Adversatives in Lao.

This paper investigates the so-called “passive” construction in Lao (Tai-Kadai; Laos: SVO), which is formed with the verb tʰːɨːk ‘touch, strike’. An example along with my proposed structure is in (1).

(1) a. ṅːjì, tʰːɨːk (lot) tām e, N. tʰːɨːk car hit ‘Noy suffered a car hitting.’

The subject of tʰːɨːk receives an affectee thematic role that is non-truth conditional; it cannot be negated and does not project past yes/no questions. I present novel data from negation, modality marking, and prosody as evidence that tʰːɨːk is a full lexical verb which selects for a vP complement and is not a functional head, as proposed by Kim (2013) for a similar construction in Thai. The fact that disjoint time adverbials are incompatible with the construction, demonstrated in (2), indicates that the complement size can be no larger than a vP.

(2) *mùː-nìː, ṅːjì tʰːɨːk (lot) tām mùː-vaːn-nìː: yesterday Noy tʰːɨːk car hit today ‘Today, Noy suffered a car hitting her yesterday.’

I also analyze the obligatory co-reference between the matrix subject and the embedded element as instances of A’-movement of a null operator (NOP), similar to Chomsky’s (1977) account of tough movement in English and Sudmuk’s (2003) and Kim’s (2013) accounts of adversative constructions in Thai. The embedded element is sensitive to island violations and allows long-distance dependencies which is indicative of A’-movement. However, asymmetrical quantifier scope and the lack of idiom reconstruction effects provide evidence for an analysis in which the subject of tʰːɨːk is base-generated in the matrix clause. This single analysis is also able to explain what Huang (1999) calls “indirect passives,” in Lao as in (3) and (4), where the subject of tʰːɨːk is co-indexed with the agent of the complement or a null possessor respectively.

(3) a. ṇːː-ŋːn hāw tɔːː tʰːɨːk són definitely 1sg must tʰːɨːk fight ‘I will definitely have to fight.’ (Enfield 2007: ex 1264)
In (3), the NOP is base-generated as the agent of the lower complement and moves up to spec, vP. In (4), the NOP is generated as an external possessor and then moves to spec, vP position. Evidence from topicalization shows that the extraction of external possessors is possible in other types of A’-movement as well.

Arguments for non-movement (Bruening & Tran 2013; Vietnamese), A-movement (Huang 1999), and A’-movement of a NOP (Sudmuk 2003, Kim 2013; Thai) have all been put forth as explanations of the relationship between the matrix subject and embedded element in similar constructions in other languages. These Lao data give further weight to an A’-movement of a NOP approach to related constructions in other languages.

References: