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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the function of pre-verbal particles in Hakha Lai. It describes how the five pairs of these morphemes show the "where" of the participants and the "how" of the actions involved, indicating the position, distance, and movement of the interlocutors. It also discusses the possible diachronic origins of these preverbal particles.

KEYWORDS

deitics (deixis), interlocutors, verbal stem alternation, diachronic linguistics, grammaticalization

Directional pre–verbal particles in Hakha Lai

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1 Introduction

Hakha Lai (henceforth: H. Lai, or Lai) is mainly spoken in Hakha and Thantlang areas, and their vicinities in Chin State, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). It is also spoken in the adjacent areas of India and Bangladesh. There are about 100,000 Lai speakers. Lai is also used extensively as a second language by speakers of other Chin languages in Chin State, Myanmar.

The data in H. Lai are transcribed in both standard orthography as well as a phonemic orthography developed when the first author was a consultant for a two-semesters long field method class (Fall 1997 – Spring 1998) conducted by Prof. James A. Matisoff at UC Berkeley.

There are five pairs of pre-verbal particle in H. Lai. Table (1) introduces these particles with abbreviations, DIR (Direction), S (Speaker), L (Listener), and A (Angmang), the name of the main actor who is also the A (Agent) in all of the model sentences. Other abbreviations include *LV* for Level, *DNW* for Downward, and *UPW* for Upward.

Preverbal Particles	Functions
1.1. hei	LV DIR (S & L with A), A does not move
1.2. va	LV DIR (S & L & A), A moves towards P
2.1. rak	LV DIR (S & L with P), A does not move
2.2. ra	LV DIR (S & L with P), A moves towards P
3.1. vun	DNW DIR (S & L with A), A does not move
3.2. vung	DNW DIR (S & L with A), A moves towards P
4.1. run	DNW DIR (S & L with A), A does not move
4.2. rung	DNW DIR (S & L with A), A moves towards P
3.1. hun	UPW DIR (S & L with A or P), A does not move
3.2. hung	UPW DIR (S & L with A or P), A moves towards P

Table 1. H. Lai pre-verbal particles

This paper analyzes these deictic phenomena in terms of how the participants behave in relation to position, distance, and movement. An investigation of the diachronic origins and analysis of the other functions of these pre-verbal particles is also included in this paper.

2   Directional pre-verbal particles

Directional pre-verbal particles are morphemes which occur before main verbs. They are also considered a sub-class of verb since many of them still function as independent verbs. (1) is a basic sentence to which the directional markers can be added, and therefore serves as a model sentence in describing the functions of these deictics.

(1)   *Angmang   nih   vok   a cheh*
       /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-tsheʔ/
       Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-throw.II

       'Angmang stones a pig.'

The incident in (1) describes a generic scenario where Angmang stones a pig. It does not tell us the relative distance between Angmang and the pig nor the relative position of the two, that is, if Angmang is at a higher or lower level. This is where the role of pre-verbal particles comes into play. In the following sections, the use of each directional pre-verbal particle explains the "where" of the participants and the "how" of the actions involved.

2.1   *hei and va*

This pair of particles is used when the interlocutors are on relatively the same spatial level. As indicated in Figure 1, S and L must be on the A side. If A stones P from where he is, S will use sentence (2a), as illustrated by a long arrow, but if A moves towards where the P is and stones the pig, the speaker will use sentence (2b) as shown by a short arrow.

Figure 1.

(2)   a.   *Angmang   nih   vok   a **hei** cheh*
             /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-**hăy**-tsheʔ/
             Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Lv.DIR(S&L with A)-throw.II[1]

             'Angmang stones a pig from afar.'

---

[1] II represents Form II verb in Lai. VanBik (2002) provides a detailed description regarding the rule for the verbal alternation of Form I and Form II. Generally speaking, the test sentence for Form I is a matrix negative sentence (*Angmang does not kill a pig.*) whereas Form II occurs in subordinate clauses (*When Angmang does not kill a pig ….*).

b.   *Angmang*   *nih*   *vok*   *a va cheh*
   /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-**va**-tsheʔ/
   Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Lv.DIR(S&L with A)-throw.II

‘Angmang moves towards a pig and stones it.’

