Syntactic Parallelism and Morphological Elaboration
in
Lahu Religious Poetry

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Pauline H. Walker's life was suffused with art and literature, and her aesthetic response to the beauty of Southeast Asian culture was profound. As editor and collaborator, she played a vital role in Anthony's academic career for decades, from the early 1970's until her tragic death last year. This paper is affectionately dedicated to the memory of this lovely woman.

1.0 Introduction

A member of the Lolo-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman (TB) phylum of the Sino-Tibetan family, Lahu is spoken by well over half a million hillfolk in China's Yunnan Province, Burma's Shan State, and scattered areas of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Like the other Central Loloish languages, Lahu is highly tonal and monosyllabic; like almost all TB languages, it is verb-final, with relatively free order of noun phrases in the clause.

Partly as a compensation for the homophony problem caused by the monosyllabicity of its morphemes, Lahu makes extensive use of *compounding*, adding phonological bulk to words by hitching extra syllables onto their roots. Particularly interesting are the hundreds of special 4-element compounds I call *elaborate expressions (Elab's)*,[1] where either the first and third, or the second and fourth, syllables are identical, yielding structures of the form A-B-A-C or A-B-C-B:

fâʔ-ɔ̄-ŋâʔ-ɔ̄   "rodent-rice-bird-rice": 'rat food and bird food' (epithet for harvested paddy left out in the fields too long)

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[1]See Matisoff 1973:81-6 and 297-301). The term "elaborate expression" was first used by Haas (1964:xvii-xviii), to characterize analogous expressions in Thai. Similar quadrisyllables are in fact a Southeast Asian areal feature (Matisoff 1983:76-7): for Chinese, see Ching (1964); for Vietnamese, see Liem (1970); for Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) see Pan and Cao (1958). Unlike the situation in Lahu, however, where two of the four syllables are almost always identical, such repetition is merely optional in these other languages.

khɔ̂-mu-khɔ̂-nɛ̀	"word-high-word-low": 'high and low pitched words; tones (of a tone-language)'
ha-lɛ̀-ha-qa	"spirit-warm-spirit-**qa**": 'happy and relaxed'
dɔ̂-ša-gâ-ša	"think-easy-**gâ**-easy": 'be serene and easy in one's mind'

Usually the non-repeated syllables of an *Elab* are closely related semantically, often being synonymous, antonymous, or otherwise "correlative", e.g. *foot...hand, silver...gold, male...female, high...low, beg...beseech.* The more productive of these "elaborate couplets" may combine with a variety of other repeated syllables to form families of related *Elab's*, e.g. **fâʔ** 'rodent' and **ŋâʔ** 'bird' recur in such expressions as **fâʔ-thɔ̄-ŋâʔ-thɔ̄** 'zoo' ("rodent-jail-bird-jail"), **fâʔ-ɛ́-ŋâʔ-ɛ́** 'little animals; the small fauna of the forest' ("rodent-small-bird-small"), **fâʔ-hu-ŋâʔ-hu** 'nourish the rats and birds' (by giving them a chance to eat the crops). As in these examples, each syllable of an *Elab* often has a clearcut individual meaning. At the other extreme are syllables whose independent meanings can only be guessed at -- *hapax legomena* which occur only in a single *Elab* but nowhere else in the language, like the **-qa** in **ha-lɛ̀-ha-qa**. Somewhere in the middle of this continuum are cases where a syllable means one thing in *Elab's* but another in ordinary language, like the second member of the common couplet **dɔ̂...gâ** 'think...feel', as in **dɔ̂-pɔ̄-gâ-pɔ̄** 'think penetrating thoughts' (**pɔ̄** 'pierce'), **dɔ̂-yɨ̀-gâ-yɨ̀** 'be broadminded, imperturbable' (**yɨ̀** 'be long'). Although **dɔ̂** is the ordinary verb 'think', **gâ** no longer occurs as a free verb in colloquial Lahu, functioning rather as a desiderative verb-particle, e.g. **pɔ̄ gâ** 'want to pierce', **qay gâ** 'want to go'.[2]

Elaborate expressions are freely sprinkled into ordinary Lahu conversation, but they are especially characteristic of the archaic ritual language used in animist prayers, where they come thick and fast, often twice in the same clause, once in a noun-phrase (NP) and once in the verb-phrase (VP). Among the beauties of this liturgical style is a syntactic analogue or expansion of the morphological process of elaboration that I would like to call *syntactic parallelism.* This involves the juxtaposition of entire clauses whose grammatical structures are identical, and where some of the lexical items filling the corresponding grammatical slots are also the same, while others are different but semantically correlative.

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[2]The criterion for verbhood in Lahu is negatability by direct preposing of the adverb **mâ** 'not'. Thus 'not want to go' is **mâ qay gâ**, not ***qay mâ gâ**.

Lest this seem overly abstract, we should now examine a particular Lahu religious text, and see how its intricate poetic fabric is created by the interplay of these analogous devices: *morphological elaboration* and *syntactic parallelism*.

