

# Word Compounding in Tai Dam: A Reflection of People World Views and Culture<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper shows how word compounding reflects Tai Dam world views and culture. Data were collected from ten Tai Dam informants in the lower northern part of Thailand and naturally occurring texts such as narratives and dialogues collected from Facebook. The result shows that word compounding in Tai Dam is performed in two ways: syntactic and semi-syntactic. The syntactic compounding type involves three syntactic categories such as synthetic, verb-verb, and noun-noun compounds. The synthetic strategy is the imitation of simple clauses, non-simple clauses, nominalization, and phrases. The verb-verb strategy is the combination of a main verb and its complement. And the noun-noun strategy displays various patterns of semantic relations. The semi-syntactic method is the combination that carries a number of lexical relations such as reduplicative, synonymous, similar, member, and opposite. Word compounding in Tai Dam reflects their world views and culture in terms of the folk taxonomic system of spatial entities, complex categorization, conceptualization, cultural concept & practices, and folk wisdom.

**Keywords:** Tai Dam, word compounding, world views, culture

## บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการประสมคำในภาษาไทยดำ โดยพิจารณาลักษณะทางภาษาศาสตร์และลักษณะที่คำประสมสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงโลกทัศน์และวัฒนธรรมของชาติพันธุ์ไทดำ ข้อมูลได้จากการซักถามผู้บอกภาษาชาวไทดำในเขตภาคเหนือตอนล่าง ตัวบทที่เป็นเรื่องเล่าและการสนทนาในเฟซบุ๊ก ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า การประสมคำในภาษาไทยดำกระทำใน 2 วิธี คือ วิธีวางยสัมพันธ์และวิธีกิ่งวากยสัมพันธ์ คำประสม

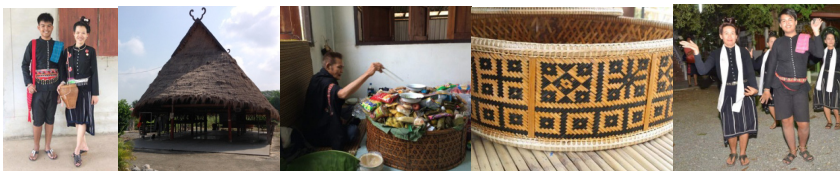
<sup>1</sup> The article is a part of the research project “Language Wisdom and Inheritance of Tai Ethnic Groups in the Lower Northern Part: A New Paradigm in the Study of Thai Regional Dialects and Literatures”, funded by National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) in the year 2015.

วิธีวากยสัมพันธ์อธิบายได้เป็น 3 กลวิธี ได้แก่ กลวิธีประโยค กลวิธีกริยา-กริยา และ กลวิธีนาม-นาม คำประสมกลวิธีประโยคเป็นการเลียนประโยคสามัญ ประโยควิสามัญ การกลายเป็นนามและวลี คำประสมกลวิธีกริยา-กริยา เป็นการประสมกริยาหลักกับ กริยาอนุประโยคเติมเต็ม และคำประสมกลวิธีนาม-นามแสดงรูปแบบความสัมพันธ์ทาง อรรถศาสตร์ที่หลากหลาย ส่วนวิธีกึ่งวากยสัมพันธ์นั้นเป็นการประสมคำที่มีความสัมพันธ์ ในระดับคำศัพท์ ซึ่งได้แก่ คำซ้ำ คำพ้อง คำคล้าย คำสมาธิ และคำตรงข้าม การประสม คำในภาษาไทยคำสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงโลกทัศน์และวัฒนธรรมในรูปของระบบอนุกรมวิธาน พื้นบ้านของสรรพสิ่งรูปธรรม การจำแนกชั้นซ้อน การสร้างประกอบมนทัศน์ แนวคิดและ การปฏิบัติเชิงวัฒนธรรม และภูมิปัญญาพื้นบ้าน

**คำสำคัญ:** ไทดำ การประสมคำ โลกทัศน์ วัฒนธรรม

## Introduction

Tai Dam is a Tai ethnic group located in Thailand that still continues to speak its own language, a member of the Tai-Tai language family which is closely related to Laotian and Standard Thai (Premsrirat et al., 2004). They maintain their traditional lifestyle and practices. They have many names and are referred to by the Thai people according to their characteristics such as “Tai Dam” (black Tai) or “Tai Song Dam” (black-clothes Tai) from black clothes, “Lao Song” referring to their migration from Laos, and “Thai Song” referring to the Thai government practice of attempting to include minorities in Thailand into mainstream Thai society. This ethnic group is well-known for their cultural practices including traditional houses, spirit worship, dancing, and handicrafts.



