

Causatives and clause union in Lai (Chin)

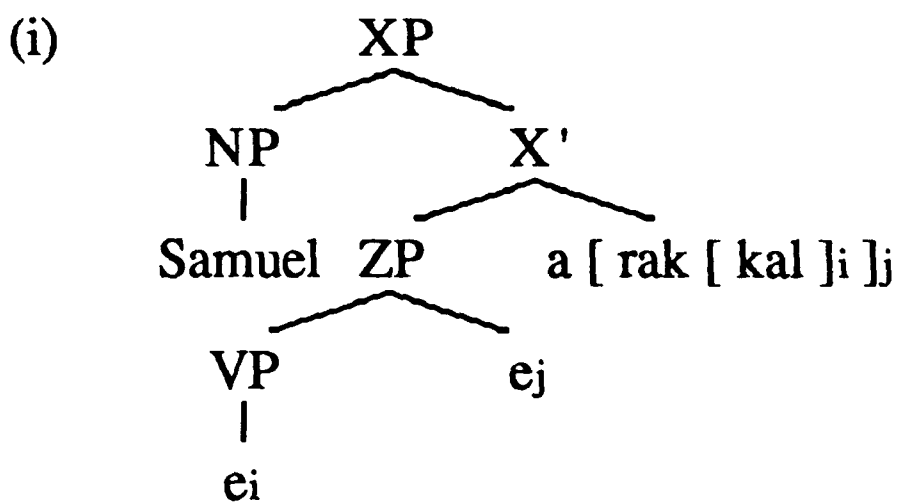
George BEDELL
International Christian University

Consider the following sentences containing the Lai (Chin)¹ intransitive verb *kal* 'go'.

(1) *Samuel a rak kal.*
Samuel went.

(2) *Ka rak kal.*
I went.

Intransitive verbs take only a subject; in (1) *Samuel* is the subject. This is consistent with the appearance of the third person singular subject agreement marker *a*.² We take the structure of (1) to be something like (i).



No overt subject appears in (2), but the subject agreement marker *ka* requires that it be first person singular. The structure of (2) will be as in (i), but with an empty subject and *ka* replacing *a*.

There is a Lai causative verb *kalter* 'make/let go', as in sentences like (3) to (8).³

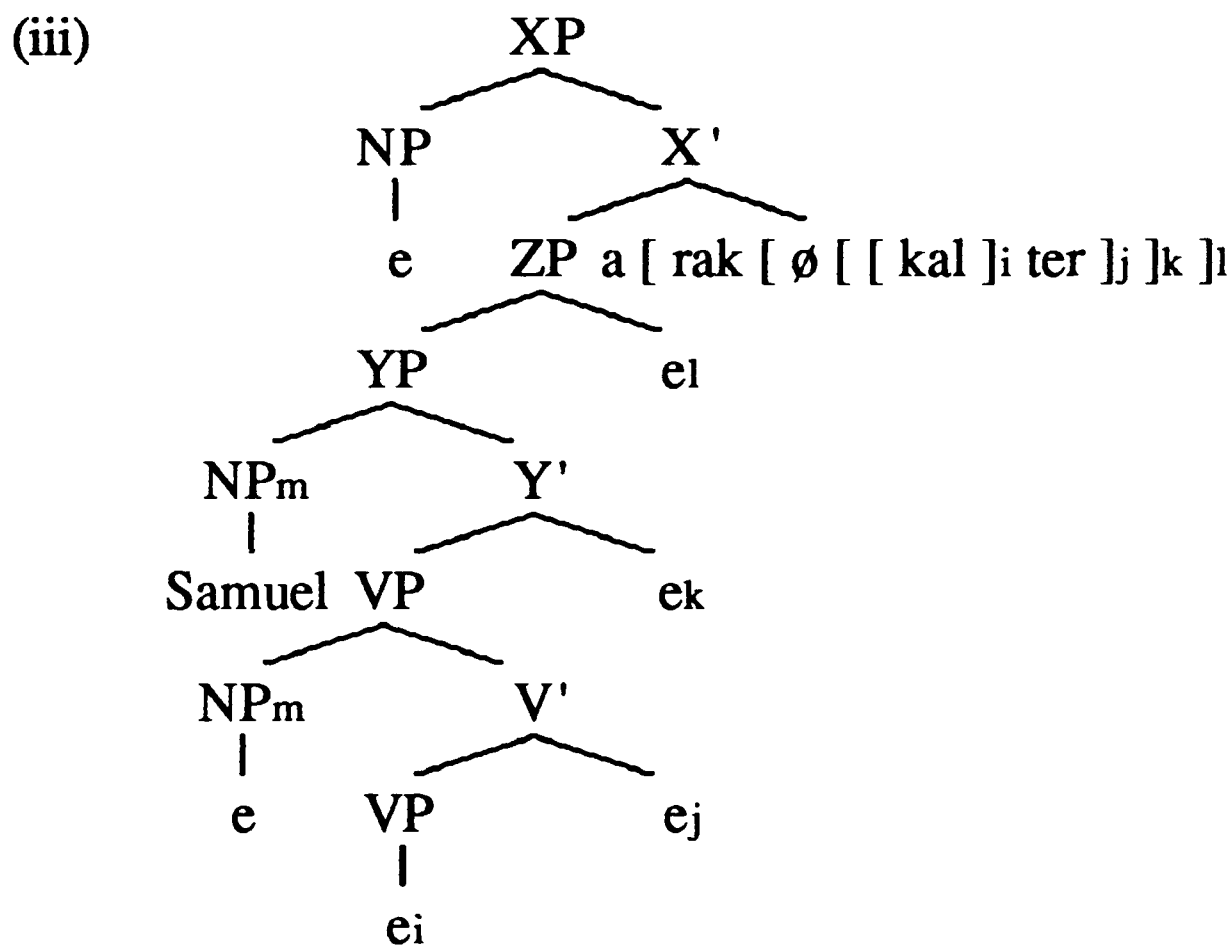
¹Lai is spoken in and around the town of Hakha, present administrative capital of Chin State, Myanmar. It is often called (Hakha) Chin in Linguistic literature. I am grateful to Rev. Samuel Ngun Ling for teaching me what I know about Lai, and to F. K. Lehman for various helpful comments and suggestions.

²The agreement system of Lai is discussed in detail in Bedell (1995).

³The meaning of the Lai causative *ter* is not sensitive to the volition of the causee. Thus it may be translated into English as 'make' or 'let', depending on the context. It is sometimes written as a separate word, i. e. *kal ter*.

- (3) *Samuel a rak kalter.*
He/she made/let Samuel go.
- (4) *Samuel ka rak kalter.*
I made/let Samuel go.
- (5) *Samuel nih a rak kalter.*
Samuel made/let him/her go.
- (6) *Samuel nih a rak ka kalter.*
Samuel made/let me go.
- (7) *?Samuel (nih) a rak i kalter.*
Samuel made/let himself go.
- (8) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah a rak i kalter.*
Samuel made/let himself go.

We take the structure of (3) to be something like (iii).



