verb to which *-tîr* is suffixed (*la chhuak* 'take out') in (1) appears in (2). It is itself a sequence of two verbs (*la* 'take' and *chhuak* 'go out').

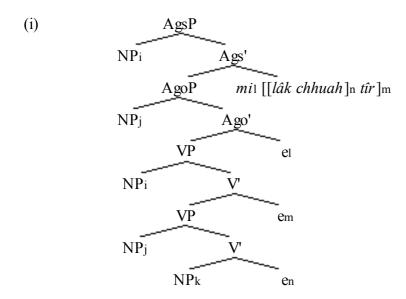
- (2) a i mit ata khanchhuk kha la chhuak hmasa rawh; (7: 5)
 - b *i mita thingtum awm kha la chhuak hmasa zet rawh;* 'first take that wooden beam out of your eye;

Like Lai and other Kuki-Chin languages, Mizo exhibits 'verb stem alternation'. In (2), *la chhuak* is the 'stem I' form, while in (3) *lâk chhuah* is the 'stem II' form.

- (3) a i unau mit ata hmawlh tê tak tê lâk chhuah tûr chu fiah takin i hmu ang.
 - b *i unau mita thil tê tak tê lâk chhuah tûr chu fiah takin i hmu thei ang.*'you will see clearly to take the small chip out of your brother's eye' (7: 5)

A complicated set of morphosyntactic and semantic conditions determines which stem variant is used; Mizo uses stem I in imperatives as in (2), but stem II in purpose clauses as in (3). The causative $-t\hat{r}r$ is suffixed to the stem II form as in (1). Not all Mizo verbs exhibit stem alternation; the causative verb $l\hat{a}k$ $chhuaht\hat{r}r$ is an imperative (stem I) form in (1), but it has no alternative (stem II) form.

We take the causative structure in sentence (1) to be as in (i).



In (i), the lower NP_i is the position of the understood subject of the causative verb *lâk chhuahtîr* (*nang* 'you'), and the lower NP_j is the position of the understood subject of the base verb *la chhuak* (*kei* 'me'). NP_k is the position of the object of the base verb *hmawlh tê tak tê kha* 'that small chip'. *Mi* indicates object agreement of the causative verb with NP_j. *I mit ata* 'from your eye' and the imperative particle *rawh* are not included in (i).

The clauses (4), (5) and (6) are parallel to (1), (2) and (3). Here the base verb in stem I is *chhuak* 'go out' as in (5), with the stem II form *chhuah* appearing in the causative (4) or a temporal subordinate clause (6).

- (4) a Ani chuan mi sualte leh mi thrate chungah chuan a ni a chhuahtîr thrîn a, (5:45)
 - b ani chuan mi sualte leh mi thrate chungah ni a chhuahtîr a, 'he makes his sun come out on sinners and good people,'
- (5) a anni chu an chhuak a, (9:31)
 - b anni chu an chhuak a, 'they came out'
- (6) a an chhuah lai takin, (9:32)
 - b An chhuah laiin 'when they had come out'

(7) and (8) are a similar set with the base verb \hat{sur} 'precipitate'. The verb \hat{sur} in (8), like the causative verbs $\hat{chhuahtir}$ 'make go out' in (4) and \hat{surtir} 'make precipitate' in (7), does not exhibit stem alternation.

- (7) a mi felte leh mi fel lote chungah pawh ruah a sûrtîr thrîn a ni. (5:45)
 - b *mi dik leh dik lote chungah pawh ruah a sûrtîr thrîn.* 'and makes it rain on the just and the unjust'
- (8) a Ruahte a lo sûr a, (7:25)
 - b Ruah a lo sûr a, 'it rained'

The *ti***- causative in Mizo.** Sentence (9) illustrates a second type of Mizo causative verb (*tid-am* 'heal') formed by prefixing *ti*- to another verb.

- (9) a Ka lo kal ang a, ka tidam ang, (8:7)
 - b Ka lo kal ang a, ka rawn tidam ang e, 'I will go and heal him'
- (10) a Chawlhniin tihdam a thiang em? (12:10)
 - b Sabat nia tihdam a thiang em? 'is it proper to heal on the sabbath?'

The verb to which *ti*- is prefixed (*dam* 'be well') in (9) appears in (11). The verb *dam* does not exhibit stem alternation, but the causative verb *tidam* does; its stem II form (*tihdam*) appears in ifclauses like (10).

- (11) a thu chauh sawi la, ka naupang a dam mai ang. (8:8)
 - b thu chauh sawi la, ka nau chu a dam mai ang.
 'just say the word, and my servant will immediately be well'

The clauses in (12), (13) and (14) are parallel to (9), (10) and (11). Here the base verb in stem I (12) is tlu 'fall', which appears as stem II $tl\hat{u}k$ in the causative if-clause (13).

