

# 2 *Functions of 'give' and 'take' in Lao complex predicates*

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Lao grammar crucially involves a small set of polyfunctional verbs, performing a range of important grammatical roles (especially in unmarked combination with other verbs). These include *'ăw* 'take', *hàj* 'give', *dâj* 'acquire', *máa* 'come', *pǎj* 'go', *míi* 'have', among a number of others. These items behave like main verbs, as well as performing duties which in other languages might be performed by morphological means. In this paper I examine some roles of *'ăw* 'take' and *hàj* 'give' in Lao grammar, with relation to their similar and related roles in complex predications, especially those involving mechanisms of valency-changing. We also see cases where 'give' and 'take' constructions are appropriated for other purposes. Some preliminary generalisations concerning argument structure and constituent structure are suggested.

## 2 Clause structure, valency and transitivity in Lao

The Lao language (Southwestern Tai, Laos) is a fairly extreme example of the isolating, analytic type. (See Enfield 1999 on Lao as the national language of the Lao PDR.) Typological features include a large phoneme inventory (very large number of vowel

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My transcription of Lao is based on International Phonetic Association conventions, except for the following: glottal stop /' /, palatal and velar nasals /ñ, ng/, low central vowel /a/, and high back unrounded vowel /ɯ/. Tones are represented (approximately) as: level (/33/) /ˉ /; low falling (/21/) /ˊ /; high falling (/51/) /ˋ /; low rising (/213/) /ˊˊ /; high rising (/34/) /ˊˋ /.

contrasts), lexical tone, strong left-headedness in constituent structure, ubiquitous multi-verb structures. Like other ‘typical’ isolating/analytical languages, the features of ‘one-morpheme-per-word’, ‘no morphology’ (derivation or inflectional), and so on have been overstated (as has been pointed out for typologically similar Chinese; see DeFrancis 1984; Kratochvil 1968; Norman 1988). For example, there is much productive compounding which is clearly not ‘syntactic’ in nature (that is the semantics of the whole are not straightforwardly computable from the known semantics of constituent morphemes). There is a rich system of reduplicative (usually expressive) derivation, clearly a morpho-phonological process. Grammarians perhaps experience some psychological difficulty in viewing certain items as morphosyntactic markers, since they also function as full lexical items (mostly verbs) elsewhere. However, there is good reason to view them as grammatical morphemes, given their often strict syntactic position and restricted morphosyntactic behaviour when performing more structural or grammatical functions.

The basic Lao clause is (schematically) organised thus:

- (1) (Left Position) Subject [Verb (Object)]<sup>2</sup>

‘Left position’ (LP) is a kind of ‘topic’ slot, and may contain any nominal, whether it is a core argument of the verb or not. Further, LP may contain phrases, clauses, or even whole sentences. ‘Subject’ is an S/A pivot, but less pervasive in the grammar than, say, subject in English. For instance, Lao subject operates in restricted instances of equi control, but apparently does not figure in mechanisms of relativisation or reflexivity. Virtually any NP anywhere may be ellipsed if reference is contextually retrievable. (Rare exceptions include objects of certain ‘prepositions’ such as *càak* ‘from’, *káp* ‘with’, and *kēē* ‘to’. Indeed, a syntactic requirement for NPs to be explicitly mentioned is less common in Lao than a requirement that they be ellipsed — a number of control constructions, for example, require certain arguments to be omitted when subjects of structurally related clauses are coreferential.) ‘Movement’ of core arguments based on their discourse status is common, particularly fronting (into LP), as well as postposing (for reiteration or afterthought). Classifier phrases, which host the range of nominal modifications including ‘adjectives’, determiners, quantifiers and numerals, may be separated and moved away from the lexical noun in a kind of ‘modifier float’ (see §4.3 below). A good number of verbs are S=O ambitransitive (‘unaccusative’, as in English *break* or *open*). These are typically telic predicates with inherent resulting state, such as *sàng* ‘build/be built’, *mûng* ‘thatch (a roof)/be thatched’, *kǎang* ‘hoist/be hoisted’, but also include (more typically S=A) verbs like ‘eat’ and ‘work’. Demotion of O is effectively achieved in these latter cases by generic noun incorporation, as in, for example *kîn-khàw* [eat-rice] ‘eat (not necessarily rice)’, *àap-nâm*

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<sup>2</sup> Abbreviation conventions: 3P/2P/1P (third/second/first person); CLF (classifier); C.LNK (clause linker); EXPR(essive); HON(orific); LNK (linker, focus particle); NEG(ative); NP (noun phrase); o.bro (older brother); PCL (particle); PFV (perfective); Q(uestion); RCP (reciprocal marker); RDP (reduplication); REL.FUT (relative future); TPC (topic marker); VP (verb phrase); y.sib (younger sibling). A and O are ‘semantic-syntactic categories’ based on grammatical status of typical agents and patients, respectively (Dixon 1994:6). S is not semantically defined — it refers to the single core argument of an intransitive clause. Period between words indicates glossed element is morphologically unanalysable. Proper names are glossed with initial capital and period. Examples are from my own 1997 corpus of spontaneous spoken texts, and references are to page/line number. Unmarked examples are constructed in collaboration with informants.

[bathe-water] 'bathe', *hēi-viāk* [do-work] 'work' (see Durie 1985:51 for the same in Acehnese).

Combination of these three aspects of clausal syntax — movement, ellipsis, and S=O ambitransitivity — can create significant structural ambiguity (see Chao 1968:72 on similar examples in Modern Standard Chinese):

(2) NP V<sub>ambitr (S=O)}</sub> = [O<sub>fronted</sub>  $\emptyset$ <sub>A</sub> V], [A V  $\emptyset$ <sub>O</sub>], or [S<sub>O</sub> V]:

- a. *kāj kīn lēw*  
 chicken eat PFV  
 i. 'The chicken, they have eaten.' ('chicken'=O)  
 ii. 'The chicken has eaten it.' ('chicken'=A)  
 iii. 'The chicken has been eaten.' ('chicken'=S<sub>O</sub>)
- b. *khēw bɔɔ thán mī*  
 tooth NEG be.on.time have  
 i. 'Teeth, it didn't yet have.' ('teeth'=O, actual reading; 853.7)  
 ii. 'The teeth didn't yet have (it/them).' ('teeth'=A, possible reading)  
 iii. 'There were not yet any teeth.' ('teeth'=S, possible reading)

There are cases in which it is perhaps impossible to decide whether to assign a structure like (a.i) or one like (a.iii) to a surface string 'NP V'. The structures share overt expression of the patient argument and differ in the level of contextual retrievability of the agent (at zero in (a.iii)). It is thus doubtful whether a clear line can be drawn separating a 'two-place' from a 'one-place' predicate in this case, since the idea of contextual retrievability of an argument is so difficult to characterise in a binary way, given that the context which provides possible referents includes not only what is currently activated in the discourse, but also what is in the inventory of cultural knowledge shared among speakers.

S=A ambitransitive ('unergative') verbs include *pāj* 'go (somewhere)', *máa* 'come (somewhere)', *'òk* 'emerge (from/into something/somewhere)', *sūaj* 'help (someone)', *púk* 'wake someone up'/'be stimulating' (e.g. strong coffee or tobacco). Another class of S=A verbs has an undergoer subject: for example, *hwan* 'wake up, get a start', *tāj* 'die (of something)', and *'āj* 'cough (from something)'.

