CHAPTER 7

Description of reciprocal situations in Lao

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This chapter describes the grammatical resources available to speakers of Lao for describing situations that can be described broadly as ‘reciprocal’. The analysis is based on complementary methods: elicitation by means of non-linguistic stimuli, exploratory consultation with native speakers, and investigation of corpora of spontaneous language use. Typically, reciprocal situations are described using a semantically general ‘collaborative’ marker on an action verb. The resultant meaning is that some set of people participate in a situation ‘together’, broadly construed. The collaborative marker is found in two distinct syntactic constructions, which differ in terms of their information structural contexts of use. The chapter first explores in detail the semantic range of the collaborative marker as it occurs in the more common ‘Type 1’ construction, and then discusses a special pragmatic context for the ‘Type 2’ construction. There is some methodological discussion concerning the results of elicitation via video stimuli. The chapter also discusses two specialised constructions dedicated to the expression of strict reciprocity.

1. Introduction

Reciprocal situations – as in They gave each other diamonds – are among those situation types whose description is handled less straightforwardly by the world’s grammars than more canonical types like simple transitives (‘see’, ‘hit’) and intransitives (‘sneeze’, ‘walk’). In describing less canonical situation types, grammars go for work-around solutions, more complex and sometimes less obvious ways of structuring the description of events and other states of affairs. Examples include situations with three or more participants (Hudson 1992, Newman 1996, 1997, Narasimhan et al. 2007), with unusual configurations of transitivity parameters (Hopper & Thompson 1980), and with actor and undergoer arguments that do not show the standard asymmetrical alignment, as in reflexives (where actor and undergoer are one and the same entity; Frajzyngier & Curl 1999a, Kemmer 1993, Geniušienė 1987) or reciprocals (where distinct entities map onto multiple semantic roles; Dalrymple et al. 1998, Frajzyngier & Curl 1999b).
The present volume is partly about the range of ways in which languages distinguish the grammatical encoding of reciprocal situations from the encoding of other types of situation. Each language should have a formal way of distinguishing the description of symmetrically reiterated events like They saw each other from asymmetrical ones like He saw her. A second issue is cross-linguistic variation in the (extensional and intensional) semantics of constructions which may be used for the description of canonical reciprocal events. The broader theoretical issues concerning comparative research on how languages cope with the non-canonical argument structure configurations that reciprocal situations give rise to are dealt with in the introduction to this volume (cf. also Frajzyngier & Curl 1999b, Dalrymple et al. 1998). This chapter contributes to the comparative project described in the introduction, with an account of the lexico-grammatical resources which Lao speakers possess for the description of reciprocal situations, as well as the broader expressive functionality of those resources.

To preview the descriptive content of the chapter, Lao speakers have two main lexico-grammatical resources for describing reciprocal situations. One of these is a narrowly specialised, relatively seldom occurring construction, which I call the reciprocal mirror construction. It has the structure 'I Vα you, you Vα me', typically appended to a differently worded description of the event. The reciprocal mirror construction is confined to the description of events that are strictly reciprocal; that is, where for some predicate for which A and B are participants, A acts upon B and B acts upon A (see Section 4.2, below). The other of the two main constructional means for describing reciprocal situations in Lao is far more common and is the main focus in this chapter. This construction, featuring the nominal particle kan3 occupying an (erstwhile) object slot in the verb phrase, is more general in meaning than strict reciprocity of action or orientation. The kan3 construction is used for the description of a range of situation types in which multiple participants map onto multiple roles of a single predicate. This covers reciprocal situations (They saw each other) as well as situations in which people carry out some activity together (They celebrated together), or are inherently or properly complementary in action or orientation (One gives while the other receives, One is a clone of the other). The data are consistent with an analysis of the kan3 construction as having a single, general meaning applying across this range of situations (as opposed to a polysemy account whereby kan3 would entail strict reciprocity in some cases and something else in other cases).

The findings are the combined result of two distinct complementary procedures of data collection and analysis: (1) showing prepared, focused stimuli to consultants for description, and eliciting a set of linguistic types which target the description of these tokens (a set of videoclips; see introduction to this volume for a description of these stimuli); (2) searching existing texts (narratives, conversations collected for general grammatical description) for the range of token
situations in which the target types are used (the target type being the particle kan3). These are complemented by interviews with native-speaker consultants in a fieldwork setting, probing possible descriptions of possible situations (to test hypotheses suggested by 1 and 2). This combination of multiple methods is the ideal approach to semantic typology (Enfield, Majid & Van Staden 2006: 138–139). Each method can shed light on the problem which the others may not. In the context of this volume, procedure 1 forms a basis for comparison across languages, and contributes to the formation of hypotheses of language-specific meaning. Procedure 2 and the interviews with consultants target the intensional analysis of language-specific types.

