

## CHAPTER 2

# Semantics and combinatorics of ‘sit’, ‘stand’, and ‘lie’ in Lao\*

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### 1. Introduction

An implied (though not necessarily intended) premise of this volume is that the lexical meanings ‘sit’, ‘stand’, and ‘lie’ are both basic and universal. Accordingly, this chapter begins with a discussion of the problem of semantic/conceptual ‘basicness’ and its relation to semantic/conceptual universality. The chapter then sticks to grammatical/semantic description, the primary object of which is a set of examples of the Lao basic posture verbs *nang1* ‘sit, be seated’, *jùun3* ‘stand, be standing’, and *nòdn2* ‘lie, be lying’, from a corpus of spoken Lao texts.<sup>1</sup> The issues dealt with include aspect-modality marking, internal aspectual semantics, valence properties, and accessibility to various complex expressions (such as adverbial constructions). The scope of the chapter is delimited to ‘literal’ meanings of the posture verbs.

In a typology such as could emerge from this volume, Lao provides one of the least exotic cases, being one example of a language in which the three posture verbs show no unusual ‘extended’ scope of meaning, and none of the more grammaticalized functions observed in other languages.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. ‘Basicness’, cross-linguistically or otherwise, of the three posture verbs

In what sense may the three posture terms — ‘sit’, ‘stand’, ‘lie’ — be regarded as ‘basic’? Among a set of words describing posture in a language, they could be *semantically simplest*, in that they have fewer entailments than other posture verbs. Thus, it could be that ‘sit’ contains fewer semantic specifications than, and may be subsumed by, say, ‘squat’. Demonstrating this would be a matter of defining the positive semantic specifications of the full range of posture words, and then comparing their respective semantic structures. Another, perhaps more general sense in which the three posture verbs may be regarded as ‘basic’ would be in their

representing something *cognitively* more simple. From the point of view of some researchers, this cognitive simplicity is not distinct from the question of semantic simplicity just mentioned — for example, where one's theory 'equates meaning with conceptualization' (Langacker 1987:5). But different research traditions take different stands on this point, attributing different degrees of relatedness to given pairs of semantic (i.e. linguistic) and conceptual (i.e. cognitive) structures (Levinson 1997). The problem of assuming cognitive 'basicness' is loaded with important theoretical difficulties. Let us consider just two claims about 'basicness'.

'Basic' can be interpreted to mean 'unelaborated', implying some kind of conceptual starting point upon which further conceptual elaborations (reflected in more elaborated semantics in a given language) are based (Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1987). This has obvious ontogenetic implications. With regard to posture, the putative starting points — 'unelaborated' conceptual templates — could be conceived to arise from mechanical facts about the human physique and its interaction/engagement with gravity and space. The claim would be that the prototypical (and thus 'basic' or unelaborated) concepts of 'sitting', 'standing', and 'lying' are inherently constrained and/or determined by biological facts about the human species and our terrestrial fate. Now some may take a claim that the structure of the human body defines the basic postures to lead to a further claim (unjustified, I argue) that the basic postures are not only environmentally universal (given the human body as a cross-culturally stable aspect of the environment), but must therefore also be *conceptually* universal. However, an environmental universal entails neither a conceptual nor a semantic universal. Signifiers signify *concepts*, and concepts are in the mind. While facts about the world provide for speakers' abstractions and categorizations, it is not the case that words *are labels for* things in the world. Not even things as environmentally salient, universal, and denotationally unequivocal as 'sun' and 'moon' have semantically equivalent linguistic representations across languages (Dixon 1980:104, Wierzbicka 1992:8; cf. Nida 1945, 1947, Goddard 2001). An assumption that there are three universal environmental features (i.e. 'sitting posture', 'standing posture', 'lying posture') which are simply 'labelled' in given languages misses a crucial step between 'environment' and 'referent of label'. We label not environmental features (i.e. real instantiations of people 'sitting', 'standing', 'lying down'), but associated or derived *concepts*, which are not worldly artefacts but categories constructed by people. He who asks *How do you say 'sit', 'stand' and 'lie' in your language?* assumes that translation from English into the target language is possible. This may not be a bad assumption, as long as we are not too strict about the accuracy of translation — but more importantly, even if something called 'sitting' *could* be extensionally defined, it would *not* be this extensional definition that is labelled by words such as English *sit* and Lao *nangl*. These words label *concepts*, produced by people.