## 2.1 Preliminary note on three-place predicates in Lao

A certain number of three-place predicates (including *tham* 'ask', *bòk* 'tell', *tháa* 'apply:on:to') may appear with no 'supporting' verbs, allowing adjacent expression of two objects, postverbally. The theme argument appears in immediately postverbal position:

- (3) *khòj thām mǒng láaw*  
 1P ask o'clock 3P  
 'I asked him/her the time.'
- (4) *láaw tháa sǐ hwan lǎng nī*  
 3P apply colour house CLF this  
 'S/he painted (i.e. 'applied paint (to)') this house.'

Alternatively, non-theme arguments may be overtly marked as peripheral, as in the following examples — peripheral arguments (underlined> are marked by *nám* ‘with/from’ (a verb-preposition, elsewhere a main verb ‘accompany’), *káp* ‘with’, and *kēē* ‘to’, respectively:

- (5) *lāj nāat-’ăw tōn sīn nám \_\_\_\_\_ mǎa*  
 chase grab-take lump meat with/from dog  
 ‘She chased the dog to grab the lump of meat from it.’ (911.5)
- (6) *khōj dāj hāj sǎnǎa káp cāw lêw*  
 1P did give promise with 2P PFV  
 ‘I did give my promise to you already.’ (857.10)
- (7) *cá’ dāj lāw nūhán pakōp thámmā’ phāa pěn*  
 REL.FUT get relate fable.tale comprise dharma in.order.to be  
*khátí’-khám-sāng-sōn hāj kēē ’anusón-hūn-lǎng*  
 provision-word-order-teach give to younger.generations  
 ‘I’ll tell some dharmic tales as lessons to give to the younger generations.’ (838.4)

Further discussion of three-place predicates below will be more concerned with cases where two predicates conspire to form the necessary means to cooperate in hosting the expression of three arguments.

### 3 ‘Take’

The following sections describe functions of ‘*’ăw* ‘take’, including its role as a main verb, and, in more detail, as  $V_1$  in a number of complex constructions of the form (schematically) ‘ $NP_1 V_1 NP_2 V_2 (NP_3)$ ’.

#### 3.1 Main verb usage of ‘take’

The predicate ‘*’ăw* ‘take’ may be used as a simple transitive verb to mean ‘take/get’ (with intent/volition) or to mean ‘want (a thing)’:

- (8) *khan si ’ăw pǎa...*  
 if REL.FUT take fish  
 ‘If you are going to take the fish...’ (915.2)
- (9) *’āaj cāng sī káp-khúwn máa ’ăw nōng*  
 o.bro so REL.FUT go.back-return come take y.sib  
 ‘So (then) I’ll come back to get you.’ (900.8)
- (10) *’ăw cāk ’ăn*  
 want (take) how.many CLF  
 ‘How many do you want?’
- (11) *bō ’ăw*  
 NEG want (take)  
 ‘I don’t want any.’

### 3.1.1 V- 'take' constructions

There is a productive pattern in which a compound verb is formed with 'ăw 'take' as its second element, and a verb of carrying, gathering, or otherwise coming into possession of something, as its first. Consider the following examples:

- (12) ...lɔ̀k-'ăw nǎng...  
 peel.off-take hide  
 '...they peeled off the (tiger's) hide...' (944.7)
- (13) náng nân kɔ̀w lēen-pǎj  
 girl that LNK run-go  
 cǎp-'ăw ngâaw thūi tók jūu táam dǎən  
 grab-take sword which fall be.at along ground  
 'The girl ran off, and grabbed the sword which had fallen on the ground.' (892.1)
- (14) hěn mǎa too nǎng khâap-'ăw sàj-kɔ̀k láaw lēen-pǎj lēew  
 see dog CLF one carry.in.mouth-take sausage 3P run-go PFV  
 'He saw a dog running away, carrying his sausages in its mouth.' (41.10)

### 3.2 Functions of 'take' in valency-changing mechanisms

As in many verb-serialising languages (see Lord 1993:Ch.5; Durie 1997), 'take' may be used in Lao to introduce an extra argument into the core in the following pattern (with 'ăw 'take' as V<sub>1</sub>):

- (15) NP<sub>1</sub> V<sub>1</sub> NP<sub>2</sub> (DIR) [V<sub>2</sub> (NP<sub>3</sub>)]

(I will henceforth use the abbreviations NP<sub>1</sub>, V<sub>1</sub>, NP<sub>2</sub>, V<sub>2</sub>, NP<sub>3</sub>, and DIR to refer to the positions in (15) so marked.)

Note that it is rare for all three NPs in a three-argument clause to be overtly mentioned. Most examples below omit at least one argument, most often the subject. (Where necessary I will indicate 'missing' arguments with  $\emptyset$ . Note also that V<sub>2</sub> in (15) is almost always directly preceded by a DIRectional particle *paj* 'go' or *maa* 'come'; see examples below.) What import this has is not yet entirely clear, but it is certain that the effect is not simply predication of motion or direction. Structurally, as may become clearer in discussion below, it appears that the 'go/come' element is not necessarily a preverbal marker of V<sub>2</sub>, but may be a complement of the phrase headed by V<sub>1</sub>. This conclusion is based on facts about ellipsis of NP<sub>2</sub>. Generally, if NP<sub>2</sub> is to be ellipsed (as its discourse status may allow), both V<sub>1</sub> ('ăw 'take') and DIR (*paj* 'go'/*maa* 'come') may remain, but if the entire 'V<sub>1</sub>-phrase' (e.g. 'ăw take' and its nominal complement NP<sub>2</sub>) is to be ellipsed, it is usually much more natural to (and sometimes impossible not to) also remove the 'go/come' verb which follows NP<sub>2</sub>, suggesting it is attached to the V<sub>1</sub>-NP<sub>2</sub> phrase.

As V<sub>1</sub>, 'ăw 'take' may mark its object NP<sub>2</sub> as an instrument, or as a causee. It may also mark theme arguments with three-place predicates like *hâj* 'give' and *sāj* 'put' (which appear as V<sub>2</sub>). The schema is further utilised in a 'pretransitive' construction, as described in Mandarin Chinese and some other serialising languages. These usages will now be discussed, in turn.

### 3.2.1 'Take' object as instrument

The direct object of 'take' may be an instrument in some action. That NP<sub>2</sub> has a role as 'instrument' can be diagnosed using a test involving semantic entailments:

- (16) If NP<sub>2</sub> in a string S of the form 'NP<sub>1</sub> "take" NP<sub>2</sub> (go/come) VP' is an instrument, then the same sentence with "'take" NP<sub>2</sub> (go/come)' omitted is entailed by S.<sup>3</sup>

In other words it is NP<sub>1</sub>, the *subject* of 'take', which 'does' the action in VP. If the expression were rendered with only two arguments, it is only NP<sub>2</sub> which could be left out. In the following examples, I have put square brackets around omissible material (as usual, any of the NPs are omissible on their own):<sup>4</sup>

- (17) *mán* [*ǎw sǎn máa*] *cám kacĕe fông* *lǎj*  
 3P take arrow come ram lock come.apart altogether  
 'He broke the lock apart [with an arrow].' (176.17)  
 (He took an arrow and rammed the lock; it came apart completely.)
- (18) *...bĕep*  $\emptyset$  [*ǎw hǔa-lāan*] *són* *kǎn*  
 style take head-bald make.collide RCP  
 '...in the manner of butting each other [with bald heads].' (72.6)
- (19)  $\emptyset$  [*ǎw néew-visáa māj máa*] *khĕeng.khǎn káp háw naa*  
 take manner-plan new come compete with IP PCL  
 'They will fight us [with a new strategy], you know.' (150.3)