2. Lao

Lao is a Southwestern Tai language, spoken in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. It is the national language of Laos (Enfield 1999, 2007). It is closely related to Thai (Iwasaki & Horie 2005) in all structural respects. Lao is isolating and analytic in morphological organisation, with no case-marking, and no cross-referencing or verbal agreement. Grammatical relations in a transitive clause are canonically signaled by constituent order (SV/AVO):

(1) dèèng3 cuup5/phop1 sèèng3
Deng kiss/meet Seng
‘Deng kissed/met Seng.’

Widespread zero anaphora (almost any contextually retrievable argument can be ellipsed) along with heavy topic prominence (fronting) and common post-placement of arguments means that surface constituent order varies a lot. This, combined with the fact that there is no morphological marking of grammatical relations (whether on clausal heads or dependents), results in significant context-dependence for mapping of arguments onto semantic roles. These morphosyntactic features are highly characteristic of languages of the immediate mainland South East Asia area (Enfield 2005).

1. The methodological critique leveled at an earlier draft of this chapter in an otherwise useful article by Wierzbicka (2009: 162–4) misrepresents my view (and misquotes it; the draft was not final), implying that I and colleagues privilege ‘objectivist’ and ‘neo-behaviourist’ stimulus-based elicitation methods, thereby failing to tap into the native concepts under study. This is baffling, as I am at pains in this chapter to stress the opposite, namely that while stimulus-based techniques are a useful comparative tool, they alone are not sufficient for semantic analysis (the ‘Nijmegen School’ has never proposed otherwise), hence my heavy reliance on non-elicited examples, and my attention to methodological limitations (see Sections 3.3.4 and 3.4).

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3. ‘Reciprocal’ marking with \textit{kan3}

The key resource in Lao for describing the kinds of situations included under the reciprocal rubric is the particle \textit{kan3}. I refer to it as a collaborative marker (glossed \textit{coll}), since its meaning is more general than ‘reciprocal’. This is an independent word and does not belong in a larger form class. It appears in an object slot, typically immediately after a verb (though there are some occasions in which it may appear after a noun, for example when the noun is incorporated; cf. Examples (5), (22), below).

Verbs with inherently reciprocal meanings require explicit marking using \textit{kan3}. Thus, while English has reciprocal readings of objectless strings like \textit{John and Mary met (Ø) at the park} and \textit{They kissed (Ø)}, these zero objects in Lao are taken to be contextually retrievable, tracked arguments. Example (2) is interpreted as having an ellipsed object argument whose referent is not (included in) the plural subject \textit{khacaw4}:

\begin{align}
\text{(2)} & \quad \text{khacaw4} \quad \text{cuup5/phop1} \\
& \quad 3\text{PL.P} \quad \text{kiss/meet} \\
& \quad \text{‘They kissed/met him/her/them.’ (NOT: ‘They kissed/met each other.’)}
\end{align}

For the reciprocal reading, \textit{kan3} is required:

\begin{align}
\text{(3)} & \quad \text{khacaw4} \quad \text{cuup5/phop1} \quad \text{kan3} \\
& \quad 3\text{PL.P} \quad \text{kiss/meet} \quad \text{coll} \\
& \quad \text{‘They kissed/met each other.’}
\end{align}

The marker \textit{kan3} conveys a general idea that a predicate is true of multiple individuals ‘together’, covering not only actions done \textit{to} each other but also those done \textit{with} each other, and even entirely asymmetrical relations (where one of the participants does not correspond to the actor role of the verb at all), as long as the people involved are consensually or otherwise rightfully playing their part in the activity or state of affairs as a whole.

There are two main types of \textit{kan3} construction, which I shall call Type 1 and Type 2.

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2. There is a complex variant \textit{sùng1 kan3 lèq1 kan3}, made up of \textit{sùng1} a relative marker ‘which’, and two instances of the reciprocal marker \textit{kan3}, in coordination marked by \textit{lèq1} ‘and’ (see Example (46) in this chapter). It is a stylistically high form of expression, suitable for writing and for more formal speech such as in traditional narratives. There is a homonym, the verb \textit{kan3} ‘hold back, constrain, resist, block’. In the closely related language Thai, there is an ‘intimate’ third person pronoun \textit{kan3} (presumably cognate).
3.1 Type 1 kan3 construction: ‘A and B V kan3’

The most common type of kan3 construction involves (a) a single subject argument whose meaning is plural (either inherently plural like the plural pronoun khacaw4 in Example (3), or a compound of more than one noun conjoined by kap2 ‘with/and’ as in Example (4)), (b) a main verb, and (c) kan3 in postverbal position:

(4) dèèng3 kap2 sèèng3 hên3/vaw4/tii3/khaa5 kan3
    Deng with Seng see/speak/hit/kill COLL
    ‘Deng and Seng saw/spoke-to/hit/killed each other.’