So what are our terms of cross-linguistic comparison? When we use English *sit*, *stand*, *lie* as direct glosses for non-English words without considering possible subtle (or not so subtle) distinctions, we are in danger of misleading both ourselves and our readers that the 'basic' concepts expressed by speakers of different languages *are* semantically equivalent (but perhaps differing in minor details of grammatical behavior and extensional range). One response to this might be that in cross-linguistic research, *sit*, *stand*, and *lie* are not meant to represent English words, but are technical terms for the postures.<sup>3</sup> How then are these 'basic postures' to be defined? As stated already, they cannot be defined extensionally, because the referent is not in the world but in the mind, and no direct correspondence between these can be automatically assumed. Thus, throughout this chapter, by glossing the three Lao words as 'sit', 'stand', and 'lie', I do not mean that they are identical in meaning with the English words, and indeed I would be surprised if they were.

### 3. The three posture verbs in Lao

The Lao verbs *nang1* 'sit', *jùun3* 'stand', and *nòon2* 'lie' are run-of-the-mill verbs, relatively infrequent in a large corpus of Lao spoken texts, as shown in Table 1. Verbs in Table 1 which appear in the corpus more than 400 times (i.e.

Table 1. Sample of some common verbs in a corpus of spoken Lao (Enfield 2000)

More than 100 occurrences		30–100 occurrences		Less than 25 occurrences				
<i>paj3</i>	'go'	(1181)	<i>taam3</i>	'follow'	(95)	<i>ñok1</i>	'lift, pick up'	(23)
<i>maa2</i>	'come'	(1049)	<i>saj4</i>	'use'	(86)	<i>tom4</i>	'boil' (tr.)	(22)
<i>juu1</i>	'be.at'	(1044)	<i>bòok5</i>	'tell'	(96)	<i>suaj1</i>	'help'	(22)
<i>daj4</i>	'acquire'	(881)	<i>jaan4</i>	'scared'	(76)	<i>tùun1</i>	'wake/start'	(18)
<i>mii2</i>	'there is/have'	(841)	<i>nòon2</i>	'lie'	(63)	<i>tèek5</i>	'break'	(17)
<i>haj5</i>	'give'	(605)	<i>nii3</i>	'flee'	(60)	<i>thim5</i>	'discard'	(15)
<i>qaw3</i>	'take'	(567)	<i>hap1</i>	'receive'	(56)	<i>liaw4</i>	'turn'	(12)
<i>hêt1</i>	'do/make'	(433)	<i>thaam3</i>	'ask'	(56)	<i>lom4</i>	'fall over'	(12)
<i>kin3</i>	'eat, consume'	(311)	<i>sùu4</i>	'buy'	(55)	<i>fòon4</i>	'dance'	(11)
<i>vaw4</i>	'say'	(292)	<i>qaan1</i>	'read'	(54)	<i>lùak4</i>	'select'	(10)
<i>haa3</i>	'seek'	(237)	<i>cap2</i>	'catch'	(54)	<i>jiap5</i>	'flatten'	(10)
<i>hian2</i>	'study, learn'	(185)	<i>song1</i>	'send'	(52)	<i>haaj3</i>	'disappear'	(9)
<i>jaak5</i>	'want to'	(166)	<i>khaam5</i>	'cross over'	(48)	<i>qaap5</i>	'bathe'	(7)
<i>huu4</i>	'know'	(121)	<i>nang1</i>	'sit'	(47)	<i>ñoon2</i>	'throw'	(6)
<i>fang2</i>	'listen'	(110)	<i>lèn1</i>	'run'	(42)	<i>sùang1</i>	'conceal'	(5)
<i>long2</i>	'descend'	(110)	<i>saang5</i>	'build'	(33)	<i>jùun3</i>	'stand'	(5)
<i>tòd1</i>	'connect'	(108)	<i>sùal1</i>	'believe'	(32)	<i>bin3</i>	'fly'	(3)
<i>taaj3</i>	'die'	(101)	<i>tat2</i>	'cut'	(31)			

‘go’, ‘come’, ‘be at’, ‘acquire’, ‘there is’, ‘give’, ‘take’, and ‘do/make’) do so because they serve relatively general ‘extended’ grammatical functions. None of the cross-linguistically common ‘extended’ functions of ‘sit’, ‘stand’, and ‘lie’ (e.g. marking aspect or modality, existence, event- or nominal-classification), are observed in Lao. Nor do these Lao verbs even predicate location in any general sense independent of physical posture. In 2000, I worked with Lao speakers in Vientiane using materials which were designed to elicit particular positional location expressions (LCG/MPI 1999) — for example, illustrations contrasting bottles ‘lying’ versus ‘standing’ on a table. While verbs like ‘sit’, ‘stand’, and ‘lie’ are a standard feature of such expressions in some languages (e.g. Dutch; Stern 1979:5), I found by contrast very few comparable uses of the posture terms in Lao. For, example, *tang4* ‘set up, be erected’ is normal where one might expect ‘stand’ in many other languages (e.g. for *The bottles are standing on the table*).

