# Imperative Clauses in Lai and Mizo [1]

## George Bedell

Lai and Mizo are Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in neighboring (and overlapping) areas of Chin State, Myanmar and Mizoram State, India. Both have paradigms with imperative meaning in main clauses when the subject is second person and precative meaning when the subject is first or third person. The forms are as in (i) for Lai and (ii) for Mizo. [2]
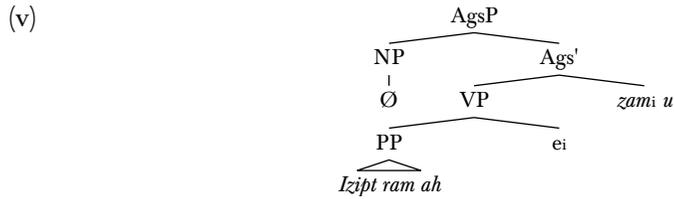
(i)      s                                pl

     1   *kal ning* 'let me go'            *kal u sih* 'let us go'
     2   *kal* 'go!'                    *kal u* 'go!'
     3   *kal seh* 'may he/she/it go'      *kal hna seh* 'may they go'

(ii)      s (pl)                           pl

     1                         *kal ang u* 'let us go'
     2   *kal rawh* 'go!'          *kal rawh u* 'go!'
     3   *kal rawh se* 'may he/she/it/they go'

In addition to the intransitive verb *kal* 'go' the two languages also share the third person marker *seh* or *se* and the non-third person plural marker *u*. Mizo has an imperative marker *rawh* absent in Lai, but lacks a third person plural marker. It also has no first person singular form. [3]

Both Mizo and Lai also have coordinate and subordinate clauses with verb forms resembling imperatives. The forms in (iii) and (iv) correspond to those in (i) and (ii), respectively. [4]
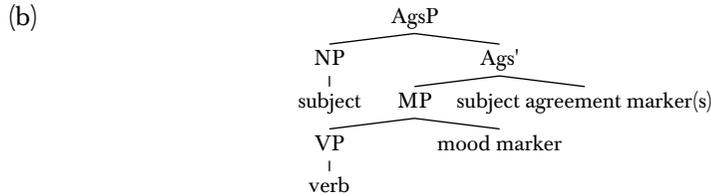
(iii)      s                               pl

     1   *kal ning law*              *kal u sih law*
     2   *kal law*                   *kal u law*
     3   *kal sehlaw*            *kal hna sehlaw*

(iv)      s (pl)                           pl
     1   *kal ila*
     2   *kal la*                 *kal ula*
     3   *kal se(la)*

In Lai, the non-final clause forms consist of the imperatives followed by the particle *law*; in Mizo there is the particle *la* corresponding to Lai *law*, but the Mizo imperative marker *rawh* does not appear. This neutralizes one difference between the two languages, making (iv) look more similar to (iii) than (ii) does to (i). Mizo has a first person form here which does not distinguish number like the third person, and the particle *la* is optional in the third person forms. [5]

One use of the verb forms in (iii) and (iv) is in non-final conjoined imperatives, as illustrated in (1) to (3). [6]

(1)  (Lai)   *Tho law, ngakchia le a nu kha i kalpi hna law, Izipt ram ah va zam u.*
     (Mizo)  *Tho la, nautê leh a nu hrui la, Aigupta ramah tlân bo rawh.*
             'Get up, take the child and his mother, and run away to Egypt.'
             (Mt. 2: 13)

Example (1) is a conjunction of three imperatives. In each language, the last conjunct is a normal imperative, but the first two end in the word (or suffix) *law* or *la*.

(2)  (Lai)   *Tho law, na ihkhun kha i put law, inn ah va trin.*
     (Mizo)  *Tho rawh, i khum la la, i in ah kal rawh.*
             'Get up, pick up your bed, and go home.' (Mt. 9: 6)

Example (2) is similar to (1), but here the Mizo version uses a normal imperative for the first conjunct: *la* is replaced by the imperative marker *rawh*.

