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The Hakha Lai Discourse Particle *ko*

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December 23, 2025

Discourse Particles in South Asian Languages (DiPSAL) 2025

Talk Overview

- Introduction
 - Introduction to Hakha Lai *ko*
 - Hakha Lai
 - Previous Research on *ko*
- Current Investigation
 - Research Questions
 - Data and Findings
- Discussion
- Future Directions
- Conclusion

Introduction

Introductory Summary

- Hakha Lai (South Central Tibeto-Burman) has a grammatical element, *ko*, whose function is said to mark speaker certainty
- Discourse particle *ko* appears within the verbal complex, following core verbs, preceding other grammatical elements
- This talk provides an analysis of *ko* referencing examples of the contextual usage of *ko* from Bible translations and natural conversation in Hakha Lai

Hakha Lai Discourse Particle *ko*

Formal and Functional Properties

- Discourse Particle *ko* marks speaker certainty
- Appears in the clausal predicate position, following the core verb
- Often found in:
 - Declarations
 - Assertions
 - Rhetorical statements

1. *Quarantine kha san tlai tuk teh ttha tuk in ka-hmuh [ko]*
QuarantineFAM useful very even good very OBL 1SG-see KO
“I (really) think it [wearing a mask] is useful.” (LM04, 73)
2. *Pathian nawl a-si [ko]*
God will 3SG-be KO
“It is God’s will.” (chin-dictionary.com)
3. *Zanriah ei ah cun ka-ra-manh [ko] lai*
Dinner eat when 1SG-come-ready KO IRR
“I will/shall be on time for dinner.” (chin-dictionary.com)

Hakha Lai Discourse Particle *ko*

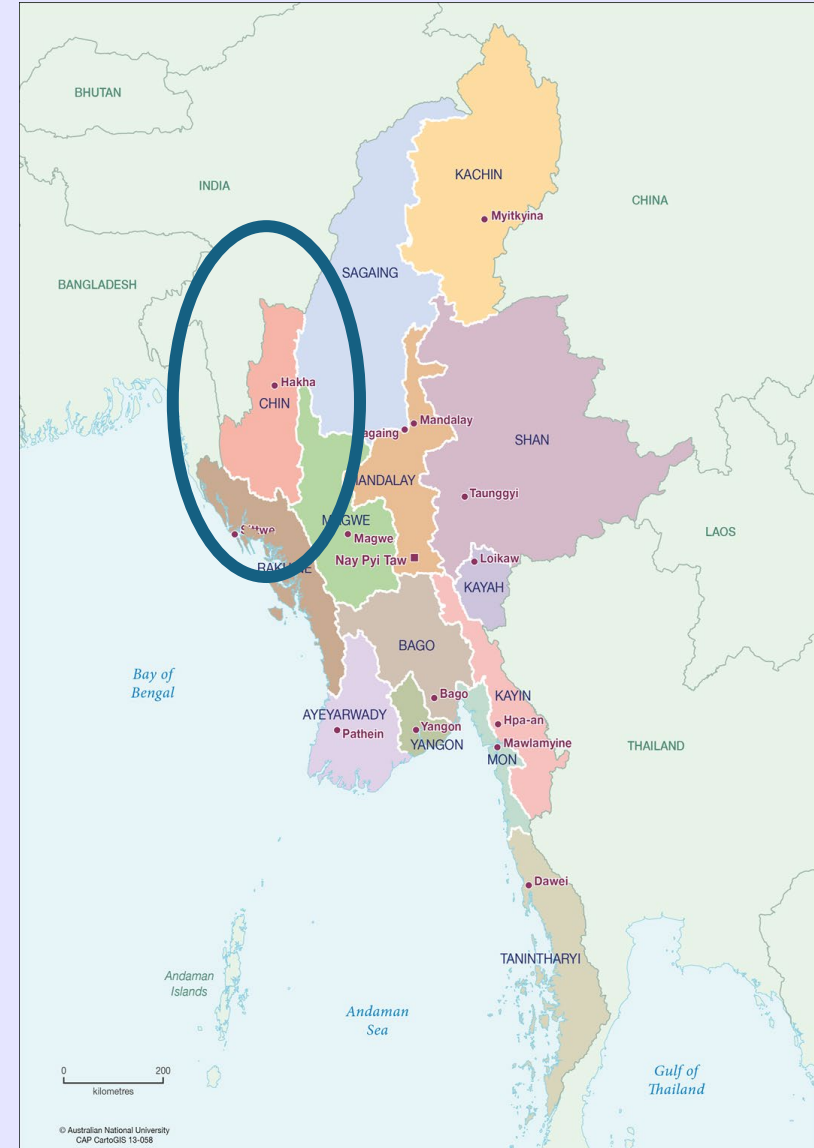
1. *Quarantine* *kha* *san tlai tuk* *teh* *ttha* *tuk* *in* *ka-hmuh* *[ko]*
Quarantine FAM useful very even good very OBL 1SG-see KO
“I (really) think it [wearing a mask] is useful.” (LM04, 73)

