

A WILLY-NILLY LOOK AT LAI IDEOPHONES*

Jason D. Patent

University of California, Berkeley

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).¹ They have three characteristics setting them apart as a class. First, and most salient, is their partially reduplicative phonology, e.g. *hlua?-ma?*, *phik-phek*, *tlar-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 *hriɣ-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’, *ɲaay* ‘very’), aspectual or temporal specification (e.g., *deen-maɲ* ‘about to’, *leɲ-maɲ* ‘continually’,² *tsia* ‘already’, *tʃhoʔl* ‘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-maɲ* and *leɲ-maɲ* 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 | tsiŋ-tseŋ |
| | 3SG.POSS-skin | 3SG.S-smooth | IDEO |
| | ‘Her skin is flawlessly smooth.’ | | |

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|-------------|---------|
| (2) | tii | ʔa-fiaŋ | 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) | ʔa-ʔoo | ʔa-thuum | dek-duk |
| | 3SG.POSS-voice | 3SG.S-guttural | 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-reduplicative 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:

kʰnək-kʰnək '(walking) with a limp'

tɕuk-tɕək '(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., *rolly-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 *thuʔ* 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 (Diffloth 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) | t _{sa} -kay | ?a-hraam | pua?-ma? |
| | tiger | 3SG.S-growl | IDEO |
| | 'The tiger growls very loudly.' | | |
| | | | |
| (6) | t _{sa} -kay | faa | ?a-?aaw |
| | 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.³ 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 C₁ is a bilabial stop and C₂ is glottalized /w/: *baʔw-maʔw* / *beʔw-maʔw* and *paʔw-maʔw* / *peʔw-maʔw*. The latter has surfaced only when C₁ is /v/ and C₂ is velar: *vun-man* / *van-man* 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” than /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 C₂, V is long, and therefore diphthongal, so /i/ is present to signify smallness (as in *ʔaw-maaw*, the small version of *ʔaw-maaw*).

The other major subtype of ideophone is what I call same-type, since the initial consonant is the same for both syllables.⁴ 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 C₁ and C₂. As with *m*-type, each V slot can be long or short, but both vowels must be of the same length, except when C₂ 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 V₁ that is monophthongal, and

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: *heʔ-huaʔ*, *veʔ-vuaʔ*, and *zeʔ-zuaʔ*. Indeed, this is the general pattern across same-type ideophones: when the vowels are long, it is V_1 than is monophthongal, while V_2 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-kuuŋ* and *kiŋ-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 duʔ law
 DEM road IDEO DEM 1SG.S-go want NEG
 'I do not want to go on this twisty-turny road.'

- (8) tsuu ʔaŋ-kii phen-phuŋ tsuu, ka-duʔ law
 DEM shirt IDEO DEM 1SG.S-want NEG
 'I do not want this loose-fitting shirt.'

- (9) luŋ tee leʔl-maʔl khoy na-kal laay
 stone small IDEO where 2SG.S-go FUT
 'Oh, rolling stone, where are you going?'

- (10) ʔaar-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, *he?-hua?*, 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;⁵ 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.’

⁵ Childs (1994) lists inexact translation as a defining property of African ideophones (178).

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.

- (21) ti-lii ?a-thuuk duk-mak mii ?a? ?a-pil ŋam
 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 (*thuuk* ‘deep’ vs. *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 ʔa-kal duʔr-maʔr
elephant 3SG.S-go IDEO
‘The elephant is tramping along.’

- (24) tso-faa ʔa-kal deʔr-maʔr
calf 3SG.S-go IDEO
‘The calf is walking shakily.’

These appear to be identical to *baʔw-maʔw* and *beʔw-maʔw*: ‘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) hlij ʔa-tam hluar-maar naak
thorn 3SG.S-many IDEO place
‘(a) place with a zillion thorns’

- (26) ʔa-ʔaan-kaa niʔ thlum hliar-maar-te-ʔin
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) tii ?a-tlok hlua?-ma?
 water 3SG.S-boil IDEO
 ‘The water is at a rolling boil.’

