Lai Reflexives and Reciprocals

George Bedell, Ph. D.
Roland Siang Nawl, M. Div.

==

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
12 : 6 June 2012
George Bedell, Ph. D. and Roland Siang Nawl, M. Div.
Lai Reflexives and Reciprocals

<117-129>

Lai Reflexives and Reciprocals

George Bedell, Ph. D.

Roland Siang Nawl, M. Div.

===

Lai is spoken in and around the town of Hakha, present administrative capital of Chin State, Myanmar. It is often called (Hakha) Chin in linguistic literature. According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009), the total speaking population is 131,260, including a large number in Mizoram State, India. Lai is a Tibeto-Burman language of the Kuki-Chin subgroup; as such it has the characteristic agreement system of verbs with their subjects and objects. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 42nd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, hosted by Payap University, November 2009.

Agreement. (1) illustrates the agreement pattern of intransitive verbs.

(1)   a   *ka ra*   'I come'
      b   *na ra*   'you come'
      c   *a ra*   'he/she comes'

      d   *kan ra*   'we come'
      e   *nan ra*   'you come'
      f   *an ra*   'they come'

The subject agreement markers *ka*, *na*, *a*, *kan*, *nan* and *an* vary according to the person and number of the subject.

There are also markers which vary similarly according to the object of a transitive verb. A few of them are illustrated in (2).

(2)   a   *na kan bawmh*   'you help us'
      b   *na bawmh*   'you help him/her'
      c   *na bawmh hna*   'you help them'

      d   *kaan bawmh*   'I help you'
      e   *kan in bawmh*   'we help you (singular)'
      f   *kan in bawmh hna*   'we help you (plural)'

As seen in (2), an object agreement marker comes between the subject agreement marker and the verb. The first person object agreement markers are *ka* and *kan*, the same as the subject agreement markers. The second person object agreement marker is *in*, which combines with a singular subject agreement marker to form *kaan* or *aan*. There is no third person object agreement marker, but the plural of a second or third person object is indicated by *hna* following the verb. For a more complete account of Lai agreement, see Bedell 1996.

The 'object agreement marker' *i*. Lai reflexive and reciprocal verb forms are as in (3).

(3)   a   *kaa bawm*   'I help myself'

<117-129>

b	*naa bawm*	'you help yourself'
c	*aa bawm*	'he/she help him/herself'
d	*kan i bawm*	'we help ourselves/each other'
e	*nan i bawm*	'you help yourselves/each other'
f	*an i bawm*	'they help themselves/each other'

These forms consist of a verb stem *bawm* 'help' preceded by a subject agreement marker and *i*. The last occupies the position of the object agreement marker in ordinary transitive verb forms, but its realization does not vary according to the person or number of an object; rather it indicates coreference of the subject and object. When immediately following a singular subject agreement marker, like the second person object agreement marker *in*, it merges with the preceding short *a* into a long *aa*. Thus the paradigm in (3) resembles that of an intransitive verb in having only six forms according to the person and number of the subject.

There are other ways in which the verb forms in (3) resemble intransitives. The presence of *i* blocks the usual object agreement.

(4) a *ka ka bawm*
     b *kaa ka bawm*

(5) a *nan in bawm*
     b *nan in bawm hna*
     c *nan i bawm hna*
     d *an i bawm hna*

In (4), although it might appear that the object is first person singular, no object agreement marker *ka* may appear either in place of, or in addition to *i*. In (5), although it might appear that the object is second or third person plural, no second person object agreement marker *in* or plural object agreement marker *hna* may be used in place of or in addition to *i*. If the forms in (3) were intransitive, this would follow, since intransitive verb forms have no object to agree with.

The verb forms in (3) vary in agreement with their subject. Because of this agreement, it is often the case that the subject is identifiable without being mentioned. But it is always possible to make the subject overt. Ordinarily, only a pronoun may appear as the subject of a first or second person verb form.