In most of the text examples of *nòdn2* ‘lie’ referred to in Table 1, the meaning is not ‘lie’, but an ‘extended’ meaning such as ‘sleep’ or ‘stay/live (somewhere)’. There are perhaps only 6 genuine examples in the corpus of *nòdn2* meaning simply ‘be in a lying posture’, about the same low frequency of *jùùn3* ‘stand’. No ‘extended’ usages are found for *jùùn3* ‘stand’ at all, and there are only a few ‘extended meaning’ examples of *nang1* ‘sit’ (e.g. in idioms referring to political rule; cf. English *throne* and *seat of power*).

### 3.1. Combinatoric properties

We begin by examining accessibility of the three verbs to various grammatical behaviors. Being ordinary verbs, they participate in a much wider range of constructions than can be described here — I discuss only those cases which seem interesting in the context of this volume.

#### 3.1.1. Logical/aspectual properties

First, *nang1* ‘sit’, *jùùn3* ‘stand’, and *nòdn2* ‘lie’ are defined as verbs because they take the negation marker *bò0*, as well as other aspect-modality markers which define the class (e.g. *kamlang2* ‘progressive’ and *sí0* ‘irrealis’):

- (1) qee4 bò0 daj0 nang1 cak2      thùal naa3  
 INTJ NEG ACHV sit      how.many times PCL  
 ‘Yeah, (she) didn’t sit (down) once.’ (209)
- (2) laaw2 kamlang2 jùùn3 juu1 nòdk4  
 3      PROG      stand be.at outside  
 ‘S/he’s standing outside.’

- (3) khòj5 si0 nòon2 juu1 nii4  
 1 IRR lie be.at here  
 'I'll lie/sleep here.'

The three posture verbs have membership in two major verb classes (defined in terms of 'logical/aspectual' properties; Dowty 1979), namely the 'state' class and the 'accomplishment' class (see Enfield in press a:79 for more details); see Table 2.

Table 2. Some Lao verb categories based on aspectual properties

	'VP at t' entails 'sth. happened at t'?	'VP-PFV' entails 'VP now'?	'PROG-VP' entails 'VP-PFV'?	'begin to V' grammatical? (with non-iterative reading)	'almost V' ambiguous?	Reduplication grammatical?
Achievement (‘meet someone’)	+	-	-	-	-	-
Activity (‘walk’)	+	-	+	+	-	-
Accomplishment (‘build a house’)	+	-	-	+	+	-
State (‘have something’)	-	+	-	-	-	-
Gradable state (‘be tall’)	-	+	-	+	-	+

The logical/semantic relationship between verbs of the accomplishment and state classes should be fairly clear (cf. Dowty 1979: Chapter 2, especially §2.2, §2.3.2, §2.3.6) — specifically, an accomplishment contains in its complex structure an activity which results in inception of a state, and therefore realization of the predicate as a whole entails realization of a resultant state (thus, *I have knitted a scarf* entails the *existence* of the scarf). So, if you have ‘stood (up)’, then you are ‘standing’; if you have ‘sat (down)’, then you are ‘sitting’. This verb-internal structure may be illustrated as follows, using the example of *nang1* ‘sit’ (which involves an activity of ‘orienting into a seated position’ followed by a resultant state of ‘being in a seated position’):<sup>4</sup>

- (4) [\\\\ - - - - ] ‘sit’  
 →<sub>t</sub>

The illustration shows that there are two ‘parts’ to the complex event. (See Newman and Yamaguchi, this volume, on these different ‘phases’ of ‘sitting’ in Japanese and English.) While these event components are both encoded in the ‘base’ semantics as illustrated, they may not both necessarily be ‘profiled’ (Langacker 1987: 183 ff.) in given contexts. Throughout this chapter, I use *dynamic* and *stative* to refer to readings of these posture verbs corresponding to the dynamic (marked as ‘\|\|’), and stative (marked as ‘—’) components, respectively, of the complex base illustrated in (4).