If an incorporated object of the verb is expressed (usually a body part such as naa5 ‘face’ in the following example, see also Example (22), below), it comes in the immediate postverbal slot, with kan3 in the main object slot:

(5) dèèng3 kap2 sèèng3 hên3 naa5 kan3
    Deng with Seng see face COLL
    ‘Deng and Seng saw each other’s faces.’

Of the four example verbs shown in the Type 1 construction in (4), vaw4 ‘speak’ is intransitive and does not allow another human participant as a direct complement in a transitive construction (cf. (1), above):

(6) dèèng3 hên3/khaa5/tii3 sèèng3
    Deng see/kill/hit Seng
    ‘Deng saw/killed/hit Seng.’

(7) *dèèng3 vaw4 sèèng3
    Deng speak Seng
    ‘Deng spoke Seng.’

For vaw4 ‘speak’ in a regular two-place expression, the second argument is marked by kap2 ‘with’:

(8) dèèng3 vaw4 kap2 sèèng3
    Deng speak with Seng
    ‘Deng spoke with Seng.’
3.2 Type 2 kan3 construction: ‘A V kan3 with B’

A second type of kan3 construction features separation of otherwise conjoined subject arguments, where the second of the two – marked by kap2 ‘with/and’, as in the subject of Example (4), above – is moved into a postposed, peripheral position. The key difference between the two types of kan3 construction is the separation of the noun phrase conjuncts. The verb remains marked by kan3:

(9) dèèng3 vaw4/tii3 kan3 kap2 sèèng3
    Deng speak/hit COLL with Seng
    ‘Deng spoke-to/fought each other with Seng.’

(10) *dèèng3 hèn3/khaa5 kan3 kap2 sèèng3
    Deng see/kill COLL with Seng
    ‘Deng saw/killed each other with Seng.’

Most discussion in this chapter concerns the more common Type 1 construction. The Type 2 construction is treated separately, in Section 3.4, below. It is more restricted in scope, partly because it does not allow most transitive verbs. Those verbs that may occur in the Type 2 construction can all also occur in the Type 1 (compare vaw4 ‘speak’ and tii3 ‘hit, fight (with)’ in Examples (4) and (9)). More significantly, the alternation between the two constructions is associated with different information structure construals (see Section 3.4, below).

3.3 Semantic range of the Type 1 kan3 construction

The particle kan3 has a strikingly wide range of use over situation types. This is revealed both by observation of its range of occurrence in natural texts, and by its very liberal use across video stimulus materials developed for the comparative field research documented in this volume. As the chapters of this volume show, it is typical for a grammatical resource which is used to describe a canonical reciprocal situation to also be extended to refer to other types of situation which are not literally reciprocal in a strong sense, but which relax certain defining components (cf. Langendoen 1978, Dalrymple et al. 1998, introduction to this volume). For the purpose of organising the Lao data in this section, I use the following informal categories of situation type associated with the use of kan3:

(11) a. Strict reciprocal (e.g. They hugged each other, They gave each other diamonds): where for some multiple of participants, all map onto both actor and undergoer roles of the predicate (with some logical variations depending on quantitative and temporal relations between multiplied events, etc.).
b. Loose reciprocal (e.g. *The dogs ate each other, The plates were stacked on top of each other*): where for some multiple of participants, multiple participants map onto the actor role and multiple participants map onto the undergoer role, but strict reciprocity does not apply.

c. Collective (e.g. *They celebrated together, They ate dinner together*): where for some multiple of participants, all map onto the same role of the predicate.

d. Complementary (yet asymmetric) (e.g. *She gave him a watch, One of them is a clone of the other*): where for some multiple of participants, some participant maps onto one role, and the other maps onto a complementary role. The respective roles are not the same, but they properly complement each other to make the situation complete.

In the rest of this section, I describe the range of application of the Type 1 *kan3* construction (for the more restricted Type 2 *kan3* construction, and the reciprocal mirror construction, see Section 3.4 and Section 4.2, below).

To give an idea of how surprisingly broad the extension of *kan3* is, in three speakers’ descriptions of the full set of 64 reciprocal stimulus clips (Evans et al. 2004), there was only one clip whose target situation was unanimously described without using *kan3*. In this clip (#60), three people who are sitting side by side watch a fourth person walk by. For only a few other clips did one or more speakers omit *kan3* from the description. For example, in describing a clip in which one actor walks along and bumps into another, one speaker omitted *kan3*. The others described it as ‘people bumping into each other’ (although they acknowledged that only one actor bumps into the other; i.e., they would not break it down into two events, A bumped B and B bumped A). Most clips in the full stimulus set were spontaneously coded by all three speakers using a Type 1 *kan3* construction.

