The Lao dialect of the Tai language family, while exhibiting very few morphological processes, is characterized by a feature (which it probably shares with its sister dialects) which, by its form and the frequency of its appearance, cannot fail to capture the attention. In speaking of this aspect of Thai, Mary Haas\(^1\) uses, among others, the term "elaborate expressions." The absence of these expressions from the continuum of speech or from the continuity of a text will rob that speech or that text of something essentially Lao and their presence will add to such speech or such a text a flavor and/or a sparkle which identify them as Lao. They are to the language what spice is to food, what polishing or setting is to a gem. Without them the speaker or writer will make himself understood, but prove to be rather dull and pedestrian. With them, he enraths his audience with both lilt and light, making his message both meaningful and melodious.

This paper is based on a collection of over three hundred such expressions which the author has gathered. It is not exhaustive in any sense. He seeks to present this type of expression under rather loose headings. For a long time he has wrestled with the possibility of there being some underlying principle governing the construction of expressions of this kind. If there is—and there very well may be—he has failed to discover it. It may lie buried deep in the subconscious. It may be an innate part and parcel of the métier of those who seem to be able to vie—often extemporaneously—with the minstrels and troubadours of the Middle Ages, stringing together expressions of this kind in seemingly interminable production, to the unending delight of their audience.

Let the reader beware he should be content with learning to use judiciously what others have done to enrich the language, leaving to the specialists among native speakers the responsibility of making further contributions in this rather particular and technical area.

The basic structure of these expressions is a polysyllabic phrase with an equal number of syllables on either side of an imaginary vertical dividing line. Usually these are 4-syllable expressions, although in some cases short syllables do not seem to be counted; otherwise the expression would be a 3 - 2 or a 2 - 3 construction. However, in some expressions the short syllable is probably counted on one or the other side or on both sides of the dividing line. When rhyming takes place, it is often—although not always—between the syllables immediately adjacent to the dividing line, viz., between syllables 2 and 3 (in a 4-syllable construction) or between syllables 3 and 4 (in a six-syllable construction). In the often bewildering variety encountered, tone—or pitch level—does not seem to play a determinant or significant rôle.
Consider the following:

A. **FIXED EXPRESSIONS.** These are without apparent rhyme or reason, apart from semantic relationship.

1. [TO SUFFER, HAVE FEVER, TO BE ILL]

    ປ່າຍ້າຍ ປ່າຍ້າຍ

    to be sick

2. [TREASURE WEALTH SILVER GOLD/COPPER]

    ແມ່ນ້ຳແມ່ນ້ຳ

    riches

3. [EVERY MORNING DAY NIGHT]

    ຄ່າງ້າງໜ້າລະມົມ

    day in, day out

B. **ADAPTATION OF FOREIGN TERMS** with some reduplication.

1. [MINISTRE (Fr) n.s.]

    ເຊານອານາງານ

    cabinet minister

2. [CAPPIT o? (CAP)PITaine (Fr)]

    ວາບີເບີໂ thaimassage ( ວາບ ) ຕານຍັ່ງ

    captain
3. \[ \text{COMMANDANT (Fr) COMMANDO (Fr)} \]
\[ \text{командант командо} \]

Or: \[ \text{COMMANDANT (Fr) COMMANDO (Fr)} \]
\[ \text{командант командо} \]

major

C. REDUPLICATION (Tone--or pitch level--does not seem to be significant: e.g. ទិញ ទិញ / ទិញ ទិញ ចុះ ចុះ)

1. With half of components completely nonsense syllables (n.s.).

\[ \text{(n.s.) TO TAKE CARE OF} \]
\[ \text{៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ} \]
\[ \text{to take care of} \]

\[ \text{TO SUSTAIN (n.s.)} \]
\[ \text{៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ} \]
\[ \text{to sustain, to back} \]

2. With partial component a nonsense syllable.

\[ \text{DIP WATER DIP (n.s.)} \]
\[ \text{៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ} \]
\[ \text{to dip water} \]

\[ \text{THINGS USE THINGS (n.s.)} \]
\[ \text{៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ} \]
\[ \text{(tools) utensils} \]

(Both ៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ and ៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ are accepted pairs.)

3. With little-used component on one side of the line.

\[ \text{(little-used word) TAKE CARE, PAY ATTENTION} \]
\[ \text{៖ញ៖ញ ៖ញ៖ញ} \]
\[ \text{to pay attention, be careful} \]

4. With one component having only remote relationship to the rest of the expression.
TO JOIN WOOD TO JOIN HAND
a. ទិញបុៈ ទិញបុៈ
to cooperate

5. With all components meaningful
a. សុុៈ សុុៈ
be intimate, close
b. ការពេះ ការពេះ
customs, manners

TO SEE LIGHT, CLEAR TO KNOW TRUTH
c. ឬនុល្រឹងនុល្រឹង
to see clearly, understand truly

THINGS WEAR THINGS WEAR
d. កាចុះឈុៈ កាចុះឈុៈ
clothing
(Both មេឃ្រិន and មេឃ្រិន are accepted pairs, while ឈុៈ and ឈុៈ have a close semantic tie.)

KEEP FLESH PUT DOWN HEART
e. ប្រាហ៍ឫ៍ប្រាហ៍ឫ៍
to have confidence
(Both ឫ៍ and ឫ៍ are accepted pairs, while ប្រុញ and ឫ៍ have a remote semantic relationship.

MIND ONE HEART SINGLE
f. សុុៈ ឬនុល្រឹង
(to be of one mind/heart)
(ឬនុល្រឹង is an accepted pair.)

g. First and third elements identical; some semantic relationship between second and fourth, in addition to frequent, if partial, reduplication.