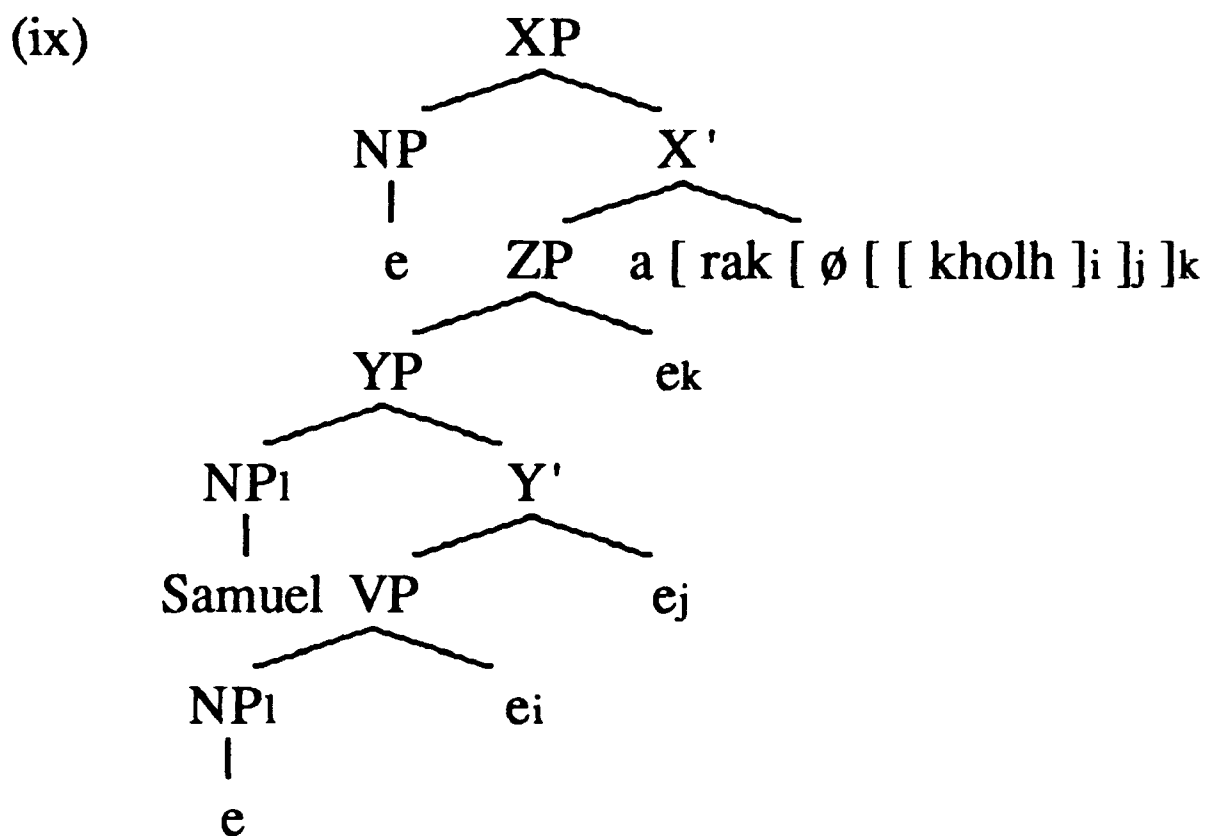
In (iii), *kalter* is morphologically decomposed into *kal* followed by *ter*. *Kal* is the same verb as in (i); syntactically it heads a VP complement of *ter*. *Ter* is syntactically a verb which takes a VP complement in addition to a subject and object, but morphologically a suffix. Its object is interpreted semantically as the subject of the VP complement. In (3) and (4), *Samuel* is this object. The agreement pattern requires that the empty subject be third person singular in (3) and first person singular in (4). *Nih* in (5) and (6) marks *Samuel* as the subject rather than the object. The agreement pattern in this case requires that the empty object be third person singular in (5), and first person singular in (6). The structure of (5) will be as in (iii), but with subject *Samuel nih* and an empty object. The structures of (4) and (6) will have *ka* replacing *a* or \emptyset . It is marginally possible to have *kalter* in a reflexive construction as in (7) or (8). In that case, the use of *nih* is optional, as is

the explicit reflexive *amah le amah* 'him/herself'.

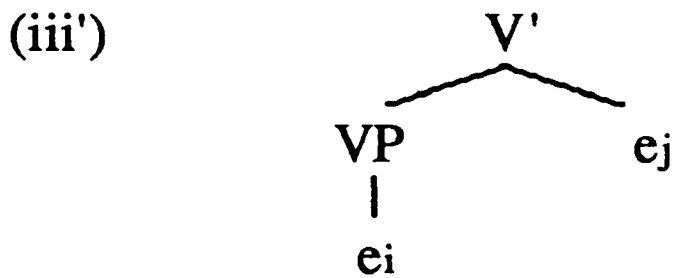
In spite of containing *kal* syntactically as well as morphologically, in external syntax *kalter* is virtually identical to simple transitive verbs. Compare (3) to (8) with (9) to (14), which contain the transitive verb *kholh* 'bathe'.

- (9) *Samuel a rak kholh.*
He/she gave Samuel a bath.
- (10) *Samuel ka rak kholh.*
I gave Samuel a bath.
- (11) *Samuel nih a rak kholh.*
Samuel gave him/her a bath.
- (12) *Samuel nih a rak ka kholh.*
Samuel gave me a bath.
- (13) *Samuel (nih) a rak i kholh.*
Samuel took a bath.
- (14) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah a rak i kholh.*
Samuel gave himself a bath.

We take the structure of (9) to be something like (ix); those of (10) to (12) differ from it precisely as those of (4) to (6) differ from (iii).



The only differences between (iii) and (ix) are first, the lexical difference of the morphologically complex *kalter* versus simple *kholh*; and second, the verb plus complement represented by (iii') within (iii) replacing the simple verb represented by ei alone in (ix).



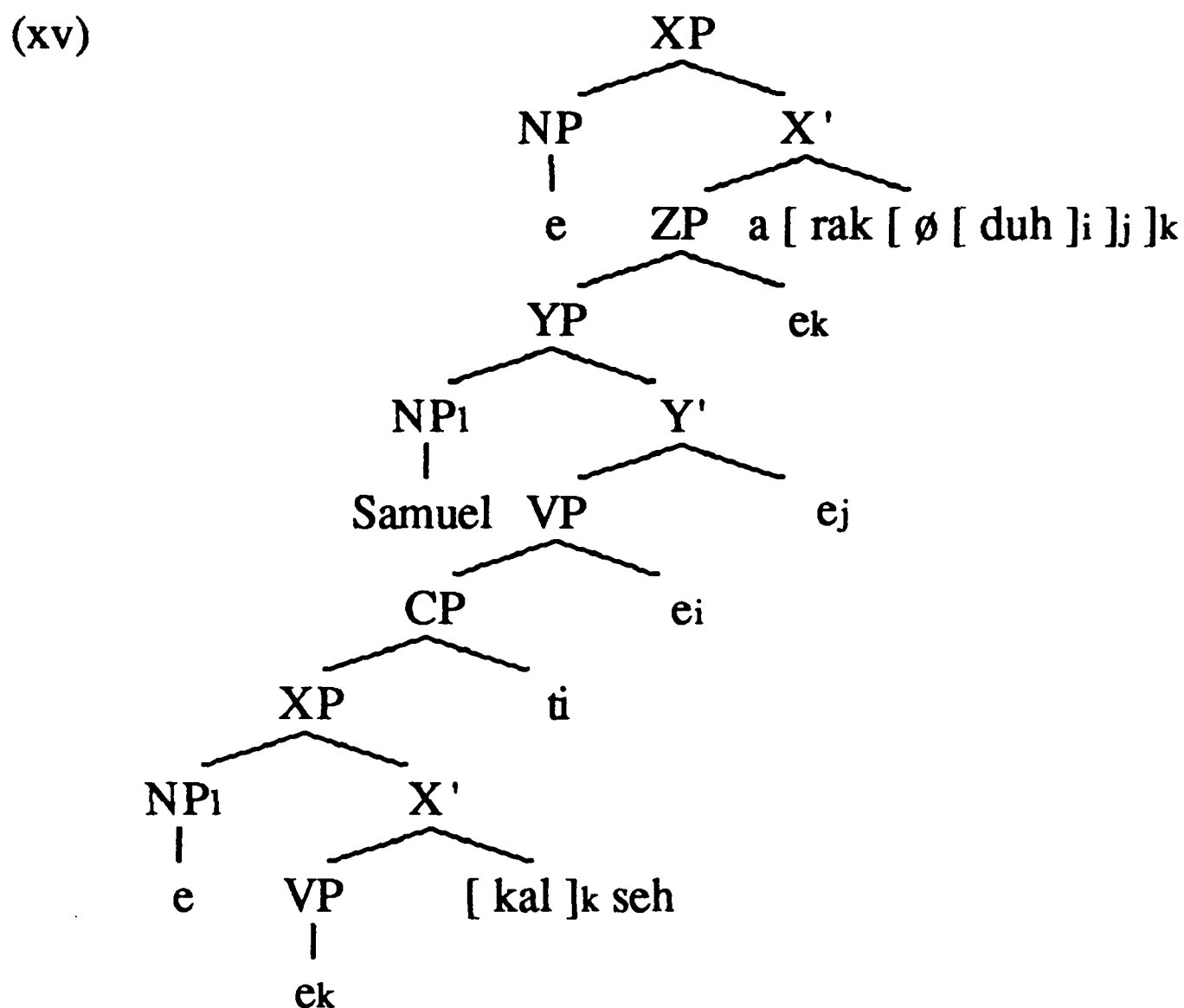
Similar causative constructions in other languages have posed an apparent dilemma between a morphological analysis of causative verbs which treats them using lexical rules like other cases of suffixed derivation, and a syntactic analysis which treats them using syntactic rules reducing a complex to a simplex structure. In the latter case the syntactic process has often been termed 'clause union'.⁴ In the analysis illustrated in (iii), there are both syntactic and morphological components; it simultaneously allows a morphological treatment of causative verbs and provides syntactically for their semantic properties. It may not be entirely clear whether structures like (iii) should count as complex or simplex, but in any case there is no syntactic derivation that might be literally described as 'clause union'. We will nevertheless continue to refer to it as a 'clause union' construction.