2.0 The text of "Praying for Game"

This ritual language is now endangered in most Lahu communities, at least in Thailand.[3] In villages that have been converted to Christianity, religious poetry has been stamped out along with all other vestiges of animism. Even in villages where the traditional belief systems are more or less intact, fewer and fewer boys and young men are learning the prayers from the elderly "ritual specialists" or "spirit doctors" who can still remember them. These reciters of prayers enjoy no particular prestige in their villages, and in fact are often opium addicts. They are compensated for their services (e.g. for praying to the Whirlwind Spirit for someone to be cured of severe headache) by small payments in kind, like a chicken or a pack of store-bought cigarettes from a Thai town. This is not much incentive for a young person to apprentice himself to an opium addict for several years in order to memorize hundreds of verses by rote.

Since these prayers have been transmitted orally for generations, it is not surprising that some passages are no longer fully understood even by those who recite them, and that some garbling has occurred. The same officiant will never say a given prayer exactly the same way twice, and there is even greater variation among different individuals. It does not help comprehension that the prayers are delivered at high speed in a rhythmic monotone. Frequent interjections at the beginnings of verses, besides serving to attract the spirits' attention, also seem to provide chances for the reciter to catch his breath.

Yet this poetry, humble as it might appear, has a beauty all its own. We are indeed fortunate that Anthony R. Walker has collected a voluminous corpus of these religious texts, mostly during his 4-year study of Red Lahu animist communities in Thailand (1966-70). These

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[3]Little is known about contemporary village life in Burma and Yunnan, where the largest Lahu communities are still to be found. Presumably the most conservative villages are those of Burma, where there is no strong centralized government to impinge on local customs.

have since been published in a series of some 50 articles scattered in journals throughout the world, a body of material unmatched for any other tribal Southeast Asian language.[4]

The text we shall look at in detail is a prayer to the Hill Spirit for success in the hunt.[5] As the custodian of the habitat of wild animals, the Hill Spirit (**qhɔ-nê**) must be propitiated before any of "his" animals are killed.

šā lɔ̀ ve
Praying for Game[6]

(1)   ó, ó! yàʔ-ni chò kàʔ **thī-ŋ̂ê-thī-khâ**[7] tɔ̂ʔ lɛ

O, o! today in this place we have brought forth silver and gold altars[8]

(2a)   **vàʔ-pā-vàʔ-ma** {làʔ-ša cê hín hu šɛ̄-phâ} /

for him *[the Hill Spirit]* who reareth 7000 pigs, male and female, on his right hand

(2b)   {làʔ-mɛ̄ cê làn hu šɛ̄-phâ}[9]

for him who nourisheth seven millions on his left hand

(3)   chò kàʔ hɔ **{cāw-mɔ-cāw-tû}/{cāw-ɨ̄-cāw-yɔ̂}**

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[4]These prayers have recently been put brilliantly into areal perspective in Walker (2003). The publication of this monumental study of Lahu religion owed much to the collaboration of Pauline, who generated many of the plates, maps, photos, and drawings which grace the volume. See the review by Matisoff (2004).

[5]See Walker 1976. The translation is my own. I have tried to stay as close to the original as possible, while maintaining an elevated tone, though the vast linguistic differences between Lahu and English "information-packaging strategies" make this something of a hopeless task.

[6]The Lahu do not recognize any particular subunits for these texts, so that the transcription into "verses" is rather arbitrary. Walker divides this text into 12 verses, but I am cutting it up into smaller chunks for easier analysis.

[7]Elaborate expressions are given in boldface.

[8]This is an example of "lying to the spirits" (**nê hē ve**). The "altar" in question is actually a humble affair of bamboo. The spirits are conceived of as powerful, but rather stupid, easily cajoled and misled by flowery language.

[9]Contiguous expressions that are syntactically parallel are enclosed in curly brackets { }, with the two halves separated from each other by a slash: {A}/{B}. Repeated but non-contiguous clauses are not indicated diagrammatically, but are listed in a separate section, below 5.0.

[and for all ye rulers of] this place, Lord Maw, Lord Tu, Great Lord, Lord Yaw *[Shan deities]*

(4a) á! {**vàʔ-pā-vàʔ-ma   lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve mē̄} /

ah! for male and female pigs we beg and beseech thee

(4b) {**chɨ-pā-chɨ-ma   lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve}

for barking-deer male and female we beg and beseech thee

(5) yàʔ-ni **khɔ́-lú-khɔ́-tân** tɔ̂ʔ lɛ

today bringing forth gifts and offerings

(6) nɔ̀ **khɨ-hɔ́-làʔ-hɔ́** gà ve

we reach under thy feet and under thy hands

(7) á! **hā-ğa-ğɔ̂-ğa** tâ yù khá

ah! do not block us up with hardship and distress

(8) **bɔ̂ʔ-ğa-ša-ğa**

may they be easy to shoot and fell

(9) **šo-câʔ-kɨ̂-câʔ** phɛ lɛ

binding them up in *[thy]* chains of iron and brass

(10a) ŋà {qhɔ-ú cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ qhɔ-ú tā lâ} /

when I circle round the hilltops put them on the hilltops for me

(10b) {qhɔ-mē̄ cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ qhɔ-mē̄ tā lâ}

when I circle round the foothills put them at the foothills for me

(11) **šɔ̂-phà-ma-phà** qō lɛ

covering [their eyes] with the leaves of trees and plants

(12a) á! {tê kə̄ qo {**chɔ-mɔ̂-chɔ-hó**

phâ-kû-ma-kû tɔ̂ gâ} / {**phâ-lî-ma-lî** fɨ̄ gâ}} /

one half for the elders' sake I wish to bring forth for apportionment
amongst the men and women, I wish to divide according to our men's and women's customs