### 3.3.1 Strict reciprocal

The *kan3* marker may be used for describing situations which are strictly reciprocal, in the sense defined in (11a), above. Here are two text examples:

(12) *qa w3 hua3 laan4 son2 kan3*  
    take head bald butt COLL  
    ‘(They’d) butt each other with (their) bald heads.’

(13) *jaan4 pajø pop1 kan3 kòon1*  
    afraid DIR.ABL meet COLL before  
    ‘(We’re) afraid (they’ll) meet each other before (the appointed time).’

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4. These cases are types of multi-verb constructions (Enfield 2007: 337ff), which act effectively like single verbs for the purposes of the syntax of *kan3* – that is, *kan3* is placed in the object slot of the whole verb complex.
Kan3 is also applicable where the reciprocated actions are separated in time. The following text example refers to two schools whose students would occasionally make visits to the other school – that is, at one time, students of School A would visit School B, at another time, students of School B would visit School A:

(14) nako-hian2 to1 nako-hian2 nao pajø jaam3 kan3
top.periph dir.abl visit coll
‘Student to student, (they’d) go (and) visit each other.’

Verbs of interpersonal communication and social relations are expressed using kan3, as in the following text examples:

(15) nguk1 hua3 saj1 kan3 lekaø leew4
toss.head head put coll can finish
‘(We’d) toss our heads at/towards each other, and that’d be it.’

(16) teel1 vaa1 mii2 niang3 kao lom2
but comp there.is indef.inan t.lnk talk
kan3 paj3 daj4 juu1
coll go can fac.weak
‘But whatever the (problems), (we) could talk (to) each other (about them).’

(17) man2 mak1 duu3-thuuk5 kan3 luang1 saa3sanaa3
3b tend look.down.on coll concerning religion
‘They tend to look down on each other concerning religion.’

(18) hêt1 siawl kan3
make best.friend coll
‘(We) became best friends (with) each other.’

Verbs of exchange encode a reciprocation of transfer. If She and John exchanged diamonds, then she transferred diamonds to John and John transferred diamonds to her.5 Events of this kind of reciprocal exchange such as the compound leek4-pian1 in the following example, are expressed using kan3:

(19) khaa5 maa2 lekaø mao leek4-pian1 kan3
kill come coll dir.all exchange-change coll
‘(We’d) kill (the cattle) and then (we and the other villagers would) exchange (the food) with each other.’

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5. Verbs of exchange are therefore distinct from verbs of transfer such as haj5 ‘give’ in Example (40), below, which encode a one-way event. If She gave John diamonds, only she corresponds to the actor role of the predicate ‘give’: Unlike in They exchanged diamonds, it doesn’t mean that John gave her diamonds in return.
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3.3.2 Loose reciprocal

Events which are loosely reciprocal in the sense defined in (11b), above, are readily described with *kan3*, as in these two examples from texts:

(20) *phuak4* *daj3* *kaø* *hum4* *kan3* *qaw3* *vaj4* *bøø* *fang2*
    group indef t.lnk cover coll take keep neg listen
    ‘They were all on top of each other, unrestrainable.’

(21) *bøøk5* *haj5* *huu4* *kan3* *thua1* *thang2* *müang2*
    tell give know coll all whole city
    ‘(They) told each other all across the city....’

The following example (overheard in context by the author) was shouted by an adult to a group of children playing boisterously with long sharp sticks. The speaker warns that someone could get their eye pierced. Despite the asymmetry of the situation described, *kan3* is used. The speaker is not saying that A will pierce B’s eye *and* B will pierce A’s eye. It doesn’t matter which of the multiple participants would be actor and which would be undergoer, it could be any of them:

(22) *lavang2* *suat5* *taa3* *kan3* *dee4*
    watch.out pierce eye coll fac.onrcd
    ‘Watch out for piercing each other’s eyes, y’hear!’

A chaining type reciprocal relation (cf. *They followed each other in to the room*) may also be described by *kan3*:

(23) *saam3* *sop2* *lian2* *kan3*
    three corpse be.in.a.row coll
    ‘(I saw) three corpses (lying) in a row.’

In a sub-category of this type, the subject is a singular noun, and the use of *kan3* coerces a plural reading of the subject participant, where multiple *parts* of the participant are in loose reciprocal relationship:

(24) *sùak4* *køøng3* *kan3*
    string heaped coll
    ‘The string is heaped on itself.’ (From a director-matcher task, describing a mess of twine)

3.3.3 Collective

*Kan3* may convey the sense that each participant performs the denoted action or situational role in the same way, quite distinct from any sense of reciprocity (as per (11c), above):
(25) khacaw4 salòòng3 kan3
3PL.p celebrate COLL
‘They celebrated (together).’ (overheard by author)

(26) phanan2 kan3 kaø lékø-lék1 nòjo-nòjoj4
gamble COLL T.LNK RDP.A-little RDP.A-small
‘(They) gamble (with each other) a little here and there.’

