A WILLY-NILLY LOOK AT LAI IDEOPHONES

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INTRODUCTION: THE SUBJECT OF STUDY

This is an investigation into an unusual type of lexeme in Lai Chin, the ideophone. Similar items in other languages have gone by other names elsewhere: “expressives” in Semai (Diffloth 1976, 1979), as well as “phonaesthetic words” (Henderson 1965), “impressifs” (Durand 1961), and “descriptive words” (various SIL linguists). They have three characteristics setting them apart as a class. First, and most salient, is their partially reduplicative phonology, e.g. hluaʔ-маʔ, phik-phek, tler-tlur, fiip-fiap. Details of their phonological shape will be given below.

Second is a semantic property: they provide vivid imagery which adds, for lack of a better term, “flavor” to an utterance. This (along with minor phonological differences) sets them apart from some superficially similar general intensifying adverbs such as hriŋ-hren and hrim-hrim. It also distinguishes them from everyday adverbs, which add less richness to verb meaning, instead fulfilling functions such as intensification (e.g., kaw ‘AFFIRMATIVE’, tuk ‘extremely’, tak-tak ‘very’, ṇaay ‘very’), aspeectual or temporal specification (e.g., deen-maan ‘about to’, len-maan ‘continually’, tsia ‘already’, tsoʔl ‘immediately’, duak ‘immediately’), or related semantic functions which, while providing important semantic detail, lack the richness of imagery associated with ideophones. An epiphenomenon of the generality of these ordinary adverbs is that they can co-occur with a wide range of verbs, while ideophones, due to their semantic specificity, are more selective with respect to their co-occurrence partners.

* I would like to thank our consultant, Ken Van-Bik, not only for all the data and other helpful information, but especially for agreeing to help me investigate this topic. The rather “fuzzy” semantic nature of ideophones makes them extremely difficult to introspect about, but Ken persevered with me.
1 The last three terms and references are taken from Diffloth 1979:49.
2 Both deen-maan and len-maan fit the phonological pattern of ideophones, but will not be treated as such, since they do not meet the semantic criterion of providing rich imagery, and since they can co-occur with a wide range of verbs.
Third, ideophones form a syntactic class of their own. While their canonical behavior is adverb-like, in that they tend to occur post-verbally, they may also appear post-nominally, which is adjective-like behavior. And in some limited syntactic contexts, they even behave nominally, appearing between circumfixed demonstratives and before adjectives.

The structure of this essay is as follows. There are two major sections. The first contains introductory information and examples. Second is the bulk of the paper, which includes examples of all the ideophones found. The first major section is divided into subsections. First I offer some canonical examples of ideophones, in an attempt to convey some of the feel of how they are used. Second is a discussion of similar phenomena in other languages. Next comes a description of the methodology employed in elicitation. Fourth is a detailed discussion of the phonological properties of Lai ideophones. This will provide us with a useful division into two major subclasses of ideophone. Fifth and finally, as justification for treating ideophones as a separate syntactic class, I will demonstrate some non-adverbial usages.

The second major section—the data—requires coming up with some form of taxonomy. The major subdivision is based on the aforementioned phonological subclasses. Within each subclass I will present examples in roughly alphabetical order by ideophone (back /t/ alphabetizes after front /t/; glottal stop comes after /z/), mentioning particulars about the scene described and pointing out any peculiarities. Finally I will propose some broad consonant-based sound-symbolic classifications.

Given this format, it is inevitable that some examples will be repeated. I have tried to minimize such cases.

**IDEOPHONES: SOME EXAMPLES**

The following convey some of the basic flavor of Lai ideophones:

(1) ʔa-vun ʔa-naal tsin̄-tseŋ

3SG.Poss-skin 3SG.S-smooth IDEO

‘Her skin is flawlessly smooth.’

(2) tii ʔa-fjaŋ vir-ver

water 3SG.S-clear IDEO

‘The water is extremely clear.’

(3) saay ʔa-naal zuaʔ-maʔ

elephant 3SG.S-slip IDEO

‘The elephant slipped (in a large, cumbersome way).’
(4) ?a-ʔoo  \(\text{3SG.POSS-voice}\)  \(\text{a-thuum}\)  \(\text{3SG.S-guttural}\)  \(\text{ideo}\)  \(\text{dek-duk}\)  \(\text{IDEO}\)

'His voice is deep and booming.'

As should be evident from the translations, the ideophones add rich semantic detail to the verb. In these canonical cases, it is hard to disentangle the semantics of the verb from the semantics of the ideophone, since most ideophones co-occur with very few verbs, sometimes only one.

SIMILAR PHENOMENA IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Tiddim Chin, closely related to Lai Chin, has something similar, which Peri Bhaskararao (1989) calls "chiming adverbs." What is most similar is the partial-replicative phonology, along with the sound-symbolic value of vowels, to be described in more detail later. The semantic function is also quite similar, in that each chiming adverb carries with it a great deal of imagery, adding semantic richness to the scene described. Indeed, my consultant, Ken Van-Bik, has almost invariably described ideophones in terms of "imagery." He would often say, for instance, "the image is of . . .".

G. Diffloth (1976, 1979) has identified "expressives" in some Mon-Khmer languages, most notably Semai. Again, we have (sometimes partial) reduplication and rich semantic detail. Also like Lai, the verb semantics and expressive semantics are often hard to separate. For instance, Diffloth's English glosses of expressives often contain the verb parenthetically, as in:

\(k^nok-k^nok\) '(walking) with a limp'

\(t^nuk-t^nuk\) '(jostling) roughly' (1979:51)

While our English system is not nearly as rich as those of Lai Chin, Tiddim Chin, or Semai, we seem to have at least a few instances of something similar, e.g., roly-poly, ticky-tack, and topsy-turvy. In addition, several of the essays on sound symbolism in Hinton, Nichols, and Ohala 1994b—in particular the essays by Aoki, Childs, Diffloth, Hamano, Langdon, and Matisoff—deal with similar-looking phenomena in a broad range of other languages spanning numerous language families. I situate the present study within this growing body of literature on sound symbolism, especially reduplicative sound symbolism.

Finally, I should point out what type of sound symbolism is at work in Lai ideophones. These are not onomatopoeia, or, to use the Japanese term, giongo; instead, they are gitaigo: they imitate an "attitude" more than a sound.
METHODOLOGY

Ken and I employed three different methodologies. The first, suggested by Ken, was to find ideophones in the Lai translation of the Bible. Ken had a strong intuition that coming up with examples would be difficult, since ideophone usage is often particular to a given situation. So we collected a number of examples from various parts of the Bible.

Second, I suggested we work from a list of ideophones prepared by David Van-Bik (Ken’s father), having Ken come up with sample sentences. This proved to be the least useful methodology. Ken found it very difficult to work from ideophone to sentence.

James Matisoff then suggested a third method: start with a semantic notion and see if Ken could think of a corresponding ideophone and example. I brainstormed for various semantic notions, such as hardness, wetness, size, loudness, etc., and, for each one, asked Ken if he could think of a corresponding ideophone and sample sentence. This was by far the most fruitful methodology, yielding a significant majority of the examples.

I am, evidently, not the only investigator to encounter difficulty in eliciting ideophones. Diffloth (1979) has written of his own difficulties in eliciting Semai expressives:

An initial attempt has been made at describing the iconic mechanisms of Semai Expressives, but it should be evident that there are serious problems in the semantic area: while some Expressives are well established in the speech community, and have become clichés of sorts, which any speaker can explain with precision, others are more personal and idiosyncratic. Many Expressives are created on the spur of the moment, and their meaning is tied to a fleeting sensation which arose on a certain occasion. This creativity relies on iconic principles shared by all speakers and insuring communication. But when such Expressives are abstracted from the particular situation where they arose, they may only have a very vague semantic content. This problem was summarised for me by an English-speaking Semai who said that these were not real words, but rather “action-words,” adding: “we just fire them.” (55-56)

Childs (1994) reports about African ideophones that:

The semantics of ideophones are indeed problematic, but it is a criterion often invoked. Ideophones often simply underscore the meaning of a verb . . . In traditional elicitation sessions, native speakers will have great difficulty in explaining the meaning of an ideophone, especially if it is
limited to occurring with one verb. They will say only that it *emphasizes*
the meaning of the verb. (188)

My own experiences working with Ken on Lai ideophones are reminiscent of
Diffloth's and Childs' difficulties. It is still uncertain to what extent Lai
speakers can create ideophones "on the fly," and how widely shared different
ideophones are, especially since we have only one native speaker with whom to
consult. Future research with a number of native Lai speakers might help clear
up some of these questions, at least for Lai ideophones.

THE PHONOLOGY

Lai ideophones fall broadly into two classes, based solely on differing
phonological patterns. For reasons that will shortly become obvious, I call
these "m-type" and "same-type". The general phonological template for m-type
is:

\[ C_1VC_2 - ma(a)C_2 \]

How we define "segment" determines what each C and V slot can or cannot
hold. For instance, although our orthography appears to treat such properties
as aspiration and lateral release as separate segments, as in *thlua?*, it is perhaps
more convenient, for present purposes at least, to think of 'thl' as one segment:
an apical stop with the properties of aspiration and lateral release. Additionally,
and for the same reason, it is easiest to treat glottalization as a consonantal
feature, similar to stop aspiration and release, in that it is best represented not as
a segment on its own. Thus, according to this approach, a word such as *thu?l*
consists of three segments: an aspirated apical stop, the vowel /u/, and a
glottalized [l]. Finally, we will treat the non-voicing of sonorants—represented
by preceding 'h' in the orthography—as a secondary feature as well. Thus, 'hl'
is one segment, not two. I do not wish to argue that this is desirable *generally*,
but am merely employing this convention because it simplifies the definition of
our template. That is, this is merely shorthand, and is not intended to be any
sort of theoretical statement about the phonology of Lai.