(12b) {tê kə̄ qo {**mî-hu-yâ-hu** gâ} / {**a-ví-a-ni   mî-hu-yâ-hu** gâ} lɛ}

with the other half I wish to nourish my wife and children, my kinsmen's wives and children

(13) nɔ̂ thà lɔ̂ ve

I pray to thee

(14) **tâ-hā-tâ-ğɔ̂** pè lâ

do not give us hardship or distress

(15) a-cí mà-cā lâ

please help sustain us

(16) yà-ni {pə̄ tâ qɛ̀} / {ha tâ qɛ̀} pè lâ

today grant us that the evening-star may not set, that the moon may
not set *[before we have caught our quarry]*

(17a) {qhɔ-ú cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ qhɔ-ú tɛ lâ} /

when I circle round the hilltops set them on the hilltops for me

(17b) {qhɔ-mɛ̄ cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ qhɔ-mɛ̄ tɛ lâ}

when I circle round the foothills set them at the foothills for me

(18) chɔ-yâ {hó-tìʔ mâ cɔ̀} / {ta-tìʔ mâ cɔ̀}

we humans have no power in our ears, no power in our eyes

(19) nɔ̀ **khɨ-qhɔ-làʔ-qhɔ   lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve

from inside thy feet and thy hands we beg and entreat thee for food

(20) **tâ-hā-tâ-ğɔ̂** pèʔ lâ

do not give us hardship or distress

(21) yàʔ-ni {pɔ̄ tâ qɛ̀} / {ha tâ qɛ̀} pèʔ lâ

today grant that neither the evening-star nor the moon may set *[before we catch our quarry]*

(22) a-cí màʔ-cā lâ mɛ̄

please grant us help and sustenance

(23) á! nô qhɔ-ú tā qo, qhɔ-ú ɔ̄

ah! when *[you]* put them up there atop the hills, on the hilltops

(24) {**šɔ̂-phàʔ-ma-phàʔ** qō lɛ, qhɔ-ú tā lâ mɛ̄} /

covering *[their eyes]* with leaves of trees and plants, please place them atop the hill for me

(25) {**šo-câʔ-kɨ̂-câʔ** phɛ lɛ, ŋà ğû chɨ šɨ-šɨ tā lâ mɛ̄} /

binding them in thy chains of iron and brass, please place them right there in front of me

(26) {**šo-mɔ̂ʔ-kɨ̂-mɔ̂ʔ** qô-thàʔ qɔ̀ʔ šɛ lɛ, tā lâ mɛ̄}

leading them to my big gun of iron and brass, please place them there for me

(27a) {nɔ̀ **hó-tì?-ta-tì?** cɔ̀} šɛ̄-phâ /

O thou who hast power in thine ears and in thine eyes

(27b) {ŋà tí qo **hó-tì?-ta-tì?** mâ cɔ̀} lɛ

since I have no power in my ears or in my eyes

(28)   nɔ̀ **khɨ-hó-là?-hó   lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve

under thy feet and thy hands I beg and beseech thee for food

(29a) á! yà?-ni {**thī-ŋə̂-thī-khâ** tɔ̂? lɛ} /

ah! today bringing thee a silver and gold altar

(29b) {**šwɛ̀-ŋə̂-šwɛ̀-khâ** tɔ̂? lɛ} /

bringing thee silver and gold streamers

(29c) {**câ-ú-dɔ̀-ú** tɔ̂? lɛ}

bringing thee the very best of food and drink

(30)   nɔ̀ **khɨ-hó-là?-hó   lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve

under thy feet and thy hands I beg and beseech thee for food

(31)   a-cí mà?-cā lâ mɛ̄

please grant us help and sustenance

(32a) {tê kɔ̄ qo **mî-hu-yâ-hu**} /

with one half nourishing my wife and children

(32b) {tê kɔ̄ qo {chɔ-mɔ̂ **phâ-lî-ma-lî** fɨ gâ cê} /

the other half I wish to divide according to the customs of our male and female ancestors, as I have said

{**phâ-kû-ma-kû** tɔ̂ʔ gâ lɛ cê}}

offering it to *[all the]* men and women *[of the village]*, as I have said[10]

(33)   nɔ̀ **khɨ-hɔ́-làʔ-hɔ́** lɔ̀ câ ve

under thy feet and thy hands we beg for food

(34)   **vàʔ-pā-vàʔ-ma**, **chɨ-pā-chɨ-ma pɛ̀-lɔ̀ʔ-thi-lɔ̀ʔ** ve

male and female pigs, male and female barking-deer, plenty to share and feast upon

(35)   màʔ-cā lâ

help and sustain us

(36)   yàʔ-ni {pɜ̄ tâ qɛ̀} / {ha tâ qɛ̀} pèʔ lâ mɛ̄

today grant that the evening-star not set, that the moon not set
[before we achieve success]

(37)   ó, ó! hàʔ lâ ò mɛ̄

o, o! please accept *[our prayer]* !

