

56th Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics
 Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
 October 10-12, 2023

***Meaning and Change of Meaning in Tibeto-Burman/Sino-Tibetan:
 compounding and semantic shift***

James A. Matisoff
 University of California, Berkeley

This paper is a distillation of my previous publications on historical semantics, full references to which appear in the *References*.

A. Semantic associations

What constitutes a “semantic association” between points A and B in semantic space? Basically it seems there are three types:

- (1) The same morpheme in a given language has both meanings A and B, either synchronically (polysemy) or diachronically, via semantic shift or slippage (“glissement sémantique”).
- (2) Reflexes of the same etymon mean A in Language X but B in Language Y.
- (3) The co-constituents of a compound each have an association with the meaning of the compound as a whole.

B. Scale of attestation of the association

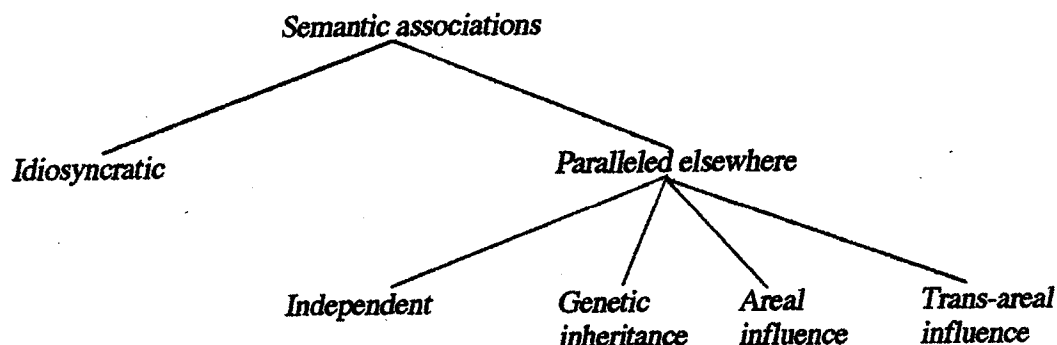


Figure 1. Distributional Types of Semantic Associations

Any such classification is naturally idealized, provisional, and porous. Usually we lack the necessary information to decide difficult cases, particularly when it comes to distinguishing between similarities due to genetic inheritance vs. areal influence. A perfect classificatory scheme would imply that we had recorded all semantic associations in all of the world's languages.

The easiest cases to pigeonhole are those associations which seem so idiosyncratic and culturally specific that one would be greatly surprised to see them occurring other than in one language:

--Jingpho *myit kabùn dùm* 'vacillate; be indecisive' < *myit* 'mind' + *kabùn dùm* 'sound the three gongs for the death-dance' (performed every day in the house of a recently deceased person, until his/her soul is sent off to the land of the ancestors). The metaphor is based on the fact that this dance involves much swaying from side to side – an exteriorization of the notion of mental vacillation. (See JAM 1986:47.)

--Lahu *phî-qhê làʔ-nɔ* 'index finger' < *phî-qhê* 'dogshit' + *làʔ-nɔ* 'finger' (so called because of its size and shape).

--Japanese *tatsu no otoshigo* 'seahorse' < *tatsu* 'dragon' + *otoshigo* 'love-child; child born to a nobleman's mistress'.

II. Association via compounding

Compounding is essentially a *syntagmatic* process. That is, the constituents of the compound occur in a linear order, appearing *in praesentia*.

Parallel but independent associations are so natural to human thought processes that they have led to similar compound formations in genetically and geographically unrelated languages families:

--FIRE + TONGUE → FLAME. This metaphor is found widely in Southeast Asian language families (e.g. in Khmer, Malagasy, Mien, Jingpho, Lahu), but also crops up elsewhere, in fact throughout the world: Swahili *ndimi za moto*, English *tongues of flame*, French *les flammes lèchent* ("flames lick"), etc.

--FIRE + MOUNTAIN → VOLCANO. Chinese *huǒshān* and Japanese *kazan*, both written with the same characters (火山), with the latter borrowed from the former. But the same formation occurs on the other side of the world, e.g. Icelandic *eldfjall*.

A number of these widespread associations are grounded in what one might call "botanical universals":

--CABBAGE + FLOWER → CAULIFLOWER. Eng. *cauli-* (≠ *kale* ≠ *cole* (slaw) < Lat. 'stalk of plant; cabbage'; French *chou* 'cabbage', *chou-fleur* 'cauliflower'. Lahu *gǔ-cá* 'cabbage', *vêʔ* 'flower', *gǔ-cá-vêʔ* 'cauliflower'.

--GROUND + BEAN/NUT → PEANUT. Eng. *groundnut* (chiefly British and South Atlantic U.S.); Thai *thù-a-din*; Lahu *mì-nôʔ*.

The following three compounds with words meaning EYE illustrate my system of diagramming the relationship between their constituents:

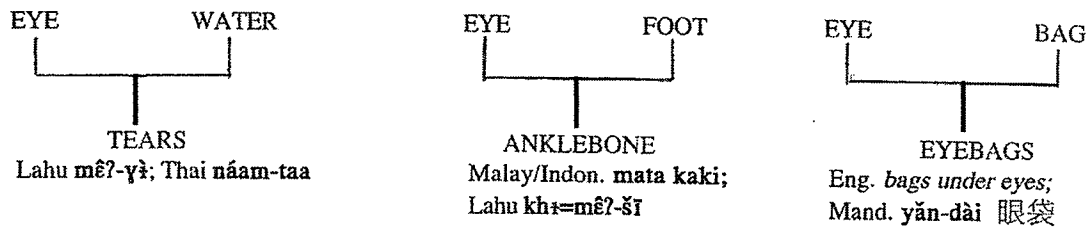


Figure 2. Association via compounding

Note that no particular semantic relationship is implied among these co-constituents of EYE (WATER, FOOT, BAG). (If desired, we could call them a “compound-forming family with respect to EYE”, but this seems rather unnecessary.)