That said, we may now describe the template. First, the consonants. \( C_1 \)
may be any ordinary initial consonant. \( C_2 \) may be almost any ordinary final
consonant, though there are several restrictions, to be discussed below. \( V \) may
be either long or short. If it is long, it is a diphthong with second mora /a/, and
the vowel in the second syllable is also long, i.e., /aa/. If \( V \) is short, then so is
the vowel of the second syllable, i.e., it is /a/. The only exception is that if \( C_2 \)
is a glottal stop, then /a/ in the second syllable is always short, regardless of the
length of \( V \). This is true generally in Lai phonology: never is there a long
monophthongal vowel before a glottal stop.
Two interesting properties of this phonological structure bear mentioning. First is that there are many possible combinations that either do not occur or have been found to occur only rarely. Secondly, there are some combinations that occur in these ideophones that do not occur elsewhere in the language. Let’s begin with the first.

One rule that holds very well is that, when V is long (i.e., diphthongal), C₂ is hardly ever a non-glottal stop. Put differently, whenever C₂ is a stop and V is long, C₂ is a glottal stop. So far only two exceptions have been found: tsuap-maap and tsiap-maap. Conversely, if C₂ is a stop and V is short, C₂ is /k/. No instances have yet been found of C₂ as /p/ when V is short, or of /t/ regardless of the length of V. Additionally, /n/ has not yet been found in C₂ position.

Perhaps more interesting is that there are occurrences of a phonological pattern that does not appear elsewhere in the language. This is not necessarily surprising, especially where iconicity, or sound symbolism, is present, since sound symbolism can interfere with the regularity of sound change (Diffoth 1979:57). Diffloth, for instance, writes of Mon-Khmer expressives that “we seem to have two distinct but overlapping phonological systems: a Prosaic phonology and an Expressive phonology” (1979:50). While the overlap in Lai is significant, to the point that it is probably inappropriate to speak of “two systems,” there are two patterns which occur only in certain m-type ideophones: the rhymes /iay/ (liay-maay, ziay-maay) and /uaw/ (?uaw-maaw, zuaw-maaw). (Lai prosaic phonology has rhymes /iaw/ and /uay/, but not /iay/ and /uaw/.)

Turning now to the sound-symbolic aspects of Lai ideophones, we find that they occur in pairs, which I have dubbed “size alternations.” One member of each size alternation designates, roughly speaking, “bigness,” the other “smallness.” Some examples—here of m-type ideophones—should help clarify:

(5)  tsa-kay     ?a-hraam     pua?-ma?
     tiger        3SG.S-growl     IDEO
     ‘The tiger growls very loudly.’

(6)  tsa-kay     faa       ?a?-aaw     pia?-ma?
     tiger        child       3SG.S-roar     IDEO
     ‘The tiger cub roars very softly.’

Here, the “bigness” and “smallness” refer both to the animals and to the sounds they make. Later we will find that they can refer to other aspects of the scene as well.
The size alternations apply to V. Whenever V is long, the "big" version of V will be /ua/ and the "small" version will be /ia/. This is not surprising, given the now well-documented cross-linguistic usage of front vowels, especially the high front vowel /i/, to indicate smallness, and back vowels, especially the high back vowel /u/, to indicate largeness. The story is more complex, however, when V is short: there are three different vowel alternations. By far the most common is u/e, where the first of the pair is the "big" V — again, not unexpected sound-symbolically (though /i/ for the small alternant would perhaps be more canonical). The two other alternations are far less common: a/e and u/a. The former has thus far appeared only when C_1 is a bilabial stop and C_2 is glottalized /w/: ba?w-ma?w / be?w-ma?w and pa?w-ma?w / pe?w-ma?w. The latter has surfaced only when C_1 is /v/ and C_2 is velar: vuŋ-manŋ / van-ŋ-manŋ and vuk-mak / vak-mak.

An interesting property of these alternations taken as a whole is that /a/ sometimes means "big" and sometimes "small," depending on the alternation. This could throw claims of iconicity into doubt. I have two responses: (1) Assuming one knows a given pair, iconicity can be relative: /a/ conveys a greater degree of "smallness" than /u/, but less "smallness" then /e/, so that within each alternation the pairing makes iconic sense. (2) So far, as mentioned, the a/e alternation happens only before (glottalized) /w/, which is high and back. And in this phonological environment, /a/ is realized as something much closer to [o] (mid-high, back) than to [a], making "bigness" a more plausible iconic target of /a/, at least in this phonological environment. In all other instances of /w/ as C_2, V is long, and therefore diphthongal, so /i/ is present to signify smallness (as in ?aaw-maaw, the small version of ?uaw-maaw).

The other major subtype of ideophone is what I call same-type, since the initial consonant is the same for both syllables. The general template is:

\[ C_1V_1C_2 - C_1V_2C_2 \]

The same definition of "segment" is in effect here as for m-type, and similar constraints hold for C_1 and C_2. As with m-type, each V slot can be long or short, but both vowels must be of the same length, except when C_2 is a glottal stop, in which case any monophthongal vowel is short. So far only three such cases have been found, and in all cases it is V_1 that is monophthongal, and

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3 Hinton, Nichols, and Ohala summarize: “high tones, vowels with high second formants (notably /i/), and high-frequency consonants are associated with high-frequency sounds, small size, sharpness, and rapid movement; low tones, vowels with low second formants (notably /u/), and low-frequency consonants are associated with low-frequency sounds, large size, softness, and heavy, slow movements” (Hinton, Nichols, and Ohala 1994a: 10).

4 The final consonant is also the same, but this is of course also true for m-type.
therefore shortened: *he?-hua?, ve?-vua?, and ze?-zua?*. Indeed, this is the general pattern across same-type ideophones: when the vowels are long, it is V₁ than is monophthongal, while V₂ is a diphthong. (This is the opposite pattern from m-type.) To this generalization only three exceptions have been found. In two of them, *keen-kuun* and *kiin-keen*, both vowels are monophthongs, and in *fiap-fuap* both are diphthongs.

Vowel pairings—that is, which vowels can co-occur in syllables one and two—are fairly tightly constrained. For long vowels, the possible pairings (leaving aside, of course, the aforementioned exceptions) are *ii-ia* and *ee-ua*. The short vowel pairings are *i-e* and *e-u*, though one exception has been found: *hur-har*.

Same-type ideophones also come in big-small pairings. Unsurprisingly, when the vowels are long the small version is *ii-ia* and the large version is *ee-ua*; when the vowels are short, the small version is *i-e* and the large version is *e-u*.

**IDEOPHONES ARE MORE THAN ADVERBS: SOME EXAMPLES**

Before moving on to the bulk of the data, I present some cases of ideophones appearing elsewhere than after a verb, in order to justify classifying them by themselves. Most often ideophones behave like adverbs, but occasionally like adjectives or nouns. Some adjectival cases:

(7) tsuu lam ker-kur tsuu, ka-kal du? law
DEM road IDEO DEM 1SG.S-go want NEG
‘I do not want to go on this twisty-turny road.’

(8) tsuu ?an-kii phen-phuuj tsuu, ka-du? law
DEM shirt IDEO DEM 1SG.S-want NEG
‘I do not want this loose-fitting shirt.’

(9) luuX tee le?nal-ma?l khoy na-kal laay
stone small IDEO where 2SG.S-go FUT
‘Oh, rolling stone, where are you going?’

(10) ?aar-tii biil-bial zay na-tii laay
chicken-egg IDEO WH 2SG.S-do FUT
‘Oh, roly-poly egg, what’s happening?’
I say these are adjectival in nature because they occur post-nominally and modify the noun. The way in which they do this is interesting, because there is no distinctive class “adjective” in Lai: noun modifiers are really verbs, but are placed post-nominally, rather than in a verb phrase. But in this case, the ideophones cannot act as verbs if relocated to a verb phrase.

Ideophones also sometimes behave like nouns:

(11) tsuu duam-maam pii!
    DEM IDEO big
    ‘What sneakiness!’

(12) khaa pem-pum pii ni? khan ?a-ri?l hno?
    DEM IDEO big ERG DEM 3SG.S-roll ADVERS
    ‘That big round thing is rolling over him.’

(13) khaa dep-dup pii ni? khan ?a-ka-doy
    DEM IDEO big ERG DEM 3SG.S-1SG.O-chase
    ‘That big black thing is chasing me.’

(14) hii niim-niam tee ni? hin kal ?aa-tiim vee
    DEM IDEO small ERG DEM go 3SGr-prepare EXC
    ‘This small, short thing also intends to go.’

The fact that these ideophones all occur with demonstratives and are modified by adjectives argues for nominal status. They are unlike nouns, however, in that modification by tee (small) or pii (big) is required, not optional. Notice also that size information is present, and is revealed by the modifiers tee or pii.

An important and idiosyncratic constraint on nominal usages of ideophones is that the ideophone must have a certain minimum richness of imagery. This makes sense, since there is neither a verb nor another noun present to “flesh out” the image; the ideophone itself must carry all this information. For instance, heʔ-huaʔ, which is used in conjunction with the verb hak ‘be hard’, cannot stand on its own as a noun. Ken’s explanation is that there is “no image.” I have found no way to generalize about which ideophones can and cannot function as nouns. My guess is that this aspect of ideophones is arbitrary, i.e., it is neither motivated nor predictable based on phonological shape.
THE DATA: M-TYPE IDEOPHONES

What follow are pairs of m-type examples, where the first of the pair is the big version, the latter the small version. Occasionally there will be more than two examples, when more than one meaning is involved or when clarification is desirable. Some cases will involve minimal pairs, where only the ideophone varies. At other times minimal pairs are either not possible or were simply not elicited. Also, given the variety of methods used in elicitation, sentences vary widely in length and amount of context provided. Translations will in most cases not be able to convey anything approaching the full flavor of the utterance; in some cases, when English possesses an idiom or other expression which seems to approximate the vividness of the scene described by the ideophone, I have taken license to be a bit more poetic than otherwise.

On, then, to the data:

(15) ?a-tlii ba?w-ma?w
    3SG.S-run IDEO
    ‘S/he runs ploddingly.’

(16) ?a-tlii be?w-ma?w
    3SG.S-run IDEO
    ‘S/he runs shakily.’