- (28) tii ?a-tlok hlia?-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 *hlua?-ma?* is the following:

- (29) ?a-?a?l hlua?-ma? mii may-phuu tshun ?a?
 3SG.S-kindle IDEO REL fire-ring inside DAT

 pa?y ?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 *hlua?-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 *hlia?-ma?* is to emphasize the smallness and harmlessness of the entity.

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

 (31) ?a-root hnia?-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.

- (32) ?a-nuu ni? ?a-baby ?a-tsoy hnian-maan
 3SG.S-mother ERG 3SG.POSS-baby 3SG.S-lift IDEO
 ‘The mother lifted her baby with sadness.’

We have no counterpart sentence for *hnuaŋ-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 *hnian-maan*, with no corresponding emotion for *hnuaŋ-maan*.

- (33) ?a-pil hrua?-ma?
 3SG.S-sink IDEO
 ‘S/he sinks slowly.’

- (34) kangaroo ni? ?a-faa ?a-zuan pii hria?-ma?
 kangaroo ERG 3SG.POSS-child 3SG.S-jump COM IDEO
 ‘The kangaroo jumped with her baby.’

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.

- (35) nuar khua?-ma?-?in ?a-tlii mii ?aar pii ka-hmu?
 slow IDEO-ADV 3SG.S-run REL chicken big 1SG.S-see
 ‘I saw a big chicken that was running very slowly.’

- (36) ranj khia?-ma?-?in ?a-tlii mii ?aar ka-hmu?
 fast IDEO-ADV 3SG.S-run REL chicken 1SG.S-see
 ‘I saw a chicken that was running very fast.’

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.

- (37) na-thil ?a-va-rit kua?-ma? vee
 2SG.POSS-things 3SG.S-DIR-heavy IDEO EXC
 ‘Your things are so heavy!’

- (38) *na-thil* *ʔa-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* *ʔa-din* *kuʔr-maʔr*
 water 3SG.S-drink IDEO
 ‘S/he drinks [a great volume of] water.’

- (40) *ʔa-khaay* *keʔr-maʔr*
 3SG.S-chew IDEO
 ‘S/he chews rhythmically.’

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

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

- (42) *tsuu* *nuu* *tun-taay* *tsuu* *ʔa-vaa-doʔ* *liay-maay* *vee*
 DEM woman body.shape DEM 3SG.S-DIR-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* *ʔa-riil* *luaʔ-maʔ*
 rock 3SG.S-roll IDEO
 ‘The rock is rolling continuously.’

- (44) *luŋ* *ʔa-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 *hnua?-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 ?a-hraam pua?-ma?
 tiger 3SG.S-growl IDEO
 'The tiger growls loudly.'

- (52) tsa-kay faa ?a-?aaw pia?-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 ?an pii tsuu ?a-thaw ruan-maan
 tiger big big TOP 3SG.S-rise IDEO
 'The big tiger arose slowly and deliberately.'

- (54) tlaan-vaal-paa ni? tsun ?a-naam khaa ?aa-zu? rian-maan
 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-maan* that has no counterpart. It is exemplified in example (55):

- (55) khoy-moo laay khua khaa lun-leen-?in ka-nyaay
 somewhere Lai world TOP lonely-ADV 1SG.S-yearn

 rian-maan toon
 IDEO HAB

'Lonely, I nostalgically yearn for the Lai world, somewhere.'

Here *riaŋ-maŋ* 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: *hniaŋ-maŋ* 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 *thlua?-ma?* depicts the overwhelming force with which the conquering is carried out. If we substitute *thlia?-ma?*, the focus shifts to the ease with which the conquering is done.