2.2   *rak and ra*

  The function of the pair in 2.2 is the reverse of the pair in 2.1 in that S and L are on the P side. As indicated in Figure (2), these verbal particles *rak* and *ra* are used when the ground levels of the locations of the agent and the patient are equal, or at least the difference is so minimal that it can be disregarded. The use of *rak* (3a) is similar to *hei* (2a) in that A does the action to the pig from where he is standing. Similarly, the verbal particle *ra* (3b) functions like *va* (2b) where the A moves towards the P and stones it.
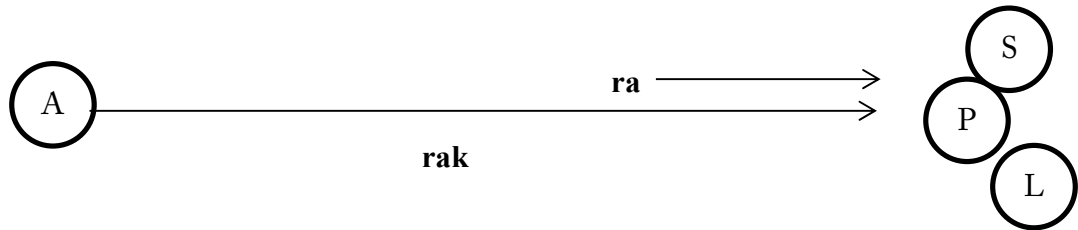

Figure 2.

(3)   a.   *Angmang*   *nih*   *vok*   *a **rak** cheh*
    /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-**rak**-tsheʔ/
    Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Lv.DIR(S&L with P)-throw.II

‘Angmang stones a pig from afar.’

   b.   *Angmang*   *nih*   *vok*   *a **ra** cheh*
    /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-**ra**-tsheʔ/
    Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Lv.DIR(S&L with P)-throw.II

‘Angmang moves towards a pig (and us) and stones it.’

2.3   *vun and vung*

  The pair *vun* and *vung* in 2.3 is used, as indicated in Figure (3), when S and L are with A somewhere in a higher place elevation-wise while P is down in a lower place. The particle *vun* is used when the A throws a stone downward at the P (4a) whereas the particle *vung* is used when A moves down and stones the P (4b).
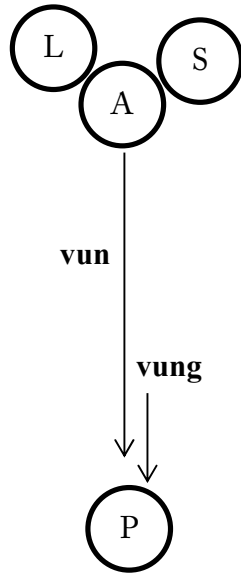
Figure 3.

(4)   a.   *Angmang   nih   vok   a **vun** cheh*
        /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa- **vǔn**-tsheʔ/
        Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Dnw.DIR(S&L with A)-throw.II

        'Angmang stones a pig downward from afar.'

    b.   *Angmang   nih   vok   a **vung** cheh*
        /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-**vûŋ**-tsheʔ/
        Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Dnw.DIR(S&L with A)-throw.II

        'Angmang moves down towards a pig and stones it.'

2.4   *run* and *rung*

The function of the pair *run* and *rung* is the reverse of the pair *vun* and *vung* of section 2.3, in that *run* and *rung* are used when S and L are with P in a relatively lower place compared to the position of the agent A. As indicated in Figure (4), the action must be in a downward direction, with *run* being used where A stones P from afar (6a), but with *rung* where A moves towards the pig (P) and stones it (6b).
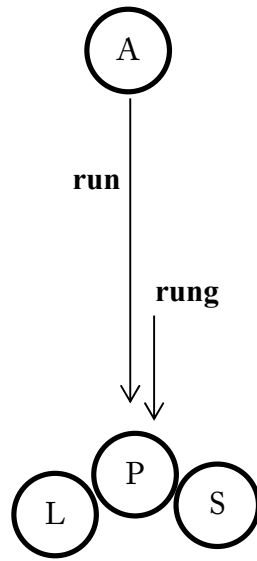
Figure 4.

(5) a. *Angmang   nih   vok   a **run** cheh*
         /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa- **rŭn**-tsheʔ/
         Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Dnw.DIR(S&L with P)-throw.II

‘Angmang stones a pig downward from afar.’

b. *Angmang   nih   vok   a **rung** cheh*
     /ʔâŋmăŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-rûŋ-tsheʔ/
     Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Dnw.DIR(S&L with P)-throw.II

‘Angmang moves down towards a pig (in our direction) and stones it.’

