

LAO FINAL PARTICLES

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Lao has a wealth of final particles. They are one-syllable words which usually occur utterance finally but some may occur alone and a few combinations occur quite often. They seem to function in three ways: as question words, imperative words, or words of special emphasis. They may indicate something about the speaker's feelings or attitude or something about the relationship between two speakers.

Lao is comprised of many dialects. The discussion here is based on the speech of Vientiane, although there is variation among individuals as well as variation from one part of the city to another.

Phonologically the final particles differ somewhat from words in other grammatical categories. Although some follow expected phonological rules of Lao, most of them have variants of different tone and vowel length depending on emphasis or nuance of meaning. Usually there is a short, high variant contrasting with a long, high, rising-falling variant. In general, the long variant is sweeter, more beseeching, softer, or less abrupt. Since some final particles have tones on a pitch or contour not usually found in other Lao words, it is difficult to write them in Lao and know exactly what tone is intended. Although their meanings are sometimes elusive and they are subject to individual variation, the final particles are essential for competence in spoken Lao. In general, these particles are acceptable on all but the most formal speech occasions. Although the number of final particles is certainly not endless, I doubt if the following list is complete.

The transcription makes use of the following inventory. Vowels are doubled when long.

p	t	c	k	ʔ		l	y	u
ph	th		kh			e	ə	o
b	d					ɛ	a	ɔ
m	n	ñ	ŋ			ia	ya	ua
f	s			h				
w		j						
		l						

┘	23	low rising	sǎj 'where'
└	22	low	caj 'heart, mind'
┘	45	high rising	sáj 'fishtrap', phét 'peppery'
┘	44	mid level	sāj 'to put', phēt 'gem'
┘	21	low falling	sâj 'intestine', saât 'mat'
┘	53	high falling	sàj 'to use', saât 'nation'

The two falling tones are glottalised. Words with low tone are said with the low rising tone by most Vientiane speakers giving only five tones. When necessary here, the approximate phonetic value of the tone of a final particle will be indicated by the number scale alone and not by a diacritic.

1 bɔɔ, bɔ̃ɔ This is usually considered the "yes-no" question word rather than a final particle. It may be considered neutral as to attitude or emphasis.

lǎaw si paj bɔɔ 'Is he going?'

2 bɔɔ ʘ 454 When said with this tone, the question word signals doubt. The speaker can hardly believe it.

lǎaw si paj bɔɔ ʘ 454 'Is he going? (I doubt it.)'

3 bɔ̃? When said alone, this means something like 'Oh, I see, is that so?'. The speaker shows he has heard what has been said.

lǎaw si paj bɔ̃? '(You said) he is going?'

4 bú? This is probably a contraction of 'bɔ̃ huù' 'don't know'.

lǎaw paj sǎj bú? 'Where he went, I don't know.'

5 dáj This serves to contradict a statement or action.

lǎaw paj dáj 'He did go too!'

kin dáj '(That's for you!) Eat it!'

6 dé-dee ʘ 454 As a question particle, this means 'and...?, what

about...?, how about...?'

láaw si paj, càw dé 'He's going; how about you?'

It is also used with the meaning 'let me remind you that..., understand that...'.
 láaw bō paj dé 'He didn't go, (you know).'

7 dē~dēē, nē~nēē As a question particle, this means 'who all, what all, etc.'

míi phǎj dēē 'Who all is there?'

sāj ñǎj dēē 'What all do you put in?'

It is also used in polite requests.

khōō nàmtaan dēē 'May I have some sugar?'

át patuu háj dēē 'Please close the door.'

8 dǎ~dǎē 454 This is used with expressions of encouragement, pardon, warning and others to emphasise the sincerity of the statement, or to be sure one is heard.

soók dii dǎē 454 'Good luck, now!'

paj dǎ 'I'm going, you hear?'

9 dōók This means 'absolutely, indeed, on the contrary'.

bō mfi dōók 'There isn't any, absolutely.'

paj juū dōók 'Oh, indeed I am going!'