(6) a *Nangmah (cu) naa bawm.*
        youSG   that   2-RR help
        'You helped yourself.'

     b **Nangmah nih naa bawm.*

(7) a *Pa Lian   (cu) aa   bawm.*
        Pa Lian   that   3-RR help
        'PL helped himself.'

     b **Pa Lian nih aa bawm.*

In (6a), the subject is the pronoun *nangmah* 'you (singular)', and in (7a) it is *Pa Lian*. An overt subject in sentences like (6a) or (7a) may be a bare noun phrase or may be followed by a demonstrative

<117-129>

such as *cu* 'that', which can serve as a topic marker. It cannot be followed by the postposition *nih*, which regularly accompanies the subject of a transitive verb form; (6b) and (7b) are ungrammatical. If the forms in (3) were intransitive, this would follow.

Finally, there is verb stem alternation. Many Lai verbs have two stem forms, conveniently referred to as stem1 and stem2. The stem2 form of transitive verbs is the default in (2). *Bawmh* is the stem2 form. But the corresponding stem1 forms appear in reflexive or reciprocals like (3). *Bawm* is the stem1 form. Intransitive verbs use stem1 as default. *Ra* 'come' in (1) is the stem1 form; the stem2 form of this verb is *rat*. Thus if reflexives and reciprocals like (3) were intransitive forms derived from transitive verbs, their stem form difference could be accounted for as part of a more general distinction in transitivity.

Reflexive or reciprocal pronouns. Nevertheless it seems difficult to regard reflexive or reciprocal verb forms as syntactically intransitive because they can in fact have syntactic objects. The appearance of such objects is relatively rare, but this is no different from other pronominal objects.

(8) a *keimah le keimah kaa bawm*   'I help myself'
     b *nangmah le nangmah naa bawm*   'you help yourself'
     c *amah le amah aa bawm*   'he/she helps him/herself'

     d *kanmah le kanmah kan i bawm*   'we help ourselves/each other'
     e *nanmah le nanmah nan i bawm*   'you help yourselves/each other'
     f *anmah le anmah an i bawm*   'they help themselves/each other'

They consist of a pronoun which agrees with the subject conjoined with itself. Forms like *nangmah le nangmah* 'yourself' or *anmah le anmah* 'themselves/each other' are at least superficially noun phrases, and occupy the position occupied by the object in an ordinary transitive sentence. They cannot be accompanied by *nih*.

(9) a *?Nangmah (cu) nangmah le nangmah naa bawm.*
        youSG   that youSG   and youSG   2-RR help
        'You helped yourself.'

     b **Nangmah le nangmah nih naa bawm.*

(10) a *Pa Lian-te (cu) anmah le anmah an i bawm.*
        Pa Lian-PL that they   and they   3PL RR help
        'PL and his family/friends helped themselves/each other.'

     b **Pa Liante (cu) anmah le anmah nih an i bawm.*

Using an overt pronoun introduces an implicit contrast; (6) means 'you helped yourself (as opposed to others helping themselves)' while (8b) means 'you helped yourself (as opposed to you helping others)'. Semantic complexity and conflict in the implicit contrast make (9a) difficult to process.

That reflexive or reciprocal pronouns like *amah le amah* 'him/her self' are noun phrase objects is clear from answers like (11c) and (12c) to questions like (11a) and (12a).

(11) a *Aho-dah   na   bawmh?*
        who-Q   2   help
        'Who did you help?'

<117-129>

b   *Aho nih dah aan bawmh?*
who BY Q   3-2   help
'Who helped you?'

c   *Keimah   le   keimah.*
I   and I
'Myself.'

d   *Keimah   le   keimah   kaa bawm.*
I   and I   1-RR help
'I helped myself.'

(12) a   *Pa Lian   nih   aho-dah   a   bawmh?*
Pa Lian   BY who-Q   3   help
'Who did PL help?'

b   *Aho nih dah Pa Lian   a   bawmh?*
who BY Q   Pa Lian   3   help
'Who helped PL?'

c   *Amah   le   amah.*
he/she   and he/she
'Himself.'

d   *Amah   le   amah   aa bawm.*
he/she   and he/she   3-RR help
'He helped himself.'