“Parallel but independent” associations can verge on the “universal” if they are extremely widespread, although as Greenberg (1963) has taught us, universality is a statistical notion.

Cultural change and neologistic compounds

Neologistic compounds are an excellent way to observe semantic change in action. Some examples from Lahu:

AFRICAN AMERICAN

Kâlâ ‘Indian’; *Kâlâ-phu* ‘Caucasian foreigner’ (lit. “white Indian”; = Thai *fàràng*); *Kâlâ-phu-nâʔ* ‘African American’ (lit. “black white Indian”). This antonymous formation is paralleled by another Lahu example: *á-pè* ‘duck’; *á-pè-ló* ‘goose’ (lit. “big duck”); *á-pè-ló-é* ‘gosling’ (lit. “little big duck”).

AIRPLANE

càʔ-pò (*càʔ* ‘machine’, ult. < Pali/Skt. *cakra*). An older word is *lâ-thâ-vî* (*lâ-thâ* < Shan < Bse. (cf. WB *rathâ* ‘cart, wagon’) + *vî* < Shan *min* ~ *win* ‘fly’ (Cushing 1881/1914, p. 619) (cf. Siamese *bin*). This word is still used in Red Lahu, but sounds old-fashioned in Black Lahu. Cf. using archaic English *wireless* or French TSF *télegraphie sans fil* for ‘radio’. Still another rather old-fashioned term is Lahu *hâ-vî* lit. “flying boat” (*hâ* < Shan *hæ* ‘boat’ (Cushing 663) [cf. Siamese *rya*].

BLESSINGS/MERIT/THANKS

Lahu *jà-bo* ~ *jà-bon* (See JAM:1988a: 186-187, 941-944)

< Shan *puñña* ~ *pùñña* (Cushing 1881:412), probably remodelled on a Northern Thai form (cf. Siamese *bun* (< Khmer) < Burmese *pouN-nya* < Pali *puñña* 'happiness resulting from meritorious action' < Sanskrit *puṇya*. This morpheme originally referred to the Buddhist concept of 'merit'. In religious contexts, Lahu animism adopted the term in the sense of 'blessing; boon to be obtained from *gì-ša* or a lesser spirit'. At the same time, the word acquired a secular sense of 'good luck, advantage, usefulness.' The Christian Lahu retained this secular meaning, and added one of their own: 'favor for which thanks are due'.¹ In addition, under the influence of missionaries, the term was reinterpreted religiously as 'blessings from God; divine grace'. Sometimes it is now hard to say in which context a given expression originated. In other cases, the same expression has acquired different meanings for animist and Christian speakers.

CELLPHONE

Lahu *làʔ-šɛ tholašâʔ*: *làʔ-šɛ* 'hand' + *tholašâʔ* 'telephone' (< Thai < Pali/Sanskrit)

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Lahu *qhô bôʔ ve*: < *qhô* 'steal; do stealthily' + *bôʔ* 'shoot; fight'

GUN/FIREARM

Henriette Daudey reports (p.c.) that in Pumi, *məda* means 'gun', an updating of the original meaning of PTB **m-da* 'bow (for arrows)'. Lidz (p.c.) points out the same development in Yongning Na.

Lahu *nâʔ* 'gun' is possibly a reinterpretation of Portuguese 16th c. military slang, *espinharda* 'the spiny/prickly one'. This etymology is due to Gérard Diffloth (p.c. 1985). Other cognates in Lolo-Burmese and elsewhere (Mon-Khmer and Tai): WB *se-nat* 'musket/fowling piece', Jingpho *sənát*, Pa-O Karen *tənàt*, Mon *sənat* (Shorto 1962 considers these last three to be loans from Burmese), Khmu *snàat* (Smalley 1961), Proto-Waic **s-nat* (Diffloth 1980), Tai Neua *naat'* (Gedney 1976). See JAM 1988a:747

HELICOPTER

Lahu *pí-cá-qôʔ*= MOSQUITO + AIRPLANE (so called because of the appearance of the rotors). An alternative formation is *tá-tù-ma=càʔ-pò* "dragonfly-airplane".

HORN (of a vehicle)

This is not treated a noun in Lahu, but rather as a verb: *lǝlǝ bù ve* "car makes noise (like an animal)" (*lǝlǝ* < British Eng. *lorry*). Interestingly, the Lahu use the animal classifier *khɛ* for automobiles, since they move and make noise like an animal.

¹ Traditionally the Lahu did not offer verbal thanks for a favor received, signalling their gratitude in other (often non-verbal) ways. To this day foreign speakers (including myself) tend to overuse the expression *jà-bo i jâ* "the favor is very great" in situations where it is not expected, and a smile would do just as well.

MOTORCYCLE

Lahu *m̄t̄-pô?*: first element < Eng. *motor*; -*pô?* because of the sound it makes *pô?-pô?-pô?*.

MY GOODNESS!/GOOD GRIEF!

The Lahu interjection *pò-thôo* expresses surprise, wonderment, disbelief, strong feeling. It is a borrowing from Thai *phû(t)thôo* ‘by the Buddha’. The Lahu use this word all the time, despite the fact that virtually no Lahu are Buddhists.

SHOE

Lahu *khí-nô?* ‘shoe’ from *khí* ‘foot/leg’ and *nô?* ‘to pinch’; *i.e.* ‘foot-pincher’. SHOE and PINCH are thus associated in the Lahu worldview.

STEAMBOAT

Lahu *hâ-šá-phô* (*šá-phô* < Bse. *Ōin-bô* (WB *saŋ-bhâw*, prob. < Malay *sampan*). The 2nd syllable of the Lahu form is folk-etymologized by some speakers to be from native Lahu *šá* ‘air, breath, vapor’.