3.0 Analysis of elaborate expressions in the text

In this section we give a morpheme-by-morpheme analysis of the *Elab's* that occur in this text. They are not arranged in strict order of occurrence, but rather in groups or "families", so that Elab's containing the same couplet (i.e. the same pair of non-repeating, semantically correlative syllables) appear together.[11]

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[10]"As I have said" translates the quotative clause-particle **cê**.
[11]The following points are to be noted about Lahu *Elab's*:

3.1 Nominal elaborate expressions in the text[12]

silver/gold

thī-ŋə̂-thī-khâ   'silver and gold altar' ("place-silver-place-gold");

   twice (1, 29a); all elements < Shan (cf. Thai **thîi** 'place', **ŋən** 'silver', **kham** 'gold')

šwɛ̀-ŋə̂-šwɛ̀-khâ   'silver and gold streamers' ("streamer-silver-streamer-gold");

   once (29b); etym. of **šwɛ̀** unknown

male/female

và?-pā-và?-ma   'male and female pigs' ("pig-male-pig-female");

   thrice (2, 4a, 34); all elements native Lahu (cf. Proto-Lolo-Burmese (PLB) ***wak** 'pig')

chɨ-pā-chɨ-ma   'male and female barking-deer';

   twice (4b, 34); all elements native Lahu (cf. PLB ***kyi(y)** 'barking-deer' *[Cervulus muntjac],* known as the best eating in the jungle

foot/hand

khɨ-hɔ́-là?-hɔ́   'under (thy) feet and hands' ("foot-under-hand-under");

   4 times (6, 28, 30, 33); all elements native Lahu (cf. PLB ***krəy** 'foot', ***lak** 'hand', ***?ok** lower place')

khɨ-qhɔ-là?-qhɔ   'within (thy) feet and hands';

   once (19); **qhɔ** 'inside; interior' is native Lahu

man/woman

phâ-kû-ma-kû   'men's and women's shares';

·The order of the morphemes in an elaborate couplet may be the same as in corresponding English expressions (e.g. **phâ...ma** 'man/woman' [not *woman/man]; **...pā...ma** 'male/female (animals)' [not *female/male]), but at least as often it is the opposite (e.g. **...ŋə̂...khâ** 'silver/gold' [not *gold/silver]; **khɨ...là?...** 'foot/hand' [not *hand/foot]).

·The two members of a couplet may be etymologically diverse. Both may be native Lahu; or one may be native and one borrowed; or both may be borrowed (perhaps from two different sources).

·*Elab's* are important historically, in that they tend to be archaic, and may preserve morphemes which have disappeared from colloquial style.

·*Elab's* may be "asyntactic", i.e. may violate the norms of morpheme combination (see **bɔ̂?-ğa-ša-ğa**, below).

[12]After translating each *Elab* as a whole, the literal morpheme-by-morpheme gloss is given in parentheses, enclosed in double quotes; then in italics the total number of occurrences of the *Elab* in the text and (in parentheses) the exact verses in which it does occur; finally miscellaneous remarks, including etymologies of the constituents.

twice (12a, 32b); all elements apparently native Lahu; **phâ...ma** 'men...women' is a
common elaborate couplet; **kû** (V) means 'guess; gamble; cast lots; get one's share'

phâ-lî-ma-lî　　　'men's and women's customs'; `

twice (12a, 32b); **lî** 'custom' is an old loan from Chinese (cf. Mand. **lǐ**)

iron/brass

šo-câʔ-kî̂-câʔ　　　'chains of iron and brass';

twice (9, 25); all elements native Lahu; **šo** 'iron' < PLB ***šam**; **kî̂** 'copper; brass; bronze;
yellow metal' < PLB ***grəy**; **câʔ** 'string; cord; elongated object' < PLB ***ʔkyak**

šo-mɔ̂ʔ-kî̂-mɔ̂ʔ　　　'big guns of iron and brass';

once (26); the origin of **mɔ̂ʔ** 'big gun; cannon' is obscure, but the etymon appears both in
Tai (cf. Shan **ʔamyok**) and elsewhere in Tibeto-Burman (Written Burmese **ʔəmrok**, Pho
Karen **mlòʔ**)

god¹/god²

cāw-mɔ-cāw-tû　　　'Lord Maw and Lord Tu';

once (3); all elements from Shan (cf. Thai **câ(a)w** 'lord, prince; holy being, deity'); for
2nd syllable cf. perhaps Thai **mɔ̀m** 'prince in the grandchild generation of royal descent';
morphemic identity of **tû** is obscure

cāw-ɨ̄-cāw-yɔ̂　　　'Great Lord and Lord Yaw';

once (3); **ɨ̄** 'be big; be great' is native Lahu; morphemic identity of **yɔ̂** is obscure

offering¹/offering²

khɔ́-lú-khɔ́-tân　　　'offerings';

once (5); all elements borrowed; **khɔ́** < Shan (cf. Thai **khɔ̌ɔ** 'beg'); **lú** (Belab) < Burmese **hlu**
(V) 'give for a religious purpose', **ʔəhlu** (N) 'an offering'[13]; **tân** (V) 'make an offering' <
Shan **tan** < Bs. **ʔəhlu-ʔətân** (N) 'an offering'; **ʔətân** does not occur as a free word in Bs., but
is perhaps derived from **tân** (V) 'have the mind extended to or fixed on'

tree/bamboo (?)