The following example allows either a dynamic or stative reading, since the aspectual operator *kamlang3* ‘progressive’ may combine with either activities or states:

- (5) man2 kamlang2 jùùn3  
 3        PROG        stand  
 i. ‘He is in a standing posture.’  
 ii. ‘He is in the process of coming to be in a standing posture.’

Certain grammatical contexts can resolve ambiguity by forcing one or another interpretation. For example, the postverbphrasal stative progressive particle *juu1* ‘be at’ forces a stative reading:

- (6) man2 nang1/jùùn3/nòòn2 juu1  
 3        sit/stand/lie        be.at  
 ‘He is sitting/standing/lying.’ (i.e. ‘... is in seated/standing/lying posture’.)

By contrast, in combination with the preverbal retrospective particle *haa3.kò0*, a posture verb is interpreted as referring to an *event*, not a state (and thus refers to *inception* of the posture state, i.e. the transition from ‘\|\|’ to ‘—’ in (4)):

- (7) man2 haa3.kò0 nang1/jùùn3/nòòn2  
 3        RETR        sit/stand/lie  
 ‘He just sat/stood/lay (down) (and is now in sitting/standing/lying posture).’ (NOT: ‘He was just in sitting/standing/lying posture.’)

In practice, if dynamic readings are intended, the posture verb will usually be accompanied by a verb expressing path (usually *long2* ‘descend’ or *khùn5* ‘ascend’), as in the following example:

- (8) laaw2 loot4 hùq1 — caj3-haaj4 dèè1 nòòj5-nùng1 lèka0 jaa1 —  
 3        so    INTJ    angry    PCL    a.little        then “forget.it”  
 si0 ngoo2    maa2 nang1 long2    bòòn1 thong3 nan4  
 IRR turn.back come sit    descend place bag    that  
 ‘So he (went) “Humph!” — (He) was a bit angry, and so he (went) “Forget it”, and (he) was going to come back and sit down where that bag was.’ (41)

Dynamic readings can also arise due to the presence of preverbal directional/purposive *maa2/ma0* ‘come’. An expression ‘*ma0 V*’ means ‘came-and-V-ed’. *V* is interpreted as an event (not a state), thus profiling the dynamic component of the posture verb’s semantic structure. For example, with *nang1* ‘sit’ this results in a ‘sitting down’ *event*:

- (9) lang3-caak5 nan4 laan3 ka0 daj4 pùm4 lèka0 qaw3  
 after that nephew FOC.PCL come.to.have book then take  
 ma0 nang1 – qaw3 ma0 nang1 long2 nii4  
 come sit take come sit descend here  
 ‘After that, the nephew had got his book and then brought (it) and sat  
 — (he) brought (it) and sat down here.’ (48)

With a dynamic reading, *jùùn3* ‘stand’ would normally be interpreted as ‘stand up’ (i.e. having been lying or sitting), but it is worth pointing out that this is an implicature and not an entailment. The next example shows that ‘coming to be in a standing position’ may also refer to a situation of ‘coming to a standstill’ (e.g. having been walking):

- (10) b̀̀0 mii2 b̀̀òn1 nang1 laaw2 ka0 lee2 ma0 jùùn3  
 NEG there.is place sit 3 FOC.PCL so come stand  
 cap2 b̀̀òn1 haaw2 lot1-mêê2 naa3  
 grab/hold place handle/rail bus PCL  
 ‘There was no place to sit, so she just came (along) and stood and held  
 onto the bus handrail.’ (44)

Similarly, posture verbs with stative interpretations tend to appear with a locative phrase, headed by *juu1* ‘be at’ (note that this morpheme is the one that has a ‘stative progressive’ meaning elsewhere — cf. example (6), above):

- (11) nang1 juu1 theng2 lot0-mêê2  
 sit be.at atop bus  
 ‘(He) was sitting on the bus.’ (44)

### 3.1.2. Valence properties

The three verbs *nang1* ‘sit’, *jùùn3* ‘stand’, and *ǹ̀òn2* ‘lie’ are ambitransitive, where ‘S equals A’ (Dixon 1991: 286 ff.), not the dominant pattern among Lao verbs. The two simple frames — intransitive and transitive — are illustrated here using *nang1* ‘sit’:

- (12) man2 nang1  
 3 sit  
 ‘He sat/was sitting.’

- (13) man2 nangl tangl  
 3 sit chair  
 'He sat/was sitting (on a) chair.'