2. *Pathian* *nawl* *a-si* *[ko]*
God will 3SG-be KO
“It is God’s will.” (chin-dictionary.com)

3. *Zanriah* *ei* *ah cun* *ka-ra-manh* *[ko]* *lai*
Dinner eat when 1SG-come-ready KO IRR
“I will/shall be on time for dinner.” (chin-dictionary.com)

Hakha Lai

- One of the Chin languages
- South Central ('Kuki-Chin') languages in the Tibeto-Burman family
 - From the Central sub-branch of Chin languages
- Lai spoken in Hakha Township in Chin State, Burma
 - 170,000 worldwide (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2023)



Hakha Lai

- There are around 50 Chin languages
 - Spoken in Burma, India (Mizo), Bangladesh (Hyow, Khumi)
- Head-final tonal SOV language with mostly isolating morphological structure
 - Pre- and post-verbal, subject and object agreement

Hakha Lai Verbal Complex

- Hakha Lai (Kavitskaya 1997, via Van Bik 2021)
 - (SBJ)-(DIR)-V₁-(AUX)-(ASP#)-(T)-(NEG)
 - (SBJ)-(DIR)-V₂-(AUX)-(ASP#)-(T)-(NEG)
- *Ko* would be with AUX
- Other grammatical items:
 - Plural word *hna*
 - Imperative markers *u; seh*
 - Applicatives
 - Question marker *maw*

4. ka-võn-râa khàw dèeŋ ri? lâay lăw
1SG.S-DIR-come1 able1 (AUX) about.to yet FUT NEG
“I am not able come soon yet.” (Van Bik 2021)

5. ka-võn-rat-têr kho? dèeŋ tsàŋ
1SG.S-DIR-come2-CAUS able2 (AUX) about.to PFV
“I am about to be able to let him come now.” (Van Bik 2021)

Previous Research

Previous Research

- “*-kaw* indicates the speaker’s certainty, or at least assumed certainty, in the accuracy of the proposition” (Peterson 2017)
 - Categorized as a marker of subjective evaluation
 - Implied *factivity*
- ‘Affirmative particle’ *kaw* interacts with markers of tense/aspect/mood (Kavitskaya 1998)
 - When co-occurring with irrealis *lai*, prohibits a future tense reading
- Bedell (2012) remarks on the position of *ko* in relation to other markers
 - Classifies it as having an ‘emphatic meaning’, something like ‘indeed’

Discourse Particle *ko*

- As a discourse particle, *ko* is expected to have the following qualities (Grosz 2016):
 - Distributional rigidity
 - Co-occurs with elements of a similar category
 - Appears as a ‘semantic atom’, meaning that it co-occurs with other discourse particles to yield a compositional meaning
 - Cannot be a separate utterance

Other Discourse Particles

- Peterson (2017) also identifies *rua* (lack of evidence), *ttung* (counterexpectation), *ee* (excitement), and ‘?aay’ (regret)
- Demonstrative morphemes known as *multi-functional deictics* (MFDs) appear in utterance-final position and encode expressive content (Barnes 1998)
 - *Hi* – speaker proximal
 - *Kha* – addressee-proximal
 - *Khi* – distal
 - *Cu* – unspecified location

6. *Ek na-lamh lai hih!*
dung 2sg-step.on irr HI
“You are going to tread in dung (here)!” (adapted from Barnes 1998)

7. *Ek na-lamh lai cu!*
dung 2sg-step.on irr CU
“You are going to tread in dung (I suspect)!” (adapted from Barnes 1998)

The Current Study: An investigation of Hakha Lai Discourse Particle *ko*

The Current Investigation

- A survey and analysis of the formal and functional properties of *ko*
 - Formal: morphology, syntactic distribution
 - Functional: semantic, pragmatic
- Data come from translated and naturalistic sources
 - Bible translations
 - Interview transcriptions

Research Questions

- What are the distributional properties of ko ?
- What are the functional properties of ko ?

Research Questions

- What are its distributional properties?
 - How frequent is it?
 - Where does it occur in a clause?
 - Which other grammatical elements does it co-occur with?
- What are its functional properties?
 - Does it always encode speaker certainty?
 - As a semantic atom, what is its compositional character?