Just as in English, answers like (11c) and (12c) to questions like (11b) and (12b), though understandable, are less natural than to questions like (11a) and (12a). More explicit answers such as (11d) and (12d) are more natural.

Similarly, reflexive or reciprocal pronouns appear in the focus position of cleft sentences like (13a) and (14a).

(13) a   *Ka bawmh-mi cu   keimah   le   keimah   a   si.*
1   help-REL that I   and I   3   be
'It was myself that I helped.'

b   *A ka   bawm-tu cu   keimah   le   keimah   a   si.*
3 1   help-REL that I   and I   3   be
'It was myself that helped me.'

(14) a   *Pa Lian   nih a   bawmh-mi cu amah   le   amah   a   si.*
Pa Lian   BY 3   help-REL that he/she   and he/she   3   be
'It was himself that PL helped.'

b   *Pa Lian   a   bawm-tu   cu amah   le   amah   a   si.*
Pa Lian   3   help-REL that he/she   and he/she   3   be
'It was himself that helped PL.'

<117-129>

Sentences (13) and (14) contain relative clauses. Note that there is a different structure depending on whether it is the subject which is relativized or a non-subject. The subject relativizer *-tu* attaches to the stem1 verb form, while the non-subject relativizer *-mi* attaches to the stem2 form.

   Variations 1. The *i* which appears in reflexive and reciprocal verb forms like those in (3) is not restricted to canonical reflexives or reciprocals. It may appear in sentences like (15a) and (16a) where the verb it accompanies is intransitive.

(15) a   *Kaa   lawm.*
          1-RR be.happy
          'I am happy.'

      b   **Keimah nih kaa lawm.*

      c   **Keimah le keimah kaa lawm.*

      d   *Ka   lawmh.*
          1   make.happy
          'I made him/her happy.'

      e   *Ka   lawmh-ter.*
          1   be.happy-CAUS
          'I made him/her happy.'

(16) a   *Pa Lian   aa   hngilh.*
          Pa Lian   3-RR sleep
          'PL went to sleep.'

      b   **Pa Lian nih aa hngilh.*

      c   **Pa Lian cu amah la amah aa hngilh.*

      d   **Pa Lian a hngilh.*

      e   *Pa Lian   ka   hngilh-ter.*
          Pa Lian   1   sleep-CAUS
          'I made/let PL go to sleep.'

An overt subject of such sentences may not be followed by *nih*; (15b) and (16b) are ungrammatical. And no object agreement is possible. But reflexive or reciprocal pronouns are also not allowed; (15c) and (16c) are likewise ungrammatical. Thus sentences like (15a) and (16a) are true intransitives, syntactically as well as semantically. The *i* which occurs with them is part of the lexical verb and cannot be dispensed with; (16d) is ungrammatical. (15d) appears to present a problem since there is no *i* and the stem2 form corresponding to *lawm* is *lawmh*. But *lawmh* in (15d) is not the same verb as *lawm* in (15a). Rather it is a lexical causative of *i lawm* 'be happy', and does not show stem alternation. The meaning of (15d) is similar to that of (15e) with the syntactic causative *lawmhter* rather than to that of (15a). Note that *i hngilh* 'go to sleep' has no such lexical causative. Note also that in causatives, whether lexical or syntactic, the *i* seen in simple clauses with these verbs disappears.

<117-129>

Variations 2. A different kind of *i* is illustrated in (17b) and (18b).

(17) a *Pa Sui nih nupi a kawl.*
    Pa Sui BY wife 3 look.for
    'Pa Sui is looking for a wife.'

  b *Pa Sui nih nupi aa kawl.*
    Pa Sui BY wife 3-RR look.for
    'Pa Sui is looking for a wife for himself.'

  c **Pa Sui nih amah le amah nupi aa kawl.*

  d *Pa Sui nih nupi a kawl-piak.*
    Pa Sui BY wife 3-RR look.for-BEN
    'Pa Sui is looking for a wife for him.'