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

- (62) tshi-zo? ?a-kal tse?r-ma?r
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 *tsu?r-ma?r*, without a small counterpart, is given in example (63):

- (63) ?a-?un ?a-thuu tsu?r-ma?r mii tlaaj-vaal-paa khaa
3SG-?7 3SG-stink IDEO REL bachelor TOP

zay-ban-tuk gaak-nuu hma?n ni? ?an-du? 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 ?an-?ii-tsho?n tsuap-maap mii
person many 3PL-REFL-converse IDEO REL

?oo ka-tha?y
sound 1SG.S-hear
‘I hear the sound of many people conversing loudly.’

⁷ The abstract noun *?un* 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 [thu?l-ma?l
 bull 3SG.S-go IDEO
 ‘The bull walks shakily.’

- (67) tso-fa ?a-kal [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?r* / *de?r-ma?r* 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 [ual-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) | ʔa-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) | ʔa-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) | ʔa-hloʔn | vuŋ-manj |
| | 3SG.S-throw | IDEO |
- 'S/he threw it with great effort.'

- | | | |
|------|-------------|----------|
| (74) | ʔa-hloʔn | vaŋ-manj |
| | 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 | ŋan | pii | ʔa-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 | ʔa-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-huŋ-tshuak ?ii, tsaa
 hand CLF one 3SG.S-DIR-come.out and letter

?a-hun tʃial zuay-maay kaw
 3SG.S-come write IDEO AFFIRM

‘A hand came out and wrote slowly, ploddingly.’

(*Daniel* 5:5: ‘the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote [on the plaster of the wall . . .]’)

- (78) ŋaak-nuu hmee tee ?a-tʃiin zia-y-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) ŋaak-nuu hmee 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) ʔa-thaw ʔuaw-maaw
 3SG.S-get.up IDEO
 ‘S/he gets up with difficulty.’

- (84) ʔa-thaw ʔiaw-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 alternant conveys relative ease with respect to the large alternant, 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) hɲaak-tshia ʔa-vaak ʔuaʔ-maʔ
 baby 3SG.S-crawl IDEO
 ‘The [big, fat] baby crawls around.’

- (86) hɲaak-tshia ʔa-vaak ʔiaʔ-maʔ
 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 ʔin ʔan-tluŋ ʔuʔr-maʔr
 field ABL 3PL.S-return IDEO
 ‘They return with commotion from the field.’

- (88) law ʔin ʔan-tluŋ ʔeʔr-maʔr
 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 IDEOPHONES⁸

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 ʔa-noy ber-bur naak ti-vaa ʔaʔ 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 ʔa-noy bir-ber naak ti-vaa ʔaʔ 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) *ʔaar-tii biil-bial khoy na-kal laay" tiaʔ ʔa-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 ʔan-ʔii-buut beʔr-buʔr naak ʔaʔ 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 ʔa-hmul ʔa-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.'

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-?oo ?a-thuum dek-duk
 3SG.POSS-voice 3SG.S-guttural IDEO
 ‘His voice is deep and booming.’

- (95) USA ?ii ?an-lam-ŋan-pi-pii hnaa tsuu, ?an-din-nin
 LOC 3PL.S-highway PL TOP 3PL.S-straight-way
 hii, ?an-din 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 mii ka-hmu?
 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) ?a-ʔaŋ-kii ʔaa-hruk niŋ tsuu ʔa-tshia feep-fuap
 3SG.POSS-shirt 3SG.REFL-wear way TOP 3SG.S-bad IDEO
 ‘He wears his shirt so loosely and untidily.’
- (100) ?a-ʔaŋ-kii ʔaa-hruk niŋ tsuu ʔa-ʔhaa fiip-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-fuap*:

- (101) ?a-thil ʔa-tet fiap-fuap 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) ka-phaay-sa-boom ʔa-khat fek-fuk
 1SG.POSS-purse 3SG.S-full IDEO
 ‘My purse is stuffed to the brim.’
- (103) ka-phaay-sa-boom ʔa-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-hluk* and *hlik-hlek*.