- (12) a tupawh hêng mi ringtu mi tête zînga pakhat pawh titlu apiang chu, (18: 6)
 - b tu pawh hêng mi ringtu zînga tê ber pakhat pawh titlu chu 'anyone who makes one of these little ones who believe in me fall'

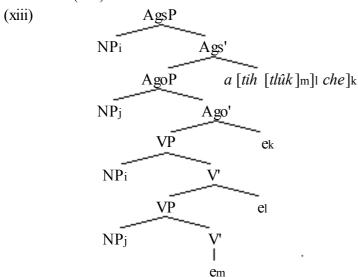
- (13) a i kutin emaw, i kein emaw, a tihtlûk che chuan, (18: 8)
 - b *I kutin emaw, i kein emaw a tihtlûk che chuan* 'if you hand or your foot makes you fall,'

It appears in its stem I form in (14).

- (14) a Chu mi hunah chuan mi tam tak an tlu ang a, (24:10)
 - b *Chumi hunah chuan mi tam tak an tlu ang a,* 'many of those people will fall'

While the causative *-tîr* is suffixed to stem II forms but has no stem alternation itself, the causative *ti-* may be prefixed to either form but has its own stem II form *tih-*. While *-tîr* may be attached to either intransitive or transitive verbs, *ti-* may not be attached to transitive verbs.

We take the causative structure in (13) to be as in (xiii). In (xiii), the lower NPi is the subject of the causative verb *tihtlûk* (*i kutin emaw*, *i kein emaw* 'your hand or your foot'), and the lower NPj is the understood subject of the base verb *tlu* (*nang* 'you'). A shows agreement of the causative verb *tihtlûk* with NPi and *che* shows agreement with NPj. The subordinating conjunction *chuan* 'if' is not included in (xiii).



The *-ter* **causative in Lai.** Example (15) contains the Lai causative verb *tlanter*, formed by suffixing *-ter* to another verb.

- (15) c Anih nih cun a thrami he a thralomi he, an cungah a ni kha a tlanter i, (5:45)
 - d amah nih cun a thrami he a thralomi he an cungah ni a tlanter i 'he makes his sun shine on the good and the evil'

The verb to which *-ter* is suffixed (*tlang* 'shine') in (15) appears in (16).

(16) c thlapa cu a tlang ti lai lo, (24:29)

d thlapa a tlang lai lo, 'the moon will not shine'

Like Mizo -tîr, to which it is likely cognate, Lai -ter is suffixed to the stem II form of a verb; tlang in (16) is the stem I form corresponding to the stem II form tlan in (15). A parallel pair of examples is (17) and (18).

- (17) c thratnak a tuahmi he thratlonak a tuahmi he, an cungah a ruah kha a surter. (5:45)
 - d *miding he misual he an cungah ruah a surter ko.*'he makes it rain on those who do good and those who do evil'
- (18) c Ruah a sur, (7:25)
 - d Ruah a sur, 'it rained'

Like the Mizo verbs *sûr* and *sûrtîr* in examples (7) and (8), the Lai verbs *sur* 'precipitate' in (18) and causative *surter* 'make precipitate' in (17) do not show stem alternation.

Lai lacks a causative construction like Mizo ti-. It generally uses -ter corresponding to Mizo ti- as well as -tir. Thus the Lai causative verb damter appears in both (19) and (20); the Mizo distinction between tidam and tihdam in (9) and (10) does not exist in Lai, since no causative verb exhibits stem alternation. Example (21) illustrates the base verb dam 'be well' also cognate to Mizo dam

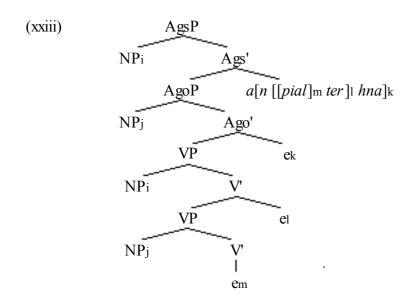
- (19) c Ka ra lai i ka damter lai, (8:7)
 - d *Ka ra lai i ka damter ko*, 'I will come and heal him'
- (20) c Sabbath ni ah hin mi damter phung a si maw si lo? (12:10)
 - d Sabath ni i mi damter hi a thiang maw?
 'is it proper or not to heal people on the sabbath?'
- (21) c Nawl hei pe law ka sinumpa cu a dam ko lai. (8: 8)
 - d Na bia lawngin chim law ka mithri cu a dam ko lai. 'give the order, and my servant will be well'

Examples (22), (23) and (24) are a parallel set to (19), (20) and (21).