Here actual physical size is evoked, along with typical characteristics of someone or something of the given size carrying out the given verb, in this case ‘running’. The key semantic element common to both alternants is “shaking,” but it applies to different parts of the scene: in example (15) the ground is shaking due to the weight of the runner, while in example (16) the runner’s legs are shaking, as if the runner is unstable or weak.

(17) ?a-kiir duam-maam
    3SG.S-return IDEO
    ‘S/he returned sneakily.’

(18) ?a-kiir diam-maam
    3SG.S-return IDEO
    ‘S/he returned sneakily.’

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If one looks only at the translations, these sentences appear identical. But there is a difference. Part of the “sneakiness” is a certain degree of shame attributed to the person doing the sneaking. In example (17), the amount of shame is greater than in example (18).

(19) ?a-tshim  dua?-ma?
    3SG.S-speak IDEO
    ‘S/he speaks in a rapid-fire way.’

(20) ?a-tshim  dia?-ma?
    3SG.S-speak IDEO
    ‘S/he speaks in a relaxed and rapid-fire way.’

Again we have a rather subtle difference between big and small alternants. The basic image is of a speaker talking about something, addressing issues one after another. In example (19), the “impact of the speech” (Ken’s words) is emphasized, while in (20) the focus is on the ease with which the speaker is speaking. (One can see the near futility of trying to find suitable ways of expressing these meanings in English.) So the “size” here seems to apply to the force of the speech, but that cannot explain all of the differences between dua?-ma? and dia?-ma?. There may be some idiosyncratic differences involved which do not result merely from the size alternation; this, we will see, is not uncommon.

    lake  3SG.S-deep IDEO NOM LOC 3SG.S-sink dare
    ‘S/he dared to dive into a really deep part of the lake.’

(22) ti-lii  ?a-puan  dek-mak  mii  tee  ?a?  ?a-pil  vee
    lake  3SG.S-shallow IDEO NOM small LOC 3SG.S-sink EXC
    ‘S/he dove into a really shallow part of the lake.’

Depth is the relevant semantic element in this scene (these ideophones may also be used for color depth, as in sen duk-mak ‘deep red’ and sen dek-mak ‘light/dull red’). This pair exemplifies an interesting characteristic of several pairs of m-type ideophones: big and small alternants occasionally behave like antonyms; note that verbs of opposite meaning (\textit{thuuk} ‘deep’ vs. \textit{puan} ‘shallow’) are used. This begs the deeper question of what, in general, makes two words “opposites”. What I mean here is that there is a semantic dimension which may be described with reference to a linear scale, and that the verbs and
ideophones demarcate regions at opposite ends of this scale. This is the characteristic that seems to make such antonymy possible: “big” and “small” here mean opposite ends of a linear scale.

(23) vuy  ?a-kal  du?r-ma?r
elephant  3SG.S-go  IDEO
‘The elephant is tramping along.’

(24) tso-faa ?a-kal  de?r-ma?r
calf  3SG.S-go  IDEO
‘The calf is walking shakily.’

These appear to be identical to ba?w-ma?w and be?w-ma?w: ‘shaking’ is the dominant image, and in example (23) the elephant is causing the shaking, whereas in example (24) the calf is undergoing the shaking.

(25) hliq  ?a-tam  hluar-maar  naak
thorn  3SG.S-many  IDEO  place
‘(a) place with a zillion thorns’

(26) ?a-?aan-kaa    ni?  thlum  hliar-maar-te-?in
3SG.POSS-word-mouth  ERG  sweet  IDEO-small-ADV
‘His words are ever so sweet . . .’
(Song of Solomon 5:16: ‘His speech is most sweet . . .’)

Sentence (26), it should be apparent, comes from the Bible; in such cases, I give two English versions: my own, and that of The New Oxford Annotated Bible (1971).

This is our first case in which there is no detectable semantic connection between the big and small versions. But there are still elements of meaning that do fit with the general size alternation. In (25), the amount of thorns is large. In (26), we have a diminutive usage which will appear again later in other “small” alternants; a common use of such diminutives in m-type ideophones is to provide positive aesthetic judgment on something, such as beauty or, in this case, sweetness. I call this usage “aesthetic diminutive,” and it will surface again many times. “Aesthetic” here is to be interpreted quite loosely, to mean any sort of pleasant sensory or emotional experience; later we will see examples in which the big version involves fear or intimidation, while the small version evokes lightness, happiness, or some other pleasant emotion.
(27) tī ʔ-a-tlok hluaʔ-ma?
water 3SG.S-boil IDEO
‘The water is at a rolling boil.’

(28) tī ʔ-a-tlok hliaʔ-ma?
water 3SG.S-boil IDEO
‘The water is at a rolling boil.’

Again, looking at the English can be deceptive, because it does not convey the differing images evoked. In example (27) the image is of a large amount of water and very large bubbles; example (28), in contrast, portrays a small amount of water and tiny bubbles. Another sentence with hluaʔ-ma? is the following:

(29) ʔ-aʔ-l hluaʔ-ma? mii may-phuu tshuŋ ʔa?
3SG.S-kindle IDEO REL fire-ring inside DAT
paʔy ʔ-an-sii laay
throw 3PL.S-be FUT
‘They will be thrown into the ring where the gigantic fire is building.’
(Daniel 3:11: ‘[and whoever does not fall down and worship] shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.’)

Here hluaʔ-ma? depicts an image of some fluid entity building upon itself, and having potential destructive power. In example (29) it is a fire, but it could also, for instance, be a flood. The corresponding effect of hliaʔ-ma? is to emphasize the smallness and harmlessness of the entity.

(30) ʔ-a-root hnuəʔ-ma?
3SG.S-drag IDEO
‘S/he drags [the big thing] along.’

(31) ʔ-a-root hniaʔ-ma?
3SG.S-drag IDEO
‘S/he drags [the small thing] along.’

“Dragging” is the shared meaning here. The size refers to three things: the object being dragged, the path left by the object, and the amount of effort required to carry out the dragging.
We have no counterpart sentence for *hnuag-maan*, but Ken says it would involve something like a large machine lifting a boulder. "Lifting" is the common meaning, and the size difference applies to the lifter, liftee, and effort required. An additional element is the sadness associated with *hnuag-maan*, with no corresponding emotion for *hnuag-maan*.

This pair is strange, because Ken was unable to come up with particulars as to the manner of jumping in (34); he just said that *hria?-ma?* refers to the manner of carrying and moving. Thus it is difficult to find what the shared meaning of this pair is.

This opposition is fairly straightforward: the shared meaning has to do with speed, with the big version referring to a large, slow animal (note the *pii* modifying *?aar*) and the small version to a small, fast animal. This is another case of size alternants being used with antonymous verbs.
(38) na-thil  ?a-va-zaaŋ  kiaʔ-maʔ  vee  
     2SG.POSS-things  3SG.S-DIR-light  IDEO  EXC  
    ‘Your things are light as a feather!’

Weight is the common meaning, with the big version indicating “heaviness” and the small version “lightness.” Again the relevant verbs are antonyms.

(39) tii  ?a-din  kuʔ-r-maʔr  
     water  3SG.S-drink  IDEO  
    ‘S/he drinks [a great volume of] water.’

(40) ?a-khaay  keʔ-r-maʔr  
     3SG.S-chew  IDEO  
    ‘S/he chews rhythmically.’

The semantic opposition is not so crisp here. While kuʔ-r-maʔr involves a large amount and keʔ-r-maʔr a small amount, the latter also conveys a rhythmic feel. Additionally, the former may be used only for liquids.

(41) mii  nuŋ  ?an-va-tam  luay-maay  vee  
     person  living  3PL.S-DIR-many  IDEO  EXC  
    ‘There are so many people!’

(42) tsuu  nuu  tuŋ-taay  tsuu  ?a-vaa-doʔ  liay-maay  vee  
     DEM  woman  body.shape  DEM  3SG.S-DIRr-beautiful  IDEO  EXC  
    ‘That woman’s really shapely!’

The semantics of example (41) are clear enough: the bigness in the scene is the number of people present. Example (42), however, involves the aforementioned aesthetic diminutive: the ideophone conveys a sense of pleasure. So these two ideophones are not canonical big-small alternants.

(43) luŋ  ?a-riil  luaʔ-maʔ  
     rock  3SG.S-roll  IDEO  
    ‘The rock is rolling continuously.’

(44) luŋ  ?a-riil  liaʔ-maʔ  
     rock  3SG-roll  IDEO  
    ‘The rock is rolling continuously.’
This pair conveys continuous motion. In example (43) the rock is big; in example (44) it is small. Nothing about speed is conveyed by either of these.

(45) ?a-riil
     lu?l-ma?l
     3SG.S-roll    IDEO
     'It rolls heavily and slowly.'

(46) ?a-riil
     le?l-ma?l
     3SG.S-roll    IDEO
     'It rolls lightly and slowly.'

What is common to these two ideophones is slow motion. In example (45) the stone is big, and the rolling has a heavy feel; in example (46) the stone is small and has a light feel.

(47) ?a-riin    nua?-ma?
     3SG.S-draw.line    IDEO
     'S/he draws a big line with effort.'

(48) mu-pii    ni?    ?aar-faa    ?a-tsoy    nia?-ma?
     eagle    ERG    chicken-child    3SG.S-lift    IDEO
     'The eagle easily lifted the chick.'

This pair is almost identical to hnu?a?-ma? / hnia?-ma?, in that both size of actor and amount of effort are depicted. There is also an additional meaning of sadness in example (48): the speaker is interpreting the death of the chick as a sad event.

(49) ?an-puak    pa?w-ma?w
     3PL.S-pop    IDEO
     '[A bunch of big balloons] went pop-pop-pop!'

(50) ?an-puak    pe?w-ma?w
     3PL.S-pop    IDEO
     '[The popcorn] went pop-pop-pop!'

As should be obvious from the bracketed sections of the translations, example (49) describes relatively big things popping, while in example (50) the things
popping are small. In example (50) there is an additional sense of bustling activity among the things that are popping.