(3)  (Lai)   *Tho u, nan thin phang hlah u.*
     (Mizo)  *Tho ula, hlau suh u.*
             'Get up, and don't be afraid.' (Mt. 17: 7)

In example (3), it is the Lai version which uses a normal imperative where Mizo has *la*: Lai has no imperative marker parallel to Mizo *rawh*. The two languages mark plurality with *u* in both normal and conjoined imperatives. The final clauses in (3) illustrate the special negative imperative markers, *hlah* in Lai and *suh* in Mizo. The latter replaces *rawh*.

Lai imperatives like those in (1) to (3) may be analyzed as in (a), where it is assumed that the syntactic head of a finite clause is the subject agreement marker.

(a)



Here the subject is normally omitted if first or second person; this is no different from

declarative clauses.  Thus the final clause in (1) will be analyzed as in (v).

(v)

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{AgsP} \\
\text{NP} \qquad \text{Ags'} \\
\varnothing \quad \text{VP} \qquad zam_i\ u \\
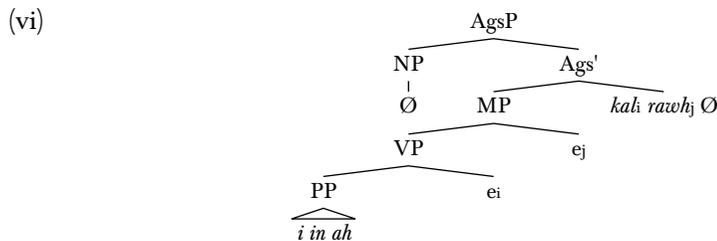\text{PP} \qquad e_i \\
\textit{Izipt ram ah}
\end{array}
$$

The directional particle *va* has been ignored in (v); it appears in the final clause in (2) as an independent verb.  Also, the effect of Lai morphology, whereby the verb is located with the subject agreement marker in the Ags position is indicated. [7]

In Mizo, where in addition to the subject agreement marker, there is also an imperative mood marker, the syntax is assumed to contain a second projection headed by that marker, as in (b). [8]

(b)

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{AgsP} \\
\text{NP} \qquad \text{Ags'} \\
\text{subject} \quad \text{MP} \quad \text{subject agreement marker(s)} \\
\text{VP} \qquad \text{mood marker} \\
\text{verb}
\end{array}
$$

As in Lai, a non-third person subject will normally be omitted, and the final clause in (2) will have the syntax shown in (vi).

(vi)

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{AgsP} \\
\text{NP} \qquad \text{Ags'} \\
\varnothing \quad \text{MP} \qquad kal_i\ rawh_j\ \varnothing \\
\text{VP} \qquad e_j \\
\text{PP} \qquad e_i \\
\textit{i in ah}
\end{array}
$$

Also as in Lai, it is assumed that both the verb and mood marker are in Ags. [9]

Both Lai and Mizo show agreement with the object of a transitive verb; where such agreement is present, there will be a further projection headed by the object agreement marker, and the VP in (a) or (b) will be relaced by AgoP as in (c).

(c)

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{AgoP} \\
\text{NP} \qquad \text{Ago'} \\
\text{object} \quad \text{VP} \quad \text{object agreement marker(s)} \\
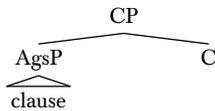\text{verb}
\end{array}
$$

Object agreement is restricted with third person objects, Lai having only number agreement in this case, and Mizo no agreement at all. The second clause in (1) would have the structure shown in (vii) as an indepent imperative. Here the object agreement marker joins the verb under Ags.
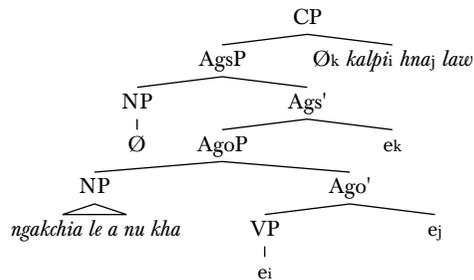
(vii)



We further assume that the particle *law* or *la*, which appears in coordinate or subordinate imperative clauses, is a kind of conjunction or complementizer, which also heads a syntactic projection, as in (d). If so, then the second clause in (1) in that context will have the structure in (viii).