šɔ̂-phàʔ-ma-phàʔ　　　'leaves of trees and plants';

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[13]**lú** is an example of what I call a Belab, (i.e. a bound morpheme that occurs only in an *Elab*), like the **-qa** in
ha-lè-ha-qa (above 1.0).

twice *(11, 24);* all elements apparently native Lahu, though the tone of **šɔ̂** is aberrant; **šɔ̂**...**ma** is an elaborate couplet meaning 'trees'. Comparative evidence indicates that **ma** might originally have meant 'bamboo'; the usual colloquial words for 'tree' and 'bamboo', **šɨ̂ʔ** and **vâ**, can also form an elaborate couplet with each other, e.g. **šɨ̂ʔ-bá-vâ-bá** 'planks of wood and slats of bamboo'; **phàʔ** 'leaf' < PLB ***C-pak**

elder/leader

chɔ-mɔ̂-chɔ-hó   'elders and leaders' ("person-old-person-head");
once (12a); **chɔ** < PLB ***tsaŋ** 'person'; **mɔ̂** 'old' < PLB ***maŋ**; **hó** < Shan (cf. Thai **hǔa** 'head; leader')

elder sibling/younger sibling

a-ví-a-ni   'kinsmen; brethren' ("elder and younger siblings");
once (12b); native Lahu; **a-** is a kinship prefix (either vocative or referential); **ví** 'elder sibling' < PLB ***ʔwyik**; **ni** 'younger sibling' < PLB ***ʔñey**

ear/eye

hó-tìʔ-ta-tìʔ   'all-hearing ear and all-seeing eye';
thrice (18, 27a, 27b); all elements < Shan; **hó** 'ear' and **ta** 'eye' form an elaborate couplet (cf. Thai **náam-hǔu-náam-taa** 'tears' ("water-ear-water-eye"); note that the Tai etyma for 'ear' and 'head' (Thai **hǔu** and **hǔa**, respectively) both come out as **hó** in Lahu (cf. **chɔ-mɔ̂-chɔ-hó**, above); **tìʔ** 'eternal abundance; something everlasting and supernatural' ult. < Skt. **divya**, via Shan **thip**

food/drink

câ-ú-dɔ̀-ú   'the best of food and drink' ("eat-head-drink-head");
once (29c); all elements native Lahu; **câ** 'eat' < PLB ***dzya²**; **dɔ̀** 'drink' < PLB ***n-daŋ¹**; **ú** 'head; best part' < PLB ***ʔu²** < PTB ***d-bu**

3.2   Verbal elaborate expressions in the text

beg/beseech

lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ   'beg and beseech [for food] to eat' ("beg-eat-groan-eat");

5 times (4a, 4b, 19, 28, 30); **qhâ(n)** 'cry out; groan; beseech' < Shan **khaŋ**; appropriately enough, since this is a prayer for sustenance, this is the *Elab* that occurs the most frequently in the text

have hardship/suffer

hā-ğa-ğô̂-ğa　　'meet hardship and distress' ("difficult-get-suffer-get");
　　once (7, 14, 20); all elements are native Lahu; **hā...ğô̂** 'suffer; be wretched' is an elaborate couplet; **ğô̂** is perhaps cognate to Burmese **rôŋ** 'very dry; tending to decay'; **ğa** 'get; obtain' < PLB ***ra**; this expression functions here as an antonymous parallel to **bô̂ʔ-ğa-ša-ğa** [q.v.]

tâ-hā-tâ-ğô̂　　'do not inflict distress!';
　　twice (14, 20); **tâ** 'negative imperative < PLB ***da** < PTB ***-ta-**

shoot/easy　(instead of shoot/get)

bô̂ʔ-ğa-ša-ğa　　'easy to shoot and get' ("shoot-get-easy-get");
　　once (8); antonymously parallel to **hā-ğa-ğô̂-ğa** [q.v.]; this expression is syntactically anomalous: in ordinary language it would be **bô̂ʔ-ša-　ğa-ša** ("shoot-easy-get-easy")[14]; **bô̂ʔ** 'shoot' < PLB ***m-pök**

wife/children

mî-hu-yâ-hu　　'support one's wife and children';
　　thrice (12b, 12b, 32a; all elements native Lahu; **mî** 'wife' < PLB ***mi**; **yâ** 'child' < PLB ***za**; **hu** 'rear; raise; nourish' < PLB ***hu**

share/feast

pὲ-lɔ̂ʔ-thi-lɔ̂ʔ　　'plenty to share and feast upon' ("share-enough-feast-enough");
　　once (34); all elements native Lahu; **lɔ̂ʔ** 'enough' < PLB ***lok**

4.0　Basic Lahu clause structure

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[14]The strange impression created by this *Elab* is due to the fact that **bô̂ʔ** 'shoot' and **ša** 'easy' do not semantically constitute an elaborate couplet, even though they occur in couplet-position (1st and 3rd syllables). The semantic couplet of 'shoot' is 'get', but that is the repeated (i.e. non-coupleted) syllable.