(51) tsa-kay ḥa-raam pua?-ma?
tiger 3SG.S-growl IDEO
'The tiger growls loudly.'

(52) tsa-kay faa ḥa-aaw pi?-ma?
tiger child 3SG.S-roar IDEO
'The tiger cub roars very softly.'

The size alternation in these ideophones refers both to the animal and to the volume of the noise. There is another ideophone pair that is, as far as I can tell, completely synonymous, so will not be mentioned again later: puam-maam and piam-maam.

(53) tsa-kay ṣan pī pi tsum ḥa-thaw maṽ-maṽ
    tiger big big TOP 3SG.S-rise IDEO
'The big tiger arose slowly and deliberately.'

(54) tlaṽ-vaal-paa ni? tsum ḥa-naam khaa ḥa-a-ṇi? rian-maṽ
    bachelor ERG TOP 3SG.POSS-knife ABS 3SGr-draw IDEO
'The bachelor drew his knife and was ready.'

The shared meaning of this pair is what Ken terms "preparedness": both the tiger in (53) and the bachelor in (54) are carrying out their acts with "readiness". As for size, in sentence (53) we have a large animal, whereas in (54) we have a (relatively, at least) smaller animal. Quickness, too, is a factor: the action in (53) is slow; in (54) it is quick.

There is also another meaning for rian-maṽ that has no counterpart. It is exemplified in example (55):

(55) khoy-moo laay khua khaa ḫuŋ-leen-?iŋ ka-ṇaay
    somewhere Lai world TOP lonely-ADV 1SG.S-yearn
    rian-maṽ toon
    IDEO HAB
    'Lonely, I nostalgically yearn for the Lai world, somewhere.'
Here *riang-maang* conveys a certain sadness or nostalgia. Even though, as mentioned, there is no “large” counterpart with this meaning, we have already seen two other “small” alternants with a meaning of sadness: *hniaang-maang* and *nia?-ma?*. So perhaps this, which I will call “melancholic diminutive”, constitutes, along with the aesthetic diminutive, another systematic but infrequent variation on smallness in this class of ideophone.6

(56) tshim-tuu ?a-phaan rua?-ma?
teacher 3SG.S-arrive IDEO

‘The teacher took a long time to arrive.’

(57) tshim-tuu ?a-phaan ria?-ma?
teacher 3SG.S-arrive IDEO

‘The teacher took a long time to arrive.’

The difference here is in the size of the teacher: big in (56), small in (57).

(58) ?a-tshim thlua?-ma?
3SG.S-speak IDEO

‘S/he speaks unsparingly / carelessly / without restraint.’

(59) ?a-tshim thlia?-ma?
3SG.S-speak IDEO

‘S/he speaks unsparingly / carelessly / without restraint.’

Again the translations do not tell the whole story. In example (58) the emphasis is on the tremendous volume of speech produced; in example (59) the emphasis is on the ease with which the speaker produces the speech.

Example (60) illustrates another usage of *thlua?-ma?:*

(60) ?a-ma? ?a-da?w tuu raal-kaap buu khaa
3SG.S 3SG.S-make.war NOM soldier group TOP

?a-tay thlua?-ma? hnaa laay
3SG.S-conquer IDEO PL FUT

---

6 Since I have defined aesthetic diminutive as involving generally “pleasant” sensations, it may seem contradictory to say that small alternations may also be associated with unpleasant feelings. However, the type of unpleasantness is different from the type evoked by “big” alternants of aesthetic diminutives: the former is melancholy or nostalgia, while the latter is usually intimidation or fear. So the category of melancholic diminutive seems justified.
'Those groups of soldiers that made war with him, he will conquer them one by one.'

(*Daniel* 11:22: ‘Armies shall be utterly swept away before him and broken . . .’)

Here *thluaʔ?-maʔ* depicts the overwhelming force with which the conquering is carried out. If we substitute *thliaʔ?-maʔ*, the focus shifts to the ease with which the conquering is done.

(61) saay ʔa-kal tsuʔ-r-maʔr
    elephant 3SG.S-go IDEO
    ‘The elephant goes [in a particular way].’

(62) tshi-zoʔ ʔa-kal tseʔ-r-maʔr
cat 3SG.S-go IDEO
    ‘The cat goes [in a particular way].’

Ken had some difficulty defining just what property of “going” is emphasized by these two ideophones. But we can say definitively that size applies to the subject: a large one in example (61), a small one in example (62). Another usage of *tsuʔ-r-maʔr*, without a small counterpart, is given in example (63):

(63) ʔaʔ-ʔun ʔa-thuu tsuʔ-r-maʔr mii tlaʔŋ-vaal-paa khaa
    3SG-ʔʔ 3SG-stink IDEO REL bachelor TOP
    zay-ban-tuk ʔaak-nuu hmaʔn niʔ ʔan-duʔ law
    any.kind.of bachelorette even ERG 3PL.S-want NEG
    ‘No kind of young woman wants a young man who’s so incredibly sullen.’

Here the ideophone intensifies the rudeness expressed by the psycho-collocation.

(64) mii tam-pii ʔanʔ-ʔi-tshoʔn tsuap-maap mii
    person many 3PL-REFL-converse IDEO REL
    ʔoo ka-thaʔy
    sound 1SG.S-hear
    ‘I hear the sound of many people conversing loudly.’

---

7 The abstract noun *ʔun* is not glossed because it has no meaning outside of this psycho-collocation.
(65) nuu pa-hni? ?an-?ii-tshoon tsiap-maap
   woman two 3PL-REFL-converse IDEO
   ‘Two women are conversing in whispers.’

Size in this pairing refers to the volume of the sound.

(66) tso-paa ?a-kal t[hu?]-ma?l
   bull 3SG.S-go IDEO
   ‘The bull walks shakily.’

(67) tso-fa ?a-kal t[he?]l-ma?l
   calf 3SG.S-go IDEO
   ‘The calf walks shakily.’

These two are similar to ba?w-ma?w / be?w-ma?w and du?r-ma?l / de?r-ma?l in that the key semantic notion is “shakiness.” There are, however two differences: (a) here the “big” animal is itself shaking, rather than causing the ground to shake, and (b) the shakiness results from a broken leg, in both cases. Size applies to the subject.

(68) bia ?a-tshim tual-maal mii khaa
   word 3SG.S-say IDEO NOM TOP
   ‘the thing which spoke words with great effort’
   (Daniel 7:20: ‘... [the horn which had eyes] and a mouth that spoke great things ...’)

In this Biblical example the ideophone portrays the great effort with which the speaking is done. If it were tial-maal, the focus would be on ease instead of effort.

(69) ?a-zuaŋ vua?-ma?
   3SG.S-fly IDEO
   ‘[The airplane] is flying smoothly.’

(70) ?a-zuaŋ via?-ma?
   3SG.S-fly IDEO
   ‘[The airplane] is flying smoothly.’

In this pair size applies straightforwardly to the perceived size of the object: right when the plane takes off, example (69) is felicitous; once the plane has
been in the air for some time and appears to have shrunk considerably, (70) may be uttered.

(71) ?a-tsew vuk-mak mii may ka-hmu?
3SG.S-bright IDEO REL light 1SG.S-see
‘I see a light that is really bright.’

(72) ?a-tsew vak-mak mii may ka-hmu?
3SG.S-bright IDEO REL light 1SG.S-see
‘I see a light that is really bright.’

In this minimal pair the only information about size applies to the light: example (71) is good for a big light, (72) for a small light.

(73) ?a-hlo?n vuŋ-maŋ
3SG.S-throw IDEO
‘S/he threw it with great effort.’

(74) ?a-hlo?n vaŋ-maŋ
3SG.S-throw IDEO
‘S/he threw it with great ease.’

What matters in this minimal pair is both the effort and the relative size of the thrown object: example (73) works best with a small thrower and a large, heavy object; example (74) is appropriate, for instance, for describing a giant throwing a human.

(75) ruul ṇan pii ?a-kal zuaw-maaw
snake large big 3SG.S-go IDEO
‘That big, big snake is slithering along in a big way.’

(76) na-kut-zaa tsuu ?a-va-naal ziaw-maaw vee
2SG.POSS-palm TOP 3SG.S-DIR-smooth IDEO EXC
‘Your palm is so smooth!’

The opposition here is not crisp. Still, this pair fits some familiar patterns: the snake in example (75) is big, and (76) is an instance of the aesthetic diminutive.
(77) kut bor pa-khat ?a-hunj-tshuak ?ii, tsaa
hand CLF one 3SG.S-DIR-come.out and letter
?a-hun tiyal zuay-maay kaw
3SG.S-come write IDEO AFFIRM
‘A hand came out and wrote slowly, ploppingly.’
(\textit{Daniel 5:5:} ‘the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote [on the plaster of the wall . . . ]’)

(78) qaak-nuu hmeex tee ?a-\text{"jii}\text{"n} ziay-maay
bachelorette small small 3SG.S-return IDEO
‘The small, small young woman returned very slowly.’

Here is another less-than-transparent opposition. In example (77) the ideophone emphasizes that the writing is done slowly and deliberately. It is unclear what is “small” about example (78), especially since the woman is larger than the hand in (77). It is probably another case of the aesthetic diminutive.

(79) saay ?a-naal zua?-ma?
elephant 3SG.S-slip IDEO
‘The elephant slipped (in a large, cumbersome way).’

(80) ka-thoo ka-tshua? zia?-ma?
1SG.POSS-breath 1SG.S-come.out IDEO
‘I can breathe very clearly.’

The clumsiness (due to size) of the elephant, as well as its difficulty in remaining upright, is the focus in example (79); ease and unobstructedness of breathing is the focus in (80). It is not yet clear what these ideophones share.

(81) ?a-rim ?a-tshia ?ur-mar
3SG.S-smell 3SG.S-bad IDEO
‘He reeks badly.’