I refer to the structure in (13) as 'transitive' primarily in order to differentiate it from an alternative means for expressing the ground participant, namely an 'oblique' construction in which the ground (e.g. a chair) is marked as oblique with the locative verb-preposition *juu1* 'be at (some place)':

- (14) man2 nangl juu1 tangl  
 3 sit be.at chair  
 'He was sitting on (/at?) a chair.'

The same structure is used for expression of locative adjuncts generally:

- (15) man2 taaj3 juu1 talaat5  
 3 die be.at market  
 'He died at the market.'

Example (13) is 'transitive' only to a degree. In any language, primary transitive verbs (Andrews 1985:68) are accessible to a given range of grammatical behaviors, while verbs of other classes, with different argument structures and logical/aspectual specifications, will be accessible to different subsets of this range (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1980). Accordingly, example (13) does not show the full range of grammatical behaviors associated with primary transitive verbs such as 'smash' or 'kill', but nonetheless does show some. For example, it may be paraphrased using a 'disposal' type multi-verb construction involving 'take' (see Enfield in press b: §3.4 for description of these constructions):<sup>5</sup>

- (16) man2 qaw3 tangl ma0 nangl  
 3 take chair come sit  
 'He took the chair and sat (on it).'

The transitive pattern illustrated in (13) is restricted to expression of stereotypical situations. Example (13) works because a chair is a typical thing to sit on. Some associations of particular posture verbs and particular objects may be stereotypical yet may not show the same topological association as (13). Compare (13) (a case of 'sitting *on*') with the following example (a case of 'sitting *at*'):

- (17) man2 nangl toq2  
 3 sit table  
 'He was sitting (at the) table.'

Pragmatic consequences arise, with the introduction of a *frame* (Fillmore 1982); i.e. the context-specific importation of more information than is apparently



specified in the semantics. Thus, (17) describes someone sitting at a table in a way that people normally sit at tables — i.e. facing the table, with legs underneath the table surface, and with the table surface accessible for the activity the subject is engaged in (e.g. studying or eating). (Note that a reading 'He was sitting on the table' is also marginally possible, but would require contextual support.)

A covert grammatical distinction between (13) and (17) concerns accessibility to the 'disposal' construction illustrated in (16) — this permutation specifies that the ground object be actually sat upon (as in (13)), and does not allow the 'showing stereotypical topological relation' reading preferred in (17):

- (18) man2 qaw3 toq2 ma0 nang1  
 3 take table come sit  
 'He took the table and sat (on it).' (NOT: 'He took the table and sat (at it).')

Another covert distinction between the two 'transitive' constructions (13) and (17) concerns expression of the ground participant by a pronominal, permissible once again only where the ground object is actually sat upon (as in (13)), not merely 'showing stereotypical topological relation' with the figure (as in (17)). Thus, in the following example, the relation between *nang1* 'sit' and the first instance of *man2* 'it' is one of 'sitting on', not 'sitting at':

- (19) khòj5 nang1 man2 pap2, lèw4 man2 tèk5  
 1 sit 3 right.then PFV 3 break  
 'Right when I sat (on it), it broke.'

If *man2* 'it' in example (19) refers to a table, then the figure was sitting *on* the table. (English similarly allows *I sat on it* but not \**I sat at it*.)

Now consider the 'oblique' counterpart of example (17):

- (20) man2 nang1 juu1 toq2  
 3 sit be.at table  
 'He was sitting at a/the table.'

Although this still entails that the subject was sitting at the location of some table, it may refer (unlike (17)) to a case in which someone was sitting on the ground *next to* the table, or on a chair facing away from the table — i.e. in a non-stereotypical relation to the table, or where there is no 'logical' connection between the table and the seated posture of the figure.

The transitive construction with posture verbs invokes enriched conceptual detail, drawing on what is commonly known by speakers about stereotypical associations of particular postures and particular objects. As a result, when a given posture and a given ground object do not have a stereotypical relation, the transitive construction is not used. Thus, *nòn2* 'lie' may take *saat5* 'straw mat', *din3* 'ground' or *tiang3* 'bed' as direct object (in the pattern of (17)), since these

are typical things on which one would lie (and sleep) — but *nòòn2* ‘lie’ does not normally take direct object nominals like *ton4-maj4* ‘tree’ or *langkhaa2* ‘roof’, since those are not typical things on which to lie (or sleep). With such ground objects, the oblique-marking locative verb *juu1* is obligatory:

- (21) *man2 nòòn2 \*(juu1) ton4-maj4/langkhaa2*  
 3 lie (be.at) tree/roof  
 ‘He is lying/sleeping in a tree/on the roof.’