The Lai causative construction in (3) to (6) contrasts with syntactically less compact structures like (15) to (20) containing the verb *duh* 'want' accompanied by a complement clause.

- (15) *Samuel kal seh ti a rak duh.*
He/she wanted Samuel to go.
- (16) *Samuel kal seh ti ka rak duh.*
I wanted Samuel to go.
- (17) *Samuel nih kal seh ti a rak duh.*
Samuel wanted him/her to go.
- (18) *Samuel nih kal seh ti a rak ka duh.*
Samuel wanted me to go.
- (19) *Samuel (nih) kal seh ti a rak i duh.*
Samuel wanted to go.
- (20) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah kal seh ti a rak i duh.*
Samuel wanted himself to go.

We take the structure of (15) to be something like (xv).

⁴We have in mind particularly the literature dealing with causative sentences in Japanese. For recent general discussion of causative verbs and references, see Hendrick 1995.



Unlike (3), (15) contains a full subordinate clause *Samuel kal seh* 'let Samuel go' followed by a quotative complementizer *ti*. In (15) and (16) *Samuel* is the subject of *kal*; the agreement pattern in the verb complex requires that the subject of *duh* be third person singular in (15) and first person singular in (16). In (17) and (18) *Samuel nih* is the subject of *duh*; the agreement pattern in the verb complex requires that the subject of *kal* be third person singular in (17) and first person singular in (18). Note that this is parallel to both (3) to (6) and (9) to (12). If the subject of both verbs is *Samuel*, there are the variant more compact structures (21) and (22).⁵

(21) *Samuel nih a rak kal duh.*
Samuel wanted to go.

(22) *Samuel nih kal a rak duh.*
Samuel wanted to go.

Lai causative verbs may be based on transitive as well as intransitive simple verbs; (23) to (30) illustrate *kholhter* 'make/let bathe'.

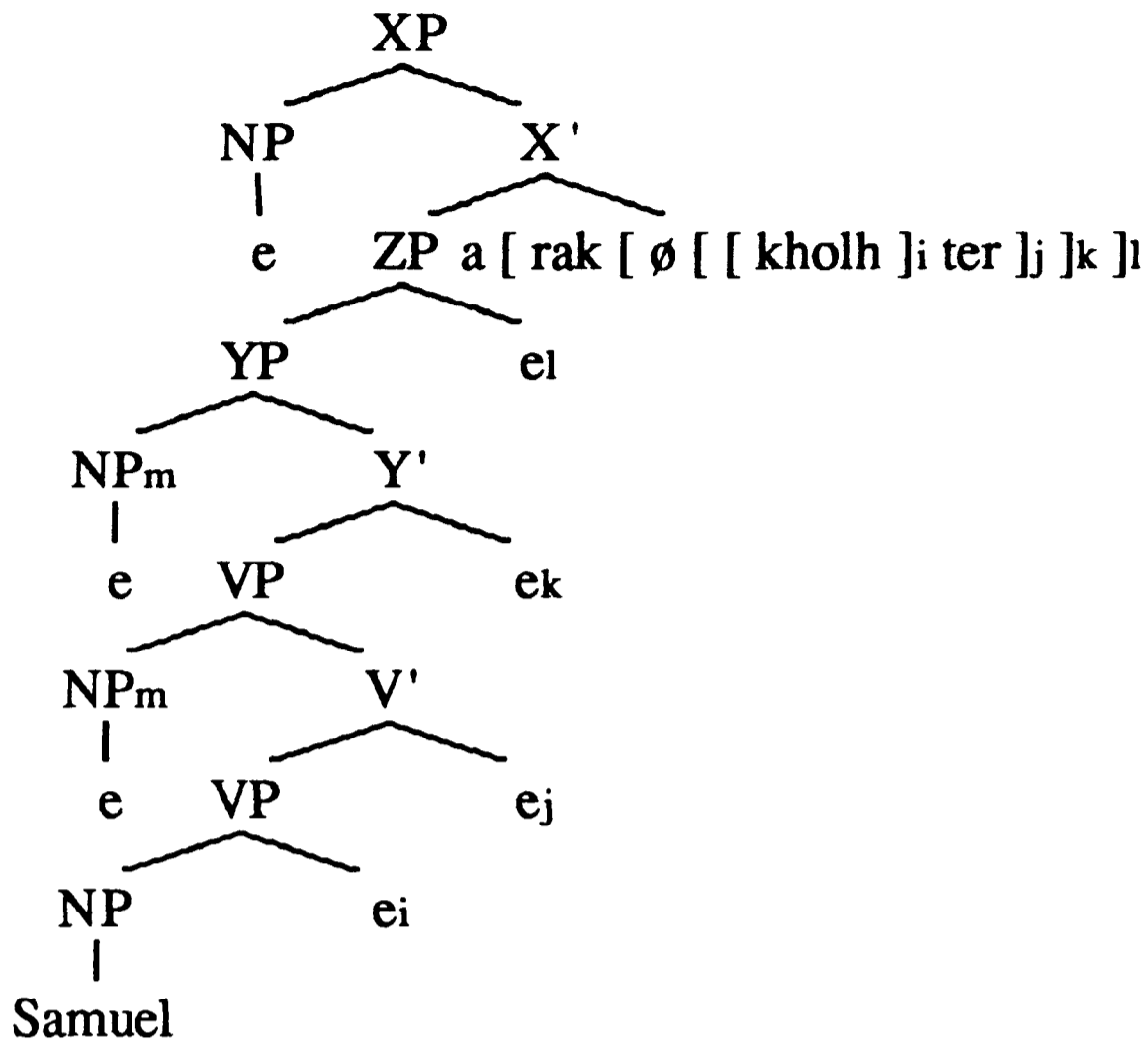
(23) *Samuel a rak kholhter.*
?He/she made/let him/her give Samuel a bath.
He/she made/let Samuel give him/her a bath.
He/she made/let Samuel take a bath.