(82) qaak-nuu hmeex tee ni? ?a-vo?y ?er-mar
bachelorette small small ERG 3SG.S-fart IDEO
‘The very small young woman made a nasty fart.’
Size of the subject is the issue in this pair. The smells are equally bad.

(83) ?a-thaw       ?uaw-maaw  
     3SG.S-get.up     IDEO  
     'S/he gets up with difficulty.'

(84) ?a-thaw       ?iaw-maaw  
     3SG.S-get.up     IDEO  
     'S/he gets up with difficulty.'

Unlike many of the pairs we have seen that involve effort, in which the small alternate conveys relative ease with respect to the large alternate, here the sense of difficulty is shared by both members of the pair; the difference is in the size of the actor: example (83) is appropriate for, say, an elephant, while example (84) works better for human-sized or smaller animals.

(85) hญาak-tshia  ?a-vaak  ?ua?-ma?  
     baby       3SG.S-crawl     IDEO  
     'The [big, fat] baby crawls around.'

(86) hญาak-tshia  ?a-vaak  ?ia?-ma?  
     baby       3SG.S-crawl     IDEO  
     'The [small, thin] baby crawls around.'

Neither of these ideophones has to do with effort; the size of the baby is the only issue.

(87) law  ?in  ?an-tluŋ  ?u?r-ma?r  
     field   ABL    3PL.S-return     IDEO  
     'They return with commotion from the field.'

     field   ABL    3PL.S-return     IDEO  
     'They return with commotion from the field.'

In example (87) there are a lot of people returning. There is also much commotion, and a lot of crops have been harvested. In contrast, example (88) depicts a scene with fewer people, less commotion, and a smaller harvest.
THE DATA: SAME-TYPE IDEOPHONES

We now begin our investigation of same-type ideophones. Again, this is a purely phonological taxonomy, and so the analyses in this section are of the same general tenor as those of the previous section. Again I present them in roughly alphabetical order.

(89) tii ?a-noy ber-bur naak ti-vaa ?a? ka-kal laay
    water 3SG.S-muddy IDEO NOM river DAT 1SG.S-go FUT
    ‘I’m going to a river with extremely muddy water.’

(90) tii ?a-noy bir-ber naak ti-vaa ?a? ka-kal laay
    water 3SG.S-muddy IDEO NOM river DAT 1SG.S-go FUT
    ‘I’m going to a river with extremely muddy water.’

The notion of muddiness is shared by both alternants; the difference lies solely in the size of the river: in example (89) it is a large, gushing river; in example (90) it is a small babbling brook.

(91) “?aar-tii biil-bial khoy na-kal laay” tia? ?a-tii
    chicken-egg IDEO where 2SG.S-go FUT QUOT 3SG.S-say
    ‘“Chicken egg, so roly-poly, where are you going?” he said.’

No sentence was elicited for the large version, beel-bual, but Ken did note that both biil-bial and beel-bual share the notion of roundness; beel-bual can apply to something like an air balloon, which is both round and large.

(92) mii nuŋ ?an-ʔi-buut beʔr-buʔr naak ?aʔ ka-phaan
    person living 3PL-REFL-crowd IDEO NOM LOC 1SG.S-arrive
    ‘I arrived at a place where the people were packed in like sardines.’

(93) vaa ?a-hmul ?a-liŋ biʔr-beʔr mii ka-hmuʔ?
    bird 3SG.POSS-feathers 3SG.S-unkempt IDEO REL 1SG.S-see
    ‘I see a bird with unkempt feathers.’

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8 It was only towards the end of the study that it became apparent that same-type ideophones also participate in size alternations. As a result, much of the data was hastily gathered. For instance, most of the data in this section are presented as minimal pairs, gathered by working from sentences that had already been elicited for one of the alternants.
What is common to both ideophones is a sense of disorder; the difference is in size and scale: example (92) depicts a large scene with vast numbers of people; example (93) describes a small animal.

(94) ?a-ʔəo ʔa-thuum dek-duk  
3SG.POSS-voice 3SG.S-guttural IDEO
‘His voice is deep and booming.’

(95) USA ?? an-lam-ʔan-pi-pi hnaa tsuu, ?an-din-niŋ  
LOC 3PL.S-highway PL. TOP 3PL.S-straight-way
hii, ?an-dinŋ dik-dek  
DEM 3PL.S-straight IDEO
‘The highways in the USA are straight as an arrow.’

This is one of the few cases in which no size alternation is at all apparent. I speculate that dek-duk conveys the deepness of the voice and dik-dek conveys the thinness of the highways.

The following example is another instance of the aesthetic diminutive, which is why only the small version is presented here:

(96) sen-ri-paar ?a-sen dil-del nii ka-hmuʔ  
Senri-flower 3SG.S-red IDEO REL 1SG.S-see
‘I see a vividly red Senri flower.’

Flowers are, typically, aesthetically pleasing, and are described as such. If one were to substitute del-dul, the color would be equally vivid, but darker, and would conjure up feelings of fear or intimidation, rather than admiration. A synonymous pair is zel-zul and zil-zel.

(97) ?a-muy-sam tsuu ?a-muy dep-dup kaw  
3SG.POSS-features TOP 3SG.S-black IDEO AFFIRM
‘His features are deeply mysterious.’

(98) ?a-muy-sam tsuu ?a-muy dip-dep kaw  
3SG.POSS-features TOP 3SG.S-black IDEO AFFIRM
‘His features are laughable.’

Again, what we have here is not so much a difference in physical properties, but rather a difference in emotional impact: in example (97) there is a sense of
fear along with the mystery; in (98) the mystery almost ceases to exist, and the sentence borders on the humorous.

(99) ʔaʔaŋ-kii ʔaa-hruk niŋ tsuu ʔaʔaŋ-tshia feep-fuap
3SG.POSS-shirt 3SG.REFL-wear way TOP 3SG.S-bad IDEO
‘He wears his shirt so loosely and untidily.’

(100) ʔaʔaŋ-kii ʔaa-hruk niŋ tsuu ʔaʔaŋ-thaa fiap-fiap
3SG.POSS-shirt 3SG.REFL-wear way TOP 3SG.S-good IDEO
‘He wears his shirt so tightly and tidily.’

Both ideophones describe a way of wearing clothes. In both cases the clothing is thin; one would not, for instance, picture the subjects of (99) and (100) as wearing sweaters. Example (99) could be used to describe the loose-fitting clothing of hip-hop artists: the clothing, though loose and untidy, is not torn and haggard. That notion, instead, is conveyed by fiap-fiap:

(101) ʔaʔaŋ-thil ʔaʔaŋ-tet fiap-fiap mii
3SG.POSS-clothes 3SG.S-haggard IDEO REL
law-thlaw-paa na-sii moo
farmer 2SG.S-be Q
‘Are you a farmer with tattered and torn clothes?’

Recall that this is one of three exceptions to the same-type phonological pattern, since both syllables have diphthongs. It is difficult to say whether this is a ‘big’ or a ‘small’ ideophone, since it contains both types of diphthongs. At any rate, no counterpart has been found.

(102) kaʔaŋ-haa-sa-boom ʔaʔaŋ-khat fek-fuk
1SG.POSS-purse 3SG.S-full IDEO
‘My purse is stuffed to the brim.’

(103) kaʔaŋ-haa-sa-boom ʔaʔaŋ-tlew fik-fek
1SG.POSS-purse 3SG.S-shiny IDEO
‘My purse is absolutely empty.’

(Here tlew has the idiomatic meaning of ‘empty’.) This is another example of the size alternants designating opposite regions on a linear scale, and so they occur with antonymous verbs. The linear scale in this case refers to the amount of the purse’s contents. A synonymous pair is hlek-hluhk and hlik-hlek.
(104) ?um-tuu  ?a-thiam  law  fer-fur  mii
behavior  3SG.S-know/how  NEG  IDEO  REL

ñaak-nuu  ka-ñay
bachelorette  1SG.S-have
‘I’ve got a girlfriend who lacks social skills.’

(105) ?um-tuu  ?a-thiam  fir-fer  mii  ñaak-nuu
behavior  3SG.S-know/how  IDEO  REL  bachelorette
ka-ñay
1SG.S-have
‘I’ve got a girlfriend who’s really socially adept.’

This appears to be another instance of aesthetic diminutive, or something closely related: fir-fer is used to describe something pleasant, fer-fur for something unpleasant. It is also another case of opposite points on a linear scale denoting an abstract quantity, in this case the amount of social adeptness: notice that verbal antonymy is explicitly marked with the negator in example (104). A synonymous pair is tsér-tsür and tsir-tsér.

(106) na-kut  tsuu  ?a-va-lum  heek-huak  vee
2SG.POSS-hand  TOP  3SG.S-DIR-warm  IDEO  EXC
‘Your hand is so warm!’

(107) na-kut  tsuu  ?a-va-kiik  hiik-hiak  vee
2SG.POSS-hand  TOP  3SG.S-DIR-cold  IDEO  EXC
‘Your hand is so cold!’

In this pair, “size” refers to degree of warmth, though the endpoint on the warm end of the scale is cooler than “hot”; that is to say, the linear temperature scale is somewhat restricted in its range.

(108) tsuu  ka-rool-taam  heem-huam  pii  ni?
DEM  1SG.POSS-hunger  IDEO  big  ERG

?a-ka-fiar  ter
3SG.S-1SG.O-steal  cause
‘This gnawing hunger of mine has driven me to steal.’
(109) tsuu ka-rool-taam hiim-hiam tee ni?
DEM 1SG.POSS-hunger IDEO small ERG
?a-ka-fiar ter
3SG.S-1SG.O-steal cause
‘This gnawing hunger of mine has driven me to steal.’

This pair is puzzling. Ken says either could be used to describe the same situation, and that the choice of alternant has no bearing on the degree of hunger. For now this must remain a mystery.

(110) tsuu luŋ heʔ-huaʔ pii tsuu ?a-va-hak vee
DEM rock IDEO big DEM 3SG.S-DIR-hard EXC
‘This big rock is extremely hard.’