(d)



(viii)



The position of the verb complex in C here is based on the feeling that *law* belongs to it; otherwise *kalpi hna* might well be left in Ags as in (vii).

Conjoined clauses in these languages thus have the form in (e).

(e)



In conjoined declarative clauses, Lai uses the conjunction *i*, and Mizo the conjunction *a*, as illustrated in (4). [10]

(4)  (Lai)  *Nunnak a phanmi lam cu a har i, kutka cu a bi i, mi tlawmte lawnglawng nih an hmuh.*
'The road leading to life is hard, and the door is narrow, and only a few people find it.'  (Mt. 7:14)

(Mizo)  *Nunna kalna kawngka chu a zîm a, a kawng pawh a chêp bawk a, a hmutute pawh tlêmtê an ni.*
'The door going to life is narrow, and the road is quite cramped, and those who find it are few.'

The verb forms which precede *i* or *a* are no different from those in main clauses.

A second use of the forms in (iii) and (iv) is in the clause complements to certain verbs; the most common example is *duh* 'want', found in both Lai and Mizo, illustrated in (5) to (7).

(5)  (Lai)  *Aho deuhdeuh hi dah in chuahpiak hna ning law nan duh?*
(Mizo)  *Tunge chhuah sak che u ila in duh?*
'Who do you want me to let go for you?'  (Mt. 27:17)

In example (5), both languages have an imperative clause complement to *duh* ending in *law* or *la*. The main verb of the clause is also the same: *chuah* or *chhuah* 'let go'. The benefactive marker is *piak* in Lai, but *sak* in Mizo. [11]

(6)  (Lai)  *Kan mit hung kan damter law kan duh.*
'We want you to heal our eyes.'  (Mt. 20:33)
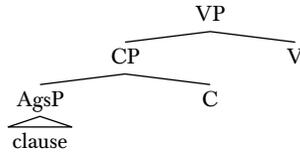(Mizo)  *Mit vâr kan duh.*

In example (6), Lai has an imperative clause complement to *duh*, but the Mizo version substitutes a noun phrase object. Literally translated, it says 'We want keen eyes.'

(7)  (Lai)  *Khuazei ah dah Lanhtak Puai Zanriah cu va tim u ti na kan duh?*
(Mizo)  *Kalhlên Kût chaw eina tûrin khawiahnge buatsaih sak che ila i duh?*
'Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?'
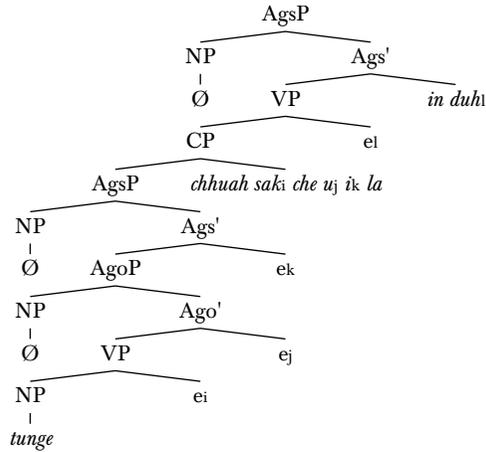(Mt. 26:17)

In example (7) it is Mizo which has an imperative clause complement to *duh*. The Lai version also has an imperative, but followed not by *law*, but by the quotative particle *ti*. This is a usage which does not seem to be permitted in Mizo, though the Mizo quotative particle *tih* can be used in the clause complements of other verbs, such as *hria* 'know'.