This is not the place to go into detail about Lahu syntax,[15] though we need a rough idea of basic clause structure in order to discuss parallelism as a poetic device. As mentioned above, Lahu (like all TB languages except Karen and Bai) has the verbal nucleus in clause-final position, with the noun-phrases of the clause preceding in a relatively free order.[16] Deictic (e.g. time and place) NP's tend to come before NP's referring to participants in the verbal event. Interjections frequently occur clause-initially in the poetic style. The verbal nucleus, which may consist of as many as 5 verbs in direct juxtaposition, may be preceded by adverbs. A clause typically ends in a string of particles of various types, conveying abstract notions like aspect, affectivity, evidentiality, inter-clause propositional relations, etc. Especially frequent in prayers is the post-verbal benefactive particle **lâ** (it occurs 17 times in our text), which indicates 'action performed for the benefit of a non-3rd person'. This is not surprising, since prayers are the way the spirits are asked to do things *for us/for our benefit.*

5.0   Verbatim clause-repetition

The intricate poetic texture of this prayer is achieved by repetitions of various sorts. At the syntactic level of the clause,[17] the simplest type of repetition is *verbatim*, where the clause as a whole is repeated with no significant variation in separate parts of the text.[18] It stands to reason that verbatim repetition should be a striking feature of orally transmitted texts, which tend to be *modular*, i.e. built up of ready-made bits that can recur and be combined in various ways.

Clauses repeated verbatim in our text include the following:[19]

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[15]See Matisoff 1973/1982.

[16]I object to the term "SOV language", since there is no reason to single out the "object" as being especially important in the nominal part of the clause, nor is there a well-defined role category of "subject" in Sino-Tibetan languages. See LaPolla 1990.

[17]There is much skillful use of repetition on the lexical level as well. We have already noted that many elaborate expressions occur more than once in the text (section 3.0, above). Even more subtle is the recurrence of individual monosyllabic morphemes at widely separated intervals: e.g. the verb **hu** 'rear; nourish' is predicated of the Hill Spirit in verse (2a,b), which lends an added resonance to its use in the expression **mî-hu-yâ-hu** 'nourish wife and children', predicated of the suppliant villagers in verses (12b) and (32a).

[18]By "no significant variation" I mean no difference in major constituents like nouns or verbs. Minor differences like the presence or absence of a particle or adverb are not considered enough to violate this loose criterion of verbatimity.

[19]The numbers on the left refer to the verses where the repeated clauses occur. Minor constituents that are omitted in one of the occurrences are parenthesized.

(A)   1/29a: **yà?-ni (chò kà?) thī-ŋə̂-thī-khâ tɔ̂? lɛ**

    today (in this place) we have brought forth silver and gold altars

On its second occurrence (29), this clause is put in parallel with two others, yielding a tripartite structure "29a-c"; see below 6.0.

(B)   11/24: **šɔ̂-phà?-ma-phà? qō lɛ**

    covering [their eyes] with the leaves of trees and plants

(C)   15,22,31,35: **(a-cí) mà?-cā lâ (mɛ̄)**

    please help sustain us

In its last occurrence (35), this clause appears in minimal form, as **mà?-cā lâ**, without the softening adverb **a-cí** 'a little; please', or the pleading particle **mɛ̄**. This bareness serves to make the clause all the more insistent, direct, and moving, as the prayer approaches its end.

(D)   16,21,36: **yà?-ni pɔ̄ tâ qὲ ha tâ qὲ pὲ? lâ (mɛ̄)**

    today grant us that the evening-star may not set, that the moon may

    not set *[before we have caught our quarry]*

This utterance, repeated three times in the text, is itself composed   of two subparts in parallel, **pɔ̄ tâ qὲ / ha tâ qὲ**, that can be regarded as an extended elaborate expression (below 7.0).

6.0   Repetition with variation: syntactic parallelism

Syntactic parallelism is also a stylistic device that is common to traditional oral poetry the world over, as in David's celebrated lament for Saul and Jonathan:

    Al tagidu bə-Gath,

          al təvasru bə-xutsoth Ashkəlon;

    Pen tismaxna bənoth Plishtim,

          pen ta?alozna bənoth ho-?areylim!

    Tell it not in Gath,

          publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;

Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,

> *lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph!*

<div align="right">**Samuel II:1.20**</div>

Syntactic parallelism is clearly a more complex poetic device than mere verbatim repetition, since it simultaneously involves both repetition *(a syntactic framework which is held constant)* and variation *(different fillers of the corresponding syntactic slots).* These pairs of fillers stand in close semantic relationship to each other, as in the above example: *tell/publish*; *Gath / Ashkelon*[20]; *Philistines / uncircumcised*; *rejoice / triumph*.[21]

Clauses that are repeated verbatim are always *non-contiguous* in Lahu prayers, since to repeat the same clause twice in a row would be boring and puerile. Syntactically parallel clauses, on the other hand, are most often contiguous, since they depend for their effect on the tension between sameness and difference, and this can best be appreciated when the variants occur in quick succession.[22]

Examples of contiguous parallel clauses in the text include the following:

(A)   (4a)   **á! {và?-pā-và?-ma lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ ve mē̄}** /

ah! for male and female pigs we beg and beseech thee

(4b)   **{chɨ-pā-chɨ-ma lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ ve}**

for barking-deer male and female we beg and beseech thee

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[20]Both cities of the Philistines.