(111) tsuu luŋ hiʔ-hiaʔ tee tsuu ?a-va-hak vee
DEM rock IDEO small DEM 3SG.S-DIR-hard EXC
‘This small rock is extremely hard.’

Both ideophones convey the same degree of hardness; the size alternation applies here to actual physical size of the hard object.

(112) hliŋ niʔ ?a-ka-tshuʔn mii khaa ?a-faak heʔn-huʔn
thorn ERG 3SG.S-1SG.O-poke REL TOP 3SG.S-hurt IDEO
‘The thorn that poked me stings sharply.’

(113) hliŋ niʔ ?a-ka-tshuʔn mii khaa ?a-faak hiʔn-heʔn
thorn ERG 3SG.S-1SG.O-poke REL TOP 3SG.S-hurt IDEO
‘The thorn that poked me stings sharply.’

These ideophones both depict sharp pain. The degree of pain is the same in both cases, but what differs is the quality of the pain: with hiʔn-heʔn the pain is localized to the puncture wound; with heʔn-huʔn the pain, still sharp, resounds and throbs throughout the whole body.

(114) naʔin-tuŋ ?a-fek keeŋ-kunŋ kaw
2SG.POSS-house-post 3SG.S-sturdy IDEO AFFIRM
‘Your house post is really sturdy.’

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9 As a free verb, heʔn means ‘sting’: khuay niʔ a-ka-heʔn ‘The bee stung me.’ [KVB]
(115) naʔin-tuŋ \( ?a \)-fek law kiŋ-kem kaw
2SG.POSS-house-post 3SG.S-flimsy NEG IDEO AFFIRM
‘Your house post is really flimsy.’

These ideophones are the two remaining exceptions to the phonological pattern; both syllables have long monophthongs. Still, for these it is easy to see the size alternation: what we have is simply the short-vowel pattern with long vowels. Degree of sturdiness is the linear scale, with keŋ-kuŋ and kiŋ-kem designating opposite ends. There is also another meaning of keŋ-kuŋ, shown in example (116):

(116) mii nuŋ \( ?a \)-kiŋ keŋ-kuŋ
person living 3PL.S-sparse IDEO
‘People (here) are really sparse.’

There is no corresponding small version.

In examples (117) and (118) the degree of twistiness is the same with both ideophones; the size of the road is what differs.

(117) tsuu lam tsuu \( ?a \)-va-koy ker-kur vee
DEM road DEM 3SG.S-DIR-twisty IDEO EXC
‘This road is so twisty!’

(118) tsuu lam tsuu \( ?a \)-va-koy kir-ker vee
DEM road DEM 3SG.S-DIR-twisty IDEO EXC
‘This road is so twisty!’

Examples (119) and (120) involve a linear scale of the amount of dirt in the water.

(119) tii \( ?a \)-noy keʔr-kuʔr naak ti-vaa \( ?a \) ka-kal laay
water 3SG.S-muddy IDEO NOM river DAT 1SG.S-go FUT
‘I’m going to a river with really muddy water.’

(120) tii \( ?a \)-fiim kiʔr-keʔr naak ti-vaa \( ?a \) ka-kal laay
water 3SG.S-clear IDEO NOM river DAT 1SG.S-go FUT
‘I’m going to a river with crystal-clear water.’

This could be an aesthetic opposition as well, since clarity of water is more
likely to be thought of as aesthetically pleasing than is muddiness. Two synonymous pairs are thler-thlur / thlir-thler and ver-vur / vir-ver.

(121) sa-hŋər  ni?  fa-rəal  khaa  thaaw  lem-lum-teʔin
   wildcat  ERG  chicks  ABS  fat  IDEO-small-ADV

?a-hmuʔ  hnaa
3SG.S-see  PL
'The wildcat saw the round and plump little chicks.'

(122) sa-hŋər  ni?  fa-rəal  khaa  der  lim-lum-teʔin
   wildcat  ERG  chicks  ABS  thin  IDEO-small-ADV

?a-hmuʔ  hnaa
3SG.S-see  PL
'The wildcat saw the round and thin little chicks.'

Example (121) is more natural, because within the context of the story of which it is a part the wildcat wants to eat the chicks, probably because they are plump; example (122) was derived from (121). Regardless, there is a linear scale, one of “plumpness”. An interesting property of (121) is that a big alternant is followed by tee ‘small’ instead of pii ‘big’. This is probably allowable because, compared to the wildcat, the chicks are very small. Note also that the wildcat is the deictic center for the size judgment, which does not come across in the translation: the ideophone is part of an adverbial phrase modifying the verb ‘see’, so it depicts the manner of seeing; but it would be awkward to say, in English, “the wildcat plumply saw the chicks”. At any rate, since (a) the ideophones are understood from the perspective of the wildcat, (b) the chicks are so small in comparison, and (c) plumpness and size are independent of each other, then it seems not unreasonable that tee can follow a big alternant here.

(123) maʔ ʔin  tsuu ʔa-vaŋən  mek-muk  vee
   DEM  house  DEM  3SG.S-DIR-big  IDEO  EXC
'That house is huge.'

(124) maʔ ʔin  tsuu ʔa-hmee  mik-mek  vee
   DEM  house  DEM  3SG.S-small  IDEO  EXC
'That house is teensy-weensy.'
This is probably the most straightforward pair yet: only actual physical size is involved. There are also two synonymous pairs: *zek-zuk* / *zik-zek* and *zeer-ziar* / *ziir-ziar*.

(125) tsuu la-tshon tsuu ?a-neem neem-nuam
DEM cotton DEM 3SG.S-soft IDEO

‘This cotton is extremely soft.’

(126) tsuu la-tshon tsuu ?a-neem niim-niam
DEM cotton DEM 3SG.S-soft IDEO

‘This cotton is extremely soft.’

The degree of softness is the same for both ideophones; in example (125) there is more cotton than in example (126).

(127) na-fuŋ tsuu ?a-toy pek-puk
2SG.POSS-stick TOP 3SG.S-short IDEO

‘Your stick is really short [and fat].’

(128) na-fuŋ tsuu ?a-toy pik-pek
2SG.POSS-stick TOP 3SG.S-short IDEO

‘Your stick is really short [and thin].’

In both cases the stick is short, but there is a difference in degree of fatness, with *pek-puk* designating a short, fat stick, and *pik-pek* a short, thin stick. Thus “size” may pick out a sub-dimension of overall size, in this case “fatness.”

(129) hii ka-luu fa? pem-pum ni? hin
DEM 1SG.POSS-head pain IDEO ERG DEM

?a-ka-buay ter
3SG.S-1SG.O-confused cause

‘This throbbing headache has me confused.’

(130) hii ka-luu fa? pim-pem ni? hin
DEM 1SG.POSS-head pain IDEO ERG DEM

?a-ka-buay ter
3SG.S-1SG.O-confused cause

‘This throbbing headache has me confused.’
The quality of the pain is the same in both cases: dull and throbbing. The degree of pain, however, is different: greater in example (129) than in (130). Thus we have here another case of a rather narrow-range linear scale, where the “low” point, rather than representing absence of pain, still involves a certain degree of pain.

(131) tsuu nuu tsuu ?a-vaa-do? law per-pur vee
    DEM woman DEM 3SG.S-DIRr-beautiful NEG IDEO EXC
    ‘That woman is really ugly.’

(132) tsuu nuu tsuu ?a-vaa-do? law pir-per vee
    DEM woman DEM 3SG.S-DIRr-beautiful NEG IDEO EXC
    ‘That woman is really ugly.’

Ugliness is shared by both ideophones. But here the “size” refers to an aesthetic sub-dimension of the scene: the degree of “untidiness” that contributes to the ugliness. The scene in example (131) is of a person with no makeup and messy hair, while in example (132) the person, while still ugly, is less “messy” than her counterpart in example (131): she may have neat hair and makeup, but is still unattractive.

(133) ka-?aŋ-kii kaa-teet phek-phuk
    1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-tight IDEO
    ‘This shirt is so tight!’

(134) ka-?aŋ-kii kaa-teet phik-phek
    1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-tight IDEO
    ‘This shirt is so tight!’

Both ideophones convey tightness, but what differs is the thickness of the clothes: the shirt in example (133) is thicker than in (134). Example (133) could also be used to describe a tight-fitting sweater, but (134) could not.

(135) ma? tsa-buay hii ?a-tsha? pheap-phup kaw
    DEM table DEM 3SG.S-thick IDEO AFFIRM
    ‘That table is really thick.’

(136) ma? tsa-buay hii ?a-pan phip-phek kaw
    DEM table DEM 3SG.S-thin IDEO AFFIRM
    ‘That table is really thin.’
Size here refers to degree of thickness of the table—that is, the vertical dimension of the tabletop.

(137) tsuum-piɪ  pher-phur-piʔin  kaʔum  
have a cold  IDEO-big-ADV 1SG.S-be
'This cold of mine is really severe.' (lit., 'I exist in a severe cold')

(138) tsuum-piɪ  phir-pher-teʔin  kaʔum  
have a cold  IDEO-small-ADV 1SG.S-be
'This cold of mine is not so bad.' (lit., 'I exist in a small cold')

The size alternation here depicts differences in severity of the cold. In example (137), the sufferer is in the throes of a nasty cold, with stuffy nose, thick mucus, a lot of phlegm, etc. In contrast, in example (138) the cold is relatively mild: the mucus is relatively thin, breathing is easier, etc.

(139) kaʔanʔ-kiɪ  kaa-loŋ  phenʔ-phunğ  
1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-loose IDEO
'This shirt is very loose-fitting.'

(140) kaʔanʔ-kiɪ  kaa-loŋ  phinʔ-pheŋ  
1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-loose IDEO
'This shirt is very loose-fitting.'

This alternation is reminiscent of phek-phuk / phik-phek: the thickness of clothing is what distinguishes example (139) from example (140), with example (139) of course depicting thicker clothes.

(141) nanʔin  tsuu  ?a-va-khuu  pheʔr-phuʔr  vee  
2PL.POSS-house TOP 3SG.S-DIR-smoky IDEO EXC
'Y'all's house is so smoky!'