⁵Examples like (21) and (22) are discussed in detail in Bedell (1996a). It is argued there that (21) has a suffixed structure parallel to (5). However, *duh* is not normally written as one word with the verb to which it is suffixed.

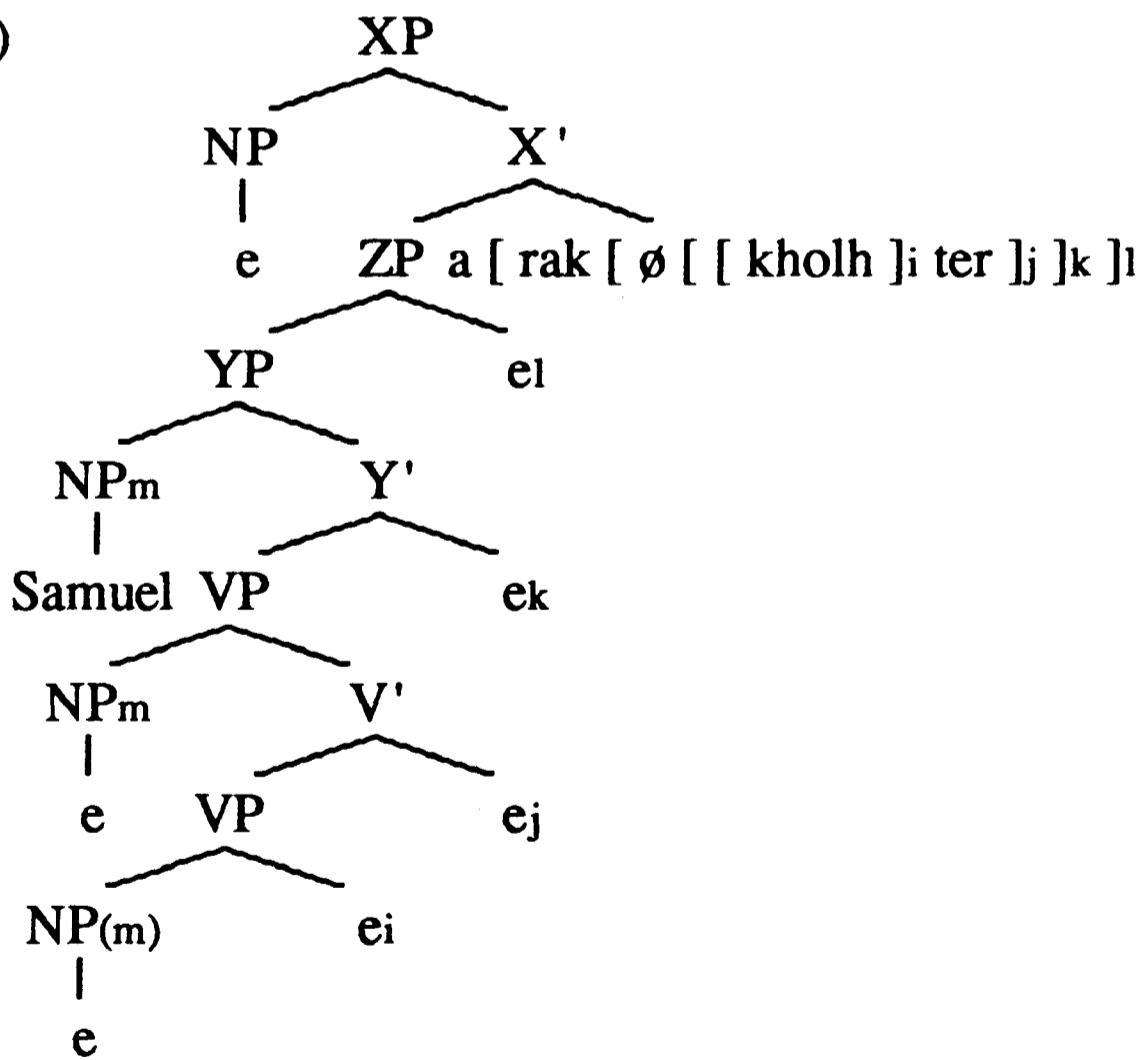
- (24) *Samuel ka rak kholhter.*
 ?I made/let him/her give Samuel a bath.
 I made/let Samuel give him/her a bath.
 I made/let Samuel take a bath.
- (25) *Samuel a rak ka kholhter.*
 He/she made/let Samuel give me a bath.
 He/she made/let me give Samuel a bath.
- (26) *Samuel nih a rak kholhter.*
 Samuel made/let him/her give him/her a bath.
 Samuel made/let him/her take a bath.
- (27) *Samuel nih a rak ka kholhter.*
 Samuel made/let him/her give me a bath.
 Samuel made/let me give him/her a bath.
 Samuel made/let me take a bath.
- (28) *Samuel nih nangmah a rak ka kholhter.*
 Samuel made/let me give you a bath.
 Samuel made/let you give me a bath.
- (29) *Samuel (nih) a rak i kholhter.*
 ?Samuel made/let himself give him/her a bath.
 Samuel made/let someone give him a bath.
 Samuel made/let himself be given a bath.
- (30) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah a rak i kholhter.*
 ?Samuel made/let himself give him/her a bath.
 Samuel made/let someone give him a bath.
 Samuel made/let himself be given a bath.

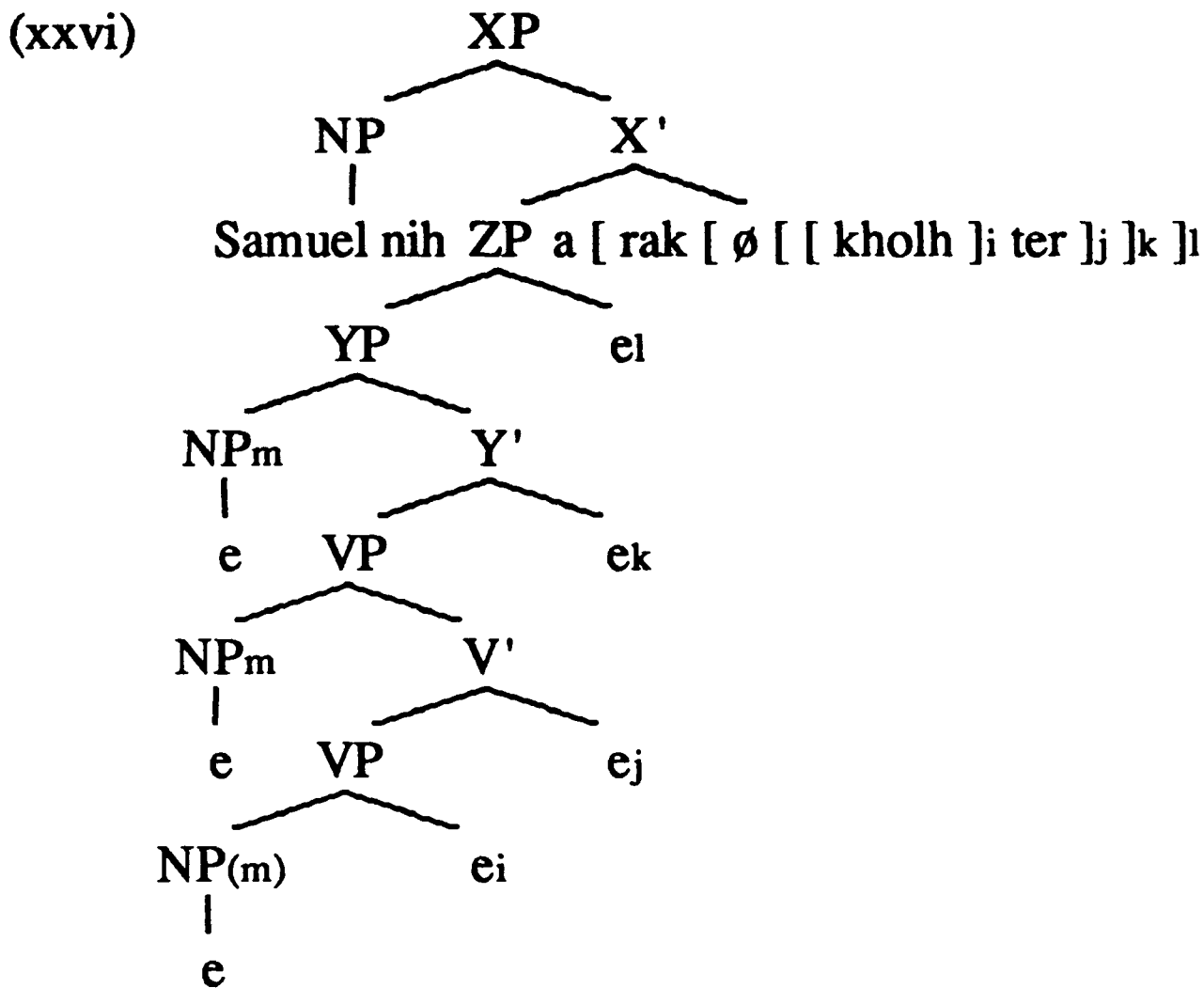
We take the structure of (23) to be something like (xxiii) or (xxiii'), and the structure of (26) to be something like (xxvi).