TRACTOR

Lahu *cà?-t̄* : formed from native Lahu *cà?* ‘push’ + *t̄* < Eng. -*tor*

III. Cross-cultural differences in compound formation

UVULA

Even closely related languages may have quite different metaphors for the same concept. The uvula is an organ the functions of which are totally obscure to most people, leaving the way open for great diversity in compound formation possibilities.³ Our English word is from Latin *ūvula* ‘little grape’. Tibeto-Burman languages typically form compounds with other bodyparts, but these range all over the anatomy, e.g.: Burmese *hlya-khaŋ* “tongue-knoll”, Tangkhul Naga *kharok-əməthin* “throat-liver”; Written Tibetan *lce-chuŋ* “little tongue”; Lushai (Mizo) *daŋ-mən* “palate-clitoris”; Lahu *ha=cú-ni* “tongue clitoris”.⁴

ZOO

European languages tend to romanticize the displaying of captive animals, with expressions meaning ANIMAL + GARDEN: Eng. *zoo* < *zoological garden*, French *jardin des animaux*, German *Tiergarten*, Dutch *dieren-tuin*, etc. The Lahu have viewed the matter quite differently, expressing this with their compounds *to-nû-to-šâ?=th̄* or *fâ?-th̄-ŋâ?-th̄* ANIMAL + JAIL.⁵

³ See JAM 1978:67-8

⁴ Apparently via the phenomenon that Benedict (1979) dubbed “genital flipflop”, Japanese has the compound *nodo-chinko* “throat-penis”)

⁵ A more recent Lahu formation is more in line with Western ideas on the subject: *to-nû-to-šâ?=yè*: ANIMAL + HOUSE.

A famous example of the same ideographic compound with vastly different meanings in Japanese and Chinese is 手紙 (HAND + PAPER), read *tegami* in Japanese, with the meaning ‘letter, epistle’, but pronounced *shǒuzhǐ* in Chinese, with the meaning “toilet paper”.

Not all Lahu compounds are fully analyzable. The notorious concept RAINBOW, with a dazzling array of unrelatable forms, is a five-syllable Lahu compound, none of whose components has any meaning I can discover: *á-lâ-mì-ší-jɔ*. We Stedtniks knocked ourselves out trying to find any cognates among all the forms in our database. Different cultures made up different words for this spectacular natural occurrence (e.g. “Indra’s G-string”).

IV. Polysemy and semantic shift

By definition, a polysemous morpheme is one that has undergone semantic shift, or what French semanticists call *glissement sémantique* (semantic slippage). We have seen how compounding may be viewed as a *syntagmatic* relationship between morphemes all of which are present at the same time, in linear order, i.e. a relationship *in praesentia*. Perhaps it is not going too far to consider polysemy as a *paradigmatic* relationship, in the sense that in any given context only one of the various shades of meaning is present in any particular context, i.e. a relationship *in absentia*.

Some Lahu examples:

- Lahu *jû?* in its literal sense means ‘pierce, stab; insert by piercing, inject; stick into, thrust into; poke; jab’ (e.g. *nâ?-chî jû? ve* ‘inject medicine’). But it is also used metaphorically to mean ‘point at (with the finger or another object), as in *chɔ tâ jû?* “Don’t point at people!” In a more abstract sense, as in the elaborate expression *jû?-ve-bè-ve*, it means ‘goad; incite; stir up; instigate; arouse to action’.

- The Lahu verb *cû* is highly polysemous, with related meanings ranging among ‘prefer; adopt as one’s own; accept; put one’s trust in; have recourse to; depend upon’.⁶ Some of these shades of meaning are illustrated in such contexts as the following:

<i>à-mī cû ve</i> (à-mī ‘fire’)	‘get a light from someone else’s fire’
<i>í-kâ? cû ve</i> (í-kâ? ‘water’)	‘take to the water (as a swimmer or fish)’
<i>bo à? cû ve</i> (bo ‘blessing; favor’)	‘depend on someone’s good will; put one’s trust in a supernatural power’
<i>ca-cû-kì</i> (ca ‘go and do’, <i>kì</i> ‘locative nominalizer’)	‘place of refuge; something to be depended on’
<i>nê te thô mâ na qo nâ?-chî-yè thà? ġa cû ve yò</i>	‘If the spirits don’t listen even when you pray to them, then you’ve got to try [i.e. have recourse to] the hospital.’
<i>Ye-šû? thà? cû le ha-lè-ha-qa chê tù yò cê</i>	‘By accepting Jesus [as your savior] they say you will live in happiness.’

⁶ I reconstruct this verb as PST **d-yu-k*, claiming that it is also the source of the simple Lahu verb *yù* ‘take’ (see JAM 1989).

•A particularly interesting case is provided by the semantic peregrinations of the word $\dot{\text{y}}\text{-}\check{\text{s}}\check{\text{e}}\text{-ma}$ 'female body' (the male correlative is $\dot{\text{y}}\text{-}\check{\text{s}}\check{\text{e}}\text{-ph}\hat{\text{a}}$ 'man's body'). $\dot{\text{y}}\text{-}\check{\text{s}}\check{\text{e}}\text{-ma}$ has evolved into a feminine reflexive ('she herself') and a feminine agentive nominalizer ("she who does something"). In combination with $\dot{\text{i}}\text{-k}\hat{\text{a}}\text{?}$ 'water' it came to mean a 'female proprietary spirit specializing in bodies of water' among the animist Lahu. Among Christian Lahu it has the secular meaning of 'female owner'. In combination with $\text{y}\check{\text{e}}$ 'house' the word has gone in two directions. Straightforwardly $\text{y}\check{\text{e}}\text{-}\check{\text{s}}\check{\text{e}}\text{-ma}$ means 'lady of the house', but jocularly it is now applied to the ubiquitous lizards (Thai *cîŋcòk*) that populate the walls and ceilings of most Thai houses. In combination with $\text{p}\hat{\text{u}}$ 'insect' it now means 'silkworm' (i.e. a bug that dominates all others in its usefulness). Most recently it has been compounded with the verb $\text{n}\hat{\text{a}}$ 'be ill' to form a neologism meaning 'germ/microbe'. See Fig. 3.