Data

- Two sets of corpus data
- Hakha Chin Bible
 - Translation from Myanmar Bible Society (2006)
 - Accompanied with chapter and verse
- Natural Language interviews
 - LUCAH Project

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Chin, Hakha - All Bible

Genesis

Genesis 1

Sernak Kong

¹A hramthawk ah, Pathian nih van le vawlei a ser hna tikah,

²vawlei cu mui zong a ngei lo, pungsan zong a ngei lo. Rilipi cu muihnak nih a khuh i ti cungah cun Pathian òhawnnak cu aa chawk.

³Cun Pathian nih, “Ceunak um seh,” tiah a ti i ceunak cu a hung um.

⁴Ceunak cu a zoh i aa lawm. Cun ceunak le muihnak cu a òhen hna i

⁵ceunak cu “Chun” tiah min a sak i muihnak cu “Zan” tiah a ti. Zanlei cu a hung dih i zinglei kha a hung um § cucu ni khatnak ni cu a si.

⁶Cun Pathian nih cun, “Ti le ti a òhentu hna ding caah aa kuaimi van pakhat in um seh law, ti cu hmun hnih ah um hna seh,” tiah a ti i cu tining cun a hung si.

⁷Cuticun Pathian nih cun van kuai cu a ser i a tang i a ummi ti le a cung i a ummi ti cu a òhen hna;

⁸van kuai cu a min ah “Van” a sak. Zanlei cu a hung dih i zinglei kha a hung um, cucu ni hnihnak ni cu a si.

⁹Cun Pathian nih cun, “Van tang i a ummi ti cu hmun khat ah i pum hna seh law vawlei kha hung lang seh,” tiah nawl a pek i cu bang cun a hung si.

The LUCAH Project



- **Linguistically Underserved Communities And Health**
- **Student team members interviewed Chin community members over Zoom**
 - About health (e.g. perceptions of healthy behavior, how health info is obtained, thoughts on COVID-19 pandemic, etc.)
 - In Hakha Lai (the community lingua franca)
- **Interviews were transcribed and translated by LUCAH team members who are fluent in Hakha Lai**

The LUCAH Project

- 38 interviews conducted in Hakha Lai
 - 20 used in this study
- 8 student employees transcribed and translated
 - SayMore, Flex
- The resulting corpus of conversational data is housed in CoRSAL, the Computational Resource for South Asian Languages (<https://corsal.unt.edu/>)
- LUCAH examples are accompanied with interview codes and segment numbers

Findings

Distributional Properties

- In the LUCAH corpus
 - 20 interviews (around 30 minutes average)
 - 123,451 word tokens, 8,739 segments
 - 1203 tokens of *ko*
 - 13% of segments, 1% of all words

Distributional Properties

- Always occurs post-verbally
- Follows most aspect and mood markers
 - Precedes perfective aspect *cang*, plural word *hna*, irrealis *lai*, negation *lo*, question particle *maw*

dih COMP	beh IMM	bal EXP	tawn HAB	ko AFFIRM	cang PERF	hna PL.OBJ	lai IRR	lo NEG	maw Q
	kaa INCH	dengmang ABOUT.TO	lio PROG						
	hnik IMM	deng ABOUT.TO	len WITH.EFFORT						
	seek IN.VAIN		cuahmah ITER						
			lengmang CONT						
			tthan AGAIN						

Table 1. Post-verbal class positions (adapted from Kavitskaya 1997)

Distributional Properties

8. *Zanlei cu inn=ah a-um [ko] lai*
Evening TOP home=LOC 3SG-be.at KO IRR

“He will be home all evening.” (chin-dictionary.com)

9. *Falam=ah a-kal tawn [ko] lai*
Falam=loc 3sg-go hab KO irr

“He might usually go to Falam” (adapted from Kavitskaya 1997)

10. *A-chim bal tawn [ko]*
3sg-say exp hab KO

“He surely used to have the experience of saying it several times.” (adapted from Kavitskaya 1997)

Distributional Properties

11. *Saya, hi nawlbia vialte hi cu ka-ngakchiat*
teacher this command all HI CU 1sg.poss-childhood
lio=in ka-zulh lengmang [ko] cang hna
while=adv 1sg-abide often ko perf pl.obj

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these [commands] I have kept since I was a boy.” (Mark 10:20)

12. *A-ka-hmutu cu ka-hmuh taktak [ko] maw?*
3sg-1sg-finder CU 1sg-see actually KO q

“I have now seen the One who sees me.” (Genesis 16:13)

