RHYME, REDUPLICATION, ETC. IN LAO

G.E. Roffe

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

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

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

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

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

1. **TO SUFFER, HAVE FEVER, TO BE ILL**

   ທ່າຍເຂົ້າ ປ່າຍເຂົ້າ

   to be sick

2. **TREASURE WEALTH SILVER GOLD/COPPER**

   ຜູ້ສ້າງຂັມຮາວງ

   riches

3. **EVERY MORNING DAY NIGHT**

   ຖ່າເຮືອການນີ້

   day in, day out

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

1. **MINISTRE (Fr) n.s.**

   ອຸປະກອນ ຜຸປະກອນ

   cabinet minister

2. **CAPPIT ᵁ? (CAP)PITAINE (Fr)**

   ບ້ານເລັກ (ນັກ) ທ່ານ

   captain
C. **REDUPLICATION** (Tone--or pitch level--does not seem to be significant: e.g. ដុំក្លាហារ/ដុំក្លាការ)

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

   a. [**(n.s.)** TO TAKE CARE OF]**
      
      [ប្រែ ប្រៀប]  
      to take care of

   b. [TO SUSTAIN (n.s.)]

      [ំឃី ំម្លេ]  
      to sustain, to back

2. With partial component a nonsense syllable.

   a. [DIP WATER DIP (n.s.)]

      [ប្រៀប ប្រែ]  
      to dip water

   b. [THINGS USE THINGS (n.s.)]

      [ំឃី ំស្លឹ ស្លឹ]  
      (tools) utensils

   (Both ដុំឃី  and ដុំស្លឹ are accepted pairs.)

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

   a. [**(little-used word)** TAKE CARE, PAY ATTENTION]

      [មាន មាន]  
      to pay attention, be careful

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

a. ដឹងសឹង សឹង
    to cooperate

5. With all components meaningful

INTIMATE, ALONE ROYAL SERVANT

a. សមី សមី
    be intimate, close

CUSTOMS RITES CUSTOMS WAY

b. រឿងកុត ទិមួន
    customs, manners

TO SEE LIGHT, CLEAR TO KNOW TRUTH

c. មូលាកុតិថិ៍
    to see clearly, understand truely

THINGS WEAR THINGS WEAR

d. កាយម៉ា រី រី
    clothing

(Both កាយម៉ា and រី រី are accepted pairs, while ម៉ា and រី have a close semantic tie.)

KEEP FLESH PUT DOWN HEART

e. កុងម៉ូងនូវឈុត
    to have confidence

(Both ខុង and នូវឈុត are accepted pairs, while ខុង and នូវឈុត have a remote semantic relationship.

MIND ONE HEART SINGLE

f. នូវជាគឺរដូវ
    to be of one mind/heart

( ជាគឺ is an accepted pair.)

g. First and third elements identical; some semantic relationship between second and fourth, in addition to frequent, if partial, reduplication.
(1) **SEEK CRAB SEEK FISH**

**อรูป ทรงวาย**

to hunt for small seafood

(2) **BE A GROUP BE A GROUP**

**ข่มฉก ข่มผอง**
to be broken up into groups

(This is a productive pattern: cf. 3, 4, 5 below.)

(3) **TO BE BEGINNING TO BE BEGINNING**

**ข่มข่มค่า**
to be the beginning

(4) **TO BE HEART (WOOD) TO BE HEART (WOOD)**

**ข่มถ่มข่มสาม**
to be the essence or the gist

( ผม and สาม have a close semantic relationship.)

(5) **THINGS WEAR THINGS COVER**

**กษัตริย์ กษัตริย์**
clothing

(This is a productive pattern: มหาบุรุษ มหาบุรุษ)

(6) **LOSE MIND LOSE HEART**

**เสียใจเสียใจ**
to be dismayed, disappointed

( เสียใจ means to lose one's mind, a meaning that is not carried over into this expression!)

(7) **TREE WOOD TREE STRIP**

**ทักษิณ ทักษิณ**
plantation, trees

(8) **INHABITANT VILLAGE, INHABITANT VILLAGE**

**ประเทศ ประเทศ**
compatriots, fellow-citizens
COME/GO OUT SWEAT COME/GO OUT STRENGTH

(9) ខ្ញុំពណ៌វិបត្តិ ខ្ញុំពណ៌វិបត្តិ
    to spend oneself

FINISH HEART FINISH HEART

(10) ស្រេច ស្រេច
    with all one's heart

ENOUGH SIT ENOUGH LIE DOWN

(11) មានទឹកសុំ
    to be in comfortable circumstances

This is a productive pattern:

(12) មិនមិន
    to have both beginning and end; so, to be well known

(Both ណូ and ពៅ have a semantic relationship.)