This text example demonstrates the point:

- (22) *khòòj5 hên3 tèè1 khon2 taaj3 nòòn2 \*(juu1) thaang2 saam3 sop2*  
 1 see only person die lie be.at road three corpse  
 ‘I only saw dead people lying on the road, three (of them).’ (6)

Finally, note that the transitive posture construction is not highly productive, and *juun3* ‘stand’ is apparently not accessible to it at all.

### 3.1.3. Associated posture construction

An important construction involving posture verbs is the ‘associated posture construction’, of the following form:

$V_{\text{POSTURE}} + V_{\text{ACTION}}$  ‘do ACTION while in POSTURE’

This is comparable to the English ‘V and V’ construction (e.g. *He sat (down) and read his book*, *He was sitting and reading his book*), or an adverbial construction of the form ‘V V-ing’ (with the posture verb in either position — e.g. *He sat reading his book*, *He read his book sitting (down)*).

Here are some examples, with the relevant verbs in boldface:

- (23) *kin3 lèka0 nang1 sangkêêt5 juu1 han5 lèèw4 khaw3 hêt1 nèèw2.daj3*  
 eat PCL sit observe be.at there PFV 3 do how  
 ‘(When I’d) eaten, (I) sat there **observing** what they did.’ (340)
- (24) *laaw2 ka0 paj3 jùùn3 lòò2-thaa5 lot1-mêê2 juu1 baat5.ni0*  
 3 FOC.PCL go stand wait bus PCL PCL  
 ‘So he went and **stood waiting** (for) the bus.’ (40)
- (25) *mè0-paa4 nan4 laaw2 ka0 nang1 khaaj3 saj5-kòòk5 juu1*  
 aunty that 3 FOC.PCL sit sell sausages be.at  
 ‘That aunty, she was **sitting selling** sausages.’ (38)
- (26) *nang1 lin5 – nang1 lom2 kan3 lin5 juu1 naj2 paa1*  
 sit play/enjoy sit talk together play/enjoy be.at in forest  
 ‘We’d sit and enjoy (ourselves) — sit and talk, enjoying ourselves in the forest.’ (1080)

V1–V2 sequences in which V1 is a posture verb may receive other interpretations in addition. First, if the posture verb is interpreted as *dynamic*, then these  $V1_{\text{POSTURE}}+V2_{\text{ACTION}}$  strings are simply event sequences, analogous to *paj3 talaat5 maa2* [go market come] '(I've) been to the market (and) come (back)' or resultatives like *tok2 taaj3* [fall die] 'fall (and) die'. However, the vagueness/ambiguity between interpretations of these strings as [posture+action] versus [action] > [action] apparently needn't always be definitively resolved — resolving the distinction appears to be a pragmatic process, i.e. not one encoded in the semantics of the expression. Consider the V1–V2 sequence *nang1 sit2* 'sit (and) put a line in for fish' in the following example:

- (27) *long2 paj3 qaap5 nam4 ni0 thùù3 bêt2 paj3 phòòm4 ni0*  
 descend go bathe water PCL carry hook go together PCL  
*paj3 nang1 sit2 qaw3 bùt2-diaw3 thòò1-nan4 lèq1*  
 go sit put.a.line.in.for.fish take moment-single only PCL  
*saaw2 saam3-sip2 too3 khùn5 maa2*  
 twenty three-ten PCL ascend come  
 '(When we'd) go down to bathe, and (we'd) take a hook-and-line along  
 — (we'd) sit and put a line in and in just a moment we'd get twenty or  
 thirty (fish) come up.' (712)

The V1–V2 sequence *nang1 sit2* could be construed as a dynamic sequence of 'sitting down' and then 'putting a line in'. However, due to the logical structure of *nang1* 'sit' — action followed by resultant state, as illustrated in (4) above — stative 'seated posture' naturally scopes over the subsequent action of 'putting a line in', since 'being seated' is entailed by 'having sat'. We now consider this in more detail, with reference to the base semantics of these verbs.