- (104) ?um-tuu ?a-thiam law fer-fur mii
 behavior 3SG.S-know.how NEG IDEO REL
 ?aak-nuu ka-ŋay
 bachelorette 1SG.S-have
 'I've got a girlfriend who lacks social skills.'
- (105) ?um-tuu ?a-thiam fir-fer mii ?aak-nuu
 behavior 3SG.S-know.how IDEO REL bachelorette
 ka-ŋay
 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 *tser-tsur* and *tsir-tser*.

- (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 lunj he?-hua? pii tsuu ?a-va-hak vee
 DEM rock IDEO big DEM 3SG.S-DIR-hard EXC
 ‘This big rock is extremely hard.’
- (111) tsuu lunj hi?-hia? 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) hlij ni? ?a-ka-tshu?n mii khaa ?a-faak he?n-hu?n⁹
 thorn ERG 3SG.S-1SG.O-poke REL TOP 3SG.S-hurt IDEO
 ‘The thorn that poked me stings sharply.’
- (113) hlij ni? ?a-ka-tshu?n mii khaa ?a-faak hi?n-he?n
 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 *hi?n-he?n* the pain is localized to the puncture wound; with *he?n-hu?n* the pain, still sharp, resounds and throbs throughout the whole body.

- (114) na-?in-tuj ?a-fek keej-kuuj kaw
 2SG.POSS-house-post 3SG.S-sturdy IDEO AFFIRM
 ‘Your house post is really sturdy.’

⁹ As a free verb, *he?n* means ‘sting’: *khuay ni? a-ka-he?n* ‘The bee stung me.’ [KVB]

- (115) na-ʔin-tuŋ ʔa-fek law kiŋ-keŋ 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-kuuŋ* and *kiŋ-keŋ* designating opposite ends. There is also another meaning of *keŋ-kuuŋ*, shown in example (116):

- (116) miŋ nuŋ ʔan-kiŋ keŋ-kuuŋ
 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 ʔa-va-koy ker-kur vee
 DEM road DEM 3SG.S-DIR-twisty IDEO EXC
 ‘This road is so twisty!’

- (118) tsuu lam tsuu ʔa-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) tiŋ ʔa-noy keʔr-kuʔr naak ti-vaa ʔaʔ 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) tiŋ ʔa-fiim kiʔr-keʔr naak ti-vaa ʔaʔ 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-hɣar niʔ fa-rual khaa thaaw lem-lum-te-ʔin
wildcat ERG chicks ABS fat IDEO-small-ADV

ʔa-hmuʔ hnaa

3SG.S-see PL

‘The wildcat saw the round and plump little chicks.’

- (122) sa-hɣar niʔ fa-rual khaa der lim-lem-te-ʔin
wildcat ERG chicks ABS thin IDEO-small-ADV

ʔa-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 *pīi* ‘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-va-ŋan 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-zuar* / *ziir-ziar*.

- | | | | | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|----------|------|------------|-----------|
| (125) | tsuu | la-tshon | tsuu | ʔa-neem | neem-nuam |
| | DEM | cotton | DEM | 3SG.S-soft | IDEO |
| | 'This cotton is extremely soft.' | | | | |

- | | | | | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|----------|------|------------|-----------|
| (126) | tsuu | la-tshon | tsuu | ʔa-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 | ʔa-toy | pek-puk |
| | 2SG.POSS-stick | TOP | 3SG.S-short | IDEO |
| | 'Your stick is really short [and fat].' | | | |

- | | | | | |
|-------|--|------|-------------|---------|
| (128) | na-fuŋ | tsuu | ʔa-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 |
| | ʔa-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 |
| | ʔa-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-ʔaŋ-kii kaa-teet phek-phuk
 1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-tight IDEO
 ‘This shirt is so tight!’

- (134) ka-ʔaŋ-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) maʔ tsa-buay hii ?a-tshaʔ phep-phup kaw
 DEM table DEM 3SG.S-thick IDEO AFFIRM
 ‘That table is really thick.’