(18) a *Mah laksawng hi keimah nih ka va lak.*
    this present this I   BY 1 away take
    'I took this present away.

  b *Mah laksawng hi keimah nih ka vaa lak.*
    this present this I   BY 1 away-RR take
    'I took this present away for myself.'

  c **Mah laksawng hi keimah nih keimah le keimah ka vaa lak.*

  d *Mah laksawng hi keimah nih ka va in lak-piak.*
    this present this I   BY 1 away 2 take-BEN
    'I took this present away for you.'

These sentences differ from (17a) and (18a) only in the presence of *i* accompanying the transitive verb. As suggested by the English glosses, the variants with *i* have an additional benefactive argument interpreted as coreferential with the subject. Like (17a) and (18a), (17b) and (18b) are fully transitive; their subject can be marked with *nih*, and stem2 of the verb is used. The verb *kawl* in (17) does not alternate, but *lak* in (18) is stem2 corresponding to stem1 *la*. A reflexive or reciprocal pronoun cannot be used in these sentences; (17c) and (18c) are ungrammatical. In (18) there is a directional particle *va* which is located between the subject and object agreement markers; when followed by *i*, the same merger takes place as with singular subject agreement markers. This benefactive *i* can only have the coreferential meaning; to get an independent benefactive, a suffix *-piak* is used as in (17d) and (18d). The benefactive argument is treated as an object for purposes of agreement as in (18d).

Variations 3. While the examples in (17) and (18) involve a type of reflexive, those in (19) and (20) involve a type of reciprocal.

(19) a *Ni Hu nih a pa a loh.*
    Ni Hu BY 3 father 3 be-similar
    'NH is similar to his father.'

  b *Ni Hu le a pa an i lo.*
    Ni Hu and 3 father 3PL RR be-similar

'NH and his father are similar.'

c   *Ni Hu le a pa an loh.

d   Ni Hu   a   pa   he   an   i   lo.
Ni Hu   3   father   with 3PL RR   be-similar
'NH is similar to his father.'

e   *Ni Hu a pa he an loh.

f   *Ni Hu le a pa nih an i lo.

g   *Ni Hu nih a pa he an i lo.

h   Ni Hu   le   a   pa   anmah   le   anmah   an   i   lo.
Ni Hu   and   3   father   they   and   they   3PL RR   be-similar
'NH and his father are similar to each other.'

i   *Ni Hu a pa he anmah le anmah an i lo.

j   *Ni Hu a pa he aa lo.

(20)   a   Keimah   nih   Pa Lian   ka   paih.
I   BY   Pa Lian   1   wrestle
'I wrestled PL.'

b   Pa Lian   le   keimah   kan   i   pai.
Pa Lian   and   I   1PL RR   wrestle
'PL and I wrestled.'

c   *Pa Lian le keimah kan paih.

d   Pa Lian   he   kan   i   pai.
Pa Lian   with 1PL RR   wrestle
'I wrestled with PL.'

e   *Pa Lian he kan paih.

f   *Pa Lian le keimah nih kan i pai.

g   *Keimah nih Pa Lian he kan i pai.

h   Pa Lian   le   keimah   cu   kanmah   le   kanmah   kan   i   pai.
Pa Lian   and   I   that   we   and   we   1PL RR   wrestle
'PL and I wrestled each other.'

i   *Keimah nih Pa Lian he kanmah le kanmah kan i pai.

j   *Pa Lian he kaa pai.

<117-129>

(19a) and (20a) are transitive sentences corresponding to reciprocal (19b) and (20b). (19d) and (20d) are variants in which one of the participants appears as a postpositional phrase object of *he* 'with'. The subject will have plural agreement and the verb will be accompanied by *i* in this case, just as in the reciprocals. (19ce) and (20ce) are ungrammatical due to the absence of *i*, and (19j) and (20j) are ungrammatical due to singular subject-verb agreement. Reciprocal pronouns are possible in reciprocals like (19h) and (20h), but not with postpositional phrases as in (19i) or (20i). *Nih* may not accopany the subject in either case; (19fg) and (20fg) are ungrammatical.

Variations 4. (21c) and (22) illustrate a rather specialized use of *i*.