These constructions can be represented schematically as follows, where the solid lines represent the status of NP<sub>1</sub> as actor with respect to *both* verbs:

- (20)  $\left[ \left[ \text{NP}_{1, \text{AGT}} \right]_{\text{subject}} \left( \left[ \text{V}_1 \text{ 'take' } \text{NP}_{2, \text{INSTR}} \right]_{\text{extra argument}} \right) \left[ \text{V NP} \right]_{\text{predicate}} \right]_{\text{S}}$

In terms of argument structure, by which I mean a level of grammatical organisation specifying the number and relative prominence of a predicate's arguments (essentially following Manning 1996), this complex predicate could be described as follows:

<sup>3</sup> Actually, there is occasionally not true 'entailment', since the VP may be purposive, i.e. merely intended, and perhaps never realised. Optional insertion (in the test) of the relative future marker *cá'* before V<sub>2</sub> might circumvent the problem, and would not render the rule ineffective in distinguishing the instrumental from other constructions.

<sup>4</sup> There is a syntactic test for clause coordination in Lao (involving the possibility or not of insertion of the clause linker *lekaa*), which gives some important results here. *Lekaa* is acceptable before and after *máa* 'come' in (17), but much better after it. Arguably in pre-*máa* position the result is not equivalent to the original string, since it would entail literally 'coming' (i.e. from the place where the subject 'took' the arrow, to the place where s/he rammed the lock). In (18) and (19), however, *lekaa*-insertion is *not* acceptable, since it forces separate clauses, and therefore a literal reading for 'ǎw 'take', which could not apply where the 'ǎw-object is a nominal which cannot be literally 'taken', like *hǔa-lāan* 'bald head' or *néew visáa māj* 'new strategy'.

- (21)  $V_1 < \overbrace{NP_1, NP_2} \text{---} V_2 < \text{---}, NP_3 >>$

Thus, in these instrumental expressions, two verbs, each with their own argument structure, are combined, whereby  $NP_1$  is an argument of both verbs, *and* is the most prominent argument with respect to both verbs.  $NP_2$  (instrument) does not appear in the (embedded) argument structure of  $V_2$ .

### 3.2.2 'Take' object as causee

The object of 'take' in (15) may also be a causee. Here, in contrast to the examples in §3.2.1,  $NP_2$  (the *object* of 'take'), *not*  $NP_1$ , 'does' the action of the following VP. These examples fail the instrumental entailment test in (16). The following examples are causatives (at least semantically), as evidenced by the generally felicitous substitutability of *hāj* 'give' (as a causative verb) for 'ǎw 'take':

- (22)  $\emptyset$  'ǎw *sían-miàng* *máa* *sūaj* ( $\emptyset$ )  
 take S.M. come help  
 '(He would) get Siang-Miang to (come and) help (him).' (93.16)
- (23)  $\emptyset$  'ǎw *khón* *pāj* *khút-hēt* *khóng.mǎang*  
 take people go dig-do/make canal  
 'They got the people to dig the canals.' (267.9)
- (24)  $\emptyset$  'ǎw *pasáasón* *pāj* *hían* *jūu* *vāt* *nǎa*  
 take common.person go study be.at temple PCL  
*lekkaa* 'ǎw *khón* *pāj* *sǎn*  
 CLNK take person go teach  
 'They got the common people to (go and) study at the temples, you know,  
 and they got people to (go and) teach them.' (255.1)
- (25) *...tēē*  $\emptyset$  'ǎw *pasáasón* *pāj* *hēt* *náa.séeng*  
 but take common.person go do/make irrigated.rice.field  
 '...but they got the common people to make the irrigated rice fields.' (270.8)

Note that by simply replacing  $NP_2$ , the object of 'ǎw 'take', in (25) with a (semantically) typical instrument, an instrumental rather than causative meaning (with the accompanying differences in entailments) emerges:

- (26) *tēē*  $\emptyset$  'ǎw *khǎang-cák* *pāj* *hēt* *náa.séeng*  
 but take apparatus-engine go do/make irrigated.rice.field  
 '...but they used machinery to make the irrigated rice fields.'

Thus, in (25) it is  $NP_2$  (*pasáasón* 'common people') which makes the fields (not  $NP_1$ ), while in (26) it is  $NP_1$  that makes the fields, *not*  $NP_2$ . It is important to note that despite the apparent structural similarity of the instrumental and causative 'ǎw-constructions, the two cannot be collapsed into a single construction, since it can be demonstrated that their semantic entailments differ.

The causative analysis for the string 'NP<sub>1</sub> 'take' NP<sub>2</sub> (go/come) VP' may be summarised as follows: where the correspondence lines indicate that NP<sub>1</sub> and NP<sub>2</sub> are actors (or, at least, most prominent arguments) with respect to 'take', and VP, respectively (see (21), above):

- (27)  $[[\text{NP}_{1, \text{CAUSER}}]_{\text{subject}} [\text{V}_1 \text{'take'} \text{NP}_{2, \text{CAUSEE}}] [\text{V NP}]_{\text{predicate}} ]_S$
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I suggest the following argument structure corresponding to this (see (21), above), revealing that the most prominent (or 'highest') arguments of V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub> are separate NPs (namely, the higher and lower arguments, respectively, of V<sub>1</sub>):

- (28)  $V_1 < \overbrace{\text{NP}_1, \text{NP}_2} \text{, } V_2 < - \text{ (, NP}_3 \text{)} >>$

### 3.2.3 [*'Take' NP 'come'*] as *'take NP and come' versus 'cause NP to come'*

In the 'ǎw-causatives we have seen so far, it is certainly the causee which performs the action in V<sub>2</sub>, but there is also a strong degree of responsibility on the part of the causer. Now, there are further examples whose proper interpretation (if interpreted as causatives) is complicated by the 'causer's' direct involvement in the V<sub>2</sub> action itself. Consider the following example:

- (29) *véeláa 'ǎw 'ǎa máa...*  
 time take aunty come  
 'When you bring your auntie (here)...' (194.27)

In the context in which it appears, (29) cannot mean 'when you "cause" your aunty to come here', nor can 'ǎa 'aunty' take an instrument role in the action.

It is common for serialising languages to use a pattern 'take' + 'come/go' to mean 'bring/take' (Durie 1997; Lord 1993). However, different interpretations of this observation have been offered. Compare, for example, Lord's paraphrase of 'take + come' (i.e. 'bring') as 'cause to come' (Lord 1993:Ch.5), to Durie's 'verb-by-verb rendering' of a Yorùbá construction 'he took book come' as 'He takes a book; he comes' (Durie 1997:290). Lord's paraphrase suggests that the object of 'take' is the logical subject of 'come' (as in a causative, see (27), (28), above), while Durie's has a same-subject interpretation (parallel to the instrumental argument structure arrangement, (20), (21), above). Durie's description is perhaps closer to the truth, given that a causative interpretation is (semantically, at least) not really plausible here. It is hardly possible to paraphrase *John brought a cake* as 'John caused a cake to come'. Even if we accept this paraphrase, there remains an important distinction between *John brings a cake* and *John causes a cake to come*, namely that in the former case John must also come, while in the latter (if indeed a plausible context can be found), John need not come at all. Also, the 'coming' of John and the cake are hardly alike, since John's participation involves volition and agency, while the cake is presumably participating as a theme (or even an undergoer).