- (136) maʔ tsa-buay hii ?a-pan phip-phep 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-pii* *pher-phur-pi-ʔin* *ka-ʔum*
 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-pii* *phir-pher-te-ʔin* *ka-ʔum*
 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) *ka-ʔaŋ-kii* *kaa-loŋ* *phen-phuŋ*
 1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-loose IDEO
 ‘This shirt is very loose-fitting.’

- (140) *ka-ʔaŋ-kii* *kaa-loŋ* *phiŋ-phen*
 1SG.POSS-shirt 1SG.REFL-loose IDEO
 ‘This shirt is very loose-fitting.’

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

- (141) *nan-ʔin* *tsuu* *ʔa-va-khuu* *pheʔr-phuʔr* *vee*
 2PL.POSS-house TOP 3SG.S-DIR-smoky IDEO EXC
 ‘Y’all’s house is so smoky!’

- (142) *nan-ʔin* *tsuu* *ʔa-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.

- (143) khiŋ riŋ-riaŋ laay hoʔl laay tlaaŋ ʔa? . . .
 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, *reen-ruaŋ*. Example (143) conveys a light, happy feeling, as well as relatively high-pitched ringing; *reen-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-hnuk tshuŋ khoʔl mii [thu-raw mit-faŋ
 cow-milk inside wash REL dove eyeball
 rik-rek-te-kaw, law ʔaay¹⁰ 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-ruk*, on the other hand (followed by *pīi* 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-hmuur tee niʔ sen siir-siar-ʔin . . .
 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 *seer-suar*, 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 *ʔaay* appears nowadays only in poetry. It might be related to the free verb *ʔaay* ‘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-suar* is the different emotions they evoke, rather than any difference in color.

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

- (147) ma? ?in tsuu ?a-hmee tlik-tlek
 DEM house TOP 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-zuar* / *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-ṭhaa 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 tsan
 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-maanj niam tset-tsut-pi-?in ?a-diir kaw
 short IDEO-big-ADV 3SG.S-stand AFFIRM
 ‘Ceumang is so short (and fat)!’¹¹
- (156) tsew-maanj 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-tsuŋ
 3SG.POSS-tooth 3SG.S-big IDEO
 ‘His/her teeth are big (and unpleasant).’

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

- The opposition is not perfect here, since information about physical size is conveyed by *tseŋ-tsuŋ* 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.

- 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 *tsheel-tshual*, there would then be a sense of intimidating and foreboding mystery. Thus what we have in *tshuil-tshial* is another case of aesthetic diminutive.

- (161) na-kut ?a-va-thian 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 | teek-ɬuak | vee |
| 3SG.S-DIR-fat | IDEO | EXC |
| 'How fat it is!' | | |

- (163) ?a-va-der tʰiik-tʰiak vee
 3SG.S-DIR-thin IDEO EXC
 ‘How thin it is!’

Another simple case here: the linear scale is degree of fatness.

- (164) hoʔl daŋ tam hmaʔn-seʔ luŋ-hmuʔy ʔook
 language other many even.though heart-fragrant PURP
- ʔa-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 ʔa-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 ʔa-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 tlaaŋ tsuu ʔa-va-saaŋ veʔ-vuaʔ vee
 DEM mountain DEM 3SG.S-DIR-tall IDEO EXC
 ‘This mountain is so towering!’

- (168) tsuu tlaaŋ tsuu ʔa-va-saaŋ viʔ-viaʔ vee
 DEM mountain DEM 3SG.S-DIR-tall IDEO 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 *veʔ-vuaʔ* 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-maaŋ saaŋ zeeŋ-zuaŋ-pi-ʔin ʔa-diir kaw
 tall IDEO-big-ADV 3SG.S-stand AFFIRM
 'Ceumang looks really tall standing (there)!'

- (170) tsew-maaŋ niam ziiŋ-ziaŋ-te-ʔin ʔa-diir kaw
 short IDEO-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.