**Figure 1:** Tai Dam people and some of their cultural practices

Since the Tai Dam are a minority group whose traditional practices and beliefs are quite different from those of the majority of people in Thailand, it is also considered an endangered language & culture and thus needs to be preserved. The best way to preserve these communities is to strengthen their minority rights. Linguistically, most of the previous studies concentrated on Tai Dam phonology, e.g. Anuntrawan (1978), Daecha (1987), Maneewong (1987), Saengngam (2006), and Burusphat (2013). A number of the studies were conducted on words and their meanings, e.g. Yensamut (1981), Buranasing (1988), Praphin (1996) and Singnoi et al (2003). Certain studies were devoted to syntactic analysis, e.g. Jiranathanaporn et al (2003) and Jiranathanaporn (2007). Semantically, Burusphat (2014) worked on plant-based numeral classifiers in Tai Dam. Patpong (2013) and Burusphat (2016) worked on textual management and discourse analysis. However no study, thus far, has been conducted on word formation, a salient linguistic aspect of Tai Dam, and of other Tai languages (Singnoi, 2005). As a lexical category, compound words could reflect world views and cultural practices of the people.

### **Methodology and framework**

Methodologically, the research paper is descriptive. It is aimed at the study of word compounding in Tai Dam to understand its linguistic characteristics and how such word building strategies reflect Tai Dam world views and culture. Data were mainly elicited from a number of Tai Dam informants in Phitsanuloke Province – at Ban Bo Thong, Bang Rakam District, where most Tai Dam villages in the northern part of Thailand are located. Data were also taken from naturally occurring texts such as tales, narratives and daily dialogues found on Facebook.

The analysis was mainly conducted on the basis of a functional typological linguistic perspective and cognitive linguistics. Following Givón (2001), the analysis makes use of a variety of sources of information aimed at understanding the core formal properties of syntactic constructions such as constituency, hierarchy, grammatical

relations and semantic roles. At the same time, the cognitive (conceptual meaning) and communicative (propositional and information discourse coherence or pragmatics) underpinning of grammatical universals are elucidated and underscored, and the interplay between grammar, cognition and communication is outlined. Primary grammatical markers involve coding devices such as morphology and the sequential order of words or morphemes (intonation and rhythmicity are also included in spoken communication). Although it (grammar-as-code) is located wholly in the phrase or clause, its functional scope is not primarily about the propositional information couched in the clause in which it resides. Rather, grammar is predominantly about the coherence relations between the propositional (clause) and its wider discourse context.

In this framework, the simple or basic clause is the main, declarative, affirmative, active clause. It is the most frequent clause-type in human discourse and is thus an unmarked syntactic construction. Such a clause-type has to have a privileged cognitive position used in a particular functional domain. It serves as the reference point for grammatical description. Describing the various types of simple clauses is tantamount to describing the various types of verbs, or predications, (states, events, and actions) used in language. Simple clauses are thus defined in terms of their two matching templates or frames, one semantic frame of participant roles, the other syntactic frame of grammatical roles. Clause types other than the basic one are seen as variations. The various clause-types found in the grammar of a language are nothing but differential grammatical packaging of propositional-semantic contents in different discourse-pragmatic functional domains. Compound words are considered as lexical constructions that have imitated a variety of phrases and clause types, either basic ones or variants.

### **Word compounding methods and strategies**

The term “compounding” generally refers to the method or strategy where two or more totally different occurring words are picked up to

form a compound word which refers to a new thing or idea that is different from any of the original words or the composition of the original words. The new word meaning is idiosyncratic (peculiar to the individual), rather than transparent (straight forward) like a phrase. However, Singnoi (2005) stated that the term “idiosyncratic” or “transparent” is best accounted for in continuum, rather than two clear-cut conceptual poles. We could still see the track, obviously in the degree of transparency, from which the new meaning is metaphorically created. The following examples display the continuum of compounds in Tai Dam from more transparent (less idiosyncratic) as in (1a) to more idiosyncratic (less transparent) compound words as in (1c), where an intermediate is in (1b).