I am thus inclined to treat a construction like 'take' + 'come' in Lao as being basically idiomatic (for 'bring'), or perhaps as a special case of instrumental construction.



### 3.3 Role of 'take' with three-place predicates

Examples (30)–(33), below, show three-place predicates *vâj* 'put/place/fix', *sōng* 'send', *hàj* 'give', and *sāj* 'put/put in' appearing as  $V_2$ , with the 'take'-object  $NP_2$  the theme.  $NP_3$  is obligatory here (i.e. not in the sense that it must be explicitly expressed, but that there must be a contextually retrievable referent for it). Unlike the valency-changing operations above, however, it is not possible to say in these cases that  $NP_1$  or  $NP_2$  'VP-ed' without reference to the other — all three are core arguments:

- (30)  $\phi$  'ăw *kīaw* *vâj* *pót*  
 take cutter put post  
 'She put the cutter on the post.' (929.1)
- (31)  $\phi$  'ăw *vēen-tǎa* *máa* *sōng* *cék* *kháun*  
 take mirror-eye ('spectacles') come send Chinaman return  
 'He sent the spectacles back to the Chinaman.' (57.8)
- (32)  $\phi$  'ăw *ngáaw* *máa* *hàj* 'áaj *nēε*  
 take sword come give o.bro PCL ('please')  
 'Please give me the sword.' (891.15)
- (33) *tamláa*<sub>i</sub> *khǎw* *kɔɔ* 'ăw  $\phi$  *máa* *sāj* *thǒng-sàa*  
 recipe 3P LNK take come put bag-shirt  
 'The recipe, he put in his shirt pocket.' (40.10)

Example (33) shows fronting of the theme *tamlaa* 'recipe'. The following version is fine, where the theme appears in the  $NP_2$  slot (marked as  $\phi_i$  in (33)):

- (34) *khǎw* *kɔɔ* 'ăw *tamláa* *máa* *sāj* *thǒng-sàa*  
 3P LNK take recipe come put bag-shirt  
 'He put the recipe in his shirt pocket.'

Note that it is not only 'ăw 'take' which may mark the theme argument of a three-place predicate in this way. Other verbs of handling, such as *nōk* 'lift' in the first clause of the following example, may also be used, where semantically appropriate. In this example, 'ăw 'take' marks the theme in the subsequent clauses 'put bamboo shoots in' and 'put water in':

- (35)  $\phi$  *dǎng* *fáj* *lekaa* *nōk* ... *mòɔ-kěeng* *nāj* ...  
 light fire C.LNK lift pot-soup big  
  
*sāj* *tâw-fáj* *lekaa* 'ăw *nɔɔ.máj* *sāj*  $\phi$  / 'ăw *nâm* *sāj*  $\phi$   
 put stove-fire C.LNK take bamboo.shoots put take water put  
 '(He) lit the fire, and then put the big soup pot on the stove, and then put bamboo shoots in (it), and put water in (it).' (925.7)

Note that any of the three-place predicates may be expressed as an apparently simple transitive verb (i.e. without 'ăw 'take' and its object), as long as the identity of the three arguments is clearly understood from the context (the relevant clause is underlined):

- (36) *câw* *jàak* *dáj* *nǎng* *néew-dáj* *khòɔj* *míi* / *khòɔj* *hàj* *câw*  
 2P want acquire what type-which 1P have 1P give 2P  
 'Whatever I have that you want to get, I'll give it to you.' (408.5)

Consider now the (notionally) three-place predicate *fǎng* 'bury':

- (37) *háv kɔɔ khút khũm / 'ǎw sǎw fǎng ø mēen bɔɔ /*  
 IP then dig hole take post bury be.so PCL(Q)  
*lǎng-càak 'ǎw sǎw fǎng ø lêew...*  
 back-from take post bury PFV  
 'Then we dig a hole, and plant the post (in it), right? (Then,) after we've  
 planted the post...' (21.13)

Speakers generally agree that the default referent of  $\emptyset$  in (37) is *dĩn* 'earth, ground',<sup>5</sup> and thus the following sentence is acceptable:

- (38)  $\emptyset$  'ǎw sǎw fǎng *dĩn*  
 take post bury earth  
 'S/he buried the post in the ground.'

Now, the following two strings are also acceptable, given appropriate discourse status of the relevant nominals:

- (39) *fǎng sǎw*  
 bury post  
 'S/he buried the post (in the ground).'
- (40) *fǎng dĩn*  
 bury ground  
 'S/he buried (it) in the ground.'

Note here that *fǎng* 'bury' cannot appear as a three-place predicate without a 'supporting' verb such as 'ǎw 'take' (except by using LP to accommodate a non-subject NP; see (59), below):

- (41) \**fǎng sǎw dĩn*  
 bury post ground  
 (S/he buried the post the ground.)

Thus, as long as semantic roles of nominals are clear, three-place predicates such as *fǎng* 'bury' and *hàj* 'give' can be, and often are, treated as simple transitive verbs (i.e. two-place predicates).

### 3.3.1 'Effected object' construction

A subtype of the construction discussed in the section above is the 'effected object' construction, in which the two lower arguments refer essentially to the same entity, but in states before and after some process (predicated by  $V_2$ ). Compare the English 'effected double object' construction in the translation of this example:

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<sup>5</sup> One might think from this example that the referent of  $\emptyset$  could be *khũm* 'hole'. However, *khũm* 'hole' cannot appear as direct object of *fǎng* 'bury'. Apparently, a direct object of *fǎng* 'bury' must refer to the *substance* in which something is buried, not to the empty space which provides a place for the thing to be buried.

- (42) *cõn nân kɔɔ 'ǎw ø pǎj hēt mía*  
 bandit that LNK take go make wife  
 'The bandit then made her his wife.' (893.4)

### 3.4 'Pretransitive' function of 'take'

In the examples considered so far, the object of 'ǎw 'take' (i.e. NP<sub>2</sub>) has had a relation to the following verb phrase as either agent (as in causative constructions), or a secondary core argument in a three-place predication (either a theme, or an instrument). (The specific semantic/role relation of the instrumental argument to the following verb is not storable in terms of either 'agent' or 'patient' — see examples (17)–(19), above. It is simply an 'instrument', a long recognised basic case role (Fillmore 1968).) In the various examples above, we have seen 'take' serving as a mechanism to introduce a third core argument (conceptually, a participant 'midstream' on the 'action chain', neither an original 'energy source', nor a terminal 'energy sink' (Langacker 1991:Ch.7.1)).