This is a very productive pattern:

ពេញអូសាម មិនូសាម ធ្លាយីសុំ
មិនូសាម ធ្លាយីសុំ
ឬឬឬឬឬឬ ឬឬឬឬឬ
មិនូសាម ឬឬឬឬឬ
មិនូសាម ឬឬឬឬឬ
មិនូសាម ឬឬឬឬឬ

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HAVE OLD HAVE MATURE

(Can refer to a recognized wedding ceremony attended by elders)

h. First and third element have semantic relationship or other relationship; third and fourth exhibit the same, with or without phonetic reduplication.

REPLY FAVOR RETURN KINDNESS

(1) ลบ ลบ แปล ลบ
  to return a favor show gratitude

( และ ยูน are accepted pairs.)

HUSBAND COW WIFE CARABAO

(2) โอนม่วงคอก
  unwed couple

( โอน บัง and บึง โค are accepted pairs.)

FATHER TRADE MOTHER SELL

(3) ผู้ แตง
  sales people (male/female)

( ผู้, ผู้ and คุณ are accepted pairs.)
D. The rhyming pattern is one of the most frequent, one of the most productive. Generally speaking, the expression is made up of four syllables, two on either side of the vertical dividing line, the adjacent syllables rhyming (cf. introductory section, above).

1. Simple 4-syllable expressions with syllables two and three rhyming.

a. Everything immediately meaningful and related.

(1) BE WELL HAVE STRENGTH

(2) BE WELL HAVE VICTORY

(3) STATELY GLORY

(4) STATELY GRAND

to be well

to be on top

splendid, glorious

majestic
(5) ALTERNATE ALTERNATE LAYERS

(6) BLOOD FLESH ANCESTRY BODY GREASE

(7) OBSERVE COMMANDMENTS "EAT" ALMS

(8) LISTEN DHARMA REMEMBER COMMANDMENTS

(9) HOT CHEST FALL HEART

(10) PITY KINDLINESS

And many, many more:
b. Semantic relationships less immediate.

1. **SMILE SMILE HAPPY CLEAR**
   - ំស្នេហ៍ស្នេហ៍
   - to be in a happy mood

2. **SLAVE SERF HORSE USE**
   - សង្វាត
   - slave

3. **HABIT HEART NECK/THROAT**
   - មេីសចក
   - character, temperament

4. **SUFFER DIFFICULT MOUTH SAD**
   - ក្ស៊ុលឆ្លាក្បាស់្ិ
   - to be poor

5. **KNOW MERIT KINDNESS PENALTY**
   - កំពុង សុំឃើញ
   - to be grateful
c. Cause-effect (or reverse) relationship.

(1) [REST (n.s.) TAKE REFUGE RELY ON]
    
    [พักผ่อน]
    
    to live on the hospitality of...

(2) [REST STOP TAKE STRENGTH]
    
    [พักผ่อนแล้ว]
    
    to rest regain strength

(3) [FALL LOSE (UNAWARE) LOSE GO]
    
    [ตกเจ็ดล้าน]
    
    to lose by unawareness, drop inadvertently

(4) [BEAR (BE BORN) FLOWER ISSUE FRUIT]
    
    [เกิดดอกผล]
    
    to produce
2. Incredible reversal of semantic relationship.

ENTER OUTSIDE GO OUT INSIDE

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PATIENT MAKE AN EFFORT

ורטשבאב

to make a real effort

SURRENDER BODY OFFER UP HEART

มอบหมายหมายใจ

to surrender oneself completely (body and soul)

4. 3 - 3 syllable constructions.

a. Unsymmetrical, untypical rhyming between third and sixth syllables, with additional reduplication (between first and fourth syllables).

COUNTERACT SUFFERING, POVERTY FOSTER HAPPINESS

ภัยภัยภัยภัยภัยภัยภัย

to promote, foster happiness

b. Rhyming between third and fourth syllables, with semantic relationship between first and sixth syllables only.

PRETTY ONLY SHAPE KISS NOT SMELL GOOD

ภัยภัยภัยภัยภัยภัยภัย

"beauty is only skin deep" "fair on the outside only"

c. Approximate or complete rhyming between third and fourth syllables, with complete reduplication between second and fifth syllables, plus semantic similarity between first and fourth and/or between third and sixth syllables.

SLAVE TWO OWNER SERVANT TWO MASTER

ทยะทายทายทาย

to serve two masters
DEPENDING ON WHAT ONE CAN CATCH
PROPPING UP THE UNOBTAINABLE

 Гръмне влиза в дърводе

 cupidity

TREASURE IN EARTH WEALTH IN WATER

งุญญาสุมาภูมา

natural resources, underground wealth

With added rhyming between first and forth syllables, reduplication of initial consonant in third and sixth syllables.