The analysis given above in (d) can be applied directly to the cases in (5), (6) and (7) under the assumption that CP may function as a complement clause as well as a conjoined clause, as shown in (f). [12]  The Mizo version of (5) will have the analysis given in (ix), and the Lai version the analysis given in (x).
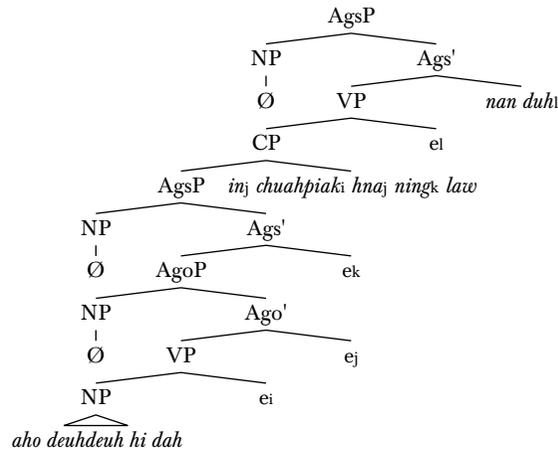
(f)

```
                                    VP
                          CP                 V
                 AgsP            C
                  △
                clause
```

(ix)

```
                                          AgsP
                          NP                        Ags'
                          |
                          Ø               VP              in duhₗ
                                  CP               eₗ
                          AgsP        chhuah sakᵢ che uⱼ îₖ la
                 NP                Ags'
                 |
                 Ø        AgoP              eₖ
                 NP              Ago'
                 |
                 Ø        VP              eⱼ
                 NP              eᵢ
                 |
              tunge
```

(x)

```
                                          AgsP
                          NP                        Ags'
                          |
                          Ø               VP              nan duhₗ
                                  CP               eₗ
                          AgsP        inⱼ chuahpiakᵢ hnaⱼ ningₖ law
                 NP                Ags'
                 |
                 Ø        AgoP              eₖ
                 NP              Ago'
                 |
                 Ø        VP              eⱼ
                 NP              eᵢ
                 △
        aho deuhdeuh hi dah
```

The difference between the two languages in *chhuah sak che u ila* versus *in chuahpiak hna ning law* (other than lexical) is due to the different ordering of the object agreement markers. In Mizo both person and number particles *che u* 'you (plural)' follow the verb, while in Lai *in ... hna*, the person particle *in* precedes the verb while the number particle *hna* follows it. [13] The Lai version of (7) differs from Mizo in being fuller. In both languages, the interrogative pronouns (*ahodah* 'who?' in Lai and *tunge* in Mizo) consist of two components which may enclose other material. [14] As shown in (x), the phrase *aho deuhdeuh hi dah* illustrates this phenomenon; *ahodah* encloses *deuhdeuh* 'more' and *hi* 'these'. The phrase might be glossed somewhat clumsily but literally as 'who more of these?'. Mizo *tunge* can do this also, but the translator has not made use of this capacity here.

(8)  (Lai)  *Hi hna pahnih lakah hin, aho hi dah kan thlahpiak seh ti nan ka duh?*
(Mizo)  *Anni pahnih chu a tu zâwk nge chhuah sak che u ila in duh?*
'Of these two, which do you want me to set free for you?'  (Mt. 27:21)

Sentence (8) is a variant of (7); in the Mizo version *tu zâwk nge* consists of *zâwk* 'more' enclosed by *tunge.* In the Lai version *aho hi dah* consists of *hi* 'these' enclosed by *ahodah.*

   In both Lai and Mizo, the verb *duh* 'want' can take a human object, so that (9) is a possible variant of (5) in both languages.

(9)  (Lai)  *Aho deuhdeuh hi dah in chuahpiak hna ning law nan ka duh?*
(Mizo)  *Tunge chhuah sak che u ila min duh?*

The first person singular object agreement particle, *ka* in Lai and *min* in Mizo, duplicates the subject of the imperative clause.  That it is independent of that subject is shown by sentences like (10). [15]
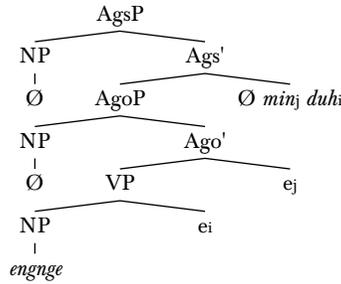
(10)  (Lai)  *Zeidah nan ka duh?*
(Mizo)  *Engnge min duh?*
'What do you want of me?'