2.5. *hun* and *hung*

In using this last pair *hun* and *hung*, as indicated in Figure (5), the location of the P must be higher or assumed to be higher, than where A is. The action also needs to be in an upward direction, with *hun* if A stones the pig from afar (6a) but with *hung* if the A moves towards the P and stones it (6b). With these particles *hun* and *hung*, the interlocutors S and L are not assumed to be at one particular side. They could be either higher (with the P) or lower (with the A).
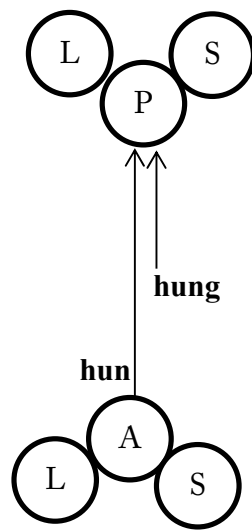
Figure 5.

(6)   a.   *Angmang*   *nih*   *vok*   *a **hun** cheh*
             /ʔâŋmǎŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-**hŭn**-tsheʔ/
             Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Dnw.DIR(S&L with A or P)-throw.II

           'Angmang stones a pig upward from afar.'

     b.   *Angmang*   *nih*   *vok*   *a   cheh*
             /ʔâŋmǎŋ   niʔ   vok   ʔa-hûŋ-tsheʔ/
             Angmang   ERG   pig   3SG.S-Dnw.DIR(S&L with A or P)-throw.II

           'Angmang moves up towards a pig and stones it.'

3   Diachronic origins and other functions of directional pre-verbal particles

It is not difficult to see that the pre-verbal particles have their diachronic origins as verbs, since some of them are still independent verbs. Since they are deictics, these particles have other functions as well, extending into temporal, modality and discourse-pragmatic functions.

3.1 *hei and va*

The pre-verbal particle *hei* is a bound morpheme across all Lai dialects and does not seem to have any cognates beyond the Lai group. This particle *hei* sometimes accompanies a wish or dream. As illustrated in (7), with the presence of *hei*, this possibility seems less likely.

(7)   *zahan*   *ka mang ah*   *khuabawi*   *ka hei si*
       /za-hân   ka-mâŋ-ʔaʔ   khûa-bòoy   ka-hǎy-sîi/
       yesterday   1SG.POS-dream-LOC   village-chief 1SG.S-DIR-COP

      'I was a chief in my dream last night.'

The pre-verbal particle *va* is still used as an independent verb in many Lai dialects (e.g. Khualsim, Mi-E, Khuahlun, Zokhua). However, it has lost its independent status among many speakers of the cosmopolitan town of Hakha, and this particle *va* sometimes accompanies an exclamatory utterance, as in (8), perhaps as an emphatic marker.

(8)   *Aw! a va nuam ee!*
        /oo!   ʔa-va-nŭam   ʔêe!/
        Excl! 3SG.S-DIR-be   pleasant.I Excl!

        'Oh my God! It's so pleasant!'

It appears that the particle *va* is reconstructible at the level of Proto Central Chin as PCC **va* 'Directional Pre-verbal Particle for 'going' generally on level ground'. According to Lorrain (1898: 220), Mizo has a similar particle *va* which is a "verbal prefix signifying 'going' generally on level ground, or from one place to another of equal elevation." Perhaps, this verb *va* 'go' is cognate to Written Burmese *swa:* 'go', both descended from Proto-Tibeto-Burma (PTB) **s–wa* (Matisoff 2003: 173).

3.2   *rak* and *ra*

The pre-verbal morpheme *ra* is still used as a Form-I independent verb with *rat* as Form-II with the meaning 'come'. Its counterpart *ra*k is a bound morpheme, and both morphemes do not seem to have any cognates among other Chin languages. One other function of the particle *rak* is that it implies the absence of the speaker when the verbal action is supposed to be carried out, as exemplified in (9).

(9)   *Nan **rak** i daw*   *lai*
        /nân-**rak**-i-dǒo   lâay/
          3PL.S-**DIR**-RFL-love.I   FUT

        'You will love one another.'
        Implication: "after I am gone."

3.3   *vun* and *vung*

The pair *vun* and *vung* are still independent verbs with the meaning 'go down', *vung* as Form-I and *vun* as Form-II, as shown in (10a) and (10b).