13. *Thawngttha cu kan-chimh hna ning khan fek=tein nan i*
gospel CU 1sg.2sg-tell pl.obj order KHA firm=adv 2sg refl
tlaih [ko] lo maw?
hold KO neg q

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.”
(1 Corinthians 15:2)

Distributional Properties

- The distribution of *ko* is quite rigid, occurring within the matrix verbal complex
- Likely occupies an independent syntactic position

Exceptions:

- Can occur in conditionals
- One instance where it appears to mark a nominal

14. *Ka-mi kha kalter duh loin na-um peng [ko] ahcun,*
 1sg.poss KHA send want without 2sg-be.at rule KO if
thaizing=ah na-ram chungah khaubawk ka-tlunter hna lai
 tomorrow=loc 2sg.poss-land within locusts 1sg-accept pl.obj irr
 “If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow.” (Exodus 10:4)

15. *va kal u law ram kha va cuan tuah u, Jeriko [ko] kha*
 Go go imp imp land KHA go gaze do imp Jericho KO KHA
 “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” (Joshua 2:1)

Distributional Properties

- Frequently co-occurs with several expressions
 - *Ngah* (get)
 - *Ruah* (think)
 - *Ngandam* (good)
 - *Ngaingai* (very)

16. <i>vei</i>	<i>kum</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>cung</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>ngah</i>	<i>[ko]...</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>thawng</i>	<i>kan-theih</i>
Well	age	50	over	CU	get	KO	say	sound	1pl-hear
<i>caah</i>	<i>khan</i>	<i>keimah</i>	<i>zong</i>	<i>hi</i>	<i>tuah</i>	<i>ka-duh</i>	<i>[ko]</i>		
because	KHA	1sg.pro	also	HI	do	1sg-want	KO		

I want for myself after hearing that it's available for age 50 and over. (M04, 107)

17. <i>thla-khat=ah</i>	<i>hin</i>	<i>seven</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>[ko]</i>	<i>tiah</i>	<i>ka-ruah</i>
month-one=loc	HI	seven	be	KO	thus	1sg-think

"I think 7 days a month." (M02 156)

18. <i>gym</i>	<i>a-tuah peng</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>khi</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>ah</i>	<i>an-ngandam</i>	<i>[ko]</i>	<i>na-ti</i>	<i>dah</i>
gym	3sg-do often	person	KHI	CU	loc	3pl-good	KO	2sg-say	what
<i>silole</i>	<i>an-muihmai</i>		<i>khin</i>	<i>dah</i>	<i>a-ngandam</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>khi</i>	<i>na-tanfungtuah</i>	
or	3sg.poss-figure		KHI	what	3sg-good	person	KHI	2sg-measure?	
<i>silole</i>	<i>an-biachim</i>		<i>holh</i>	<i>tel</i>					
or	3sg.poss-speech		speak	too					

"Do you consider people who goes to gym as healthy or do you use their facial expression as measurement, or ways they deliver speech?" (M02, 196)

19. <i>Sodom</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>Gomorrhah</i>	<i>khua</i>	<i>hi</i>	<i>an-thang</i>	<i>a-chia</i>	<i>ngaingai</i>	<i>[ko]</i>
Sodom	and	Gomorrhah	village	HI	3pl-outcry	3sg-poor	very	KO
<i>i</i>	<i>an-sualnak</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>a-ngan</i>	<i>ngaingai</i>	<i>[ko]</i>			
and	3pl-sin	CU	3sg-big	very	KO			

"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrhah is so great and their sin so grievous." (Genesis 18:20)

Functional Properties: Declaratives

- In declaratives, *ko* surfaces in many constructions
- Alone:
 - *Ko*
- With other discourse particles:
 - *Ko cu*
 - *Ko ttung*
 - *Ko ee*

Functional Properties: Declaratives

20. *Aw gym kal mi hi mino ah cun atu kanmah*
Yes, gym go person HI youth when now 1pl.pro
community=ah hin cun an-tam ngai [ko]
community=LOC HI CU 3pl-be.plenty very KO

“Yes, there are (indeed) many youths that go to the gym within our community.” (M02, 237)

21. *kanmah Laimi Lailei Laitlang=i a-tthang i a-um*
1pl.pro Lai people Chin State Chin State=loc 3sg-grow.up and 3sg-be.at
caah cun a-har deuh [ko]
because 3sg-be.difficult more KO

“It's hard for those who grew up in Chin State.” (M02, 332)

22. *Na-ni [ko], na-ni hrimhrim [ko]*
2sg-laugh KO 2sg-laugh actually KO

“Yes, you did laugh.” (Genesis 18:15)