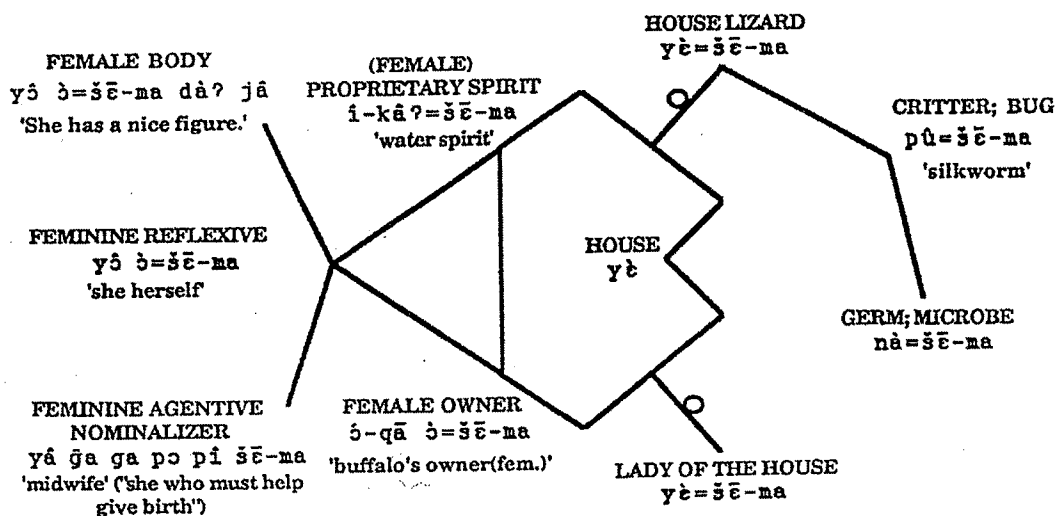


Figure 3. Semantics of $\dot{\text{y}}\text{-}\check{\text{s}}\check{\text{e}}\text{-ma}$

•Straight/flat/full

Once a semantic association has already been established on independent grounds within a linguistic area, similar associations found elsewhere may well have confirmatory force. I have hypothesized that two supposedly distinct but homophonous PTB roots **dyam* 'full' and **dyam* 'straight; flat'⁷ are really one and the same, offering as additional evidence the phonological similarity and intercontamination between two semantically similar Indo-European roots

⁷ See Benedict 1972, #'s 226 and 227.

represented by Latin *plānus* ‘flat’ and *plēnus* ‘full’.⁸ Further support was sought in the intrinsic common core of meaning among STRAIGHT, FLAT, and FULL, which represent “perfection” in one, two, and three dimensions, respectively. See JAM 1988b and Fig. 4.

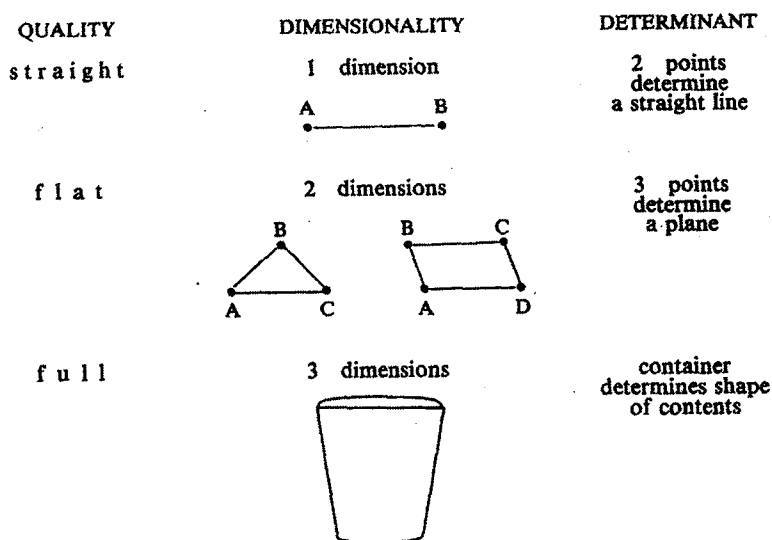


Figure 4. Rectitude / Platitude / Plenitude

•Property/livestock/talent

I have demonstrated that three graphically differentiated but homophonous Chinese characters 才 財 材, all reconstructed as OC *dz'əg in Karlgren 1957:#943, and all pronounced *cái* in modern Mandarin, actually reflect the same underlying etymon, meaning ‘resources; property; talent.’ The key evidence came from Tibeto-Burman cognates with meanings ranging from ‘cattle; elephant; valuable work animal’ to ‘mind, heart, disposition’, reflecting PTB *(t)sa:y ⚭ *(d)za:y, but a final bit of confirmatory support came from the well-known Indo-European association between cattle and property in general (cf. Latin *pecunia*, German *Vieh*, English *fee*; as well as Eng. *cattle* ⚭ *chattel*).

Schuessler 2007:175 agrees that all three of those Chinese characters are mere graphic variants of the same etymon,⁹ but he is skeptical of my TB etymology (p. 632), preferring to relate the Chinese forms to 資 (Mand. *zi*) ‘property, resources’, with different vocalism.

⁸ It has been objected that these IE roots are really distinct, since they are reconstructed with two different laryngeals, but surely they are close enough to be considered co-allofams, or at least likely candidates for intercontamination.

⁹ A similar Chinese example is the 3rd person pronoun 他 (traditionally unspecified for gender), now supplemented by 她 ‘she’ (feminine), 牠 ‘it’ (of animals), 祂 ‘He’ (of God (Christian use)), 它 ‘it’ (inanimate).