- (22) c Hi ngakchiatete pakhat khat hi keimah an ka zumhnak in a pialtertu hna cu, (18: 6)
 - d hi a ka zummi lak i a hme bik hmanh a sualtertu cu 'those who make even one of these little ones who believe in me stray'
- (23) c Nan kut nih siseh, nan ke nih siseh, an pialter hna ahcun, (18:8)
 - c Na kut nih maw na ke nih maw an sualter ahcun 'if your hand or your foot cause you to stray,'
- (24) c cu pa cu a lung chungin a sual cang, (5:28)
 - d a lung chungah a sual cang, 'that man has done wrong in his heart'

Here the base verbs are *pial* 'stray' and *sual* 'do wrong' in (22) and (23). (24) illustrates the second of these by itself.

We take the causative structure in (23) to be as in (xxiii).



In (xxiii), the lower NPi is the subject of the causative verb *pialter* (*nan kut nih siseh*, *nan ke nih siseh* 'your hand or your foot') and the lower NPj is the understood subject of the base verb *pial* (*nannih* 'you'). Lai (23) differs from Mizo (1) or (13) in showing both overt subject and object agreement.

Comparisons. Both causative constructions in Mizo seem productive: Appendix I contains those *-tîr* causatives to be found as entries in Lorrain 1990, and Appendix II the *ti-* causatives in the same dictionary. As we have observed, they differ in several formal respects. *-Tîr* is a suffix, while *ti-* is a prefix; *ti-* may be affixed only to intransitive verbs, while *-tîr* is not similarly restricted; *-tîr* attaches to stem II forms, while *ti-* is not so restricted; *ti-* itself exhibits stem alternation, while *-tîr* does not; and this carries over to causative verbs: those formed with *ti-* have alternation, while those formed with *-tîr* do not. It is much more difficult to make out any consistent difference in the meaning of the two constructions. Inspection of the examples in Appendices I and II reveals no clear semantic distinction. That there is no consistent distinction is also suggested by the correspondence of Lai *-ter* with both. Some light may be shed by looking for Mizo verbs which may take either affix, verbs which may take both at the same time, and by considering the relation of the affixes to independent verbs.

-*Tîr*, *ti*- pairs. The causative verbs *thantîr* in (25a) and *tithang* in (26ab) are formed from the same Mizo verb meaning 'be known', whose stem I form is *thang*, and stem II form *than*. The meaning of both causative verbs is 'make known'.

- (25) a *tlâng <u>thantîr</u> a duh lo va*, (1:19) 'he did not want to make it public'
 - b tihmualpho a duh lo va,
 - c Mari cu zapi hmaiah ningzahter a duh lo caah
 - d ningzahter kha a duh lo caah 'he did not want to shame (Mary) (in public)'

- (26) a chu mi ram zawng zawngah chuan a chanchin an tithang ta a. (9:31)
 - b chumi ram zawng zawngah chuan a chanchin an tithang ta a.
 - c Jesuh kong cu cuka hrawng ah cun an thanh dih.
 - d cu ram vialte ahcun a thawng cu an thanh dih. 'they spread Jesus' fame to every land'

(25b) gives a different meaning; the verb *tihmualpho* 'shame' is a *ti*- causative. Lai (25cd) use the verb *ningzahter* 'shame', a *-ter* causative. Lai (26cd) use the verb *thanh* 'spread', which is a lexical causative of *than/thang* cognate with Mizo *than/thang*. See Bedell and Van Bik 2000 for discussion of lexical causatives.

(27ab) illustrate the causative verb *hriattîr* 'make/let know' and (4ab) above illustrate *chhuahtîr* 'make/let come out'

- (27) a tisa leh thisenin a <u>hriattîr</u> che a ni si lo va, ka Pa vâna miin a <u>hriattîr</u> zâwk che a ni. (16:17)
 - b mihringin an hrilh lo che a, ka Pa vâna miin a hriattîr che a ni zâwk e.
 - c hi biatak cu minung sinin na hngalhmi a si lo i vancung i a ummi ka Pa nih an pekmi a si.
 - d Thi le sa nih si loin van i ka Pa tu nih an hngalhtermi a si.
 'flesh and blood has not let you know this but my father in heaven'

Lorrain 1990 lists corresponding *ti*-causatives in (28) and (29), but these do not appear in the Mizo translations of Matthew and seem not to be active in current Mizo.