INHABITANT DIFFERENT REGION MAN DIFFERENT AREA

ต่างคนต่างอยู่ในต่างแดน

foreigner

With added nonsense element, just to show that there is a vein of humor: there is no such thing as a

FISH (n.s.) CRAB SEA

ปลากระเพื่อง

seafood

APPENDIX

The text below is artificially contrived, presenting expressions as they could appear in speech and: or writing, but without limitations imposed by style, elegance or other consideration.

TEXT

Note: Line two is the continuum of the text, with Lao and English alternating.
Line one gives the more or less literal equivalent of the Lao expressions.

Line three gives an attempted translation into English of the Lao expressions.

The square brackets [ ] are designed to enclose the Lao expression, plus the literal equivalent in English, and, in addition, the free translation into English.

**DAY ATTACH DAY CONTINUE**

มีดี มีต์
day after day

**GO MARKET (LP) GO (n.s.)**

ไปตลาดไป

go to the market

there they see people of

every tongue and tribe

**EVERY RACE EVERY LANGUAGE**

such as

**PEOPLE DIFFERENT REGION, MALE (prefix) DIFFERENT DISTRICT**

people of different origins and areas

including

big-nosed foreigners

**FOREIGNER NOSE MELON**


**CITIZEN SKY SLAVE LAND**


**FATHER TRADE MOTHER SELL ENDURE MAKE EFFORT**

sales-people (men/women) do their best

to sell
them the things they have in great variety. But many of them come from remote villages.

and they often do not have confidence in the merchants. Others they know and, since they have not seen hide nor hair (of them) for a long time, they squat down.

to visit and get the news. When they have purchased articles then they
ESCAPE RETURN TURN AROUND RETURN (home)

return home

and, after

REACH HOUSE ARRIVE HOUSE

-reaching home

some of them, acting as

FATHER TRADE TRADING

traders

take their wares through

MOUNTAIN CLIFF FOREST JUNGLE

mountain and forest

for resale to

SLAVE LAND FOWL PEA

people in the boondocks

VILLAGE STREAM BANANA FOREST

(in the backwoods)

TORRENT DITCH VILLAGE SMALL

(ibid.)

far from

MOTHER WATER COURSE WATER

water courses
MAKE (dry) RICEFIELDS PLOUGH (wet) RICEFIELDS while others  

DO COME SEARCH EAT  

This is the way they  

TAKE MIND PUT HEART  

must  

EAT EVERY MORNING DAY NIGHT  

put heart and mind into it  

傍晚, 中午, and night  

ISSUE SWEAT ISSUE STRENGTH  

and  

in order to have  

EFFATI EFFATANEW  

sweat and labor  

ENOUGH EXIST ENOUGH EAT  

. Otherwise they may very well  

. 'AMAM  

enough to live on  

LACK WANT FRUIT (or areca nut) EXPENSIVE  

experience famine  

. If any
HAVE WIFE HAVE CHILD

they will leave them at home to

cherish (n.s.) cherish (take care of)

the house and look after

watch over, take care of

the

duck chicken cow carabao

animals

will watch over the

child small sugarcane tender

youngsters

weave loom plant mulberry (trees)

weave and do the gardening

be sick have fever get disease

become ill

and the father may come home to

mother maternal grandmother mother woman

women

sometimes the children will
learn that one or another has [HIDE EYE LEAVE WORLD ឡើង អាចលេង passed away (from sight, from world)]

and he will be [EXCEED BOSOM JERK HEART ប្រាក់ សំបូល inexpressibly heartbroken]. In the market, in

addition to the people from [VILLAGE OUTSIDE VILLAGE RICEFIELDS ផែក ផ្លែក ផ្លែក the countryside]

one often sees soldiers, sometimes a [CAPITAIN -- PITAIN ដូប្ លេង or captain]

even a [COMMANDANT -- COMMANDO គោក គោក for there is]

[major]

[RARELY TIGER NORTH SOUTH លោកតៃន លោកតៃន fierce war throughout the land]. Rarely does one see a
MINIS(tre)--MINAT

มีมัก มีมัก
Cabinet Minister

for they are too occupied with

WORK VILLAGE WORK COUNTRY

../

national affairs (politics)

. Some of them

THINK BIG ASPIRE/

==

are ambitious

CHOOSE HIGH

. Others do not

SEE CHEST SEE HEART

..=.
sympathise with

INHABITANT VILLAGE INHABITANT VILLAGE

. When these people come to

ordinary people

CRY OUT REQUEST RAISE HAND

. make a request of them

they conduct themselves as

though they are not

LIVING IN PRECEPTS EAT IN ALMS

.behaving according to the (Buddhist) codes
On the contrary, they speak evil of them, falsely accuse them, etc.