In the following common construction, structurally equivalent to (15), 'ǎw 'take' performs no valency-change function whatsoever (i.e. no argument is 'added' or 'subtracted' from the core):

- (43) NP<sub>1</sub> 'take' NP<sub>2</sub> (go/come) V<sub>tr</sub>

In (43), NP<sub>1</sub> and NP<sub>2</sub> are logical subject and object, respectively, of V<sub>tr</sub>. Example (43) is notionally equivalent to a simple transitive clause in that it predicates a transitive event, and specifies two participant arguments (see the 'pretransitive' (*bǎ*) construction in Mandarin Chinese: Chao 1968:342ff.; Li & Thompson 1981:Ch.15; Lord 1993:114ff., inter alia; see also Jagacinski 1987 on the same construction in Tai Lue). Here are some examples:

- (44) *ø<sub>i</sub> sī 'ǎw ø<sub>j</sub> pǎj khàa sân bɔ'*  
 RELFUT take go kill thus PCL(Q)  
 'So they're going to kill us, are they?' (674.1)
- (45) *ø<sub>i</sub> khwāt-'ǎw ø<sub>j</sub> lekkaa 'ǎw ø<sub>j</sub> máa tīi*  
 carve-take C.LNK take come beat  
 'They'd carve the drums, and then beat them.' (262.9)
- (46) *phān kɔɔ 'ǎw too-nūi pǎj hían khúu-kǎn*  
 3.HON LNK take CLF-this go study same-RCP  
 'They also did study this.' (270.6)
- (47) *ø<sub>i</sub> kɔɔ 'ǎw ø<sub>j</sub> máa vāw tɔ-tɔ kǎn pǎj*  
 LNK take come say connect-RDP RCP go  
 'So, I tell (the stories), passing them on.' (33.20)

This kind of construction is not limited to simple transitive expressions. Consider the following examples, first showing *kǎn* 'eat', a simple transitive verb, and second a causative construction, with a third argument added to the clause, using the additional verb *hàj* 'give':

- (48) *lūuk khanɔɔj kǎn nóm*  
 child 1P consume milk  
 'My child drank milk.'

- (49)  $\emptyset$  *hàj lûuk khanôj kîn nóm*  
 give child IP consume milk  
 'I'll feed milk to my child.'

Now, NP<sub>3</sub> in this 'give'-causative construction (see §4, below) may be 'raised' in a pretransitive construction:

- (50)  $\emptyset$  'ăw *nóm hàj lûuk khanôj kîn*  
 take milk give child IP consume  
 'I'll feed my child.' (845.6)

### 3.4.1 Range of use of the pretransitive construction

The precise semantic or functional import of the pretransitive construction in Lao is not yet entirely clear. Li and Thompson have noted that the equivalent construction in Mandarin Chinese may be used either when 'something happens to' the 'take'-marked NP, or when it is 'definite, specific, or generic' (Li & Thompson 1981:483). In general, presence of these conditions corresponds to increased transitivity (Hopper & Thompson 1980). In examples from the previous section, the 'ăw-marked NPs in (44) and (45) are clearly affected ('killed' and 'beaten' respectively), while those in (46) and (47) are, in contrast, atypical 'patients', being 'studied' and 'told' respectively, and thus hardly 'affected' in any literal sense. They are, however, referential and specific, in terms of their discourse status.

The following examples apparently display cases in which it would be almost unacceptable *not* to use the pretransitive construction:

- (51) *sàj-kòk nî ... caw 'ăw pǎj cǎwn*  
 sausage this ... 2P take go fry  
 'These sausages...you go and fry.' (39.10)
- (52) *?caw (pǎj) cǎwn sàj-kòk nî*  
 2P (go) fry sausage this  
 (You (go and) fry these sausages.)
- (53) *khǎw cá' 'ăw khón pǎj dát-sàng*  
 3P REL.FUT take person go modify-build  
 'They were going to take people for re-education.' (644.9)
- (54) *?khǎw cá' (pǎj) dát-sàng khón*  
 3P REL.FUT (go) modify-build person  
 (They were going to re-educate people.)

Why this is so requires further consideration, but some points can be made here. The verbs *cǎwn* 'fry' and *dát-sàng* 're-educate' both contain a strong notion of affectedness (specifically, a resultant change of state) of the patient. Also relevant is the discourse status of the O arguments *sàj-kòk nî* 'these sausages' and *khón* 'people'. Example (52) shows a referential and specific argument 'these sausages' appearing after the verb, a position strongly preferred for overt expression of new/non-referential arguments. Postverbal expression of any NP with this discourse status (i.e. referential and specific) is generally avoided. The following example lends support to this hypothesis, by showing a good

occurrence of 'sausages' in postverbal position, when the discourse status is *non-referential/non-specific*:

- (55) *cāw cǎwn sàj-kòk hàj khòj dēε*  
 2P fry sausage give IP PCL(please)  
 'Fry some sausages for me, please.'

In (53), the 'ǎw-object *khón* 'people' is generic, and as such may behave in similar fashion to 'definites' (Givón 1984:Ch.11; Langacker 1991:Ch.3).

The interaction between syntax and the discourse status of NPs in Lao is a fascinating and important area for further research, and one which is clearly central to many mechanisms of Lao grammar.

### 3.4.2 Purposive reading of pretransitive constructions

Pretransitive constructions may often be construed as purposive, with the lower predicate intended rather than asserted, and pragmatically defeasible. Consider the following example, with two possible readings:

- (56) *'ǎw ø máa 'āan*  
 take come read  
 i. 'He read it.'  
 ii. 'He took it to read.' (56.10)

The actual reading in context is (56ii), as revealed by the following line of the text, in which *'āan* 'read' is explicitly negated:

- (57) *'òoj lóot 'āan bōw dāj*  
 oh so.then read NEG can  
 'Oh! He couldn't read it.' (56.11)

### 3.4.3 Argument structure of the pretransitive construction

On the basis of the above discussion, I suggest the following complex argument structure for the pretransitive construction (see (21), (28), above):

- (58)  $V_1 < \overbrace{NP_1, NP_2} V_2 < -, ->>$

Here, both arguments of  $V_1$  are arguments of  $V_2$ , with the same respective prominence relations in the structure of each of the two (structurally combined) verbs.

## 4 'Give'

### 4.1 Main verb usage of 'give'

As a main verb meaning 'give', *hàj* may host its three arguments (donor, recipient, and gift) in a number of ways.

#### 4.1.1 'Give' as a lone verb with the gift in Left Position

Donor and recipient NPs may appear as A and O, respectively, with the gift NP fronted, in LP:

(59) NP<sub>GIFT</sub> NP<sub>DONOR</sub> 'give' NP<sub>RECIPIENT</sub>

(60) *pām hũa nân khòj hàj caw*  
 book CLF that 1P give 2P  
 'That book, I gave you.'

Of other logically possible NP orderings, only [recipient-donor-'give'-gift] works, and is certainly marked in comparison to (59).

#### 4.1.2 'Give' as a lone verb with the gift in postverbal position

The gift may appear in postverbal position in what looks like a double object construction:

(61) NP<sub>DONOR</sub> 'give' NP<sub>GIFT</sub> NP<sub>RECIPIENT</sub>

This construction is best analysed as a case of noun incorporation, due to the strongly constrained range of nominals that may appear in the NP<sub>GIFT</sub> slot in (61) (i.e. only non-referential/non-specific arguments are possible). Consider the following examples:

(62) *mēē dāj hàj sǎnǎá phańáa-sǎa vāj*  
 mother did give promise king-tiger fix.in.place  
 'The mother did give the tiger king a promise.' (851.4)

(63) *caw hàj ngǎn khòj*  
 2P give money 1P  
 'You gave me money.'

Now, there are examples which appear to suggest that both gift-recipient and recipient-gift postverbal orderings are possible. The following example, with recipient preceding gift is fine, although perhaps less common (no examples appear in my texts):

(64) NP<sub>DONOR</sub> 'give' NP<sub>RECIPIENT</sub> NP<sub>GIFT</sub>

(65) *caw hàj khòj hà-a-lòj kìip*  
 2P give 1P five-hundred kip  
 'You gave me 500 kip.'