(28) *tihria/tihhriat* 'remind'

(29) *tichhuak/tihchhuah* 'eject, invent'

Lai (27d) and (15cd) use ter-causatives.

Double causatives. It is possible in Mizo to have double causatives by combining the suffix $-t\hat{i}r$ with the prefix ti. In (30a) the verb $tihlumt\hat{i}r$ 'make/let kill' is apparently a $-t\hat{i}r$ causative based on the ti- causative tihlum 'kill'.

- (30) a fate pawhin an nu leh an pate an do vang a, an tihhlumtîr bawk ang.
 - b fate pawhin an nu leh pate an do vang a, an tihlum ang.
 - c fale zong nih khan an nule le an pale kha an doh hna lai i mi kha an thahter hna lai.
 - d fale zong nih an nu le an pa an ralchanh hna lai i an thahter hna lai; 'children will also rise against their mothers and fathers, and have them put to death' (10:21)

Similarly, in (31a) *tihsualtîrtute* 'causers of wrong doing' is a nominalization based on the verb *ti-hsualtîr* 'cause to do wrong'. This verb in turn is a *tîr-* causative of the *ti-* causative *tisual/tihsual* 'do wrong'.

- (31) a tihsualtîrtute leh thil tisualtute zawng zawng chu
 - b mititlu thei zawng zawng leh thil sual titu zawng zawng
 - c thratlonak a tuahtu vialte hna le mi a sualtertu vialte hna kha

d sualnak le thratlonak a tuahtu vialte hna kha 'all causers of wrong doing and wrongdoers' (13:41)

Note that in such double causative verbs, the prefix ti- must be attached to the verb before the suffix $-t\hat{i}r$. This is because ti- attaches only to intransitive verbs and $-t\hat{i}r$ causatives are transitive. Double causatives like (30a) and (31a) are not very robust in Mizo; note that the revised (30b) and (31b) do not retain the double causative verbs. In (30b) the suffix $-t\hat{i}r$ is simply dropped, changing the meaning from 'have put to death' to 'put to death'. In (31b) the base verb is changed from tisual/tihsual to $tlu/tl\hat{u}k$ 'fall' in a ti- causative which undergoes nominalization. The Lai versions lack any double causation.

Independent verbs *tîr/tirh* and *ti/tih*. According to Lorrain 1990 (p. 505) the suffix *-tîr* is used as a main verb with a variety of meanings. The main verb has a distinct stem II form *tirh* which the suffix lacks, though he includes at least one apparent counterexample (see Appendix II). (32a) and (33a) illustrate the main verb *tîr* in the meaning 'say' or 'tell'. This verb does not appear in the revised Mizo (32b) and (33b). There and in the Lai versions (32cd) and (33cd) a verb meaning specifically 'warn' is used.

- (32) a Chu veleh chhang dawidim lakah fîmkhur tûrin a <u>tîr</u> lo va, (16:12)
 - b Chu veleh, chhang dawidim lakah ni lovin,
 - c Nannih kan chimhmi hna hi changreu kong a si lo
 - d *Changreu sernak thilnu si loin*'he did not warn them to be careful of bread yeast'
- (33) a Pharisaite leh Saddukaite zirtîrna lakah fîmkhur tûrin anmahni a <u>tîr</u> zâwk (16:12)
 - b Farisaite leh Sadukaite zirtîrna laka fîmkhur tûrin anmahni a hrilh a ni
 - c Farasimi le Sadusimi hna thilnu cu i ralring tuah u,
 - d Farasi le Sadusi hna cawnpiaknak tu an i ralrin awk a si 'but he warned them to be careful of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees'

Though Lorrain 1990 does not explicitly relate it to the causative prefix *ti-/tih-*, he does list the main verb *ti/tih* (p. 492) with the meaning 'do, perform'. This is the verb *ti* in (34ab), which also occurs twice in each in its stem II form *tih*.

- (34) a Nangin i tih tihin ti rawh, (27:4)
 - b Nangin i tih tihin ti rawh,
 - c Nangmah nih naa tuahnak in vaa tuah ko,
 - d Na tuahnak in va i tuah ko, 'you do your best'

This Mizo verb corresponds to Lai *tuah* 'do'. There are three Lai main verbs *ter* which have a stem II form *teer*. given in Ni Kio 2005 (p. 354) but none seem likely to be related semantically to *-ter*.