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) a. <i>mǎ:-se:n-h̄tan</i> <sup>2</sup> | expert-worship-house<br>‘house-spirit worshipping expert’ |
| b. <i>mē:ŋ-s̄ŋ-sǎ:w</i>                   | insect-haunt-girl<br>‘spider (insect)’                    |
| c. <i>nā:j-k<sup>h</sup>ǎ:j-sǔ:</i>       | master-sell-you<br>‘bibliography’                         |

In (1a), the whole compound word is transparent or similar to a syntactic unit-like clause. In (1b), the first member, /*mē:ŋ*/, still keeps the original meaning, ‘insect’, whereas the last member which is a combination of the last two members, /*s̄ŋ-sǎ:w*/ ‘to haunt a girl’, has lost the original meaning. In (1c), the compound word is highly idiosyncratic: it is difficult to guess its meaning from its members.

Similarly to compound words in the Thai language as illustrated in Singnoi (2005), compound words in Tai Dam are basically formed in two ways: syntactic and semi-syntactic, as discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Tonal transcriptions in this article are from the version of Haas (1964) where the middle tone (33) is shown by no mark, the low tone (22) by / ` /, the low rising tone (23) by / ˇ /, the high rising tone (35) by / ˆ /, the falling tone (42) by / ˆ / and the rising-falling tone (343) by / ˆ ˆ /.

## 1. Syntactic compounding

Syntactic compounding refers to a word formation strategy used to create a word compound where its members are in a syntactic relation just like clausal or phrasal constituents are. This type of compounding could be further accounted for in three subtypes: synthetic, verb-verb and noun-noun compounding, which are different in terms of structure, syntactic relation and semantic relation.

### 1.1 Synthetic compounding

Synthetic compounding is the word building strategy that imitates clauses and phrases. That is, certain compound members convey argument structures, the mapping of syntactic and semantic relations between the main verb and arguments (nominal constituents), just like clausal constituents do. Consider the following example where a synthetic compound word and a clause are compared.

- (2) a. *mǝ:-se:n-hīan* (compound word)  
         shaman-sacrifice-house  
         ‘shaman who performs the ceremony of making  
         offerings to house spirits’
- b. *sǎw se:n hīan* (clause)  
         he sacrifice house  
         ‘He made offerings to the house spirits.’

In the example (2), the clause */sǎw se:n hīan/* in (2b) displays the argument structure where */sǎw/* is an agent subject, */se:n/* a transitive verb and */hīan/* a patient object. Similarly, the compound word */mǝ:-se:n-hīan/* in (2a) imitates such the argument structure: that is, */mǝ:/* is the agent subject, */se:n/* the verb and */hīan/* the patient object in the word level. The different levels of the clause and compound word could be illustrated in the figure below.

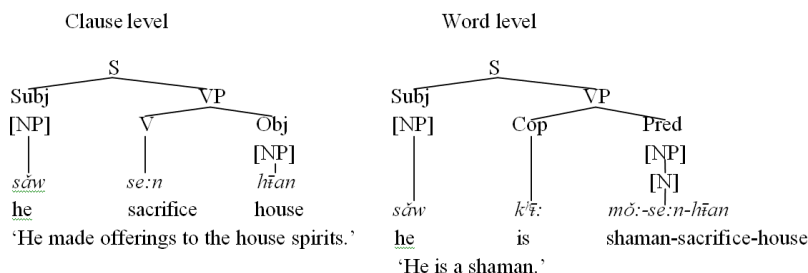


Figure 2: Different levels of clause and compound word

Regarding the heads of this compounding type, we have found that they reveal various mappings of semantic and syntactic relations just like those of simple clauses. The mappings include *agent/subject*, *dative/subject*, *instrument/subject*, *patient/subject*, *patient/object*, *instrument/adverbial*, *locative/adverbial*, *temporal/adverbial intransitive action/verb* and *intransitive action/verb*. This thus results in a variety of compound patterns as respectively exemplified below.