[21]An especially effective rhetorical subtype of parallelism involves permutation of the members of the same pair of fillers in the syntactically parallel clauses: *Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.*

[22]Non-contiguous parallel clauses do also occur in our text, however, notably the triad (1), (5), (29a,b,c), where the Hill Spirit is apprised of all the good things that the spirit-doctor has brought for him: 'a silver and gold altar' (1, 29a), 'gifts and offerings' (5), 'silver and gold streamers' (29b), 'the very best of food and drink' (29c).

    Another example is the pair of closely related nominal *Elab's* that occur as the objects of the same verbal *Elab* in verses (19) and (30):

(19)   nɔ̀ **khɨ-qhɔ-là?-qhɔ lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve
          from inside thy feet and thy hands we beg and entreat thee for food

(30)   nɔ̀ **khɨ-hɔ́-là?-hɔ́ lɔ̀-câ-qhâ-câ** ve
          under thy feet and thy hands I beg and beseech thee for food

This is similar to the last example in note 22, since here too we find closely related nominal *Elab's* appearing as the objects of the same verbal *Elab;* but in (4a)/(4b) the two structures are contiguous.

(B) (27a) **{nɔ̀ hó-tì?-ta-tì? cɔ̀} šɛ̄-phâ** /

O thou who hast power in thine ears and in thine eyes

(27b) **{ŋà tí qo hó-tì?-ta-tì? mâ cɔ̀} lɛ**

since I have no power in my ears or in my eyes

In this instance, there are two pairs of opposed constituents in the parallel clauses: the pronouns **nɔ̀** 'thou' and **ŋà** 'I', and the positive vs. negative verbs **cɔ̀** 'have' and **mâ cɔ̀** 'not have'.

(C) (24) **{šɔ̂-phà?-ma-phà? qō lɛ, qhɔ-ú tā lâ mɛ̄}** /

covering *[their eyes]* with leaves of trees and plants, please place them atop the hill for me

(25) **{šo-câ?-kɨ̂-câ? phɛ lɛ, ŋà ğû chɨ šɨ-sɨ tā lâ mɛ̄}** /

binding them in thy chains of iron and brass, please place them right there in front of me

(26) **{šo-mɔ̂?-kɨ̂-mɔ̂? qô-thà? qɔ̀? šɛ lɛ, tā lâ mɛ̄}**

leading them to my big gun of iron and brass, please place them there for me

Here 3 compound sentences, each containing 2 clauses, are set in parallel. The first clause of each ends in the suspensive particle **lɛ**, translated by the English participial *-ing* (**qō lɛ** 'covering', **phɛ lɛ** 'binding', **šɛ lɛ** 'leading'). The object of each of these verbs is an *Elab* (**šɔ̂-phà?-ma-phà?** 'leaves of trees and plants'; **šo-câ?-kɨ̂-câ?** 'chains of iron and brass'; **šo-mɔ̂?-kɨ̂-mɔ̂?** 'big gun of iron and brass'), the last two of which contain the same couplet. The second clause of each parallel verse ends in the same VP, **tā lâ mɛ̄** 'please place for me'.

(D) The most complex example is an interrelated pair of parallel verses, (12a,b) and (32a,b):

(12a) **á! {tê kɔ̄ qo {chɔ-mɔ̂-chɔ-hó phâ-kû-ma-kû tɔ̂? gâ} /**
        {phâ-lî-ma-lî fɨ̄ gâ}} /

one half for the elders' sake I wish to bring forth for apportionment amongst the men and women, I wish to divide according to our men's and women's customs

(12b) **{tê kɔ̄ qo {mî-hu-yâ-hu gâ} / {a-ví-a-ni mî-hu-yâ-hu gâ} lɛ}**

with the other half I wish to nourish my wife and children, my kinsmen's wives and children

The parallel structures (12a) and (12b) each contain the identical topic-NP **tê kɔ̄ qo** 'as for one half', which are then each followed by two parallel clauses containing the desiderative particle **gâ**. The same topic-NP later introduces the two parallel portions of (32):

(32a) **{tê kɔ̄ qo mî-hu-yâ-hu}** /
with one half nourishing my wife and children

(32b) **{tê kɔ̄ qo {chɔ-mɔ̂ phâ-lî-ma-lî fɨ̄ gâ cê}** /
the other half I wish to divide according to the customs of our male   and female ancestors, as I have said

　　{phâ-kû-ma-kû tɔ̂ʔ gâ lɛ cê}}
offering it to *[all the]* men and women *[of the village]*, as I have said

Here the first member (32a) has a relatively simple VP consisting only of the *Elab* **mî-hu-yâ-hu**, but the topic-NP of the second member (32b) is followed by a pair of clauses which are themselves parallel, each consisting of a desiderative VP preceded by an object which is a nominal *Elab* containing the same couplet, **phâ...ma** 'men...women'.