10 hý~hyy 454 Alone this indicates puzzlement or wonder. As a question particle, it means 'I wonder, can you tell me'.

láaw paj sǎj hý '(I wonder, do you know) where he went?'

11 kō?, kō?~kō? This is a question particle used to ask that a previous statement be repeated.

an daj kō? 'What did you say (again)?'

láaw paj sǎj kō? 'Where is it (you said) he went?'

12 kō~kōō 454 This is used to remind, turn the attention to something or bring up a previously mentioned subject.

kin khâw juū kō 'We were eating (you see)...'

lyàng pỳm kō 'Oh, about the book...'

13 lā This usually follows a "yes-no" question and demands a definite answer.

láaw paj mēēn bō lā 'He went. Am I right or not?'

càw si paj bō lā 'Well, are you going or not?'

14 mē, mē~mēē 454 This is a request particle meaning 'go ahead with it, don't hesitate'. It is used when the speaker urges someone to do something he wants to do but is afraid to or dares not to.

paj mē 'Go ahead go (I think you should)!'

15 nā This introduces a new subject or draws someone's attention.

sàn nā láaw si paj bɔɔ? *'In that case then, is he going?'*

níi nā cǎw si paj bɔɔ? *'Say, are you going?'*

16 naa ㄟ 454 This can be used to plead or beseech. It is also used when making excuses or giving explanations.

paj naa ㄟ 454, bɔɔ don naa ㄟ 454 *'Oh please come along; it won't take that long!'*

fǒn tók naa ㄟ 454, cȳŋ máa saǎ *'It was raining so of course I was late.'*

It may indicate that the speaker has not been immediately understood.

phūu nǎn naa ㄟ 454, phūu súŋ súŋ naa ㄟ 454 *'That one, the tall one, (don't you see!).'*

17 nɔ̄?~nɔ̄, nɔ̄?~nɔ̄ This is sometimes used alone to indicate agreement with what has been said, such as when something is said and one says *'Isn't it the truth!'*. As a question particle, it requests agreement.

paj nɔ̄? *'Lets' go all right?'*

mēēn nɔ̄? *'That's right, huh?'*

18 nɔ̄~nɔ̄ ㄟ 454 This means *'I wonder'* and is used when asking oneself especially after having forgotten.

láaw paj sǎj nɔ̄ ㄟ 454 *'I wonder where (he said) he was going?'*

19 sá~saa ㄟ 454 This is a request particle meaning *'let it be done or decided'*. The longer variant is often used to plead. The short variant may sound curt or impatient depending on the situation.

paj sá *'Leave!'*

'Go ahead and leave. (You don't have to stay).'

juū saa ㄟ 454 *'Oh, please stay!'*

20 thɔ̄? This is a request particle meaning *'let's...'*.

paj thɔ̄? *'Let's go!'*

21 tī This is used like No. 3 'bɔɔ?' to show one has heard what has been said.

láaw si paj tī *'He's going, (you say).'*

22 tǎ~tii ㄟ 454 This means *'surely, quite sure'* but always indicates some reservation or slight doubt or uncertainty.

paj tǎ *'Sure, let's go, why not. (In response to the question: "Shall we go?")'*

laaw si paj tǎ *'He's going I'm quite sure.'*

laaw si paj tii ㄟ 454 *'Of course he's going.'*

23 tuā~tua ㄟ 454 This is a question particle meaning *'of course?'*.

láaw si paj tuā *'He's going of course?'*

24 wá~waa ㄎ 454 This is a question particle. It usually expresses surprise or even puzzlement. Used alone in response to a previous statement it means 'oh?, is that so?'.
 bɔɔ paj wá 'Oh, aren't you going?'
 lǎaw paj sǎj wá 'Now where did he get off to?'
 khýy hɔ̀n thè waa ㄎ 454 'How could it be so hot?'

25 wə̀j~wə̀j ㄎ 53 This may indicate exuberance or impatience or annoyance. It is not used in formal speech.

cā̀ŋdaj wə̀j 'How's it buddy?'
 paj sǎj máa wə̀j 'Where the heck have you been?'
 bɔ̀ɔ paj wə̀j 'Heck with it, I'm not going.'