- (3) a. *sɛa-nɔ:n-kɪn* tiger-lie-eat (agent/subject head)  
'fish trap made to catch fish that come along the water flow'
- b. *mɔ:-bɔ:ŋ* expert-look (dative/subject head)  
'fortune teller'
- c. *pʰà:-[lóp-bón]* cloth-[conceal-place] (instrument/subject head)  
'bed cover'
- d. *bɛan-bín* moon-chipped (patient/subject head)  
'period of the waning moon'
- e. *pʰà:-kʰi:* cloth-ride (patient/object head)  
'diaper, nappy'
- f. *bàŋ-wɪan* [bamboo section]-gyrate (instrument/adverbial head)  
'bamboo walking tool for infants'
- g. *lǔm-lit* pit-leap (locative/adverbial head)  
'pit for trapping fish, often made in a temporally waterway'
- h. *mɛ:-[jâŋ-bún]* day-[stop-merit] (temporal/adverbial head)  
'holiday'
- i. *pàn-kàw* form-head (transitive action/verb head)  
'tie up hair in a bun, a traditional female hair style'
- j. *lōŋ-kʰuàŋ* get down-play ground (intransitive action/verb head)  
'do some group activities in the play ground, usually celebrations'

Certain compound words in Tai Dam imitate non-simple clauses or variations of clause patterns where marked word order is applied to achieve a particular communicative purpose (e.g. to emphasize a sentence element) or, in other words, to encode pragmatic information such as topicalisation or focus. Here the pattern *marked-topic construction* is found, as shown in the example below where the head is the topic element.

- (4) a. *sùaŋ-[kʰǎ:-hī:]* pants-[leg-long]  
       'trousers'  
       b. *nǔ:[tô:ŋ-kʰǎw]* mouse-[front middle part-white]  
       'mouse whose front middle body part is white'

Besides the finite-clause forms, compound words are also found in forms similar to nominalization. In such compounds, the head functions like a nominalizer and thus could be called a compound nominalizers (CN) – a derivational unit that forms a compound from a non-nominal category such as clausal or verbal. There appear to be two morphemes that generally perform this function: /bón/ and /ǎn/, which originated from superordinate nouns referring to 'place' and 'object' respectively. Examples are provided below.

- (5) a. *bón-[mat-pʰǎm]* CN-[tie-hair]  
       'plastic / rubber band used to tie the hair'  
       b. *bón-[dák-tǎ:nǔ:]* CN-[trap-rat]  
       'rat trap'  
       (6) a. *ǎn-[mǎ:-sǎ:lī:]* CN-[grind-rice]  
       'rice grinder to make flour'  
       b. *ǎn-[kʰɔʔ-lɔ:tsɔŋ]* CN-[knock-ladcheag]  
       'tool for making ladcheag'  
       c. *ǎn-le:* CN-cut  
       'small, sharp knife'

In addition, many compound words have imitated or been lexicalized from noun phrases as shown in (7) and verb phrases in (8), composed of the *noun* and *verb heads* respectively and modifiers.

- (7) a. *pʰɛŋ-[sāŋ-kǔ:]* friends-[of-me]  
       'group of friends'



- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| b. <i>sát-[těŋ-bók]</i><br>‘terrestrial animal’ | animal-[on-land] |
| (8) a. <i>bóʔ-jáʔ[-mak]</i><br>‘hate’           | not-[want-love]  |
| b. <i>kʰi:-tʰĩ:</i><br>‘be niggardly’           | often-sticky     |

### 1.2 Verb-verb compounding

Verb-verb compounding should be separated from the verb-phrase compounding discussed above since it conveys a different grammatical relation where the second verb functions as a *complement*, rather than a modifier, of the first verb, as shown below.

- |                                       |                 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| (9) a. <i>dàj-jô:n</i><br>‘thank you’ | get-[turn back] |
| b. <i>kĩn-dʒ:ŋ</i><br>‘wedding’       | eat-relate      |
| c. <i>lak-hũa</i><br>‘laugh’          | sneak-laugh     |

### 1.3 Noun-noun compounding

Noun-noun compounding is the word-creation strategy where two nouns or nominal units are combined under a variety of semantic relations, at least, including *basic-subordinate*, *shape-item*, *part-whole*, *item-location*, *item-purpose*, *item-compared*, *possessed-possessor*, *artifact-material*, *kin-gender*, *kin-age*, *kin-rank* and *kin-item*, some of which can be in a reversed order, as illustrated below.