(xxiii)



(xxiii')





The verb *kholh* takes a subject and an object; but *kholh*ter takes a subject and two objects: one interpreted as the subject of *kholh*, and a second interpreted as its object. The agreement pattern in this case marks the subject and one object, but not both.

As indicated in (xxiii) and (xxiii'), the general principle seems to be that an overt object of a verb like *kholh*ter may be interpreted as either of the two possibilities: *Samuel* is the object of *kholh* in (xxiii) and the object of *ter* in (xxiii'). In the latter case, a coreferential interpretation is also possible (indicated by the index (m) on the empty object of *kholh*). As indicated by the ? on the first gloss in (23), the interpretation in (xxiii) is less accessible than that in (xxiii'). The same holds for (24); however in (25), where both objects are overt, ambiguity arises which is impossible in English. Similar ambiguity appears in (27) and (28). But the ambiguity is not as comprehensive as might be predicted by the general principle stated above. Overt agreement with a non-third person object may apparently not be omitted in the presence of a third person object (which does not show overt agreement). That is, neither object in (23) or (26) can easily be taken as non-third person. Furthermore, these readings cannot naturally imposed by the use of an overt pronoun, as in (23') or (26').

(23') ?*Samuel kha keimah a rak kholh*ter.
 He/she made let me give Samuel a bath.
 He/she made/let Samuel give me a bath.

(26') ?*Samuel nih keimah a rak kholh*ter.
 Samuel made/let me give him/her a bath.
 Samuel made/let him/her give me a bath.

The intended meanings (23') and (26') are preferably expressed with the overt object agreement particle *ka* as in (25) and (27) respectively.

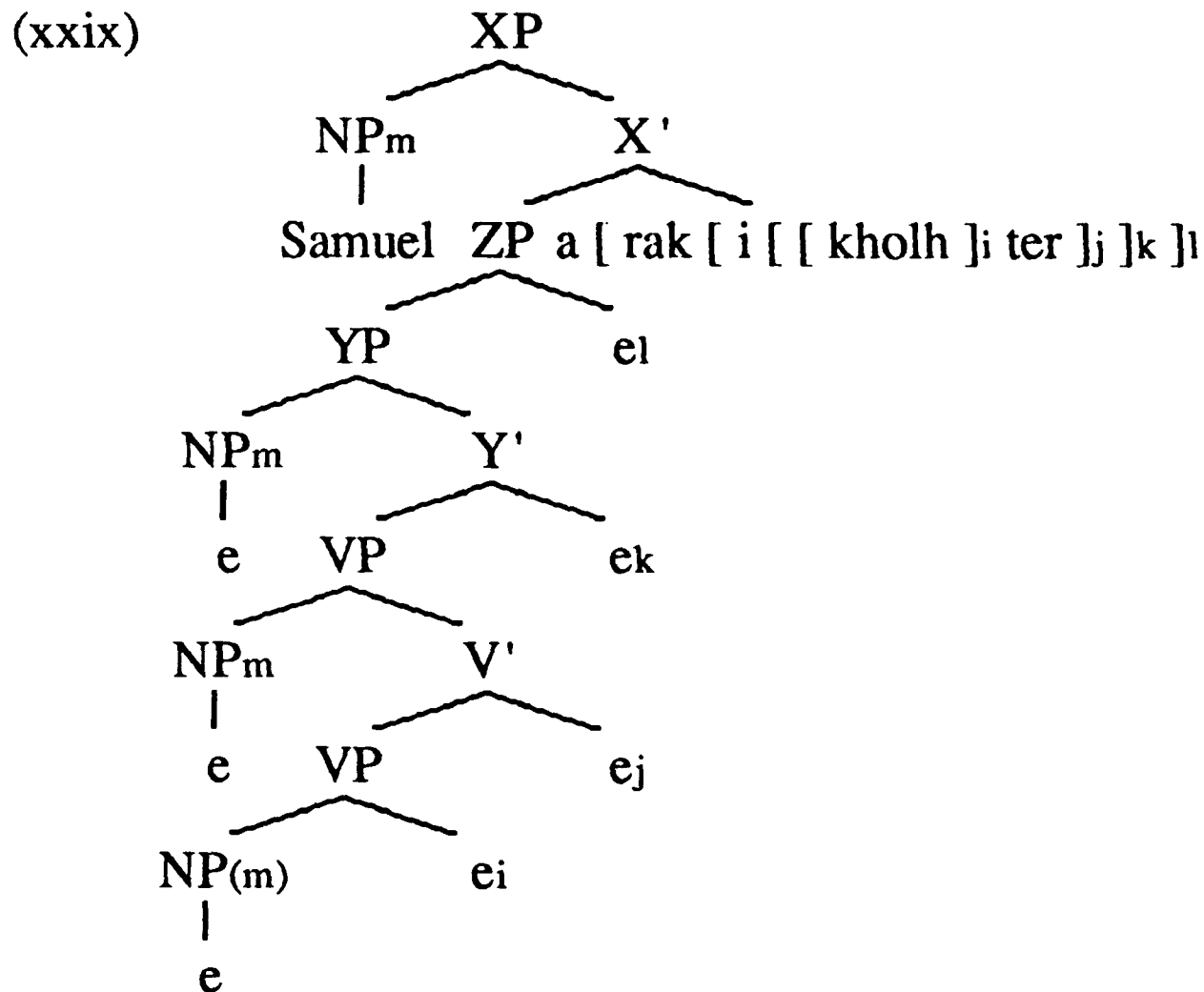
Another case of overt object agreement is the reflexive/reciprocal particle *i*, as in (29) or (30). This *i* not only need not, but in fact may not, appear in the coreferential interpretation of (23) or (26). Why this should be so is clear from the relevant version of (xxiii'): *i* marks coreference of the subject and object of a verb, but the subject of *kholh*ter (or *ter*) is disjoint from its two objects. While the subject and object of *kholh* are coreferential, there is no independent object agreement associated with this verb. In (29) and (30), by contrast, the subject is involved in the coreference, and *i* must appear. The most accessible interpretation of such sentences has coreference between the subject of the causative verb and the object of the transitive verb it is based on. A reflexive pronoun may not be used in this case in English, unless a passive appears in the clause under 'make' or 'let'.⁶ Nor may the explicit reflexive *amah le amah* 'himself' be freely introduced into (23) or (26) in the coreferential interpretation, as in (23'') or (26'').