(27) pan3 kan3 kin3
divide COLL eat
‘(They) divide (the goat meat amongst each other) to eat.’
(overheard by author)

(28) hoom2 ngen2 kan3 phuu5 lékø-lék1 nòjo-nòjoj4
assemble money COLL person RDP.A-little RDP.A-small
‘(They’d) pool their money together, a little each.’

Similarly, kan3 marks togetherness in spatial orientation:

(29) kaj1 phûûn4-mûang2 man2 niëë5 kan3 kaø daj4
chicken traditional 3.B stuff COLL T.LNK can
‘Free range chickens, it’s okay for them to be stuffed in together
(in their pens).’

(30) mii2 thahaan3 laaw2 thahaan3 falang1 pon3 kan3
there.is soldier Lao soldier French mix COLL
‘There were Lao soldiers (and) French soldiers mixed together.’

(31) taw4-hoom2 kan3
converge-assemble COLL
‘to assemble (together)’

(32) phuak4 qaaj4 pòk2 qaaj4 ñang3 nang1 kan3
group eBr Pok eBr INDEF sit COLL
‘(Brother) Pok and company sat together.’

Relatedly, a verb marked by kan3 can serve as an adverbial adjunct referring to
actions or qualities being somehow the same, done equally, at the same time, or
together:

(33) man2 ñòôn4 man2 khaj1 phòôm4 kan3
3.B because 3.B lay.eggs be.simultaneous COLL
‘It’s because they lay eggs at the same time.’

(34) haj5 dùng3 khêng1 samee3 kan3
give pull be.tight be.equal COLL
‘Pull (the ropes) equally tight.’
Similar adverbial expressions with *kan3* can appear in preverbal position:

(35)  
\[ \text{phaa2 kan3 khùn5} \]
\[ \text{lead along COLL ascend} \]  
‘(They) went up (the bank) together.’ (lit. ‘led each other up’)

(36)  
\[ \text{khaw3 ŋaat4 kan3 kin3 khaw5} \]
\[ \text{3PL.B snatch COLL eat rice} \]  
‘They fought with each other to eat the meal.’

In the next examples, *kan3* denotes a kind of general applicability of the predicate’s meaning across a collective of individuals:

(37)  
\[ \text{bòø phòò2 kan3 kin3} \]
\[ \text{NEG be enough COLL eat} \]  
‘(It) is not enough (for everyone) to eat.’

(38)  
\[ \text{khòòng3 man2 niñom2 kan3 nèèw2 nan4 dêj2} \]
\[ \text{owing to 3PL.B be popular COLL manner DEM FAC.NEWS} \]  
‘Since that sort of thing was popular (with everyone), you know.’

(39)  
\[ \text{kaaø nap1 khanèèn2 caø nap1 kan3 bèèp5 nan4 nmlz count score IRR count COLL manner DEM} \]  
‘(In the Lao sport *katòò*), regarding the counting of scores, (everyone) counts like that.’

### 3.3.4 Complementary (yet asymmetric)

So far we have encountered descriptions of situations in which multiple participants (or some coerced equivalent, such as the multiple *parts* of a single participant; Example (24), above) are participating in the same way. By contrast, in the next class of cases, *kan3* describes situations in which participants contribute in unalike yet complementary ways (as per (11d), above). Consider this description of a simple transfer scene: a videoclip in which one actor gives another actor a watch:

(40)  
\[ \text{qaw3 moong2 haj5 kan3} \]
\[ \text{take watch give COLL} \]  
‘(They’re) giving “each other” a watch.’

Only one actor gives. The other only receives. While the receiver does in a sense do something which rightfully contributes to the event as a whole (i.e., receive the gift), the two participants play distinct roles with respect to the predicate *haj5*.

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6. These cases are not distinct *kan3* constructions, but incorporate verb+*kan3* units in adverbial functions; see Enfield (2007:477).
'give'. What this kan3-marked description of an unequivocally asymmetrical event seems to have in common with the categories we have examined so far is that it conveys the idea that the participants are taking part together in the event. Giving is an event type which lends itself well to this construal, since there is a rightful complementary action: receiving.

While the responses to video stimuli clearly show that kan3 may unproblematically mark events of non-reciprocated giving, this kind of response is more common in the stimulus descriptions than in natural texts. Perhaps the decontextualised nature of the watch-giving scene (the videoclip is only a few seconds long) makes the event look like it is part of a game the actors are playing. If informants surmise that there is no purpose to the depicted act of giving other than its being acted out for the camera, or more importantly that this moment of action is not embedded in a trajectory of narrative action, perhaps it doesn’t matter who actually gave and who received (cf. Example (22), above). One way of putting it is that together the two actors engage in a joint activity of giving a watch – the ‘together’ notion licensing a kan3 construction in describing the videoclip.