- |                                   |                       |                     |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| (10) a. <i>tô:-pă:</i><br>‘fish’  | [animal-fish]         | (basic-subordinate) |
| b. <i>pʰén-láj</i><br>‘shoulder’  | [flat shape]-shoulder | (shape-item)        |
| c. <i>fà:j-se:n</i><br>‘thread’   | cotton-line           | (item-shape)        |
| d. <i>kíŋ-la:ŋ</i><br>‘body part’ | branch-body           | (part-whole)        |

- e. *p<sup>h</sup>ák-nă:m* vegetable-thorn (whole-part)  
 ‘plant of the family Araceae, which has thorns’
- f. *t<sup>h</sup>iaŋ-nā:* hut-[rice field] (item-location)  
 ‘little hut built for resting during the day while working in the rice fields’
- g. *bàŋ-nâm* [bamboo section]-water(item-purpose)  
 ‘bamboo section used for carrying water’
- h. *t<sup>h</sup>ùaj-múaʔ* bowl-hat (item-compared)  
 ‘hat-shaped bowl’
- i. *sàa-tāj* shirt-Tai (possessed-possessor)  
 ‘Tai Dam traditional male black shirt’
- j. *tə̀aw-sáaʔ* owner-mat (possessor-possessed)  
 ‘house owner’
- k. *kŏŋ-[năŋ-kóp]* drum-[skin-frog] (artifact-material)  
 drum-frog skin  
 ‘drum made of frog skin’
- l. *món-măj* [mulberry worm]-silk (material-artifact)  
 ‘silk worm’
- m. *mɛ:-jŋ* mother-female (kin-gender)  
 ‘woman’
- n. *ʔàj-t<sup>h</sup>aw* father-[old person] (kin-age)  
 ‘grandfather’
- o. *k<sup>h</sup>aj-kók* [son-in-law]-base (kin-rank)  
 ‘ceremonial leader’
- p. *mɛ:-mot* mother-ant (kin-item)  
 ‘female ceremony expert’

## 2. Semi-syntactic compounding

By semi-syntactic compounding, we mean the set of compound strategies where there is no syntactic relation as those ones displayed by clausal or phrasal constructions. Rather, such compound words display lexical relations such as *reduplicative*, *synonymous*, *similar*, *member*, and *opposite* relations, as discussed below.

## 2.1 Reduplicative compounding

Like other Tai and some other Asian languages, reduplicative compounding in Tai Dam is created by reduplicating a word either without or with changing phonological elements. The later type is much more typically found with changing of vowel, initial consonant, final consonant, both vowel and consonant, and syllable adding, as exemplified in (11) where original words are underlined.

- (11) a. lɪaŋ-lɪaŋ                      array-array (phonologically unchanging)  
          ‘queue or a linear display of objects’
- b. p<sup>h</sup>ā:n-p<sup>h</sup>ian                  tray-tray (vowel changing)  
          ‘tray for a set of food and drink provided as an oblation for the spirits’
- c. lôn-sôn                        fall-fall (initial consonant changing)  
          ‘fall down, flop’
- d. ŋwāŋ-ŋwak [perk up]-[perk up] (final consonant changing)  
          ‘turn / look around in a vague manner’
- e. ɲiʔ-ŋiam                    ticklish-ticklish (vowel and consonant changing)  
          ‘feel ticklish’
- f. māj-[búaiŋ]-[tɛ̀uāŋ-k<sup>h</sup>wāŋ]]                      (syllable adding)  
          rod-[loop-[loop-loop]]  
          ‘loop-like rod used in a funeral’

## 2.2 Synonymous compounding

Synonymous compounding, also known as semantic doublet, is created by combining two synonymous words that can be interchangeably used in some contexts. This results in semantic reduplication, as shown below.

- (12) a. tɛ̌aŋ-k<sup>h</sup>ʒ:ŋ                      thing-thing  
          ‘belongings / property’
- b. t<sup>h</sup>ǎuŋ-tú:p                    hut-hut  
          ‘hut / a small house’
- c. t<sup>h</sup>ǒŋ-lâu                        barn-barn  
          ‘barn / a farm building’

### 2.3 Similar compounding

Similar compounding is typically created by combining two words whose meanings are similar but cannot be used interchangeably in any context, as shown below.