Consider the difference between an 'associated posture' construction and a simple action sequence. A simple action sequence might be a resultative like *tok2 tèèk5* 'fall break', where two events take place one after the other (with a causal or at least counterfactual conditional relationship understood). This may be illustrated as follows:

- (28) [W] tok2 'fall'  
 [W] tèèk5 'break'  
 →<sub>t</sub>

By contrast, some complex adverbial constructions express 'overlap' of aspects of a single event — i.e. conceived 'features' of an event which are not temporally sequential, but constitute qualitatively distinct aspects of the same single event. One example involves directional constructions with path verbs like *long2* 'descend', functioning in a manner comparable to English prepositions or verb particles (such as 'down'):

- (29) [\\] ñaang1 'walk'  
 [\\] long2 'descend'  
 →<sub>t</sub>

Thus, *ñaang1 long2* 'walk down' describes a unitary event which has a 'walking' aspect and a 'descending' aspect, these two aspects being conceptually but neither physically nor temporally separable.

Now consider what happens when a path verb like *long2* 'descend' (with no stative reading available) combines with a posture verb like *nang1* 'sit'. As illustrated in (4) above, the base semantic structure of *nang1* 'sit' includes a dynamic and a stative component. In the case of *nang1 long2* 'sit down', the *dynamic* interpretation of *nang1* 'sit' is made (since it is the dynamic component of the base semantics which is profiled and combined — by 'overlap' — with the dynamic 'descend' event):

- (30) [\\] - - - - ] nang1 'sit'  
 [\\] long2 'descend'  
 →<sub>t</sub>

Here, the 'coming to be in a sitting position' and the 'descending' are qualitatively distinct yet inseparable features of a single event, which cease simultaneously. The entailed resultant state is 'being in a sitting position'. Now, if we combine *nang1* 'sit' with an action like *qaan1* 'read', two possible analyses of the V1–V2 sequence emerge. First, V1–V2 predicates a sequence of two events — 'sitting down' followed by 'reading'. This is analysable in the same way as (28), but in contrast to (28), V1 entails a specific subsequent state — namely 'being seated' — which then happens to overlap with the 'reading' activity (occurring subsequent to the 'sitting' event):

- (31) [\\] - - - - ] nang1 'sit'  
 [\\] qaan1 'read'  
 →<sub>t</sub>

Alternatively, *nang1 qaan1* [sit read] could be construed as an 'overlap' of state and event — 'being in a sitting position' and 'reading' at the same time — analysable in the same way as (29):

- (32) [\\] - - - - ] nang1 'sit'  
 [\\] qaan1 'read'  
 →<sub>t</sub>

These choices in interpretation correspond to alternative 'profilings' of complex base semantics. How to determine if one of these is a better analysis? In some cases, grammatical context virtually forces a certain interpretation (as in (30); cf.

also (6) and (7), above), while in other cases, no distinction is necessary or perhaps even possible (cf. (31) and (32), which are effectively identical).<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1.4. *On the ethnosyntax of associated posture constructions*

I have elsewhere described effects of combining certain posture verbs with certain activity verbs, where alternative construals apparently depend on whether or not the given activity is culturally typical in the given posture (Enfield 2002b). There are cultural practices in Lao-speaking culture that specify or are normally associated with, or defined as involving, particular basic postures (for example certain practices of worship, ways of playing different musical instruments). Cultural expectations surrounding typical posture-plus-activity combinations can directly determine interpretations of particular combinations of activity and posture verbs. For example, when one visits the temple to worship on holy days, one of the things one may do as part of the official proceedings is *fang2-thêêt4* — literally, 'listen to a sermon'. This is done sitting on the floor of a temple building. The following example naturally describes participation in the worship practice known as *fang2-thêêt4*:

- (33) *khaw3 fang2 thêêt4*  
 3       listen sermon  
 'They listened to a sermon.'

This *could* simply predicate an event of someone 'listening to a sermon', regardless of any aspects of context. They *could* be in any posture, washing the dishes while the sermon is on the radio, and so on. With a simple compositional reading, the meaning is the sum of the parts and nothing more, and the average English speaker wouldn't take the translation of (33) to convey much more than this. But example (33) *does* convey much more than this. On the *default* interpretation, the sermon referred to in (33) is not just any old sermon, but a live sermon chanted in formulaic Pali with a Lao accent, with a characteristic rhythm and melody. Neither the listening nor the chanting are done in any old place, but in the same place — the temple — and on particular times of religiously significant days. Many people are involved. Furthermore, it is understood that everyone involved is *seated*. Accordingly, preverbal addition of *nang1* 'sit' to (33), specifying the one posture which is compatible with the overall frame, does not clash with this enriched 'frame' interpretation.