Following are examples from spontaneous language use where kan3 is used in description of clips in which a true reciprocal meaning is clearly not intended, nor is the idea that the participants each perform the same action or contribute to the situation in the same way. Rather, in these cases, they ‘together’ take part in a situation defined by the action of a single participant, where the other’s contribution is complementary.

Here is an example from a description of an accident on a wide country road in which a truck flattens a motorcycle (and the motorcycle does not flatten the truck in any sense):

(41) khaw3 kaø ŋang2 pajo jiap5 kan3 daj4
3PL.B T.LNK still DIR.ABL flatten COLL can
‘(The road was 15 metres wide, and) they were still able to flatten each other.’

Next, the single defining action is telling a story. This activity is rightfully complemented by a consenting listening audience:

(42) haw2 caø ŋok1 qaw3 nithaan2 siang2-miang5 maø law1 kan3
1.FA irr raise take tale Siang Miang DIR.ALL tell COLL
‘I’m going to offer the story of Siang Miang to tell “each other”’

The next example (overheard by the author) describes a situation in which a movie actor is extracting the someone’s sore tooth with pliers, and the two are rolling around, tussling. While the action is distinctly asymmetrical, the tooth-pulling activity rightfully involves a consenting jaw:
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(43) \text{lokhèew\textsubscript{5} kan3} \\
\text{pull.out tooth coll} \\
‘(They’re) pulling each other’s teeth out.’

One evening in Vientiane, I telephoned B’s house, trying to locate a friend A, who was visiting the city, and who I knew was dining with B that evening. A third person answered the phone. I asked for A, and was told he had already left. Then I asked for B, and was told this:

(44) \text{hacaw\textsubscript{4} paj3 song1 kan3} \\
\text{3pl.p go send.home coll} \\
‘They’re sending “each other” home.’

While the predicated action \text{song1} ‘to send somebody (home)’ is clearly asymmetrical – only one sends the other home – the two are equally collaborating in the overall event.

In the next example, a Lao speaker was watching a movie in which one of the characters had been cloned. Having missed the beginning of the film, and puzzled for a while as to why the same actor was playing two characters on the screen at the same time, the speaker realised what was going on and said:

(45) \text{qoo4 hacaw\textsubscript{4} hloon\textsubscript{2} kan3} \\
\text{intj 3pl.p to.clone coll} \\
‘Oh, they’re clones of each other.’

One is the real character, the other is the clone. They are not literally clones of each other. Yet they are in a rightfully complementary relationship. Note that this asymmetrical situation is also readily described with a reciprocal marker in English, as shown in the translation of (45).

Finally, a cow is accosted by a tiger, and agrees for the tiger to eat it, but asks that it first be allowed to go home and bid farewell to its calf. Its resignation to the inevitability of being eaten is accompanied with this remark:

(46) \text{sùa3 kap2 ngua2 man2 pen\textsubscript{3} qaahaan3 sung\textsubscript{1} kan3 lèq\textsubscript{1} kan3} \\
\text{tiger with cow 3.b cop food rel coll and coll} \\
‘The tiger and the cow are food for each other.’

The relation predicated here is portrayed as rightful, the way of the world – the cow and the tiger are in a symbiotic relationship defined by the cow’s being food for the tiger. In a sense, they each play an equal part.
3.4 Type 2 kan3 construction, and its information structure properties

The Type 2 kan3 construction is less common in texts than Type 1, and significantly, was never once produced as a description of the video stimulus materials (despite kan3 being used in describing all but one of the 64 stimulus videoclips). This appears to be due to an information structure difference between the constructions. In the Type 1 construction, the relevant participants are packaged into a single noun phrase either as an inherently plural noun or pronoun (including coerced plurals such as the multiple-parts reading of ‘string’ in Example (24), above), or a conjunct noun phrase. Irrespective of internal complexity of the subject argument, in the Type 1 kan3 construction the members of this set of participants are expressed as a single information-structural unit. Members of the set therefore share a single discourse status (focused/presupposed, given/new, topical, etc). This type of information packaging is fitting for description of the stimulus videoclips, which run for just a few seconds, and which are devoid of any contextually framing trajectory or narrative action. Each clip is designed such that nothing in the situation, beyond any inherent asymmetry of respective roles in the behaviour taking place, encourages differential treatment of the participants with respect to discourse-level information structure. The reason the stimulus clips never elicited the Type 2 construction is because the Type 2 construction codes the participants in separate noun phrases and thereby construes the participants as distinct from each other in information status terms (e.g. with respect to reference-tracking).