(10)   a.   *khuabawipa khuahlun ah a **vung***
                /khùa-bòoy-păa   khua-hlǔun   ʔaʔ   ʔa-vûŋ/
                  village-chief-male   village-old   LOC   3SG.S-go down.I

                'The chief goes down to the old village.'
                (The chief is in a higher place with the speaker, and goes down towards the village)'

b.   *khuabawipa khuahlun a **vun** hlan ah rawl ei hna usih*

/khùa-bòoy-păa	khua-hlǔun	ʔa-**vǔn**	hlân-aʔ
village-chief-male	village-old	3SG.S-go down.II	before-LOC

rôol	ʔây	hnàa	ʔusiʔ/
food	eat.I	PLU	HORT

'Lets eat before the chief goes down to the old village.'

These independent verbs *vun* and *vung* as well as their function as preverbal particles are found in Zahao (aka Falam) (Osburne 1975: 169-170).

3.4 *hun* and *hung*

Similar to the pair *vun* and *vung* of section 3.3, the pair *hun* and *hung* are still independent verbs with the meaning 'go up', *hung* as Form-I and *hun* as Form-II, as shown in (11a,b).

(11) a.   *khuabawipa khuahlun ah a **hung***

/khùa-bòoy-păa	khua-hlǔun	ʔaʔ	ʔa-hûŋ/
village-chief-male	village-old	LOC	3SG.S-go up.I

'The chief goes up to the old village.'

b.   *khuahlun i a **hun** tikah a hawile nih an don*

/khua-hlǔun	ʔǐi	ʔa-hǔn	tikʔaʔ
village-old	LOC	3SG.S-go up.II	when

ʔa-hôoy-lěe	niʔ	ʔân-dǒn/
3SG.POS-friend.PLU	ERG	3PL.S-meet.II

'When he goes up to the old village, his friends welcome him.'

The Form-I verb *hung* 'come' is reconstructed as Proto-Kuki-Chin (PKC) *huŋ (VanBik 2009: 191 # [706]).

3.5 *run* and *rung*

Similar to the pair *vun* and *vung* of section 3.3 and the pair *hun* and *hung* of section 3.4, the pre-verbal pair *run* and *rung* are still independent verbs, with the meaning 'go down', as illustrated in (12a,b). Note that *rung* is Form-I and *run* is Form-II.

(12) a.   *khuabawipa khuahlun ah a **rung***

/khùa-bòoy-păa	khua-hlǔun	ʔaʔ	ʔa-rûŋ/
village-chief-male	village-old	LOC	3SG.S-go down.I

'The chief goes down to the old village.'

b.　　*khuahlun i　a **run** tikah aa hawile nih an don*
　　/khua-hlŭun　ʔĭi　ʔa-**rŭn**　　　　tikʔaʔ
　　village-old　　LOC　3SG.S-go down.II　when
　　ʔa-hôoy-lĕe　　　　ni?　ʔân-dŏn/
　　3SG.POS-friend.PLU　　ERG　3PL.S-(3SG.O)-meet.II

'When he goes down to the old village, his friends welcome him.'

Interestingly, the pre-verbal particle *run* has a similar and interchangeable function with the pre-verbal particle *rak* (cf. (9)), that is, the use of the pre-verbal particle *run* implies the absence of the speaker when the verbal action is supposed to be carried out, as shown in (13).

(13)　*Nan **run** i daw lai*
　　/nân-**rŭn**-i-dŏo　　　lâay/
　　3PL.S-**DIR**-RFL-love.I　　FUT

'You will love one another.'
Implication: "after I am gone."

4 Conclusion

In the above discussion, we hope to have shown that while the functions of these particles are different, there is similarity among them in terms of how the interlocutors behave in relation to position, distance, and movement.

The preverbal particles in Lai displayed various stages of grammaticalization: *hei* and *rak* are fully grammaticalized while *va* appears to be in transition towards a bound morpheme in cosmopolitan Hakha, and the rest still function as preverbal particles in addition to being independent verbs. Given their deictic nature, it would not be surprising if these particles function differently even among the Lai dialects. These particles also show a propensity towards extension into non-spatial domains, including time, modality and emphatic discourse markers. In any event, these directional verbal particles seem useful for the Lai people since their habitat is mostly hilly and mountainous. The misuse or the absence of these particles could cause misunderstanding in the discourse.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	First Person	ERG	Ergative
2	Second Person	FUT	Future
3	Third Person	HORT	Hortative
I, II	Verb Form I and II	LV	Level
A	Agent	LOC	Locative
COP	Copula	O	Object
DIR	Directional	PKC	Proto-Kuki-Chin
DNW	Downward	PL	Plural

POS	Possessive		SG	Singular
RFL	Reflexive		UPW	Upward
S	Subject			

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