Appendix 1: Examples of -tîr.

awm 'stay, be'
 awmtîr 'make stay, keep'
 awrh 'wear around the neck'
 chang/chan 'receive'
 châwl/chawlh 'rest'
 awmtîr 'make stay, keep'
 awrhtîr 'make wear around the neck'
 chan tîr 'have receive, allot'
 chawlhtîr 'make rest'

chhuak/chhuah'go out'chhuahtîr 'make go out'ding/din 'stand'dintîr 'make stand'do 'be an enemy of'dotîr 'make an enemy of'

en 'look at' entîr 'show'

hâm/ham 'blow' hamtîr 'make sound'

hria/hriat 'know' hriattîr 'inform, bear witness'

in 'drink'

rai 'be pregnant'

kal 'go'

kawl 'take care of'

keng/ken 'hold in the hand'

klang hat/klang hat/klang

khengbet/khenbeh 'nail to'khum 'wear on the head'khumtîr 'crown, put on the head'

la/lâk 'take' lâktîr 'make take'

lêng/lên 'be in vogue'lêntîr 'promote'man 'arrest'mantîr 'have arrested'sin 'wear'sintîr 'let wear'

sin 'wear'sintir 'let wear'sûr 'precipitate'sûrtir 'make precipitate'tan 'cut off'tantir 'have cut off'

thang/than 'become known'

trîn 'go away'

trîntîr 'make known'

trîntîr 'send away'

uirê 'commit adultery' uirêtîr 'make commit adultery'

vui 'bury'vuitîr 'have buried'zir 'learn'zirtîr 'teach'

chuang/chuan luihtîr 'make get in' vêng thra/vên thrattîr 'had watch well'

la chhuak/lâk chhuahtîr 'make take out'
rek pawp/reh pawhtîr 'let make a hole'

palaitîr/palaitirh 'send as an emissary'

Appendix 2: Examples of ti-.

al 'be salty' tial/tihal 'make salty'

bawlhhlawh 'be dirty' tibawlhhlawh/tihbawlhhlawh 'make dirty'

boral 'disappear'

buai 'be busy'

buk 'be rough'

chim 'fall down'

tiboral/tihboral 'make disappear

tibuai/tihbuai 'make busy'

tibuk/tihbuk 'roughen'

tichim/tihchim 'knock down'

dam 'be well'tidam/tihdam 'heal'darh 'be scattered'tidarh/tihdarh 'scatter'dum 'be black'tidum/tihdum 'blacken'fel 'be settled'tifel/tihfel 'settle'hlai 'be wide'tihlai/tihhlai 'widen'khat 'be full'tikhat/tihkhah 'fill'

lâwm 'be pleased' tilâwm/tihlâwm 'please, gladden' lungni/lungnih 'be satisfied' tilungni/tihlungnih 'satisfy'

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12: 2 February 2012 George Bedell, Ph. D. Causatives in Lai and Mizo mit/mih 'be extinguished'
nâ/nat 'be sick'
nghet/ngheh 'be steady'
nghîng/nghîn 'shake'
ngîl 'be straight'
pawr 'be untidy'
sâng/sân 'be high'
sawn 'move'
tawi 'be short'
thang/than 'be known'

thianghlim 'be pure'
thim 'be dark'
tliak/tliah 'be broken'
tlu/tlûk 'make fall'
triau 'be desolate'

vâr 'be white'

hlum 'be dead'
sual 'do wrong'
thra/thrat 'be good'

der 'be weak'
duhdah 'be careless'
el 'dress up'

famkim 'be complete'

timit/tihmih 'extinguish'
tinâ/tihnat 'make sick'
tinget/tihngheh 'make steady'
tinghîng/tihnghîn 'shake'
tingîl/tihngîl 'straighten'

tingîl/tihngîl 'straighten'
tipawr/tihpawr 'make untidy'
tisâng/tihsân 'heighten'
tisawn/tihsawn 'move'
titawi/tihtawi 'shorten'

tithang/tihthan 'make known' tithianghlim/tihthianghlim 'purify'

tithim/tihthim 'darken' titliak/tihtliah 'break' titlu/tihtlûk 'make fall'

titriau/tihtriau 'make desolate'

tivâr/tihvâr 'whiten'

tihlum/tihhlum 'do to death' tisual/tihsual 'make do wrong' tithra/tihthrat 'do good, treat well'

tider/tihder 'pretend, speak falsely' *tiduhdah/tihduhdah* 'oppress'

tiel/tihel 'mock'

tifamkim/tihfamkim 'complete'

Abbreviations

first person
 second person
 third person
 benefactive suffix

BY agentive postposition (or ergative case marker)

CAUS causative prefix or suffix

EMPH emphatic particle
FUT future particle
IMP imperative particle
NEG negative particle
NOM nominalizing suffix
ORD ordinal suffix

P postposition
PL plural suffix or particle
Q interrogative particle

REL relative suffix
PERF perfect particle

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