However, if a posture verb other than *nang1* 'sit' is used in an associated-posture construction with *fang2 thêêt4* 'listen to a sermon', the stereotypical complex 'listening-to-a-sermon' scenario is blocked, and the listener knows that the speaker is not referring to the usual situation. Then, only the simple compositional reading (i.e. the computed output of 'posture' plus 'activity', with no enrichment with culture-specific information) is then available. Consider these examples:

- (34) jùùn3 fang2 thêêt4  
stand listen sermon  
'(They) stood listening to a sermon.'
- (35) nòòn2 fang2 thêêt4  
lie listen sermon  
'(They) lay down listening to a sermon.'

None of the detail described above is imported in these two examples, since the posture associated with the culturally defined complex scenario is *nang1* 'sit'. To be in either of the other postures is not to be participating in the complex worship activity of 'listening to a sermon'. Examples (34) and (35) still refer to people literally 'listening to a sermon', but that's all. The idea of 'being a participant in a complex and conventionalized worship activity' is ruled out by contradiction of the one posture *prescribed* by the stereotype (i.e. *nang1* 'sit'). Examples (34) and (35) may refer, for example, to someone who is hanging around outside the temple (while standing or lying down) and idly listening to a sermon which happens to be audible.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Closing remark

As other chapters in this volume show, the words for 'sit', 'stand', and 'lie' in a language can be prime targets for recruitment into grammatical functions. In Lao, however, it is notable that while many verbs (such as 'arrive', 'acquire', 'finish', 'know', 'want', 'come', 'go', 'give', 'keep', and 'take') function as markers of aspect, modality, and other grammatical distinctions, the words for 'sit', 'stand', and 'lie' show none of these 'extended' functions. They remain, essentially, ordinary verbs. As should be clear, however, this makes them no less fascinating or worthy of research. To the contrary, focussed investigation of lexical semantics and pragmatics is a fundamental (yet neglected) aspect of research in linguistic typology.

#### Abbreviations used in glosses

1=1st person; 2=2nd person; 3=3rd person; ACHV=achievement; FOC.PCL=focus particle; INTJ=interjection; IRR=irrealis; NEG=negation; PCL=discourse particle; PFV=perfective; PROG=progressive; RETR=retrospective.

## Notes

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1. The texts were collected in Vientiane in 1996 and 1997 (Enfield 2000). Figures in brackets after examples are references to section numbers in the corpus. Unmarked examples are constructed/elicited and verified with native speakers. Lao has no standard transcription — in the system used here, syllable-final numerals refer to tones 1 [32], 2 [35], 3 [14], 4 [52], and 5 [31]. The numeral '0' indicates unstressed syllable. Non-IPA symbols are *ù* (high back unrounded vowel), *è* (low front vowel), *ò* (low back vowel), *a* (=IPA a), *ñ* (palatal nasal), *ng* (velar nasal), *q* (glottal stop). Double vowel symbols indicate that the vowel is long.

2. I use scare quotes for the words 'extend' and 'extension' (in the sense that one meaning of a word can be thought of as having developed out of another meaning of the same word), since it is unclear what precisely is meant by the routine use of the term in the literature on historical and cognitive semantics. Is semantic 'extension' a pragmatic, real-time, active process? Is it a kind of relationship among entities within a synchronic system? Or is it a process that occurs over time? If so, does it take place on the ontogenetic dimension (within the minds of individuals), or on the diachronic dimension (within the linguistic system)? Or are there yet further ways of understanding the notion of 'semantic extension'? See Enfield (in press a: 24, 2002a) for discussion.

3. White (1992:23) discusses the same issue with respect to the use of terms like *anger* in cross-linguistic research on emotion.

4. Let '['] refer to conceived event/state boundaries, '\\\\' refer to something happening, and '---' refer to a state, or something 'being the case'.

5. Note that this example does not entail that the speaker physically 'takes', or does anything else to (apart from sit on), the chair.

6. The situation is paralleled by the behavior of 'wearing' verbs such as *nung1* 'put on/wear an article of clothing', which have the same 'accomplishment' aspectual structure as the posture verbs — either meaning 'put x on', or 'be in the state resulting from having put x on' (i.e. 'be wearing x'). Thus:

- (i) laaw2 nung1      ka=poong3 khap2 lot1-ñaj1  
       3      put.on/wear dress      drive truck  
       'S/he's wearing a dress (and) driving a truck.'

7. Some would put the 'frame'-related details described above into the pragmatics (i.e. have them merely generated by implicature), not the semantics. Others would say that examples like (33) are polysemous, with basic compositional meanings, as well as richer, idiomatic meanings. It is unclear how substantial the distinction between these two stances is.

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