Object agreement in these examples is no different from object agreement in other sentences.  The structure of the Lai version of (9) will thus look something like (xi) and of the Mizo version of (10) something like (xii).
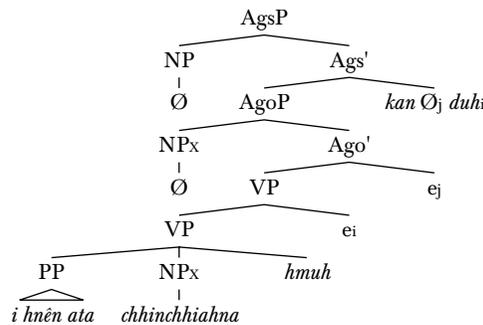
(xi)

(xii)

```
                    AgsP
            ┌────────┴────────┐
           NP              Ags'
            │         ┌──────┴──────┐
            Ø        AgoP        Ø minⱼ duhᵢ
               ┌──────┴──────┐
              NP           Ago'
               │      ┌──────┴──────┐
               Ø     VP            eⱼ
                 ┌────┴────┐
                NP        eᵢ
                 │
               engnge
```

Sentences like (11) in which the object of *duh* differs from the subject of the imperative clause must count as semantically anomalous. NPx in (xi) indicates the clause subject and higher object which must co-refer.

(11) (Lai)   \**Aho deuhdeuh hi dah chuah ning law a ka duh?*
     (Mizo)  \**Tunge chhuah ila a duh che?*
             \*'Who does he want of you for me to let go?'

Imperative clauses may be used as complements to verbs like *duh* only when the subject of the clause differs from the subject of *duh*. When the two subjects are the same, a kind of infinitive form is used for the clause verb, as discussed in some detail for Lai in Bedell 1996. A Mizo example of this construction is illustrated in (12), though the Lai version of the same text uses an imperative clause. The structure of the Mizo version of (12) will look like (xiii). [16]

(12) (Lai)   *Saya, khuaruahharnak pakhat in kan tuahpiak law kan duh ko hnga.*
             'Teacher, we would like you to do a miracle for us.' (Mt. 12:38)
     (Mizo)  *Zirtîrtu, i hnên ata chhinchhiahna hmuh kan duh e.*
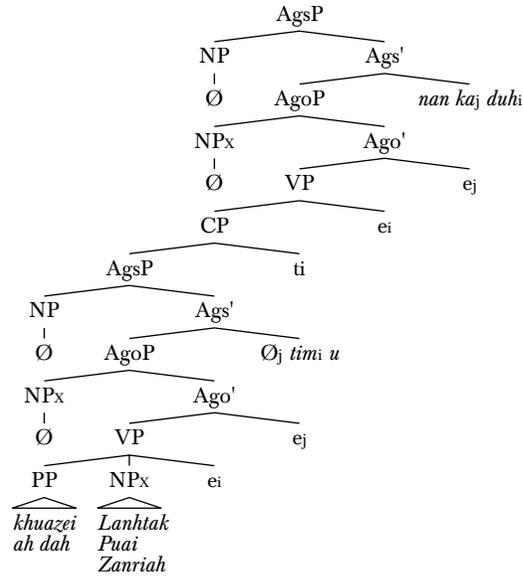             'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.'

(xiii)

```
                        AgsP
                ┌────────┴────────┐
               NP              Ags'
                │         ┌──────┴──────┐
                Ø        AgoP       kan Øⱼ duhᵢ
                    ┌──────┴──────┐
                  NPx           Ago'
                    │      ┌──────┴──────┐
                    Ø     VP            eⱼ
                      ┌────┴────┐
                     VP        eᵢ
              ┌───────┼────────┐
             PP      NPx      hmuh
              │       │
        i hnên ata  chhinchhiahna
```

Like Lai, Mizo has 'clitic climbing', whereby object agreement associated with the clause verb appears with *duh*; in example (12), this object is third person, and thus does not show overt agreement. It would appear in the position of Øⱼ, agreeing with NPx. [17]