- (13) a. *lák-salá:t*                      keen-clever  
           ‘intelligent’  
       b. *hó:-há:n*                      wrap-gather  
           ‘collect together’  
       c. [*sě:-bà:n*]-[*sě:-m̃aŋ*] [information-village]-[information-town]  
           ‘terrain’

### 2.4 Member compounding

Member compounding is used to create the superordinate terms of entity sets. It is also common to other Tai languages, but different from those of the western languages (Singnoi, 2005). In this type, a compound is created by combining two occurring words which are members of the same semantic field or category, as shown below.

- (14) a. *lūŋ-tǎ:*                      [uncle]-[mother’s father]  
           ‘relatives on the father’s side of the family’  
       b. [*pʰà:-sàa*]-[*pʰà:-sùaŋ*]              [cloth-shirt]-[cloth-pants]  
           ‘clothes’  
       c. [*mɛ:-dĩ:*]-[*mɛ:-tɕǎn*]              [mother-good]-[mother-pretty]  
           ‘beautiful (used to refer to people i.e. girls and women)’

### 2.5 Opposite compounding

Opposite compounding is performed by combining two words whose meanings are opposite. Similar to Thai (Ngamkasem and Singnoi, 2012), the meaning of the new word can be from one compound member or both, as shown below.

- (15) a. *há:ŋ-m̃:*                      lack-have  
           ‘be rich’  
       b. *wāŋ-waʔ*                      forth-back  
           ‘get around’

Compound words of any type could be more complex, consisting of complex members, as shown below.

- (16) [pǎ:-pìŋ]-tóp]-[[kóp-pìŋ]-ʔóʔ]  
[[fish-grill]-rolled up]-[[frog-grill]-stuffed]  
[grilled fish-rolled up]-[grilled frog-stuffed]  
[rolled up, grilled fish]-[stuffed grilled frog]  
'great traditional food menu made from the combination of rolled up, grilled fish and stuffed frogs as part of an oblation to worship ancestor spirits'

### **World views and cultural reflection**

The term “world view” is broadly understood as the way one perceives and interprets the world in its entirety. A person’s worldview is affected by many environmental and cultural factors (Royal Academy of Thailand, 2013) – by their inherited characteristics, background experiences and life situations, the values, attitudes, and habits and language they have developed, as well as many other aspects – and these vary from one person to another. Even though some aspects of a world view are shared by many people in a community, others differ for individuals. For “culture” here, we follow the views of the anthropologist Tylor (1974), who suggested that culture is a complex whole which includes custom, art, belief, morals, law, knowledge and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, while Kraft (2011) posits that culture is a peoples’ way of life, their design for living, their way of coping with their biological, physical and social environment. It consists of learned, patterned assumptions, concepts and behavior, plus the resulting artifacts (material culture). The relationship between the world view and culture is subtle. However, the above definitions suggest that a world view is not separate from culture. It is included in culture at the deepest level presuppositions upon which people base their lives. World view, the deep level of culture, is the culturally structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments/allegiances) underlying how a people perceive and respond to reality.

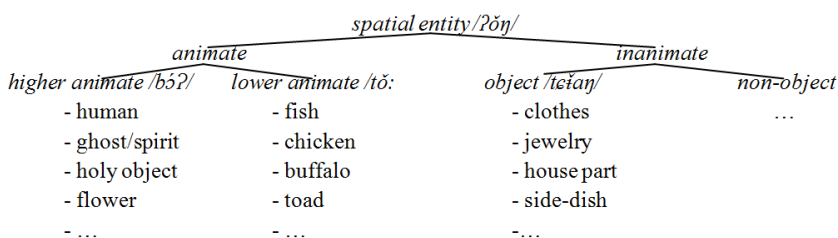
World view or culture provides a total design for living, dealing with every aspect of life including our languages and providing people with a way to regulate their lives and languages. It is well-known that lexical items in a language reflect the speakers' culture. What we are discussing here, however, is more abstract and complex; that is, compound words also reflect certain Tai Dam world views at the deeper level, such as the categorization of entities and the conceptualization of the world, which single words could not easily do. Also, quite a number of compound words are very cultural as they display concepts, objects and activities tied to cultural practices such as spirit worship, funerals, weddings, and so on, and thus are difficult for outsiders to understand. Moreover, certain compound words reveal Tai Dam wisdom: they display the people's knowledge in making efficient ways for living their lives without too much effort. These facts could be discussed in five sections: folk taxonomic system of spatial entities, complex categorization, conceptualization, cultural concept & practices, and folk wisdom.