(142) nanʔin  tsuu  ?a-khuu  phiʔr-pheʔr  
2PL.POSS-house TOP 3SG.S-DIR-smoky IDEO
'Y'all's house is smoky [but not that smoky].'

Examples (141) and (142) differ in degree of smokiness. So we have here another example, similar to pem-pum and pim-pem, in which a linear scale has
a very limited range: the bottom end of the scale still involves enough smokiness to be worth mentioning.

   ring  IDEO  Lai  language  Lai  mountain  LOC
   ‘The resounding ringing of the Lai language in the Chin hills . . .’

I only give one alternant here because its poetic nature would likely be ruined by the big version, reey-ruaŋ. Example (143) conveys a light, happy feeling, as well as relatively high-pitched ringing; reey-ruaŋ, in contrast, evokes a deep, booming sound that conjures up feelings of fear and intimidation. Thus the size alternation here depicts two linear scales—one of volume and one of pitch—as well as an aesthetic (in the loose sense employed in this paper) difference, in this case one of emotion.

(144) tsoo-haunik  tshiŋ  kho?l  mii  ṭhu-raw  mit-faŋ
   cow-milk  inside  wash  REL  dove  eyeball
   rik-rek-te-kaw,  law  ?aay¹⁰  hnaa
   IDEO-small-AFF  similar  EMPH  PL
   ‘His eyes are so fragile, like doves washed in milk . . .’
   (Song of Solomon 5:12: ‘His eyes are like doves . . . dipped in milk . . .’)

Again I only give one version here for fear of ruining otherwise beautiful poetic language. The use of rik-rek here conveys a sense of beauty, as well as an overall pleasant feeling; rek-rak, on the other hand (followed by pii instead of tee), evokes mystery and fear. So sentence (144) is an instance of aesthetic diminutive; nothing about size, or any other linear scale, is involved.

(145) na-hmnuur  tee  ni?  sen  siir-siar?-in . . .
   2SG.POSS-lip  small  ERG  red  IDEO-ADV
   ‘Your small lips are ever-so-slightly red . . .’
   (Song of Solomon 4:3: ‘Your lips are like a scarlet thread . . .’)

This, too, is a case of aesthetic diminutive: the lips are appealing. If, instead, we use seeer-suuar, the lips will be a deeper red, one which evokes a sense of unpleasantness. My guess is that the size alternation does not apply directly to the deepness of color; instead, the emotion is primary, and the color

¹⁰ The emphatic particle ?aay appears nowadays only in poetry. It might be related to the free verb ?aay ‘cry out’. [KVB]
then takes on a shade that corresponds to the given feeling. I say this because what Ken emphasized about the difference between *siir-siar* and *seer-suər* is the different emotions they evoke, rather than any difference in color.

(146) ma? ?in tsuu ?a-va-ŋan tlekt-luk vee
DEM TOP house 3SG.S-DIR-big IDEO EXC
‘That house is huge and solid.’

(147) ma? ?in tsuu ?a-lmee llik-tlek
DEM TOP house 3SG.S-small IDEO
‘That house is tiny and solid.’

These are similar to the other ideophone pairs which designate size (*mek-muk* / *mik-mek*, *zek-zuk* / *zik-zek*, *zeer-suər* / *ziir-ziar*), except that solidity is part of the shared semantics of these two ideophones.

(148) ?a-rim ?a-tshia tler-tlur
3SG.S-smell 3SG.S-bad IDEO
‘He reeks badly.’

(149) ?a-rim ?a-ʔhaa tlir-tler
3SG.S-smell 3SG.S-bad IDEO
‘He smells nice.’

These are opposites on a linear scale of smell quality. Interestingly, *tlir-tler* can also be used with *tshia* ‘bad’; if so, then it means less bad than *tler-tlur*. Thus the small alternant of this pair can delineate different “low” points on the scale: either a low degree of “badness” within the “bad” region of the scale, or a negative degree of “badness”, actually conveying “goodness”.

(150) na-naam ?a-bil tseek-tsuak
2SG.POSS-knife 3SG.S-dull IDEO
‘Your knife is dull.’

(151) na-naam ?a-va-zum tsiik-tsiak vee
2SG.POSS-knife 3SG.S-DIR-pointed IDEO EXC
‘Your knife is so sharp!’

Again we have opposites, with the linear scale being one of “dullness”: from very dull in example (150) to not at all dull, i.e., very sharp, in example (151).
(152) ?a-nak tsek-tsuk
       3SG.S-dark IDEO
       ‘It’s really deeply dark.’

(153) ka-thiam tsik-tsek tsaŋ
       1SG.S-listen IDEO PERF
       ‘I now know it thoroughly.’

This pair does not really constitute a size alternation; the two ideophones have separate meanings. I have a guess as to why: tsik-tsek has taken on a general meaning of ‘thoroughly’; whatever more specific meaning it originally had has been lost, and so it is no longer clear what the original opposition was—if, indeed, there was one—between the meanings of tsek-tsuk and tsik-tsek. Below is another example of tsik-tsek:

(154) vaan-dap ni? tsiin tsik-tsek-?in ?a-tlaak
       heaven-dew ERG wet IDEO-ADV 3SG.S-fall
       ‘The dew fell drenchingly.’

       (Daniel 4:15: ‘[ . . . Let him be] wet with the dew of Heaven . . . ’)

Our next pair is:

(155) tsew-maaj niam tset-tsut-pi-?in ?a-diir kaw
       short IDEO-big-ADV 3SG.S-stand AFFIRM
       ‘Ceumang is so short (and fat)!’

(156) tsew-maaj niam tsit-tset-te-?in ?a-diir kaw
       short IDEO-small-ADV 3SG.S-stand AFFIRM
       ‘Ceumang is so short (and thin)!’

This is like pek-puk and pik-pek, except that it refers to people instead of things: both ideophones convey shortness, but tset-tsut additionally connotes fatness, tsit-tset thinness.

(157) ?a-haa ?a-ŋan tseŋ-tsunŋ
       3SG.POSS-tooth 3SG.S-big IDEO
       ‘His/her teeth are big (and unpleasant).’

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11 This spelling of the name “Ceumang” comes from the orthography used by David Van- Birk, Ken’s father, in his translation of the Bible into Lai.
Lai ideophones

(158) ?a-vun  ?a-naal  tsiŋ-tseŋ
3SG.POSS-skin  3SG.S-smooth  IDEO

‘Her skin is flawlessly smooth.’

The opposition is not perfect here, since information about physical size is conveyed by tseŋ-tsun but not by tsiŋ-tseŋ. What does appear to be opposed is aesthetic judgment, with sentence (157) connoting unpleasantness and sentence (158) a feeling of pleasure.

(159) lam  hlaa  tloqŋ  hmaʔ-n-niŋ  moo  tsihil-tshial
road  far  visit  let.me  blurry  IDEO

tee  laŋ  laay  pay-tii
small  visible  Lai  so.called

‘Let me visit, far away, the dimly visible so-called Lai . . .’

The ideophone in this line, taken from the Lai national anthem, conveys a sense of pleasure along with the haziness. If we were to substitute tsheli-tshual, there would then be a sense of intimidating and foreboding mystery. Thus what we have in tsihil-tshial is another case of aesthetic diminutive.

(160) tszo  ?eek  na-toʔŋ  naak  kut  tsuu
cow  feces  2SG.S-touch  REL  hand  TOP

?a-wa-hnoon  tsher-tshur  vee
3SG.S-DIR-dirty  IDEO  EXC

‘Your hand, which touched cow feces, is filthy!’

(161) na-kut  ?a-va-thiaŋ  tshir-tsher  vee!
2SG.POSS-hand  3SG.S-DIR-clean  IDEO  EXC

‘Your hand is so clean!’

The linear scale here is degree of dirtiness, with the two ideophones designating opposite ends of the scale.

(162) ?a-va-thaaw  ṭeek-ʔuak  vee
3SG.S-DIR-fat  IDEO  EXC

‘How fat it is!’
Another simple case here: the linear scale is degree of fatness.

language other many even.though heart-fragrant PURP
?a-tliŋ thiim-thiam vee
3SG.S-complete IDEO also
‘Even though there are many other languages which are completely fulfilling . . .’

Poetic language again dissuades me from substituting the “unpleasant” counterpart, in this case theem-thuam. In example (164) there is a feeling of pleasure at how fulfilling these languages are. With theem-thuam, however, there is a distinct sense of displeasure, as well as “vastness,” although it is not clear precisely what that means. This seems to be one of the problematic pairs whose semantics is especially vague.

(165) na-kut-zaa tsuu ?a-va-hraap vek-vuk vee
2SG.POSS-palm TOP 3SG.S-DIR-rough IDEO EXC
‘Your palm is so rough!’

(166) na-kut-zaa tsuu ?a-va-hraap vik-vek vee
2SG.POSS-palm TOP 3SG.S-DIR-rough IDEO EXC
‘Your palm is so rough!’

Both ideophones convey roughness; the difference is in the size of the bumps that make up the roughness: big bumps with vek-vuk, small with vik-vek. There is also a synonym for vek-vuk: hur-har, which, as mentioned earlier, is the only exception to the short-vowel alternations of same-type ideophones. The vowels /u/ and /a/, along with synonymy with vek-vuk, indicate that hur-har is probably a “big” alternant, but no “small” counterpart has yet been found.

(167) tsuu tlaŋ tsuu ?a-va-saan ?e?-vua? vee
DEM mountain DEM 3SG.S-DIR-tall IDEO EXC
‘This mountain is so towering!’
(168) tsuu   tlaaj   tsuu   ?a-va-saaq   vi?-via?   vee
DEM   mountain   DEM   3SG.S-DIR-tall   IDEOGRAPH   EXC

'This mountain is so towering!'

This is an odd pair: both convey extreme height, but differ in the extent to which the height is felt to be "overpowering" or "overwhelming," with ve?-vua? being the more overpowering of the two. Perhaps this is just another case of only a small region of a linear scale being involved.