Lai permits an alternative complement type to an imperative clause, as illustrated above in (7). This is a quotative clause marked by the particle *ti*, with structure as in (xiv). [18]
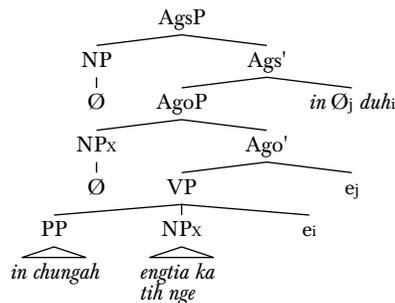
(xiv)

```
                              AgsP
                        NP          Ags'
                        |
                        Ø      AgoP        nan ka_j duh_i
                          NP_x        Ago'
                          |
                          Ø      VP        e_j
                            CP        e_i
                        AgsP        ti
                  NP          Ags'
                  |
                  Ø      AgoP        Ø_j tim_i u
                    NP_x        Ago'
                    |
                    Ø      VP        e_j
                      PP    NP_x    e_i
                    khuazei Lanhtak
                    ah dah  Puai
                            Zanriah
```

In (7) and (14), the clause is a quoted imperative, and is not followed by *law*. In this case the identity restriction on the clause subject is less rigid. The Lai version of (8) has the same construction, but the quoted clause is a passive: *aho hi dah kan thlahpiak seh* 'who of these is to be set free for us?' It is also direct rather than indirect discourse. [19]

Finally, the Mizo version of (13) illustrates a second alternative to an imperative clause complement to *duh*: enclosure of the clause within an interrogative NP.

(13) (Lai) *Zeidah kan tuahpiak seh ti nan ka duh?*
       'What do you want me to do for you?' (Mt. 20:32)
   (Mizo) *In chungah engtia ka tih nge in duh?*
       'What do you want me to do to you?'

(xv)

```
                        AgsP
                  NP          Ags'
                  |
                  Ø      AgoP        in Ø_j duh_i
                    NP_x        Ago'
                    |
                    Ø      VP        e_j
                      PP    NP_x    e_i
                    in chungah  engtia ka
                                tih nge
```

Here the clause *ka tih* 'I do' is enclosed within the interrogative pronoun *engtia ... nge* 'how, in what way?'  Exactly how the phrase *engtia ka tih nge* should be analyzed is unclear, but part of the clause, *in chungah* 'to you', is located outside the interrogative. [20] That Lai PPs have a very loose order with respect to the clause to which they belong is also illustrated by (xiii) and (xiv).  In all three cases there is reason to think that the NP which triggers object agreement (NPx) should be (syntactically) in the higher of the two positions shown.

   This discussion has been concerned with some detailed syntactic similarities and sometimes subtle differences between two closely related languages.  It thus fits into the general category of typological studies which have recently become popular in Romance linguistics (say comparisons between Spanish and Italian), Germanic linguistics (German and Dutch), Slavic linguistics (Russian and Ukrainian) or Indo-Aryan linguistics (Hindi and Nepali).  It goes without saying that linguistic theory must be able to account for observed variations in the context of how linguistic systems are acquired and transmitted from one generation to the next.  To the extent that relatively unstudied languages like those under consideration here show variations not observed in better known languages, they provide valuable data for linguistic theory.

**Notes**

1) This paper was prepared for and presented to the 34th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, sponsored by the Yunnan Institute of the Nationalities, Kunming, China, October 23–27, 2001.  I am grateful to Mr. Siang Hu Thang for assistance with the Lai examples, and to Ms. Go Deih Lun for assistance with Mizo examples.

2) Both Lai and Mizo examples are transcribed in their usual romanization, with one exception.  The alveolar or retroflex stops, usually written *t* and *th* with a subscribed dot, are here written *tr* and *thr*.