(23'') ?*Samuel kha amah le amah a rak kholh*ter.
He/she made Samuel take a bath.

(26'') ?*Samuel nih amah le amah a rak kholh*ter.
Samuel made him/her take a bath.

Like overt *i*, the explicit reflexive implies subject-object coreference.

We take the structure of (29) to be something like (xxix).



The less accessible interpretation in which the object of the base verb is not involved in the coreference, indicated in (xxix) by the parentheses on the index (m), differs in meaning from its English counterpart. Rather than the mental conflict usually

⁶It would be possible to interpret the Lai structure as in fact a passive. See Bedell (1996b) for details.

suggested by making or letting oneself do something in English, the Lai structure most often has the interpretation of pretending to do something.

The Lai causative construction in (23) to (30) can also be contrasted with syntactically less compact structures like (31) to (38) containing the verb *duh* accompanied by a complement clause.

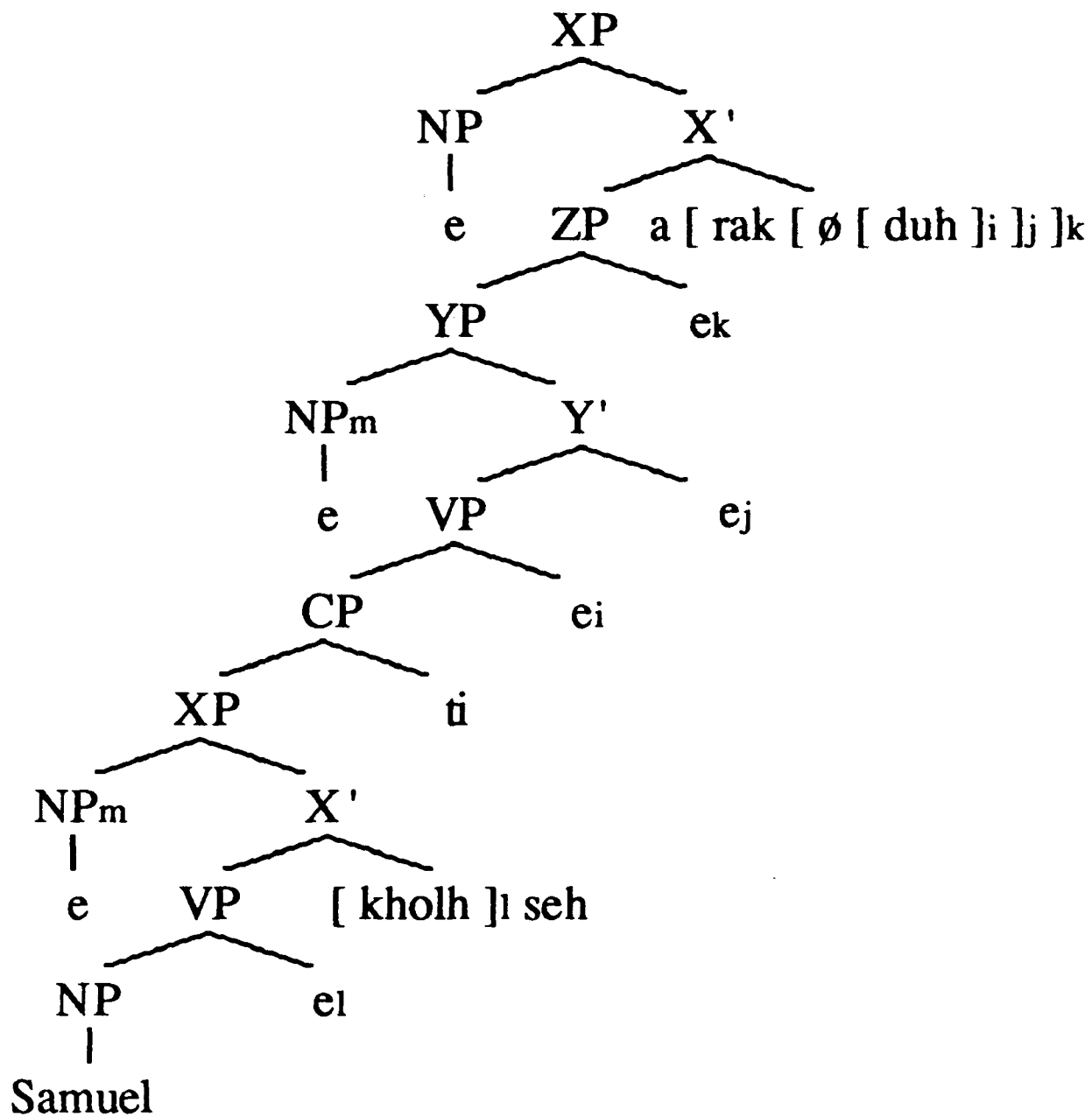
- (31) *Samuel kholh seh ti a rak duh.*
 He/she wanted Samuel to give him/her a bath.
 He/she wanted him/her to give Samuel a bath.
- (32) *Samuel kholh seh ti ka rak duh.*
 I wanted Samuel to give him/her a bath.
 I wanted him/her to give Samuel a bath.
- (33) *Samuel kholh seh ti a rak ka duh.*
 He/she wanted me to give Samuel a bath.
- (34) *Samuel nih kholh seh ti a rak duh.*
 Samuel wanted him/her to give him/her a bath.
 He/she wanted Samuel to give him/her a bath.
- (35) *Samuel nih ka kholh seh ti a rak duh.*
 Samuel wanted him/her to give him/me a bath.
 He/she wanted Samuel to give him/her/me a bath.
- (36) *Samuel nih ka kholh seh ti a rak in duh.*
 Samuel wanted you to give me a bath.
- (37) *Samuel (nih) i kholh seh ti a rak duh.*
 He/she wanted Samuel to take a bath.
 Samuel wanted him/her to take a bath.
- (38) *Samuel (nih) amah le amah i kholh seh ti a rak duh.*
 He/she wanted Samuel to take a bath.
 Samuel wanted him/her to take a bath.