(169) tsew-maan   saaq   zeej-zuaq-pi?-in   ?a-diir   kaw
tall   IDEOGRAPH-big-ADV   3SG.S-stand   AFFIRM

'Ceumang looks really tall standing (there)!'

(170) tsew-maan   niam   ziiq-zian-te?-in   ?a-diir   kaw
short   IDEOGRAPH-small-ADV   3SG.S-stand   AFFIRM

'Ceumang looks really short standing (there)!

This is a straightforward linear-scale opposition, in this case of degree of tallness.

and   2SG.POSS-face   LOC   TOP   3SG.S-stand   IDEOGRAPH   AFFIRM

and   look.at   when   that   fearsome   big   3SG.S-be

'And, it stood so tall in front of you, and when you looked at it it was fearsome.'

(Daniel 2:31: 'You saw, [O king,] and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.')

(172) ?a-sam   ker   hmaa   ni?   nak   ziiq-zeej?-in
3SG.POSS-hair   curl   PL   ERG   black   IDEOGRAPH-ADV

'The curls of his hair, so shiny black . . .

(Song of Solomon 5:11: ' . . . his locks are wavy, black as a raven.')

Both of these examples come from the Bible, and there is no clear opposition, other than the now-familiar aesthetic one: example (171) conjures up
unpleasant emotions, in contrast to (172). What these two ideophones share, semantically, is unclear, since no other examples have yet been elicited.

(173) na-fun /tsuu / ?a-saaw / ze?-zua?
2SG.POSS-stick TOP 3SG.S-long IDEO
‘Your stick is long (and fat).’

(174) na-fun /tsuu / ?a-saaw / zi?-zia?
2SG.POSS-stick TOP 3SG.S-long IDEO
‘Your stick is long (and thin).’

This pair is the “long” counterpart of *pek-puk / pik-pek*: instead of sharing “shortness”, these two share “longness”, and the size alternation indicates degree of fatness.

**SIZE ALTERNATIONS: A SUMMARY**

Having looked at all this data, what overall statements can we make about the size alternations? I count at least eight different aspects of a scene that “size” can refer to:

1. Actual physical size.
2. Metaphorical “size” of some aspect of the scene, such as the degree of shame in *duam-maam* and *diam-maam*.
3. Some sub-dimension of physical size, such as “fatness” in *pek-puk / pik-pek* and *ze?-zua? / zi?-zia?*, or thickness of clothing in *phek-phuk / phik-phek* and *pheŋ-phuŋ / phiŋ-pheŋ*.
4. Opposite ends of a linear scale, in which case antonymous verbs are used.
5. A small section of a linear scale, such that the small and big versions do not convey opposites: *heek-huak* and *hiik-hiak* encompass the heat scale from warm to cold, not hot to cold; *phe?r-phu?r* means ‘really smoky’, and *phi?r-phe?r* means ‘sort of smoky’, not ‘not at all smoky’.
6. Aesthetic judgment, with small versions generally connoting positive aesthetic judgment.
7. Emotional effect, with small versions generally connoting pleasant feelings.
8. An aesthetic or emotional sub-dimension, such as the differing degrees of untidiness, within a scene of
“ugliness”, conveyed by per-pur and pir-per. Both mean “ugly”, but the former conveys more “untidiness” than the latter.

Any given pair connotes one or more of these differences. For instance, vua?-ma? and via?-ma? distinguish only perceived size of an object, while hnuu?-ma? and hnia?-ma? distinguish size of object, size of “result”, and amount of effort.

A FEW MORE IDEOPHONES: ONES FOR WHICH NO COUNTERPARTS WERE FOUND

There are seven ideophones—all of them m-type—for which opposite-size counterparts have not yet been found. I present them here in alphabetical order. The meanings of the ideophones should be clear from the translations.

(175) a-thak bia?-ma? mii thak-ba-ree ka?-ay ñam
3SG.S-spicy IDEO REL hot.pepper 1SG.S-eat dare
‘I dare to eat super-spicy peppers.’

(176) sa-khii ni? a-faa tee hnuuk a-di?n mia?-ma?
der ERG 3SG.POSS-child small breast 3SG.S-feed IDEO
‘The deer tenderly fed milk to its calf.’

(177) ka-poo a-khim puar-maar12
1SG.POSS-stomach 3SG.S-full IDEO
‘I’m stuffed!’

(178) mii ni? liam laay a-zaal thli-ziil
sun ERG disappear FUT 3SG.REFL-prepare breeze
ni? hraaŋ siar-maar . . .
ERG blow IDEO
‘The sun prepares itself to set, a breeze gently blows . . .’
(Song of Solomon 2:17: ‘Until the day breathes and the shadows flee . . .’)

(179) rua? a-suur tshial-maal
rain 3SG.S-rain IDEO
‘It’s raining softly.’

12 As a free verb, puar means ‘to swell’. [KVB]
(180) mii nun ?an-?ii-buut tuŋ-maŋ naak ?a? ka-phaan
person living 3PL-REFL-crowd IDEO NOM LOC 1SG.S-arrive
‘I arrived at a place where the people have flooded in from all
directions.’

(181) ?aar-tii ka-?ay mii ni? ?a-ka-ðhoon ter vuar-maar
chicken-egg 1SG.S-eat REL ERG 3SG.S-1SG.O-strong cause IDEO
‘The eggs that I eat make me very strong.’

SOME IDEOPHONES WITH ODD SEMANTICS

Some words which follow the phonological pattern of ideophones are to
varying degrees not like other ideophones because their meaning is so general.
For instance, tsiam-maam has come to mean ‘with effort’ or ‘forcefully’, and
can be used with a number of different verbs:

(182) ?an-nuua ni? tsun ?a-von-vo?y tsiam-maam ?ii ...
3PL.POSS-mother ERG TOP 3SG.S-DIR-fart IDEO and
‘Their mother farted forcefully and . . .’

wildcat TOP 3SG.S-DIR-return and road big LOC TOP
khua-sik ni? khan ?a-von-tsheem tsiam-maam ?ii ...
cold.season ERG TOP 3SG.S-DIR-blow IDEO and
‘The wildcat was returning, and on the road the cold season suddenly
blew on him forcefully and . . .’

chicken-egg ERG TOP 3SG.REFL-warm 3SG.REFL-warm
and 3SG.S-DIR-explode ADVERB IDEO and
‘The chicken egg warmed itself and warmed itself, and suddenly
exploded forcefully on him and . . .’

(185) hŋeʔ-te-sen ni? khan ?a-rak-se? tsiam-maam ?ii ...
red.ant ERG TOP 3SG.S-DIR-bite IDEO and
‘The red ant bit (the wildcat) with great effort and . . .’
          wall      DAT 3SG.S-DIRr-lean TOP    when   trap
         ni?     ?a-rak-ka?            tsiam-maam
         ERG     3SG.S-DIR-shoot       IDEO

‘When (the wildcat) leaned against the wall, the trap shot (him)
forcefully.’

There is of course no strict dividing line between ideophone and non-
ideophone; but to the extent that tsiam-maam can be used with a broad range of
verbs, and is not limited to a very particular kind of scene, it seems fair to
question its ideophonic status.

Another way to tell would be to run syntactic tests. Can it occur post-
nominally as well as post-verbally? Does it ever behave like a noun? If the
answers are yes, the results argue for inclusion of tsiam-maam in the ideophone
class. However, these tests have not yet been carried out for tsiam-maam.

Three other words which obey the phonological principles of ideophones
but which clearly have been reduced to general adverbial status are deey-maaj
‘continually’, lej-maaj ‘always’, and tsua?-ma? ‘always’. These only appear
post-verbally and have very general meanings. There are also three general
intensifiers which do not quite fit the phonological pattern: hriŋ-hren and hrim-
hrim, and vee-vuu.

NON-VOCALIC SOUND SYMBOLISM

So far all the sound-symbolic aspects discussed with respect to Lai
ideophones have been vocalic: it is vowel alternations which determine “size,”
with, generally, /i/ and /ε/ meaning “small,” and /u/ meaning “large”—though
there are complications, which have already been discussed. A question
remains: do consonants ever yield sound-symbolic clues in Lai ideophones? If
so, it is significantly less systematic than vocalic sound symbolism, and so I
remain hesitant to speculate. Still, three generalizations seem to suggest
themselves:

1. Ideophones connoting “roundness” contain bilabials and /l/:
   beel-bual, biil-bial, lem-lum, lim-lem, pem-pum, pem-pem.
2. Ideophones connoting “gentleness” or “softness” involve
   liquid finals or nasal initials: mia?-ma?, nia?-ma?, neem-
   nuam, niim-niam, siar-maar, tshial-maal.
3. /k/-final ideophones often connote smallness and/or shortness: *mik-mek, phik-phek, pik-pek, tlik-tlek, tiik-tiak, zik-zek*. But of course these are all vocalically “small” ideophones, so it is hard to sort out. For two of these (*phik-phek, pik-pek*), even the big version connotes smallness, at least in one physical sub-dimension. But for the others, the big version gives a true size opposite. So either vocalic sound symbolism “overrides” the consonantal sound symbolism, or the latter simply does not exist here.

Of the three generalizations, I am most comfortable with (1), especially because of similar sound symbolism in English (fully acknowledging that this alone is far from sufficient evidence to support a claim): *roly-poly, plump*, and *blimp* all have /l/ and at least one bilabial.

**A LOOSE END AND A BRIEF CONCLUSION**

In several cases an ideophone is clearly derived from a free verb: *neem* ‘soft’ goes with *neem-nuam* and *niim-niam*; *kiiŋ* ‘sparse’ goes with *keen-kuuŋ*; *heʔn* ‘to sting’ gives *heʔn-huʔn*; *puar* ‘to swell’ gives *puar-maar*.

Although this paper has explored a large number of ideophones—somewhere around 170—there are probably many, many more, especially since there are semantic fields, such as taste, that have so far been virtually untouched.

In the meantime, I hope that this essay contributes something to the broadening field of the study of sound symbolism in the world’s languages.
REFERENCES