Functional Properties: Declaratives

23. *Kannah cu ramdang mi in pei a-kan-zoh [ko] cu*
1pl.pro CU foreign person as emph 3sg-1pl-see KO CU
Does he not regard us as foreigners? (Genesis 31:15)

24. “*Zeicahdah ka-min na-ka-hal, khuaruahhar a-si tiah na-hngalh*
Why 1sg.poss-name 2sg-1sg-ask astonishing 3sg-be thus 2sg-learn
[ko] ttung?” tiah a-ti.
KO counter thus 3sg-say
He replied, “Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding. (Judges 13:18)

25. *Hmasa=i minung a-rak-khat tawnmi khua kha, zeitindah umhar=in*
before=adv people 3sg-pst-full regular city KHA how boring=adv
a-tthut [ko] ee!
3sg-sit ko excite
How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! (Lamentations 1:1)

Functional Properties: Imperatives

- In imperative constructions, *ko* almost always co-occurs with an imperative morpheme
 - *Ko u sih*
 - *Ko hlah*
 - *Ko u*
 - *Ko seh*

Functional Properties: Imperatives

26. *a... lai thluak heiti [ko] u sih*
uh Lai mind say? KO 1pl.imp
uh..let's say Chin methods (M02, 300)

27. *Na-mi hna lakah mi kongthang ceih=in vak len [ko] hlah*
2sg.poss-person pl in person gossip discuss=adv creep see KO 2sg.imp.neg
Do not go about spreading slander among your people. (Leviticus (19:16))

28. *A-ngah [ko], chia [ko] u.*
3sg-allow KO put KO 2sg.imp
It's allowed, put it (W02, 32.1)

29. *Gad a-kauhtertu cu thangtthat si [ko] seh!*
Gad 3sg.poss-widener CU praise be KO 3sg.imp
“Blessed is he who enlarges Gad’s domain!” (Deuteronomy 33:20)

Functional Properties: Interrogatives

- *Ko* occurs in relatively few questions
 - *Ko maw*
- *Ko maw* might be used primarily rhetorically

Functional Properties: Interrogatives

30. *A-ka-hmutu* *cu* *ka-hmuh* *taktak* *[ko]* *maw?*
3sg-1sg-seer CU 1sg-see actually KO q

“I have now seen the One who sees me.” (Genesis 16:13)

31. *Nan-pupa* *hna=nih* *an-i-thurhhnawmh* *bangin nan-i-thurhhnawmh* *lengmang* *[ko]*
2pl.poss-ancestor pl=erg 3pl-refl-defile as 2pl-refl-defile often KO
maw?

q

“Will you defile yourselves the way your ancestors did?” (Ezekiel 20:30)

Discussion: Status of *ko*

- Is *ko* a discourse particle?
 - Consider the properties of discourse particles from Grosz (2016)
 - However, co-occurs with imperative markers
- Is *ko* a ‘semantic atom’?
 - If so, what is its function?

Expressive content?	✓
Non-truth-conditional?	~ ✓
Rigid distribution?	✓
Co-occurs with other markers of the same category?	✓

Discussion: Function of *ko*

1. A simple formal definition of speaker certainty:

[[ko]](p) = *p* is true, and speaker believes this strongly

- This definition works best when considering *ko* alone or with other discourse particles

2. When co-occurring with imperatives, it seems to bear a strengthened illocutionary force

3. Could it be a verum marker?

- Marks the truth of *p* and expresses a desire to prohibit consideration of $\neg p$ (Gutzmann et al. 2020)

Discussion: Syntax of *ko*

- As a discourse particle and marker of illocutionary meaning, it would be expected to interact with the CP layer
 - But co-occurs with elements (presumably) in the VP layer
 - *cang* (perfective)
 - *lai* (irrealis)
 - Various imperative mood markers
- Could be a deficient adverb
 - Resembles *kho/khawh*

Future Directions

- The findings here provide an overview of:
 - The distribution of discourse particle *ko*
 - The functions of discourse particle *ko*
- Future research would employ elicitations with speakers, providing them with contexts and utterance judgements
 - Identify possible alterations to the distribution
 - Identify subtle distinctions in function
 - *ko* vs. *ko lai* vs. *ko cu*, etc.

Conclusion

- This survey and investigation examined an understudied grammatical element, discourse particle *ko* in Hakha Lai
- Identified formal and functional properties of the discourse particle
- Contributes to research on:
 - Discourse particles
 - South Asian languages
 - Semantics and pragmatics of Chin languages

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Kaa lawm tuk
Thank you

I will gladly answer any questions you have

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