In the text examples of the Type 2 kan3 construction, half were in descriptions of events of interpersonal communication:

(47) phit2 kan3 jaang1 ŋaj1 kap2 čëk2
disagree COLL way big with Chinaman
‘(He) disagreed in a big way with the Chinaman.’

(48) haw2 kəø vaw4 kan3 kap2 phòò1-baan4
1.FA T.LNK speak COLL with father-village
‘I spoke with the village chief.’

Other examples of the Type 2 kan3 construction involved khùù2 ‘to be like’, expressing the notion of “like”, “same as”:

(49) còq2 ngaa2 saj1 khùù2 kan3 kap2 tum4-paa3-khaaw3
insert tusk put be.like COLL with “white fish basket trap”
‘Tusks are inserted (in this type of trap) like (in a) “white fish basket trap”.
(From a video-recorded interview about fish traps.)

(50) suung3 khùù2 kan3 kap2 naaj2
tall be.like COLL with boss
‘(She’s) tall like (her) boss.’
In each case, the subject (i.e. the noun phrase that appears before the verb) is a distinct, tracked participant in the discourse. Its reference is accessible, old, topical information relative to the other participant.

To summarise, there is one essential difference between the Type 1 and Type 2 *kan3* constructions: Type 1 refers to the multiple participants with a single, continuous noun phrase, while Type 2 splits them up. In this way, Type 1 treats the participants as a single unit for information structure purposes (e.g. focus, reference-tracking), while Type 2 treats them as distinct units. The need for this information-structural distinctness arises naturally in discourse, where a distinct narrative trajectory can impose differential values for otherwise equivalently involved entities.

### 4. Ways to express strict reciprocity in Lao

The previous section established that the *kan3* construction does not entail reciprocity. Its meaning is more general, covering a broader range of situations, yet compatible with reciprocal situations. Reciprocal situations are aptly described by the *kan3* construction because they fit the general description of being situations in which multiple participants map onto multiple roles (and mostly, when each argument maps onto the actor role of the predicate, though not necessarily onto an undergoer role). When it is necessary to be more specific and unequivocally depict the situation as strictly reciprocal there are also a couple of ways to do this in Lao. Both ways involve the combination of a *kan3* construction with another type of construction.

#### 4.1 The *suu1 NP suu1 VP* construction

The following text example illustrates the *suu1 NP suu1 VP* construction, meaning 'Each and every NP VP-ed':

(51) *suu1 khon2 suu1 maw2*
    each person each intoxicated
    'Each and every person was drunk.'

(52) *suu1 hùan2 suu1 mii2 nam4-saang5*
    each house each have water-well
    'Each and every house has a water well.'

This construction can combine with the Type 1 *kan3* construction to unequivocally express strictly reciprocal situations. Thus, a videoclip in which two actors hug each other (A hugs B and B hugs A; #7) can be described with a simple Type 1
kan3 construction (kòòt5 kan3 ‘hug coll’), and can also be combined with the suu1 NP suu1 VP construction:

(53) suu1 khon2 suu1 kòòt5 kan3
each person each hug coll
‘Each person hugged each other.’

The meaning of the combination of these constructions, illustrated in (53), is that for the set of actors, each acts upon the other in the way specified in the predicate. That is, each participant maps onto both the actor and undergoer roles of the predicate (regardless of whether the events are simultaneous or sequential). Thus, while examples like a videoclip in which A hugs B but B doesn’t hug A may be described with a simple kan3 expression (i.e. kòòt5 kan3 “hug coll”), the combined expression with suu1 in (53) would be inapplicable. The kan3-plus-suu1 construction cannot be used for any of the many less-than-strictly-reciprocal situations to which kan3 alone may readily apply (see Sections 3.3.2–3.3.4, above).7

4.2 The reciprocal mirror construction: ‘I Vα you, you Vα me’

In describing the reciprocal video stimulus clips, speakers would occasionally add to a simple kan3 construction an explicit spelling-out of the reciprocal relation, using 1st and 2nd person pronouns (though where these do not necessarily refer to the speech-act participants). Here is a description of a videoclip (#3) in which A hits B and B hits A (sequentiality or simultaneity is irrelevant to the expression’s applicability):

(54) khacaw4 tii3 kan3 – khòòj5 tii3 caw4 caw4 tii3 khòòj5
3PL.P hit coll 1SG.P hit 2SG.P 2SG.P hit 1SG.P
‘They hit each other – I hit you, you hit me.’

As noted already, some clips which are not strictly reciprocal can nevertheless be described using a kan3 construction, as in the following description of an asymmetrical scene (#51) in which one actor is delousing the hair of another:

(55) khacaw4 haa3 haw3 haj5 kan3
3PL.P seek louse give coll
‘They’re seeking lice for each other.’