### **1. Folk taxonomic system of spatial entities: Folk categorization**

Lakoff states that "Every time we see something as a kind of thing, for example, a tree, we are categorizing. Whenever we reason about kinds of things – chairs, nations, illnesses, any kind of thing at all – we are employing categories" (Lakoff, 1987: 5). With evidence in the analysis of 'eating' terms in Thai, Singnoi (2006) concludes that, in order to understand individual things in the world, we have to understand them not only in terms of themselves but also as categories. This implies that the words of a language can be understood via the concept of categorization rather than only in terms of individual words.

Typically, people categorize *spatial/concrete entities* into *animate* and *inanimate* and further categorize *animate* into *human* and *animal* (Givón, 2001). Under the term *animate*, however, there appears to be evidence – from the noun-noun compounding displaying the semantic relation *basic-subordinate* – that the Tai Dam ethnic group fundamentally sees and groups entities such as human, ghost/spirit, holy

objects and flowers in the same class separate from animals. They mark the former class with, though inconstantly, the class term /bóʔ/<sup>3</sup> and the latter with the different class term /toː/. Here, the two classes are called *higher animate* and *lower animate* respectively. For *inanimate* entities, they classify them as *objects* – stuff, materials, and so on – marked with the class term /teʔaŋ/ and unmarked non-objects. Moreover, certain compound words of this type are evidence of the claim that this ethnic group even marks the most superordinate level *spatial entity* with the class term /ʔõŋ/<sup>4</sup>, indicating both *animate* and *inanimate*. Regardless of the inconstant occurrence of these class terms, the (traditional) taxonomic system of spatial entities reflected by Tai Dam compound words, then, could be illustrated as follows:



**Figure 3:** Taxonomic system of spatial entities

In the *basic-subordinate* compounding strategy, the class terms – /ʔõŋ/, /bóʔ/, /toː/ and /teʔaŋ/ respectively indicating *spatial entity* (SE), *higher animate* (HA), *lower animate* (LA) and *object* (O) are employed as the compound head and thus placed in the first / *basic* position followed by the other member displaying the *subordinate* level. In this case, only the subordinate (second) member could represent the whole compound, as shown below.

<sup>3</sup> This class term is most generally found in the indication of *flower*. It has been generalized as a marker for a plant that has flowers. (Wongwattana, 2011 and 2014)

<sup>4</sup> This is in accordance with DeLancey (1986) pointing out that /ʔõŋ/ is an older classifier for human beings in Tai languages. The evidence in our study shows that the current application of the term has been semantically widened. This is also true in present Thai where, it is not only applicable to people of higher status such as royal families and monks but also holy things and places like Buddha images, palaces, pagodas and so on.

- (17) a. *Ṗǒŋ-pɔ:* SE-[father-in-law]  
           ‘father-in-law’  
       b. *Ṗǒŋ-mɔ:* SE-shaman  
           ‘shaman’  
       c. *Ṗǒŋ-[jā:ŋ-katík]* SE-slingshot  
           ‘slingshot’  
       d. *Ṗǒŋ-[[kǐŋ-kǒ:ŋ]-[mâj-p<sup>h</sup>áj]]* SE-[bamboo bow]  
           ‘bamboo bow’
- (18) a. *bɔ́Ṗ-kòn* HA-human being  
           ‘human being’  
       b. *bɔ́Ṗ-[p<sup>h</sup>i:-púaṖ]* HA-[termite spirit]  
           ‘termite spirit’  
       c. *bɔ́Ṗ-[nâm-môn]* HA-[blessed water]  
           ‘blessed water / holy water’  
       d. *bɔ́Ṗ-pí:p* HA-[Indian cork]  
           ‘Indian cork – a kind of tree with long white flowers’
- (19) a. *tǒ:-pǎ:* LA-fish  
           ‘fish’  
       b. *tǒ:-[kái-Ṗó:k]* LA-[fighting cock]  
           ‘fighting cock’  
       c. *tǒ:-k<sup>h</sup>wāj* LA-[water buffalo]  
           ‘water buffalo’  
       d. *tǒ:-tǔ:* LA-toad  
           ‘toad’
- (20) a. *tɕǎŋ-[sà-p<sup>h</sup>à:]* O-clothes  
           ‘clothes / garments’  
       b. *tɕǎŋ-jǒ:ŋ* O-jewelry  
           ‘jewelry’  
       c. *tɕǎŋ-[mâi-Ṗét-hǣan]* O-[house wooden part]  
           ‘any part of a house that is made of wood’  
       d. *tɕǎŋ-káp* O-[side dish]  
           ‘side dish’



## 2. Complex categorization

Aside from the basic categorization system, a number of *basic-subordinate* compounds display complex categorization that could be accounted for in two different ways: more-than-one-layer categorization and category extension.