We take the structure of (31) to be something like (xxxi) or (xxxi'), and the structure of (34) to be something like (xxxiv) or (xxxiv'). In (31) or (32), *Samuel* may be understood as the object either of *duh* or of *kholh*. The agreement pattern determines the subject of *duh* and the remaining object as in (23). In (33), unlike (25), *Samuel* may only be the object of *kholh*. In (34) or (35), *Samuel nih* may be understood as either the subject or the object of *duh*.⁷ The agreement pattern determines the object of *kholh* and the remaining argument of *duh* as in one meaning of (23), or (26). The object of *kholh* in (35) is first person singular, but there are two possible interpretations: it can corefer with the subject of *duh* (a direct discourse interpretation) or it can refer to the speaker of the sentence (an indirect

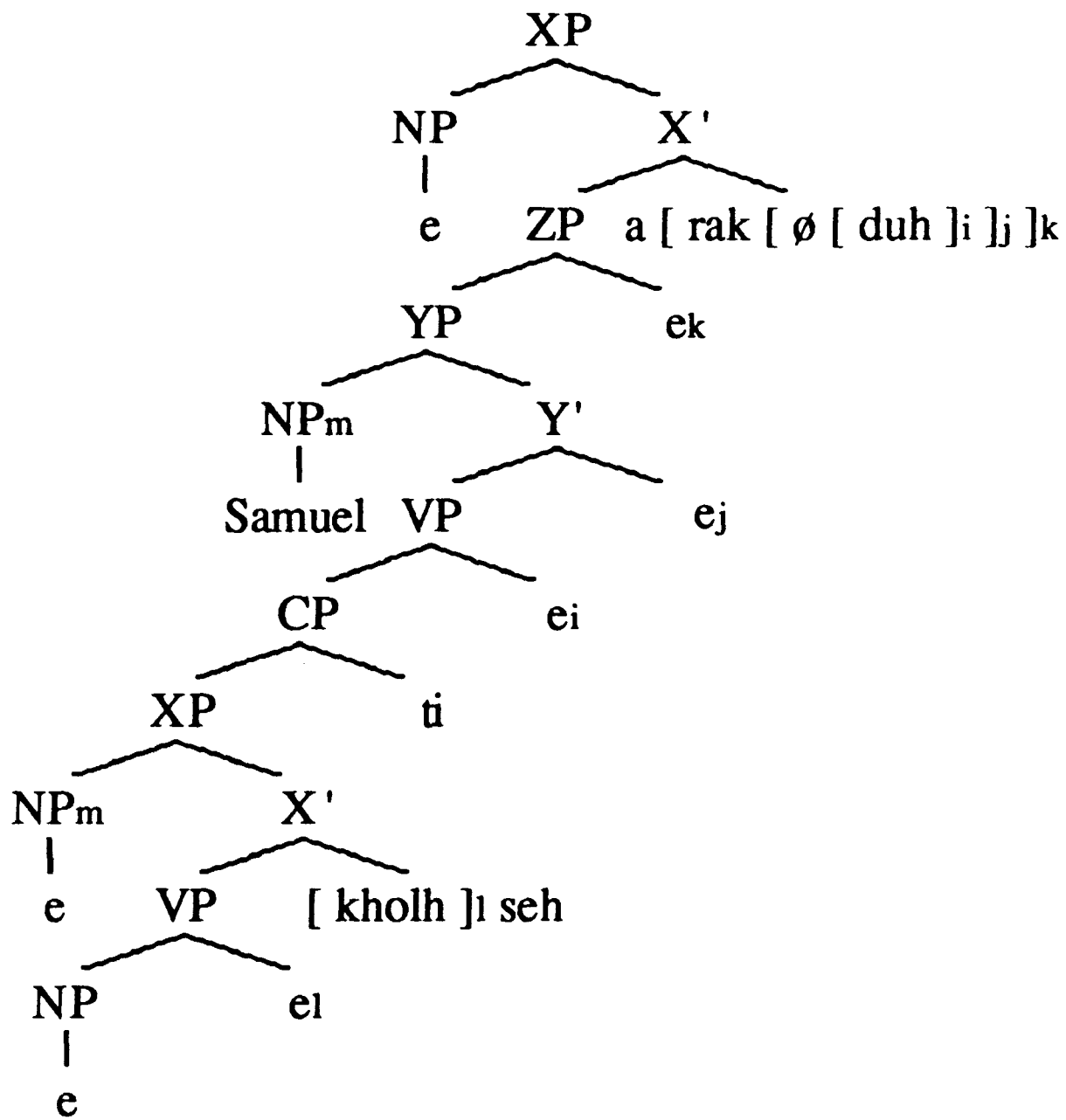
⁷The second interpretation, corresponding to (xxxiv), shows that *nih* may mark syntactic objects, and thus cannot be considered a case marker. Though it is not clear from this example, such objects impose agreement in the same way as those without *nih*. See Bedell 1996a, pp. 412-13.

discourse interpretation). In (36), like (33) but unlike (28), *Samuel nih* may only be the subject of *duh*.

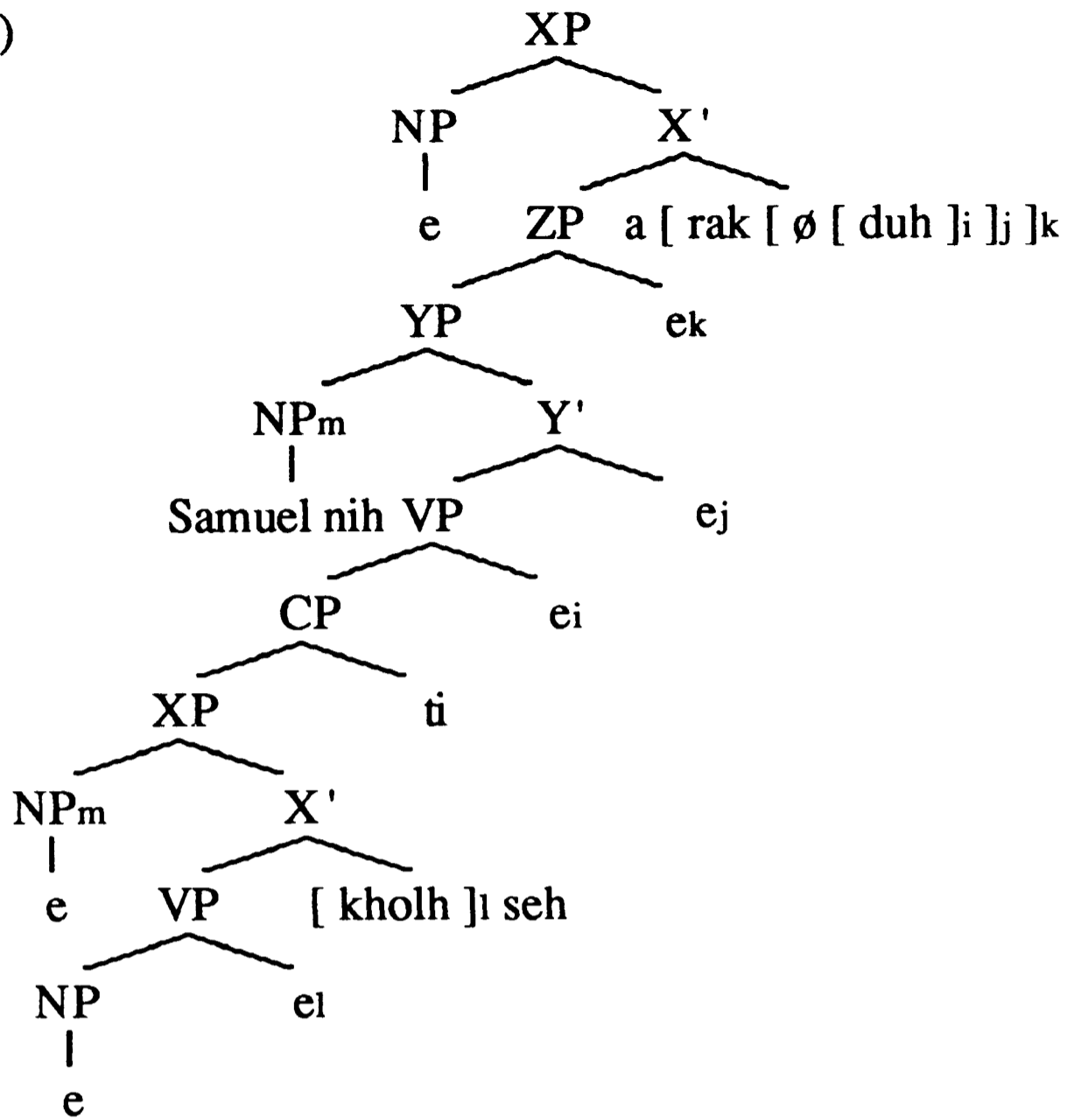
(xxxi)