- (171) ʔii, na-hmaay ʔaʔ tsun ʔa-diir zeŋ-zuŋ kaw
 and 2SG.POSS-face LOC TOP 3SG.S-stand IDEO AFFIRM
 ʔii, zaʔw ʔaʔ khin ʔiʔ-nuŋ pii ʔa-sii
 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) ʔa-sam ker hnaa niʔ nak ziŋ-zeŋ-ʔin
 3SG.POSS-hair curl PL ERG black IDEO-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.

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|-------|---------------------------------|------|------------|----------|
| (173) | na-fuŋ | tsuu | ʔa-saaw | zeʔ-zuaʔ |
| | 2SG.POSS-stick | TOP | 3SG.S-long | IDEO |
| | 'Your stick is long (and fat).' | | | |

- | | | | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|------|------------|----------|
| (174) | na-fuŋ | tsuu | ʔa-saaw | ziʔ-ziaʔ |
| | 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 *zeʔ-zuaʔ* / *ziʔ-ziaʔ*, or thickness of clothing in *phek-phuk* / *phik-phek* and *phen-phuŋ* / *phin-phen*.
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; *pheʔr-phuʔr* means 'really smoky', and *phiʔr-pheʔr* 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 *hnua?-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) *ʔa-thak* *bia?-ma?* *mii* *thak-ba-ree* *ka-ʔay* *ŋam*
 3SG.S-spicy IDEO REL hot.pepper 1SG.S-eat dare
 ‘I dare to eat super-spicy peppers.’

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

- (177) *ka-poo* *ʔa-khim* *puar-maar*¹²
 1SG.POSS-stomach 3SG.S-full IDEO
 ‘I’m stuffed!’

- (178) *nii* *ni?* *liam* *laay* *ʔaa-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?* *ʔa-suur* *tshial-maal*
 rain 3SG.S-rain IDEO
 ‘It’s raining softly.’

¹² As a free verb, *puar* means ‘to swell’. [KVB]

- (180) mii nuŋ ʔan-ʔii-buut tuŋ-maŋ naak ʔa? 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) ʔaar-tii ka-ʔay mii ni? ʔa-ka-ʔhoon 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) ʔan-nuu ni? tsun ʔa-von-vo?y tsiam-maam ʔii...
 3PL.POSS-mother ERG TOP 3SG.S-DIR-fart IDEO and
 'Their mother farted forcefully and ...'

- (183) sa-hjaŋ tsuu ʔa-rak-tluŋ ʔii, lam pii ʔa? khan
 wildcat TOP 3SG.S-DIR-return and road big LOC TOP
 khua-sik ni? khan ʔa-von-tsheem tsiam-maam ʔii...
 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 ...'

- (184) ʔaar-tii ni? khan ʔaa-ʔem ʔaa-ʔem
 chicken-egg ERG TOP 3SG.REFL-warm 3SG.REFL-warm
 ʔii ʔa-von-pua? hno? tsiam-maam ʔii...
 and 3SG.S-DIR-explode ADVERS IDEO and
 'The chicken egg warmed itself and warmed itself, and suddenly
 exploded forcefully on him and ...'

- (185) hjeʔr-te-sen ni? khan ʔa-rak-se? tsiam-maam ʔii...
 red.ant ERG TOP 3SG.S-DIR-bite IDEO and
 'The red ant bit (the wildcat) with great effort and ...'

(186)	vaan-parj	ʔaʔ	ʔa-vaa-beek	tsuu	tik-ʔaʔ	sa-rap
	wall	DAT	3SG.S-DIRr-lean	TOP	when	trap

niʔ ʔa-rak-kaʔ 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 *deej-maaj* ‘continually’, *lej-maj* ‘always’, and *tsuaʔ-maʔ* ‘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 /e/ 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*, *pim-pem*.
2. Ideophones connoting “gentleness” or “softness” involve liquid finals or nasal initials: *miaʔ-maʔ*, *niaʔ-maʔ*, *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 vocally “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*; *kiij* ‘sparse’ goes with *keen-kuuj*; *he?n* ‘to sting’ gives *he?n-hu?n*; *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.

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