7.0   Syntactic parallelism as extended elaboration

Finally, there is an especially interesting subtype of syntactic parallelism that demonstrates its close relationship with the morphological process of elaboration. In these cases, the individual fillers of the parallel syntactic slots can themselves cooccur as the two halves of elaborate expressions. Consider the following four examples:

(A)   (2a)   vàʔ-pā-vàʔ-ma **{làʔ-ša   cê hín   hu šɛ̄-phâ}** /
for him *[the Hill Spirit]* who reareth 7000 pigs, male and female, on his right hand

(2b) {**là?-mɛ̄   cê làn** hu šɛ̄-phâ}

for him who nourisheth seven millions on his left hand

Here the parallel clauses each contain two dissyllabic collocations that can combine elaborately with each other's corresponding constituents, to yield the expressions **là?-ša-là?-mɛ̄** 'right hand and left hand' and **cê-hín-cê-làn** 'seven thousand and seven million'.

(B)   (18) chɔ-yâ {**hó-tì?** mâ cɔ̀} / {**ta-tì?** mâ cɔ̀}

we humans have no power in our ears, no power in our eyes

The NP's in these parallel clauses are usually found combined in the *Elab* **hó-tì?-ta-tì?** 'supernatural powers; all-hearing ears and all-seeing eyes'.

(C)   (16) yà?-ni {**pɔ̄** tâ **qɛ̀**} / {**ha** tâ **qɛ̀**} pè? lâ

today grant us that the evening-star may not set, that the moon may

not set *[before we have caught our quarry]*

The evening-star (**pɔ̄**) and the moon (**ha**) stand in one of the fundamental paired relationships in Lahu cosmology,[23] and the two morphemes cooccur in a number of *Elab's* like **pɔ̄-khâ?-ha-khâ?** 'crossbow of the stars and moon' **pɔ̄-câ?-ha-câ?** 'occult connection with the stars and moon'.[24]

(D): (10a) ŋà {**qhɔ-ú** cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ **qhɔ-ú** tā lâ} /

when I circle round the hilltops put them on the hilltops for me

(10b) {**qhɔ-mɛ̄** cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ **qhɔ-mɛ̄** tā lâ}

when I circle round the foothills put them at the foothills for me

Here the parallel constituents may combine to form the *Elab* **qhɔ-ú-qhɔ-mɛ̄** 'hilltops and foothills; a whole mountain from top to bottom.' The couplet **...ú...mɛ̄** (lit. "head...tail") recurs in

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[23]The evening- and morning-stars are also a cosmic pair, referred to by the elaborate expression **pɔ̄-tɔ̂?-pɔ̄-qɛ̀** (**tɔ̂?** 'emerge', **qɛ̀** 'set, go down'). The word for 'moon; month' is always dissyllabic in modern colloquial Lahu, **ha-pa** (with the meaningless bulk-providing suffix **-pa**).

[24]See Matisoff 1988:875-6).

a large number of other *Elab's*, e.g., **qhâʔ-ú-qhâʔ-mɛ̄** 'upper and lower part of a village'; **hɛ-ú-hɛ-mɛ̄** 'top and bottom of a swidden', **vàʔ-ú-vàʔ-mɛ̄** 'a whole pig'.[25]

These cases show that syntactic parallelism and morphological elaboration are analogous stylistic devices. They both involve keeping certain elements constant while varying others. We may look at the relationship between them from either of two perspectives, depending on which phenomenon we take to be more basic: *either parallelism is a syntactic expansion of the morphological device of elaboration; or conversely, elaboration is a morphological compression of the syntactic device of parallelism.*[26] I tend to the latter view. Cross-linguistically, syntactic parallelism is the more general device, while elaboration -- parallelism in morphologic microcosm -- seems to be restricted to the monosyllabic languages of the East and Southeast Asian linguistic area.

The formidable research team of Anthony and Pauline Walker has played a vital role in the survival of traditional Lahu religious poetry. Comparative studies of Loloish religious discourse are now possible on a grand scale (cf. Ma 1948, Hansson 1979). These texts, fascinating both for their form and their content, deserve wider dissemination among linguists, anthropologists, and students of "oral literature".

Pauline's liteary training and poetic sensitivity, as well as her deep familiarity with the Lahu world, make me venture to hope that she would have enjoyed this paper that I have dedicated to her memory.

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[25]The whole parallel structure of (10a,b) is later repeated in virtually identical form in verse (17a,b), but the verbs of the 2nd clauses are **tɛ** 'put' instead of the closely synonymous **tā** 'place':
      (17a) {qhɔ-ú cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ qhɔ-ú **tɛ** lâ} /
      when I circle round the hilltops set them on the hilltops for me
      (17b) {qhɔ-mɛ̄ cɔ ğa qo yù lɛ qhɔ-mɛ̄ **tɛ** lâ}
      when I circle round the foothills set them at the foothills for me
Yet despite the intimate semantic relationship between these two verbs of putting, there is no elaborate expression in which they cooccur, e.g. ***tā-ve-tɛ-ve.** Thus the relationship between (10a,b) and (17a,b) is "non-contiguous parallelism", but not the "elaborational parallelism" that obtains *within* each pair (10a)/(10b), (17a)/(17b).

[26]A similar relationship between Hmong verb serialization and elaborate expressions has just been pointed out in Riddle 1990. My thanks to Annie Jaisser for calling my attention to Riddle's article, after the present paper was written.

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