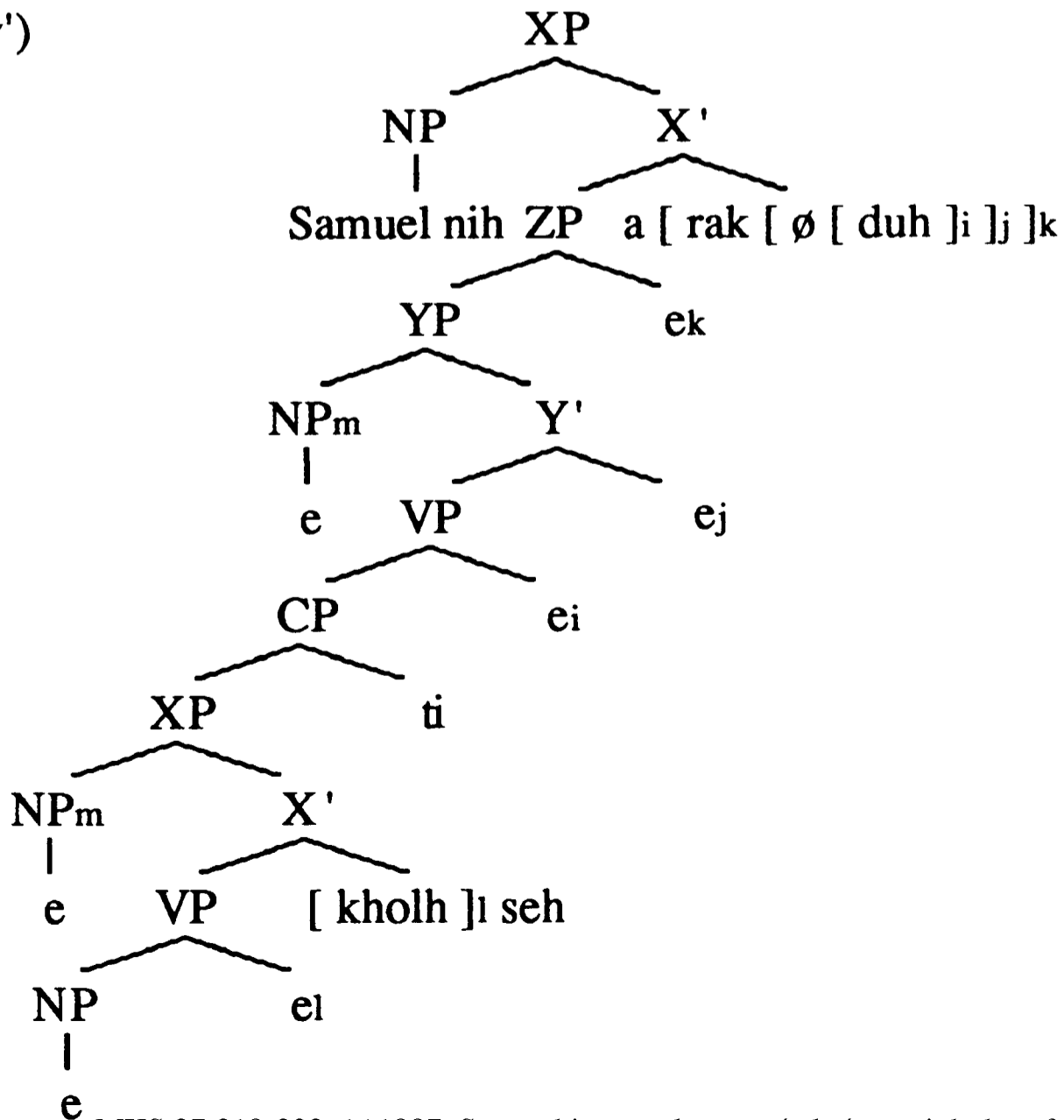
(xxxi')



(xxxiv)



(xxxiv')



(34) and (35) can be disambiguated by reversing the word order; (34') and (35') can only be interpreted with *Samuel* the subject of *duh*.

(34') *Kholh seh ti kha Samuel nih a rak duh.*
Samuel wanted him/her to give him/her a bath.

(35') *Ka kholh seh ti kha Samuel nih a rak duh.*
Samuel wanted him/her to give him/me a bath.

(34) does not overlap in meaning either with (35) or with (37) and (38): in (34) the object of *kholh* is third person singular, distinct from the subject of *duh*, and in (37) and (38), it is coreferential with the subject of *kholh*. As with sentences like (21) or (22), there is a more compact structure available in case the subject of *duh* and the subject of *kholh* are understood to be the same.

(39) *Samuel nih kholh a rak duh.*
Samuel wanted to give him/her a bath.

(40) *Samuel nih a rak kholh duh.*
Samuel wanted to give him/her a bath.

(41) *Samuel nih kholh a rak ka duh.*
Samuel wanted to give me a bath.

(42) *Samuel nih a rak ka kholh duh.*
Samuel wanted to give me a bath.

We conclude this discussion with a selection of examples of Lai causatives taken from the 1978 translation of the Bible. Literal translations are given identifying the causative verbs in bold face. Examples (43) to (46) illustrate causatives formed from intransitive verbs.

(43) *Hi nu hi kalter ko.* (Mt 15: 23)
Make this woman go.

(44) *A harmi hneksaknak chungah kan phakter hlah,*
Mi Thralopa sin khan himte in kan umter tuah. (Mt 6: 13)
Do not **let** us **arrive** in the midst of temptation,
Make us **be** where we are safe from the Evil One.

(45) *Khual ka si ah nan ka tlunter duh lo.* (Mt 25: 43)
I was a traveller and you did not want to **let** me stay.

(46) *Mah le mah aa ngantermi cu thrumh an si lai.* (Mt 23: 12)
Those who **make** themselves **big** will be brought down.

(43) and (44) are imperatives without a subject agreement marker; in (44) the object of *ter* is first person plural in both cases, marked by *kan*. In (45) we see the second person plural subject agreement marker *nan*, followed by the first person singular object agreement marker *ka*. This sentence is an example of double suffixation, with *duh* as seen in (21). (46) is a reflexive causative inside a relative clause.

Causatives formed from transitive verbs are less common, as we might expect from the rampant ambiguity. Examples like (47) to (50) are easily found nevertheless.

- (47) *Na thangthratnak cu na chimter hna.* (Mt 21: 16)
You **made** them **speak** your praises.
- (48) *An in lakter ko hna lai.* (Mt 21: 3)
They will **let** you **take** them.
- (49) *I ralring u law ahohmanh i hlen ter hna hlah u.* (Mt 24: 4)
Be careful and **let** no one **deceive** you.
- (50) *Zeicahtiah lai a nawntertu, nu le pa sualnak a tuahtertu, thil thralo dangdang a tuahtertu, a firtertu, lih a chimtertu, mi a congoihtertu ruahnak thralo vialte cu a lung chungin a ra chuakmi an si.* (Mt 15: 19)
For all evil thoughts which **make** one **murder**, **make** one **commit** adultery, **make** one **do** various evil deeds, **make** one **steal**, **make** one **tell** lies or **make** one **slander** people come from within the heart.

In (47) and (48) *hna* marks plurality of an object; since in both cases both objects are in fact plural, it is difficult to tell which is marked. (49) is an imperative with reflexive object agreement involving the (lower) object of *hlen* 'deceive'. (50) includes causatives formed from both intransitive and transitive verbs, conjoined within a relative clause construction.

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International Christian University
10-2, Osawa 3-chome, Mitaka-shi
Tokyo 181 JAPAN