(21) a   *Pa Sui   a   thi.*
          Pa Sui   3   die
          'PS died.'

   b   *Pa Sui   a   thih-ter.*
          Pa Sui   3   die-CAUS
          'PS made/let her die.'

   c   *Pa Sui   aa   thih-ter.*
          Pa Sui   3-RR   die-CAUS
          'PS pretended to be dead.'

   d   **Pa Sui nih aa thihter.*

   e   **Pa Sui amah le amah aa thihter.*

(21c) appears to be a reflexive construction based on the causative (21b), in turn based on the intransitive (21a). But the meaning of (21c) is not 'PS caused himself to die'. Rather this is one way to convey in Lai the notion 'pretend'. Sentences like (21c) are strictly intransitive and do not permit their subject to be accompanied by *nih*, or any reflexive object. (21de) are ungrammatical. (22) is a parallel example which contrasts the construction in (21c) with that in (16a).

(22)   *Aa   hngilh-ter-mi   cu   aa   hngilh-mi   nakin   a   thrangh   an*
        3-RR   sleep-CAUS-REL   that   3-RR   sleep-REL   than-P   3   awaken   3PL
        har   deuh.
        difficult   more
        'Those who are pretending to be asleep are more difficult to awaken than those who are
           really asleep.'

The *i* which appears in *aa hngilhmi* 'those who are asleep' is part of the verb *i hngilh*, but that in *aa hngilhtermi* 'those who pretend to be asleep' is the same as in (21c).

Variations 5. (23c) and (24c) illustrate another specialized use of *i*.

(23) a   *Pa Lian   cu   a   niam.*
          Pa Lian   that   3   short
          'PL is short.'

   b   *Pa Sui   cu   a   sang.*
          Pa Sui   that   3   tall
          'PS is tall.'

<117-129>

c   *Pa Lian   le   Pa Sui   cu   an   i   niam-san.*
          Pa Lian   and Pa Sui   that 3PL RR   short-tall
          'PL and PS differ in height.'

d   **Pa Lian le Pa Sui nih an i niamsan.*

e   **Pa Lian le Pa Sui cu anmah le anmah an i niamsan.*

(24) a   *Ka angki   orh-lei   ban   cu   a   chin.*
            1   shirt   right-side sleeve   that 3   short
            'The right sleeve of my shirt is short.'

      b   *Ka angki   keh-lei   ban   cu   a   fual.*
            1   shirt   left-side   sleeve   that 3   long
            'The left sleeve of my shirt is long.'

      c   *Ka angki   cu   a   ban   aa   chin-fual.*
            1   shirt   that 3   sleeve   3-RR short-long
            'My shirt has sleeves of unequal length.'

      d   **Ka angki nih a ban aa chinfual.*

      e   **Ka angki cu a ban amah le amah aa chinfual.*

The main verb in both (23c) and (24c) is a compound of two stative verbs with opposite meaning, as illustrated in (23ab) and (24ab). In (23c) the subject is a conjoined noun phrase with each conjunct understood as the subject of one member of the compound. Though there is a conventional order within the compound verb (lesser followed by greater) there is no direct association of the components of the subject with those of the verb, so that (23c) contains less information than the conjunction of (23ab). Notice that the compound verbs are composed of stem2 forms. (24c) is of interest in having no overt conjoined subject. In neither case can the subject be accompanied by *nih* nor can there be a reciprocal pronoun object. (23de) and (24de) are ungrammatical.

      Conclusion. We have surveyed some of the general and some of the specialized uses of *i*, the reflexive and reciprocal verb marker in Lai. There are other uses of both types, but our examples demonstrate the morphosyntactic variety of constructions in which it appears. Some people use 'middle verbs' or 'middle voice' as a cover for this variety, for example Smith 1998. Such terms are convenient for comparative or typological purposes, but they seem to us to disregard the structural complexity which we observe. We will conclude this discussion with a selection of examples extracted from the Lai translation of the Gospel According to Matthew (*Lai Baibal Thiang* 1999). (25) is a basic reflexive with an overt pronoun subject; the stem2 form of the verb *dawt* 'love' is due to the subordinate clause headed by *bantuk* 'as'.