7. To be clear, it is the combination of the suu1 construction and the kan3 construction that narrows the reading to strict reciprocity. It is not that the suu1 construction is used when kan3 has a more strictly reciprocal meaning, since I have argued that kan3 is general with respect to symmetry of participation, and is compatible with stricter and looser senses of reciprocity.
Chapter 7. Description of reciprocal situations in Lao

If the mirror construction were added here, it could not describe the same event, but would only felicitously describe an event in which A delouses B’s hair and B delouses A’s hair. The next example describes a clip in which each acts upon the other, but it cannot describe a clip in which one participant is passive:

(56) khacaw⁴ haa³ haw³ haj⁵ kan³
   3PL.P seek louse give COLL
   khòòj⁵ haa³ haw³ haj⁵ caw⁴ caw⁴ haa³ haw³ haj⁵ khòòj⁵
   1SG.P seek louse give 2SG.P 2SG.P seek louse give 1SG.P

‘They’re seeking lice for each other – you seek lice for me, I seek lice for you.’

The mirror construction is a dedicated constructional strategy for expressing reciprocal event relations. Its meaning is not derived from simple composition of distinct parts. This is clear from the fact that the pronouns meaning ‘I’ and ‘you’ do not refer to speech event participants, as they normally would.

5. Conclusion

The particle kan³ is the standard tool for describing reciprocal situations in Lao, but it is not a dedicated marker of reciprocity. Events and situations which may be felicitously described by kan³ feature a multiplicity of participants in some event, possibly by acting equally upon each other as in strictly reciprocal type events, possibly by doing the same action or being in the same state together (collectively or at the same time), or even just by co-participating in a situation in which the participants are equally committed or rightfully co-participating, despite a distinct asymmetry. These are not separate meanings of kan³, rather the meaning of kan³ is general across these types of situation. When it is necessary to be more specific and encode a situation as strictly reciprocal, Lao speakers can do this by using further resources in combination with a kan³ construction.

The semantic typology methodology adopted here has featured the complementary data collection tasks of (a) eliciting descriptions of a set of stimuli, a collection of token instantiations of distinct areas of the semantic space under consideration (in this case, situations depicted in short videoclips), and (b) drawing examples of the target forms from corpora of natural language use and discussing what they refer to, complemented by (c) focused consultation with native speakers, exploring the limits of extensional applicability of the descriptive types. It is a two-way street, from token referents to type descriptions and from type descriptions to token referents (onomasiology meets semasiology; Geeraerts 1997). The combined approach supplies both an anchor for comparative work and a route to language-specific facts. In the case of the description of
reciprocal events in Lao, the set of videoclip stimuli helped to establish that the meaning of Lao kan3 has a meaning more general than ‘reciprocal’, and subsequent consultation of spontaneous texts fleshed out the reach of the particle’s broader, naturally occurring distribution. All components of the procedure played a role in discovery of the facts reported.

Abbreviations

The transliteration of Lao used here follows IPA standard except for the following: $e = \text{schwa}; \dot{e} = \text{high-mid front vowel}; \mathring{e} = \text{low front vowel}; \dot{o} = \text{low back vowel}; \ddot{u} = \text{high back unrounded vowel}; ng = \text{velar nasal}; \check{n} = \text{palatal nasal}; q = \text{glottal stop}$. Lexical tone is indicated by syllable-final numeral, as follows: 1 = mid level (33); 2 = high rising (35); 3 = low rising (13); 4 = high falling (51); 5 = low falling (31); $\varnothing$ = unstressed/atonal. Abbreviations are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1/2/3</th>
<th>1st/2nd/3rd person</th>
<th>INDEF</th>
<th>indefinite pronoun</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABL</td>
<td>ablative</td>
<td>INTJ</td>
<td>interjection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>allative</td>
<td>IRR</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGT</td>
<td>agent</td>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>negation</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>bare</td>
<td>NEWS</td>
<td>new information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.LNK</td>
<td>clause linker</td>
<td>NMLZ</td>
<td>nominaliser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLL</td>
<td>collaborative</td>
<td>ONRCD</td>
<td>on record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>complementiser</td>
<td>PERIPH</td>
<td>peripheral</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>copula</td>
<td>RDP</td>
<td>reduplication</td>
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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>class term</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>demonstrative</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIR</td>
<td>directional particle</td>
<td>REL</td>
<td>relativiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eBr</td>
<td>elder brother</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>familiar</td>
<td>T.LNK</td>
<td>topic linker</td>
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<td>factive particle</td>
<td>TOP</td>
<td>topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOC</td>
<td>focus</td>
<td>WEAK</td>
<td>weakening position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Thanks to Steve Levinson, Nick Evans, Asifa Majid, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on a draft of this chapter. I gratefully acknowledge the research and fieldwork support of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen.
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