Consider, however, the following unacceptable example, with the same constituent order as (65), but with the simple noun *ngǎn* 'money' in the NP<sub>GIFT</sub> position of (64):

(66) \**caw hàj khòj ngǎn*  
 2P give 1P money  
 (You gave me money.)

It appears that the ordering in (64) and (65) results from a combination of zero anaphora and floating nominal modification or 'NP split'. The phrase *hà-a-lòj kìip* 'five hundred kip' is a classifier phrase which quantifies *ngǎn* 'money'. Example (65) may thus be analysed as having a 'zero' in the postverbal 'gift' slot, where the modifying classifier phrase *hà-a-lòj*

*kìip* 'five hundred kip' has 'floated' to sentence-final position, as made explicit in (67). The full structure, with the postverbal 'gift' slot filled, is shown in (68) (see (63) and (65), above):

- (67) *câw hàj ∅ khòj hà-lòj kìip*  
 2P give 1P five-hundred kip  
 'You gave me 500 kip.'
- (68) *câw hàj ngán khòj hà-lòj kìip*  
 2P give money 1P five-hundred kip  
 'You gave me 500 kip (of money).'

The float of nominal modification to final position results from a restriction (relating to discourse status of the gift argument) inherent in the noun-incorporating 'double object construction'. The following example, with the fully elaborated NP in postverbal 'gift' position is unacceptable (see (63)):

- (69) \**câw hàj ngán hà-lòj kìip khòj*  
 2P give money five-hundred kip 1P  
 (You gave five hundred kip to me.)

Now, consider the acceptability of the following example, where the whole 'gift' NP is intact, with 'give'-recipient-gift order:

- (70) *câw hàj khòj ngán hà-lòj kìip*  
 2P give 1P money five-hundred kip  
 'You gave me five hundred kip.'

It appears that here the whole 'gift' NP appears in 'afterthought' position, and the structural 'gift' object slot (between 'give' and recipient) contains zero. The specificity of the overall argument is presumably what disallows it from appearing in postverbal position.

#### 4.1.3 'Give' as $V_2$ in the 'take'-construction

A third, and more common way to use *hàj* 'give', is in a serial construction headed by *ǎw* 'take' (see §3.2, above):

- (71) NP<sub>DONOR</sub> 'take' NP<sub>GIFT</sub> 'give' NP<sub>RECIPIENT</sub>
- (72) *háv ǎw ngán hàj mēε-tháv*  
 1P take money give mother-old  
 'I gave money to my mother-in-law.' (388.5)

This structure allows a complex NP like *ngán hà-lòj kìip* 'five hundred kip (of money)' to be expressed in full, without being split by modifier float, or moved to an outer position (cf. examples (63)–(70), §4.1.2, above):

- (73) *câw ǎw ngán hà-lòj kìip hàj khòj*  
 2P take money five-hundred kip give 1P  
 'You gave me 500 kip.'

A couple of points can be noted here. First, the combination of movement and nominal ellipsis can create further possible constituent orders, such as the following example (schematically, 'NP<sub>GIFT</sub> 'take' 'give' NP<sub>RECIPIENT</sub>'):

- (74) [lúuk-fáj-sǎaj    nǐ<sub>i</sub>]          ø<sub>j</sub> 'ǎw ø<sub>i</sub> hàj mán  
 child-fire-project ('torch batteries') TPC ('this')          take          give 3P  
 'Torch batteries, we<sub>j</sub> gave (to) them.' (412.6)

Second, verbs more specific than 'ǎw 'take' may be used as V<sub>1</sub> in this context, where semantically appropriate (as noted above with other 'handling' verbs for transfer expressions; cf. *n̄ōk* 'lift' as V<sub>1</sub> with the three-place transfer predicate *sāj* 'place', (35), §3.3, above). Here, *nám* 'to lead, guide' is used in the V<sub>1</sub> slot:

- (75) *cá'*              *tōng nám sǎan*                              *nǐ*      *hàj*      *sěnáa.ǎamáat*  
 REL.FUT      must lead official.letter      this      give      military.forces  
 'We'll have to take this official letter to the military forces.' (89.11)

The fact that 'ǎw 'take' is most common as V<sub>1</sub> in these constructions is due to its maximally abstract semantics as a verb of 'handling'.

#### 4.1.4 Argument structure of 'give'

Based on the discussion so far, the argument structure of *hàj* 'give' as a transfer verb is similar to that for the pretransitive constructions (§3.4, above), in that the prominence relations of the two arguments of V<sub>1</sub> are preserved for V<sub>2</sub>. Compare (58), repeated here, with (76), a structure specific to transfer verbs like 'give', and made more explicit in (77), using the nominal arguments from example (72), above:

- (58)  $V_1 < NP_1, NP_2, V_2 < -, - >>$

- (76)  $V_1 < NP_1, NP_2, V_2 < -, -, NP >>$

- (77) 'take' < 'I', 'money', 'give' < -, -, 'mother-in-law' >>

Examples (58) and (76) differ only in that an extra argument appears under V<sub>2</sub> in the latter case. The correspondence of argument prominence relations across V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub> remains the same (i.e. the first and second most prominent arguments of V<sub>1</sub> are the first and second most prominent arguments, respectively, of V<sub>2</sub>).

## 4.2 Role of 'give' in complex expressions with other 'giving' verbs

The word *hàj* 'give' may appear as V<sub>2</sub> in complex expressions with other giving verbs, such as *mōp* 'hand over', *sōng* 'send', and *thavǎaj* 'present, offer'. In the examples with 'give' as a main verb which we have just seen, the main verb *hàj* 'give' is in V<sub>2</sub> position, and



the ('non-main') verb in  $V_1$  position is 'ăw 'take', or another semantically appropriate handling verb. In the following cases, however, the 'main' verb is apparently  $V_1$ , and *hàj* 'give' in  $V_2$  position now plays a more structural role (in bringing a third argument into the core). As above, the theme argument is direct object of  $V_1$ :

- (78) *phǒn thūi-sút*  $\emptyset$  *kɔɔ mɔɔp* *múang* *hàj* *sĩnsáj*  
 result at-extreme LNK hand.over kingdom give S.  
 '(As) the final result, he handed over his kingdom to Sinxay.' (205.10)

As we have seen above, there are other possible surface orders due to movement and ellipsis — the following examples show postposing, and fronting, respectively, of the theme argument (direct object of  $V_2$ ):

- (79) *háv cá'* *mɔɔp*  $\emptyset$  *hàj*  $\emptyset$  [*sáang-máa-ngúa-khwáaj-*  
 IP REL.FUT hand.over give elephant-horse-cow-buffalo-  
*-sĩng-khǒng-pǎanakǎan-kêew-věen-ngón-khám*];  
 -things-stuff-of.various.kinds-crystal-rings-silver-gold  
 'I'll hand over livestock, goods, and many precious items.' (88.3)

- (80) [*thūk-sĩng-thuk-jāang kīaw.káp lūang nī*];  
 each-thing-each-kind about matter this  
*'áaj mɔɔp*  $\emptyset_i$  *hàj nōng déj*  
 o.bro hand.over give y.sib PCL  
 'Everything concerning this matter, I hand over to you.' (94.12)

#### 4.3 Further note on 'modifier float'

As mentioned above, a noun phrase in Lao may 'split' where the lexical noun and the classifier phrase (containing various quantifiers, determiners and modifiers) are separated, with the classifier phrase postposed to sentence-final position. Here is a typical example, in which the 'discontinuous' NP is underlined:

- (81) *táw* *dɔɔk-máj* *hàn* *tèek* *sǎ'* *sǎam táw*  
 vase flower-plant.suffix that break EXPR three vase  
 'Those vases smashed, three (of them).' (63.12)

The following example reveals a further complication to those discussed above, whereby it appears that the (underlined) nominals in  $NP_2$  and  $NP_3$  slots (see the schema in (71)) refer to one and the same argument, namely the gift:

- (82) *phān* 'ăw *ngón* *hàj* *cét* *kìip*  
 3.HON take money give seven kip  
 'He gave me seven kip.' (332.3)
- (83) *phān* *dáj* 'ăw *khǒng.khwǎn* *hàj* 'ǎn *nāng*  
 3.HON did take gift give CLF one  
 'He did give him a (certain) present.' (875.2)

It appears that the gift argument is (overtly) the direct object of two separate verbs in the structure. But I assume there is an empty argument slot immediately after *hàj* 'give' in these

cases, since in both cases a nominal referring to the recipient can felicitously be inserted immediately after *hàj* ‘give’. Thus, it is only a ‘fortuitous’ case of the gift argument appearing (only apparently) as the object of *hàj* ‘give’, resulting from a combination of movement (postposing of the gift argument’s classifier phrase), and ellipsis (of the post-V<sub>2</sub> recipient argument). Thus, the underlined nominals in these examples arguably form a ‘discontinuous’ noun phrase, as described in (81), above. (Alternatively, the utterance-final nominals in these examples could be analysed as performing an adverbial role.)

#### 4.4 Peripheral argument marking

The word *hàj* ‘give’ may mark a peripheral beneficiary argument:

- (84) *khǒn-dǐn-khǒn-sáaj      hàj khǎw hanǎa*  
 dig.up-earth-dig.up-sand    give 3P      PCL  
 ‘I dug up earth and sand for them, you know.’ (350.5)
- (85) *phùu-nân    kɔɔ    aan    ø    hàj    láaw*  
 person-that LNK read    give 3P  
 ‘That fellow read it for him.’ (54.18)

That the *hàj*-marked nominals are peripheral arguments here is revealed first by their potential for ellipsis (together with *hàj*, *not* requiring contextual retrievability, i.e. not specified by the core argument structure of the verb), and second by entailment relations with sentences whose *hàj*-phrase is omitted. The entailment which diagnoses peripheral status of a *hàj*-marked nominal is as follows: if NP<sub>3</sub> in a string S of the form ‘NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub> *hàj* NP<sub>3</sub>’ is a peripheral (typically benefactive) argument, then the same sentence with ‘*hàj* NP’ omitted is entailed by S.<sup>6</sup> Thus, (85) entails the following:

- (86) *phùu    nân    kɔɔ    'āan    ø*  
 person    that    LNK    read  
 ‘That fellow read it.’

On the other hand, since the object of *hàj* ‘give’ in (72) (repeated here from above) is a core argument, (72) does *not* entail (87) (and thus fails the test for peripheral argument status):

- (72) *hǎw 'ǎw ngǎn    hàj    mēε-thàw*  
 1P    take money give mother-old  
 ‘I gave money to my mother-in-law.’ (388.5)
- (87) *hǎw 'ǎw ngǎn*  
 1P    take money  
 ‘I took money.’

Finally, note that while the effect of using *hàj* ‘give’ to bring in a peripheral argument is typically *benefactive*, the following example shows that this is not necessarily the case:

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<sup>6</sup> This may appear slightly problematic, since this entailment apparently holds for examples like (78). The crucial factor, however, which would rule out such examples, is that the ellipsed argument must *not require* contextual retrievability.

- (88) *khɔ̌j kɔ̌j bɔ̌j hēt nǎng                      hāj mūu cāw*  
 IP      LNK   NEG   do   what/anything   give   group   2P  
 'I won't do anything to you people.' (411.4)

Out of context, (88) would normally be taken as benefactive (and would be translated 'I won't do anything *for* you people'), but it is clear from the context (the speaker is making a deal with a neighbouring group of people, that the two groups are to help each other by not obstructing each other's activities) that the *hāj*-phrase cannot be interpreted as benefactive.

#### 4.4.1 Structural ambiguity in 'give' constructions

As already noted, there is possible ambiguity between *hāj* 'give' as a main verb with three core arguments, and as a marker of a peripheral (typically benefactive) argument. Another possibility exists, where *hāj* 'give' and its object may be read as the main predicate of a separate clause, in a purposive complement, or as in a clause chain:

- (89) *hāw nǎng dāj                      hēt hāan hāj mán*  
 IP   still   have.to ('get')   make   platform   give   3P  
 i. 'I still have to make a platform for them.'  
 ii. 'I still have to make a platform to give them.' (26.13)

- (90) *cót tǎmláa hāj khɔ̌j dēε*  
 jot   recipe   give   IP   PCL  
 i. 'Please write down the recipe for me.'  
 ii. 'Please write down the recipe and give it to me.' (39.7)

Thus, possible readings for a string 'NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub> 'give' NP<sub>3</sub>' could be:

- (91) i. '[NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub>] for NP<sub>3</sub>.' (e.g. (85))  
 ii. 'NP<sub>1</sub> gives NP<sub>2</sub> to NP<sub>3</sub>.' (e.g. (72))  
 iii. '[NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub>] and then give(s) it (NP<sub>2</sub>) to NP<sub>3</sub>.' (e.g. (90))  
 iv. '[NP<sub>1</sub> V NP<sub>2</sub>] in order to give it (NP<sub>2</sub>) to NP<sub>3</sub>.' (e.g. (90))

It is perhaps the case that a distinction between (91 iii) and (91 iv) is impossible to make in cases like (89) and (90), given that they are situated in the future, and so in both cases the act of giving is unrealised. A test which would bring out the distinction involves negation of 'give' in a subsequent clause, forcing the purposive complement reading (see (90)):

- (92) *lāaw cót tǎmláa hāj khɔ̌j tēε lāaw hēt tǎmláa hàn sǎ*  
 3P   jot   recipe   give   IP   but   3P   do   recipe   that   be.lost  
*lǎj      bɔ̌j   dāj   sōng                      hāj   khɔ̌j   lēεw*  
 so.then   NEG   did   send/present   give   IP   PFV  
 i. 'S/he noted the recipe for me but lost it, and never gave it to me.'  
 ii. 'S/he noted the recipe to give me, but lost it, and never gave it to me.'  
 iii. (\*S/he noted the recipe and gave it to me, but lost it and never gave it to me.)

In practice, however, this apparent vagueness is unproblematic, as interpretation is easily resolved with reference to context.