3) A detailed description and comparison of agreement in Lai and Mizo may be found in G. Bedell, 'Agreement in Lai', *Papers from the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society 1995*, ed. S. Chelliah and W. de Reuse; Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 21-32, and G. Bedell, 'Agreement in Mizo', *Papers from the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society 2001*, ed. S. Burusphat; Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 51-70.

4) The differences in spacing seen between Lai *seh* and Mizo *se* are probably not linguistically significant, but reflections of orthographic practice. For Lai, see G. Bedell '"Word Combination" in Lai', *Papers from the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society 1999,* ed. G. W. Thurgood; Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 201-219.

5) The absence of number agreement for first and third person in Mizo also characterizes object agreement.  See Bedell 2001.

6) The sentence examples given in this discussion are from the standard Lai and Mizo translations of the Gospel according to Matthew, or slight variations of them. For Mizo, see 'Chanchin Thra Matthaia Ziak' (the Gospel according to Matthew), *Pathian Lehkhabu Thianghlim* (The Holy Bible in Lushai), Bangalore: India leh Ceylon-a Pathian Lehkhabu Chhutu Pawl, 1964. For Lai, see 'Matthai sinin Thawngthra' (the Gospel according to Matthew), *Lai Baibal Thiang* (The Holy Bible in Lai), Calcutta: United Bible Societies, 1978. Parallel citations are used to try to highlight grammatical differences between the two languages. Naturally not every difference observed is relevant. Stylistic differences or simply chance differences among translators may be involved. Where there are meaning differences in the translations, separate glosses are provided.

7) Structures like (v) are often taken to be the result of moving the verb up to join with the agreement marker.  But everything that needs to be said is clear in (v); there is nothing contributed by the

8) In (v) we assumed that Lai has no mood marker in imperative clauses. But it may be that the negative imperative particle *hlah* should be so analyzed. An example appears above in (3).

9) As in n. 7, such phrases as *kal rawh Ø* are often assumed to be the result of movement, cumulative in this case. But as before, a structure like (vi) is all that is really necessary. And the verb together with its accompanying particles may be referred to as a 'verb complex'.

10) Just as imperative clauses are sometimes conjoined without any conjunction (see the examples in (2) and (3)), declaratives may also be. The structure will then be as in (e) but without CP or C.

11) Lai *piak* is normally written as a suffix, but Mizo *sak* as a separate word. This is probably not a grammatical difference, but a matter of orthographic practice, as noted in n. 4. This is often the case; another example in (7) below is Lai *khuazei ah dah* 'where?' versus Mizo *khawiahnge*. Here it is Lai which separates while Mizo combines.

12) Conjunctions and complementizers are often considered distinct lexical categories. The overlap of individual particles like Lai *law* and Mizo *la* is evidence that they may be the same at some level.

13) This is one of the 'morphological' properties of Lai and Mizo agreement. See Bedell 1995 and 2001.

14) See F. K. Lehman, 'On the use of *dah* in Lai Chin: Questions and the Operator Syntax of Functors', *Papers from the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society 1995*, ed. S. Chelliah and W. de Reuse; Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 211-231 for discussion of the syntax of these interrogatives. He does not consider such enclosed clauses.

15) The verb *duh* in both languages is also used as a simple transitive verb meaning 'love'.

16) The emphatic final particle *e* also belongs to the verb complex. In (xiii) the vocative *zirtîrtu* 'teacher' and the particle *e* have been omitted.

17) For an analysis of 'clitic climbing' in Lai, see G. Bedell, 'Clitic Climbing in Lai', *Pan-Asiatic Linguistics: Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on Languages and Linguistics*, Vol. II, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand: Mahidol University, 405-15, 1996.

18) This complementizer is doubtless related to the verb *ti* 'do, say' found in both languages. See example 13 below for a Mizo instance. In (v) the directional particle *va* is omitted.

19) The Lai passive construction is discussed in G. Bedell, 'Passives and Clefts in Lai', *Papers from the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society 1996*, ed. K. L. Adams and T. J. Hudak; Tempe, Arizona: Program for Southeast Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 15-31.

20) To put the PP inside, as *engtia in chungah ka tih nge* is perfectly grammatical Mizo.