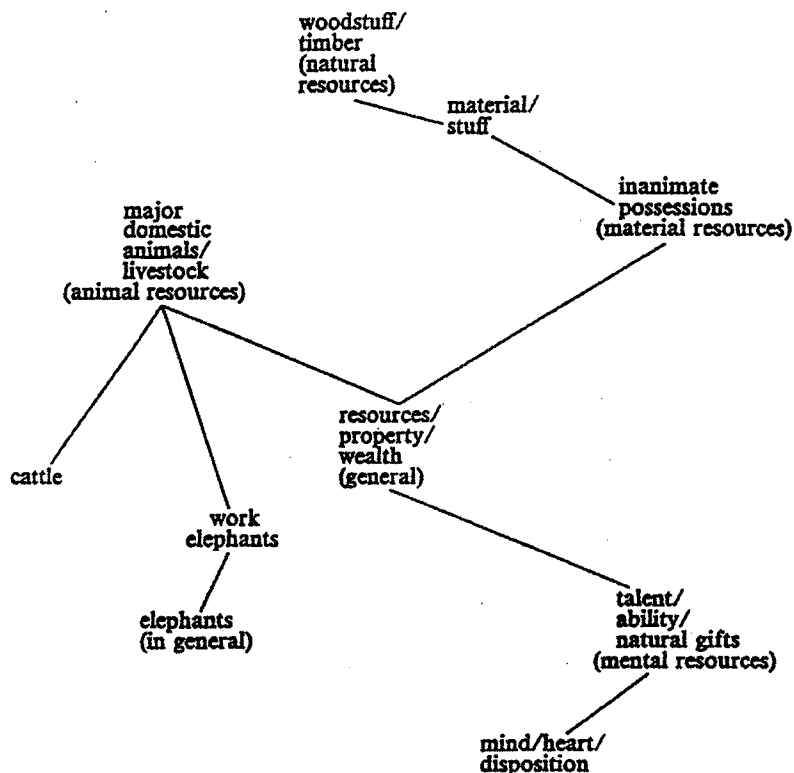


Figure 5. Sino-Tibetan Resources

V. Semantic change and grammar

Verb concatenation

A striking feature of Lahu, and of Southeast Asian languages in general, is the grammaticalization of full verbs into auxiliaries that have a more abstract meaning than the verb in isolation.¹⁰ Thus the Lahu verb *qhô* means 'steal' as a main verb, but has acquired the more abstract meaning 'do stealthily/secretly' as a pre-head auxiliary verb:

qhô bô? *ve* 'fight a guerrilla war' (*bô?* 'shoot; fight')

mì-cí qhô phān e ve 'sneak across a border' (*mì-cí* 'border', *phān* 'pass by; pass through')

Even more abstract are "bleachings" into grammatical categories, as exemplified by verbs with independent meanings like DWELL, OBTAIN, GIVE:

¹⁰ See JAM 1969. Givón refers to this phenomenon as "bleaching" of the full verb's semantic content, but perhaps "abstractification" is a better general term.

	<i>DWELL</i> > <i>progressive</i>	<i>OBTAIN</i> <i>manage to;</i> <i>must; able to</i>	<i>GIVE</i> <i>causative;</i> <i>benefactive</i>
Chinese	zài 在	dé; děi 得	gěi 給
Thai	jùu	dáj	hâj
Hmong (Miao)	nyob	tau	---
Mien (Yao Samsao)	yiəm	tú?	pun
Vietnamese	ở	đọc	cho
Khmer	---	baan	?aoy
Burmese	ne	ra	pê
Lahu	chê	ģa	pî

Fig. 6 is a more detailed diagram of the semantic extensions of the Lahu verb *ģa* 'get; obtain'.

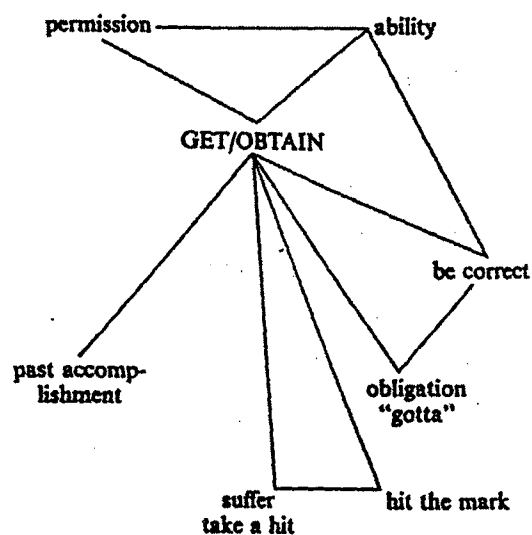


Figure 6. Semantic extensions of Lahu *ģa* 'get/obtain'

Historical origin of a key Lahu particle

Half a century ago (JAM 1972), I wrote an article demonstrating that the textually most frequent Lahu particle, *ve*, was responsible for three separate but related grammatical duties, functioning as a nominalizer, a relativizer, or a genitivizer, according to context. Much later (JAM 1985a), I derived this particle from a PST/PTB form **way* \times **ray*, with the grammatical meaning of 'copula', but with complex semantic interconnections with notions of being, existence, and God (**g-ray*).

A striking analogy to this semantic link is provided by the Hebrew copula HWH \times HYH 'to be',¹¹ which also underlies the Hebrew word for God, symbolized by the holy "tetragrammaton", or four-consonant root YHWH 'Yahweh, Jehovah, God'. See Fig. 7.