(25)   *Na innpa   cu   nangmah naa dawt bantuk   in   na   dawt lai,*
              2   neighbor   that youSG   2-RR love as   P   2   love FUT
              (22:39)
              'You will love your neighbor as you love yourself.'

<117-129>

(26) contains four overt reflexives, two imperatives and two declaratives. The verb *thrial* is used for changes of residence.

(26)   *'I   thrial   law rili chung-ah   i   paih,'   nan ti   ahcun*
            RR   move   IMP   sea   in-P   RR   throw.in   2PL say if
            aa   thrial   lai i   aa   paih   ko   lai. (21:21)
            3-RR move   FUT and 3-RR throw-in   EMPH FUT
            'If you say, 'Move and throw yourself into the sea,' it will move and throw itself in.'

(27) is plural reflexive contrasting with (28), a reciprocal. (28) contains a relative clause with a plural subject but singular subject agreement.

(27)   *nanmah   le   nanmah   nan i   philh   i* (16:24)
            youPL   and   youPL   2PL RR   forget   and
            'You (must) forget yourselves and ...'

(28)   *anmah   le   anmah   aa do-mi   bu   an   um* (12:25)
            they   and   they   3-RR fight-REL group   3PL be
            'There are groups which fight each other.'

       (29) and (30) illustrate *i* as a verb stem component.

(29)   *hi   tuu   pakhat   cung-ah   hin aa lawm   deuh.* (18:13)
            this sheep   one   about-P   this 3-RR be.happy   more
            'He is happier about this one sheep.'

(30)   *an i   lawm   tuk   hringhran.* (2:10)
            3PL RR   be.happy   very extremely
            'They were extremely happy.'

(31) and (32) illustrate the reflexive benefactive *i*, and (33) shows that this is not a verb stem component.

(31)   *Cu thilnu,   nu   pakhat   nih aa lak   i* (13:33)
            that yeast   woman   one   BY   3-RR take and
            'A woman took that yeast and ...'

(32)   *Phaisa   cu   an   i   lak   i* (20:11)
            money   that 3PL RR   take   and
            'They took the money and ...'

(33)   *a   ruak kha an lak i   an   vui;* (14:12)
            3   body that 3PL take and   3PL bury
            'They took his body and buried it.'

Finally, (34) illustrates the reciprocal use of *i* with a postpositional *he* phrase.

(34)   *Vancung Pennak   cu   thilnu   he   aa lo.* (13:33)
            heaven   kingdom   that yeast   with 3-RR be-similar
            'The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast.'

<117-129>

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
BEN	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
PERF	perfect particle
REL	relative suffix
RR	reflexive or reciprocal particle
S	singular

References

Bedell, George. 1996. Agreement in Lai. Papers from the 5th annual meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (SEALS), 21-32. Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University.

Smith, Tomoko Yamashita. 1998. The middle voice in Lai. Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area (LTBA) 21:1. 1-52.

Bedell, George and Kenneth VanBik. 2000. Lexical and syntactic causatives in Lai. Papers from the 10th annual meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (SEALS), 75-86. Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University.

Hyman, Larry M. and Kenneth VanBik. 2002a. Tone and stem2-formation in Hakha (Lai Chin). Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area (LTBA). 25:1. 113-121.

Siang Nawl, Roland. 2003. Lai Karama. Hakha: CACC.

Kathol, Andreas. 2003. Cooperating constructions in Lai "lexical insertion." Proceeding of the International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) 03, ed. by Stefan Muller. University of California, Berkeley: Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI).

Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), *Ethnologue*: Languages of the World, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2009. Online version: http://www.ethnologue.com/

===

<117-129>

George Bedell, Ph. D.
Lecturer, Department of Linguistics
Payap University
Chiang Mai 50000
Thailand
gdbedell@gmail.com

Roland Siang Nawl, M. Div.
Instructor in English
Chin Christian College
Hakha, Chin State, Myanmar
siangnawl@gmail.com

<117-129>