The poor suppliant will bow in humbleness of heart but all to

no effect: all they get is ; they are called
slander and insults

slaves and serfs

Friends will visit back and forth

They like to drink either

If they are good friends they will see to it
MEAT COME FISH GO

have food to eat

BELIEVE LISTEN WORDS

have clothes to wear

HAVE THING BITE THING EAT

HAVE THING WEAR THING COVER

HAVE CHILD HAVE GRANDCHILD

have children and grandchildren

will see to it that they

obey what they are told

will teach them to behave according to

good manners

KILL FATHER BEAT MOTHER

mistreat their parents

GORE FATHER OPPOSE PATERNAL GRANDFATHER

not be ungrateful to their elders

They will send them to school in order for them to

READ CAN WRITE BE ABLE

be able to read and write

. If they study too much they may
ACHE TOPKNOT DIZZY HEAD

They must suffer headaches

daily and be ready to help wash

remembering that they will one day receive a recompense

Some people put on airs and think their comportment is something

while others, on the contrary,

In between are the folks who take a humble place

but have not made a fortune
They eat well and may be said to be in easy and prosperous circumstances.

Enough exist enough eat enough of this world’s goods for their daily needs.

Enough sit enough lie down enough take hold of enough touch.

Enough use enough (n.s.) but no excess.

Forget God forget Lord and, instead of live irreligious lives.

Have name have voice, they cause their friends to having a good reputation.
LOSE MIND LOSE HEART
เสียใจ เสียใจ
and those who are not
be disappointed (in them)

LOVE FAITHFUL
ใจถูกที่
loyal

RECOUNT NEWS PROCLAIM ANNOUNCE
เล่าข่าว ทูตค่ม
spread the news
until nobody,

WOMAN MAN LITTLE BIG
หญิงชาย น้อยใหญ่
nor
men nor women, big or little

OLD MATURE YOUNG SMALL
แก่แก้ว แก่แก้ว
young or old

nor

AGREE RECEIVE COUNT HOLD
ยอมรับ มั่นคง
respects (them)
any longer even

OLD MATURE YOUNG SMALL
แก่แก้ว แก่แก้ว
young or old

WEALTH GOODS SILVER GOLD/COPPER
มีทรัพย์ เงินทอง
wealthy

though they are

LET GO ABANDON FORSAKE THROW AWAY
ปล่อย ละเมิด
given up

all their

CUSTOM WAY/PATTERN
นิสัย แบบ
customary ways
EAT (drink) ALCOHOL INTOXICATED DRUG/MEDICINE
Everybody are given to intoxication

AFRAID FEAR BODY TREMBLE
, convinced that such people will trembling with fear

LEAD WIFE CARRY CHILD
lead wife and children

MAKE FRIENDS SEEK SOCIETY
establish close and friendly relationships

GO COME SEEK TOWARD
with people who do not visiting back and forth

LISTEN DHARMA REMEMBER PRECEPTS
but, rather conduct themselves as they should

DECEIVE OWNER TAKE, THINGS
and then take their ill-begotten gain steal
and everyone wonders how they entertain (lavishly)

of this kind. Such people are lacking in intelligence

and don’t seem to realize that their enemies will increase and the number of their friends will decrease

and few will rely on them anymore

But, in truth
MEAT/FLESH INSIDE HEART AFFAIR

the heart of the matter

is that they

LACK FALL RECEDE (n.s.?)

seriously lack

many things and one of these days not only

ACHE HEAD ROTATE TOPKNOT

will they have a dizzy headache

but they will

FALL DOWN DISAPPEAR DIE GO

collapse and die

. It would be good if some friend were

HURT INTESTINES BURN HEART

be concerned

to exceedingly

MANNER EXCEED OVERFLOW

(escape) BEYOND GUESS

to the point of doing his best to
them and lead them out along the

way to a

liveliook teaching them to

work industriously

until they will be

in their

family circle

. Then, too, they will be

happy and well

Instead of
disgracing their race and being without morality
DEPARTMENT SPEECH

will be respectable and their conduct

STANDARD MAINTAIN EXISTENCE

will enable them to standard of living

BE COMFORTABLE HAPPY WELL

. No longer will their live in comfort and good health

trousers tear front pha (noun) tear behind

clothes be tattered and torn

able to enter outside go out inside

go in and out

AGAINST FACE AGAINST EYE

in front of

their neighbors without being ashamed

NOTES