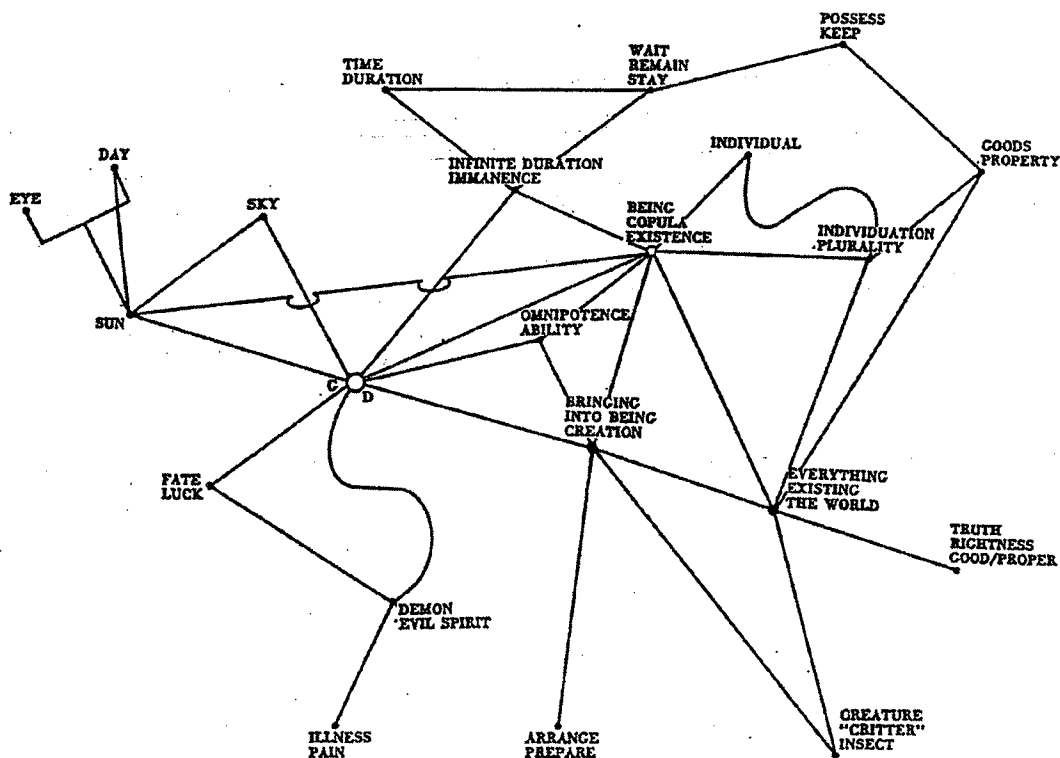


Figure 7. Semantic ramifications of the copula

VI. Areal and trans-areal semantic associations

Augmentatives and diminutives (JAM 1991b)

The metaphorical extension of the opposition MOTHER/CHILD to AUGMENTATIVE/DIMINUTIVE is clearly to be considered a Southeast Asian areal semantic feature, although it is certainly to be found elsewhere as well. While MOTHER/FEMALE + HAND/FINGER > THUMB is found in other linguistic areas, so far MOTHER > LOCK vs. CHILD > KEY has not been observed outside of SE Asia. See Fig. 8.

¹¹ Hebrew verbs are traditionally cited by the consonants of their roots, since the vowels vary all over the place in their inflected forms.

Indonesian

ibu 'mother' / **anak** 'child'

ibu kota 'capital city', **ibu roti** 'yeast' (**kota** 'city', **roti** 'bread'); **ibu djari** ~ **ibu tangan** 'thumb', **ibu kaki** 'big toe' (**djari** 'finger', **tangan** 'hand', **kaki** 'foot'); **ibu panah** 'bow' / **anak panah** 'arrow'; **ibu kuntji** 'skeleton key; lock' / **anak kuntji** 'key'

Cham

inō tañin 'thumb', **inō takai** 'big toe' (**inō** 'mother', **tañin** 'hand' **takai** 'foot')

White Hmong

niam 'mother; woman' ≠ **niag** 'augmentative' (-m and -g are tone-marks)

Mien (Chiengrai)

puad-do'q-ñei 'thumb', **zauj-do'q-ñei** 'big toe' (**puad** 'hand', **zauj** 'foot', **ñei** 'mother')

Vietnamese

cái- 'mother' / **con-** 'child'

ngón tay cái 'thumb', **ngón chân cái** 'big toe' (**ngón** 'digit', **tay** 'hand', **chân** 'foot')

Thai

mêe 'mother' / **lûuk** 'child'⁴³

hũa-mêe-myy 'thumb', **hũa-mêe-tiin** 'big toe' (**hũa** 'head', **myy** 'hand', **tiin** 'foot')

Hlai

pai³-zi:ŋ² (Baoding dial.), **mei³-zi:ŋ²** (Zhongsha dial.) 'thumb' (**pai³** / **mei³** 'mother', **zi:ŋ²** 'finger')

*Chinese*⁴⁴

(**dà**)-**mǔ**-**zhǐ** 'thumb' 大拇指 (**dà** 'big', **mǔ** 'mother', **zhǐ** 'finger'); in this compound the morpheme 'mother', usually written 母, is graphically elaborated by the hand-radical)

Karen

(E. Kayah) **kənō-mò-du**, (Kayaw) **c̄y-mòh-du** 'thumb' (**kənō** 'finger', **c̄y** 'hand', **mò/mòh** 'mother', **du** 'big')

Lahu

gâ?-ma-pō 'mother hen'; **šo-ma-pō** 'magnet' ("iron-mother"); **li?-ma-pō** 'alphabet' ("writing-mother")⁴⁵; **lâ?-ma-pō** 'thumb', **kh+ma-pō** 'big toe'

Jingpho

tá?-lənū, **yùŋ-nù** 'thumb' (**tá?** 'hand', **yùŋ** 'finger', **nù** 'mother'); **ləgō-lənū**, **ləgō yùŋ-nù** 'big toe' (**ləgō** 'foot')

Lushai

pui 'mother; augmentative', as in **ar-pui** 'mother hen', **kho-pui** 'chief village', **kong-pui** 'main road';

kut-zung-pui 'thumb', **ke-zung-pui** 'big toe' (**kut** 'hand', **ke** 'foot', **zung** 'finger')

Japanese

oyayubi 親指 (PARENT + FINGER) 'thumb' / **koyubi** 子指 CHILD + FINGER) 'little finger';

boshi 母指 or 拇指 'thumb' (MOTHER + FINGER)

Nepali

buRi aūlaa (OLD LADY + FINGER)

Tzeltal (and most other Mayan languages)

sme? 'its mother' + **ak'ab'** 'your hand' ---> **sme?ak'ab'** 'your thumb'

yal 'its child' + **ak'ab'** 'your hand' ---> **yalak'ab'** 'your finger'

Arabic

umm 'mother' ---> **umm-al-nujūm** 'Milky Way' ("mother of stars"; **umm-al-qurā** 'Mecca' ("mother of cities"); **umm-qarn** 'rhinoceros' ("mother of horn")

Figure 8. Metaphorical extensions of MOTHER and CHILD

--*Psycho-collocations*

I introduced this term in JAM 1986, to refer to polymorphemic expressions referring to mental processes, emotional states, or qualities of character, which contain a “psycho-noun” that explicitly mentions the focus of the activity or state (*heart, liver, gall, spirit, etc.*) The rest of the psycho-collocation contains morphemes (usually action verbs or adjectives) that complete the meaning, which I called the “psycho-mate”. Such expressions are an areal SE Asian feature,¹² with analogical formations all over the world.