#### 4.5 Referential disjunct or ‘switch-reference’ marking

A semantically weakened, structurally functional role of *hàj* ‘give’ is as a referential disjunct (or ‘switch-reference’) marker in control constructions. (This is related to valency-change operations, since a signal of switched subject indicates that a new argument is introduced in the subject position of the second clause.) Consider these two examples of the complement-taking predicate *jàak* ‘want to’, which demands that the following verb have a zero subject coreferential with the main subject:

- (93)  $\emptyset$  *jàak sòn dee-nô*  
 want fight PCL-PCL  
 ‘He wants to fight, don’t you think?’ (122.9)
- (94)  $\emptyset$  *jàak 'òk pǎj sóm sǎn pǎj 'àap-nâm*  
 want exit go enjoy garden go bathe-water  
 ‘She wanted to go out and enjoy the garden, and bathe.’ (159.12)

Now, in the following, *hàj* ‘give’ appears immediately after *jàak* ‘want (to)’, marking reference of the following subject as non-coreferential with the main subject, and also leaving ellipsis of the lower subject optional:

- (95) *háv<sub>i</sub> jáak hàj  $\emptyset$ <sub>j</sub> sòn*  
 IP want give fight  
 ‘I want them to fight.’ (142.13)
- (96) *mēε kɔɔ bɔɔ jáak hàj lúuk tǎaj*  
 mother LNK neg want give child die  
*lúuk kɔɔ bɔɔ jáak hàj mēε tǎaj*  
 child LNK NEG want give mother die  
 ‘The mother didn’t want her child to die, and the child didn’t want its mother to die.’ (864.9)

#### 4.6 Role of ‘give’ in causative constructions

The verb *hàj* ‘give’ may appear as either a main causative verb, or a secondary verb in expressions with other causatives.

##### 4.6.1 ‘Give’ as causative verb

The verb *hàj* ‘give’ serves as a general interpersonal causative, loosely equivalent in various contexts to *let*, *have*, *get*.

- (97) *phān kɔɔ bɔɔ hàj  $\emptyset$  pǎj*  
 3.HON LNK NEG give go  
 ‘He wouldn’t let me go.’ (332.2)
- (98) *khán vāa sán mǎn-'hǎn sáw dǎd / hàj phān máa phōp  $\emptyset$*   
 if say thus tomorrow morning PCL give 3.HON come meet  
 ‘Then in that case, tomorrow morning, y’hear! Have them come and meet us.’ (79.1)

- (99) *khɔ̀ɔj bɔ̀ɔ̀ həj thūk — həj n̄âak n̄ăng*  
 1P NEG give wretched give difficult anything  
 'I won't let you be poor or have any difficulties.' (868.11)
- (100) *ø həj nɔ̀ɔj pǎj s̄u ləw d̄ēē*  
 give N. go buy liquor PCL ('please')  
 'Get Noy to buy some liquor, please.'

Here, we may point to yet another case of possible structural ambiguity, relating to the referential disjunction function of *həj* 'give'. Consider (95), repeated here from above:

- (95) *háv<sub>i</sub> jàak həj ø<sub>j</sub> sôn*  
 1P want give fight  
 'I want them to fight.' (142.13)

In the translation here (construed given the actual context), *həj* 'give' performs a referential disjunction function, reversing control of the main complement-taking predicate *jàak* 'want' (conceptually, predicating a handover of control; see Newman 1996). This reading would see *sôn* 'fight' as the primary lower verb, subordinate to *jàak* 'want', while *həj* 'give' plays a structural function of switching reference. An alternative reading, however, would see *həj* 'give' with a causative function, as the main lower verb, with *sôn* 'fight', further embedded in subordination to it. Thus, (95) could mean 'I want to get them to fight'.

The following example shows the same kind of ambiguity:

- (101) *bɔ̀ɔ̀ jàak həj nɔ̀ɔng 'ɔ̀k càak vǎng*  
 NEG want give y.sib exit from palace  
 i. 'He didn't want his sister to leave the palace.'  
 ii. 'He didn't want to let his sister leave the palace.' (160.9)

Thus, where we find the combination [*jàak* 'want' + *həj* 'give'], it may not always be possible to clearly distinguish the two interpretations of *həj* 'give', as a 'switch-reference' marker, or as a (subordinated) primary causative verb.

#### 4.6.2 'Give' as secondary causative verb

The verb *həj* 'give' may 'mark' other causative verbs, basically as  $V_2$  in what appears to be a V-V compound:

- (102) *khɔ̀ɔj s̄ang-həj khǎw pǎj*  
 1P order-give 3P go  
 'I ordered them to go.'
- (103) *láv khɔ̀ɔ-həj khɔ̀ɔj k̄n-khaw*  
 3P request-give 1P eat-rice  
 'S/he requested that I eat.'

The following rephrasings of (102) and (103) reveal complications relating to the possibility (or not) of the causee appearing between the two verbs:

- (104) *khɔ̀ɔj s̄ang khǎw həj paj*  
 1P order 3P give go  
 'I ordered them to go.'

- (105) \**láaw khǎj khǎj həj kǐn-khàw*  
 3P request IP give eat-rice  
 (S/he requested that I eat.)

(Note, however, that (105) is acceptable with the meaning ‘S/he begged me, that I let her/him eat.’)

## 5 Discussion: structure of complex predicates

In this paper I have described some important grammatical roles of Lao verbs *ǎw* ‘take’ and *həj* ‘give’ in complex predicate constructions. Lao grammar exploits these basic predicates for certain structural functions relating to valency-increasing operations (i.e. addition of an extra argument entailed by causative, instrumental, or benefactive expressions), or syntactic permutations related to discourse status of arguments (as in the ‘pretransitive’ construction). I have not discussed theoretical issues relating to these kinds of structures, but I hope my data and discussion may contribute to current research in syntactic theory on argument structure, complex predicates, and other areas of interest in syntactic research (see Manning 1996; Alsina et al. eds 1997; Andrews & Manning 1998; and references therein).

We may now briefly review the three basic argument structure arrangements suggested above for the various *ǎw* ‘take’ and *həj* ‘give’ constructions in Lao (repeated with original numbers from above):

- (21) 
$$\overbrace{V_1 < NP_1, NP_2, V_2 < -, NP_3 >>}$$

- (28) 
$$\overbrace{V_1 < NP_1, NP_2, V_2 < -, (NP_3) >>}$$

- (58) 
$$\overbrace{V_1 < NP_1, NP_2, V_2 < -, - >>}$$

In each case two verbs ( $V_1$  and  $V_2$ ) combine to form a single clause (or complex predicate), and their respective argument structures (in the sense of Manning 1996) merge, whereby at least one argument is shared between the two, and whereby the shared argument may or may not have the same prominence with respect to each of the two verbs. Structures (21, 28, 58) are logical possibilities. The schema in (21) covers instrumental constructions (§3.2.1), the quasi-instrumental constructions discussed in §3.2.3, and purposive constructions (see §3.4.2), where the most prominent argument of  $V_1$  is also the most prominent argument of  $V_2$ , and the object of  $V_1$  is not a core argument of  $V_2$ .

The schema in (28) covers causatives (*ǎw*-causatives, §3.2.2; *həj*-causatives), where the less prominent argument of  $V_1$  is the most prominent argument of  $V_2$ .

The schema in (58) covers pretransitives (§3.4), as well as various three-place predicates such as 'give' and 'put' (§3.3), in which the prominence relations of the arguments are preserved across both  $V_1$  and  $V_2$  (see also the schema in (76), above).

These preliminary observations leave open a number of questions which remain to be resolved in settling on an analysis of the argument structure of these and other (both complex and simple) predicates in Lao. Further work needs to be done on the role of preverbal directional particles *pǎj* 'go' and *máa* 'come' (so often appearing in 'ǎw 'take' constructions, especially), as well as on the semantics of the constructions, and the discourse conditions governing their usage. The question of constituent structure (probably involving conjoined VPs under a higher VP node) is another area for further research. It may also be worth considering an analysis which posits (ready-made) construction types rather than strings which speakers assemble in novel ways, given the high level of idiomaticity of these constructions in spoken Lao.

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