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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 Haas¹ 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 enthralls 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
	ເຈັບໄຂ້ ຟ່ວຍໄຂ້
	to be sick

2.

	TREASURE WEALTH SILVER GOLD/COPPER
	ຊັບສິນເງິນທອງ
	riches

3.

	EVERY MORNING DAY NIGHT
	ທຸກເຊົ້າວັນຄືນ
	day in, day out

B. ADAPTATION OF FOREIGN TERMS with some reduplication.

1.

	MINISTRE (Fr) n.s.
	ນິນັດ ນິນັດ
	cabinet minister

2.

	CAPPIT ວ? (CAP)PITAINE (Fr)
	ກັບປີເຕາະ (ກັບ) ປີເຕາ
	captain

3. [

 COMMANDANT (Fr) COMMAN(DAINT = n.s.)
ກັມນັງດັງ ກັມນັງແດງ
 Or: CAMMANDANT (Fr) COMMANDO (Fr)
ກັມນັງດັງ ກັມນັງໂດ
 major

]

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

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

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. [(n.s.) TO TAKE CARE OF
 <u>ປະຄັບ ປະຄອງ</u>
 to take care of] | b. [TO SUSTAIN (n.s.)
 <u>ສັບ ສນນ</u>
 to sustain, to back] |
|--|---|

2. With partial component a nonsense syllable.

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. [DIP WATER DIP (n.s.)
 <u>ຕັກນ້ຳ ຕັກນ</u>
 to dip water] | b. [THINGS USE THINGS (n.s.)
 <u>ເຄື່ອງໃຊ້ ຂອງ ສອບ</u>
 (tools) utensils] |
|---|---|

(Both ເຄື່ອງໃຊ້ and ເຄື່ອງຂອງ are accepted pairs.)

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

- a. [

 (little-used word) TAKE CARE, PAY ATTENTION
ລະມັດ ລະວ້າ
 to pay attention, be careful

]

4. With one component having only remote relationship to the rest of the expression.

a. [TO JOIN WOOD TO JOIN HAND
ໂຮມໄມ ໂຮມມື
to cooperate]

5. With all components meaningful

a. [INTIMATE, ALONE ROYAL SERVANT
ສົມດິດ ສົມນົມ
be intimate, close] b. [CUSTOMS RITES CUSTOMS WAY
ຮີດຄອງ ທຳມອງ
customs, manners]

c. [TO SEE LIGHT, CLEAR TO KNOW TRUTH
ເຫັນແຈ້ງຮູ້ຈິງ
to see clearly, understand truly]

d. [THINGS WEAR THINGS WEAR
ເຄື່ອງນຸ່ງ ຂອງ ຄື
clothing]

(Both ເຄື່ອງຂອງ and ເຄື່ອງນຸ່ງ
are accepted pairs, while
ນຸ່ງ and ຄື have a close
semantic tie.)

e. [KEEP FLESH PUT DOWN HEART
ໄວ້ເນື້ອວາງໃຈ
to have confidence]

(Both ໄວ້ໃຈ and ວາງໃຈ
are accepted pairs, while
ເນື້ອ and ໃຈ have a remote
semantic relationship.)

f. [MIND ONE HEART SINGLE
ຈິດໜຶ່ງໃຈດຽວ
to be of one mind/heart]

(ຈິດໃຈ is an accepted pair.)

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