Interestingly, the psycho-nouns have been so grammaticalized in some Chin languages that their exact anatomical meaning has become vague. Van-Bik (1998:210) clearly points this out: “When one speaks of ‘liver’ and ‘heart’ in Lai Chin, one needs to be careful not to be too specific about whether *luŋ* is ‘liver’ or ‘heart’. Similarly, it is possible to translate ‘heart’ as either *luŋ-thin* or *thin-luŋ*. In some expressions either *luŋ* or *thin* may be used interchangeably...”¹³

--*Cutting and deciding*

As a final example of a trans-areal association, there is the widespread human tendency to identify mental processes with physical actions, as illustrated by the planet-wide metaphor of *cutting* for *deciding*. A few examples:

	<i>cut/sever</i>	<i>decide</i>	
<i>Lahu</i>	chê?	dô-chê?	dô 'think'
<i>Jingpho</i>	phrát; tòŋ	myít phrát; myít tòŋ	myít 'mind'
<i>Burmese</i>	phrat	cit pûiŋ-phrat	cit 'mind'
<i>Chinese</i>	duàn 斷	duàn-dìŋ; jué-dùan	dìŋ 決 'settle', jué 定 'resolve'
<i>Thai</i>	tàt	tàt-sǐn-caj	caj 'breath; heart'
<i>Hmong</i>	txiav	txiav siab	siab 'liver'
<i>Japanese</i>	kiru	omoikiru	omoi- 'think'
<i>Latin</i>	caedo	dēcīdere	
<i>English</i>	incise	decide	
<i>Russian</i>	rezatj	razrešatj	

¹² See, e.g. the studies by Jaisser (1990) with respect to Hmong, and Oey (1990) with respect to Malay.

¹³ They are from PTB *m-luŋ ‘heart’ and *m-sin ‘liver’.

* * *

I view semantic space as some kind of hugely complex n-dimensional realm with practically infinite pathways of interconnections. Figure 9 is a pathetically primitive stab at diagramming some of the associations presented in JAM 1978:228.

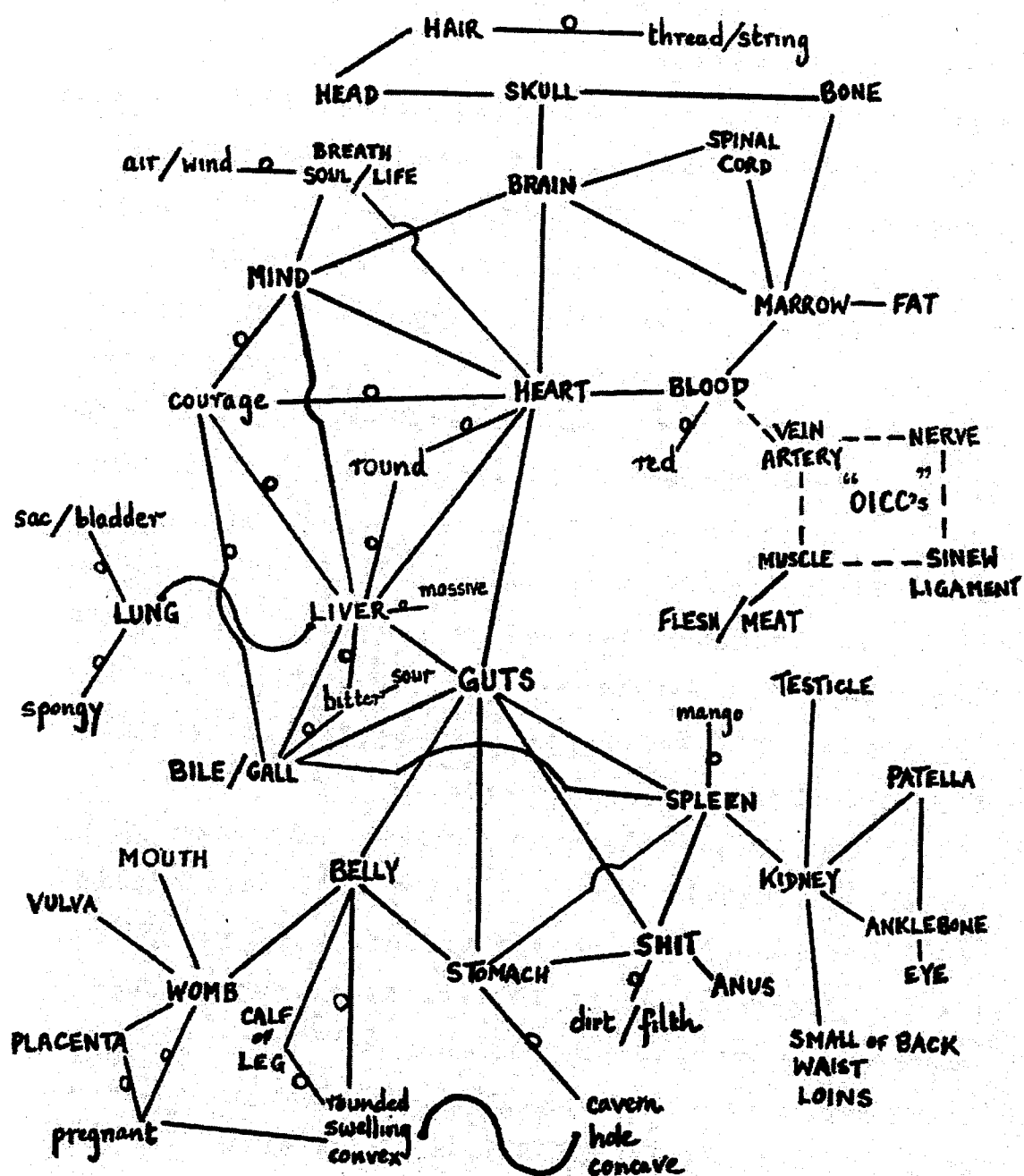


Figure 9. A small part of the Tibeto-Burman body

References

- Benedict, Paul K. 1939. "Semantic differentiation in Indo-Chinese." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 4:3-4:213-219.
- , 1972. *Sino-Tibetan: a Conspectus*. Cambridge University Press.
- , 1979. "Karen genital flipflop". In "Four forays into Karen linguistic history." LTBA 5.1:1-35.
- Cushing, J.N. 1881. *A Shan and English Dictionary*. Rangoon. Reprinted 1914, American Baptist Mission Press, Rangoon.
- Diffloth, Gérard. 1980. *The Wa Languages*. LTBA 5.2 (192 pp.).
- Gedney, William J. 1976. "Notes on Tai Neua." In Thomas Gething et al., eds. *Tai Linguistics in Honor of Fang-kuei Li* (Bangkok), pp. 62-102.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1963. "Some universals of grammar, with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements." In J.J. Greenberg, ed., *Universals of Language*. Cambridge, MA. MIT Press.
- Jaisser, Annie C. 1990. "DeLIVERing an introduction to psycho-collocations with SIAB in Hmong." LTBA 13.1:159-78.
- Matisoff, James A. 1969. "Verb concatenation in Lahu: the syntax and semantics of 'simple' juxtaposition." *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* (Copenhagen) 12.1:69-120.
- , 1972. "Lahu nominalization, relativization, and genitivization." In J. Kimball, ed., *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. I, pp. 237-257. New York: Seminar Press.
- , 1978. *Variational Semantics in Tibeto-Burman: the 'organic' approach to linguistic comparison*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- , 1980. "Stars, moon, and spirits: bright beings of the night in Sino-Tibetan." *Gengo Kenkyu* 77:1-45.
- , 1982. "Conjugal bliss: an Indo-Aryan word family PAIR/YOKE/JOIN in Tibeto-Burman." *South Asian Review* VI.3:42-50.
- , 1985a. "God and the Sino-Tibetan copula, with some good news concerning

- selected Tibeto-Burman rhymes." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Tokyo) 29:1-81.
- . 1985b. "Out on a limb: ARM, HAND, and WING in Sino-Tibetan." In G. Thurgood, J.A. Matisoff, and D. Bradley, eds., *Linguistics of the Sino-Tibetan Area: the State of the Art. Papers presented to Paul K. Benedict for his 71st birthday*, pp. 421-50. Canberra: *Pacific Linguistics* C-87.
- . 1986. "Hearts and minds in Southeast Asian languages and English: an essay in the comparative lexical semantics of psycho-collocations." *Cahiers de Linguistique Asie Orientale* 15.1:5-57.
- . 1988a. *The Dictionary of Lahu*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- . 1988b. "Universal semantics and allofamic identification – two Sino-Tibetan case studies: STRAIGHT/FLAT/FULL and PROPERTY/LIVESTOCK/TALENT." In A. Sato, ed., *Languages and History in East Asia: festschrift for Tatsuo Nishida on the occasion of his 60th birthday*, pp. 3-14. Kyoto: Shokado.
- . 1989. "A new Sino-Tibetan root **d-yu-k* BELONG/TRUST/ACCEPT/TAKE, and a note of caution to megaloreconstructionists." In D. Bradley, E.J.A.H. Henderson, and M. Mazaudon, eds., *Prosodic Analysis and Asian Linguistics: to honour R.K. Sprigg*, pp. 265-269. Canberra: *Pacific Linguistics* C-104.
- . 1991a. "Areal and universal dimensions of grammaticalization in Lahu." In E.C. Traugott and B. Heine, eds., *Approaches to Grammaticalization*, Vol. II:383-453. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- . 1991b. "The mother of all morphemes: augmentatives and diminutives in areal and universal perspective." In M. Ratliff and E. Schiller, eds., *Papers from the First Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistic Society*, pp. 293-349. Tempe, Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies.
- . 1992. "Following the marrow: two parallel Sino-Tibetan etymologies." *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 15.1:159-77.
- . 1994b. "How dull can you get? *Buttock* and *heel* in Sino-Tibetan." *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 17.2:137-51.
- . 1994a. "Watch out for number ONE: Jingpho *nāi* 'I' and *lən̄âl* 'one' (with some speculations about Jingpho number TWO)." In A.S. Abramson, ed. *Southeast Asian Linguistic Studies in Honour of Vichin Panupong*, pp. 161-169. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.

- . 2000. "Three Tibeto-Burman/Sino-Tibetan word families: SET (of the sun); PHEASANT/PEACOCK; /SCATTER/POUR." In M. Macken, ed., *Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the Southeast Asia Linguistics Society*, pp. 215-32. Tempe: Arizona State University, Program for Southeast Asian Studies.
- . 2002. "Wedge issues." *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 25.1:137-64.
- . 2004. "Areal semantics: is there such a thing?" In A. Saxena, ed., *Himalayan Languages, Past and Present*, pp. 347-93. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- . 2008. *The Tibeto-Burman Reproductive System: Toward an Etymological Thesaurus*. University of California Publications in Linguistics, Vol. 140. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- . 2011. "Areal and universal issues in plant and animal nomenclature." *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* (Osaka): 35.4:655-79.
- Oey, Eric M. 1990. "Psycho-collocations in Malay." *LTBA* 13.1:141-158.
- Schuessler, Axel. 2007. *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Shorto, Harry L. 1962. *A Dictionary of Modern Spoken Mon*. Oxford University Press.
- Smalley, William G. 1961. *Outline of Khmu' Structure*. New Haven: American Oriental Society.
- Van-Bik, Kenneth. 1998. "Lai psycho-collocation." *LTBA* 21.1:201-33.