### 2.1 More-than-one-level categorization

It is evident that certain compounds, especially biological terms, display more-than-one-level categorization <sup>5</sup> where the head slot of the whole compound word is filled with a basic term followed by the subordinate member which carries another pair of higher-lower (the first term is higher while the second is lower) terms. Certainly, only the lowest member of the compound word is able to represent the whole compound, as underlined in the following examples where each level is numbered.

- (21) a.  $t\check{o}^{1}\text{-}[nok^{2}\text{-}\underline{kájj\hat{a}}^{3}]$   
           LA-[bird-pheasant]  
           LA-pheasant  
           ‘pheasant’  
       b.  $t\check{o}^{1}\text{-}[p\check{a}^{2}\text{-}\underline{dúk}^{3}]$   
           LA-[fish-catfish]  
           LA-[catfish]  
           ‘catfish’  
       c.  $ma\check{p}^{1}\text{-}[\check{p}tat^{2}\text{-}\underline{júa\check{p}}^{3}]$   
           fruit-[pepper-[green pepper]]  
           fruit-[green pepper]  
           ‘green pepper’  
       d.  $k^{h}\bar{a}^{1}\text{-}[p^{h}ák^{2}\text{-}\underline{k^{h}ép}^{3}]$   
           vine-[vegetable-gourd]  
           vine-gourd  
           ‘gourd’

<sup>5</sup> This is in accordance with Wongwattana (2011 and 2014) finding that plant names in some Tai languages reveal up to five ranks of the Thai ethno-botanical system.

## 2.2 Category extension

The Tai Dam ethnic group not only often uses a higher class term to categorize an item expressed by the second compound member but also metaphorically extends the category to the one that is normally not a member of that class. When, for instance, the communication target is an item that looks like an animal to them (such as the rainbow that is seen as an animal bending down to drink water, kites that have tails and can move, alphabets that have heads and tails, and the like), the ethnic group would use the class term /tɔː/ indicating *lower animal* to mark them metaphorically, as shown below.

- |                                 |              |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| (22) a. tɔː-hûŋ                 | LA-rainbow   |
| ‘rainbow’                       |              |
| b. tɔː-waw                      | LA-kite      |
| ‘kite’                          |              |
| c. tɔː-tāj dăm                  | LA-[Tai Dam] |
| ‘traditional Tai Dam alphabets’ |              |

## 3. Conceptualization

Quite a number of compound words show that they usually formulate or make a concept of things from the world around them. They usually invent explanations and formulate them mentally via either a *metaphorical* or *metonymic* model. Metaphor and Metonymy are of the basic characteristics of cognition. Metaphor in the sense of cognitive linguistic theory like Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is conceptual, not merely the use of language. It involves people’s world view and thought in a social system. It helps us to understand some things in terms of others that we already understand. For metonymy, according to Lakoff (1987), it is the case that salient part or aspect is commonly used to stand for the things as a whole or for some other aspects or part of it.

### 3.1 Metaphorical model

A number of noun-noun compound words, especially in the *item-compared* compounding strategy, reveal the metaphorical model. They show that the second member applies to an object that implies a resemblance with the head/first member. Examples are shown below.

- (23) a. *tʰùaj-múaʔ* bowl-hat  
'hat-shaped bowl'



- b. *sin-tě:ηmō:* skirt-[water melon]  
'Tai Dam traditional skirt in a water melon pattern'



- c. *mē:η-kwǎ:η* insect-deer  
'stag beetle – a beetle that has horns in a deer shape'



The whole compound word could also show how the Tai Dam people see certain objects, actions or events - as shown below.

- (24) a. *kʰi:-fâ:* excrement-sky  
'cloud'



- b. *kóp-kĩn-bǎn* fog-eat-moon  
'big fog that is believed to eat the moon resulting in a lunar eclipse'



c. *sǎa-nō:n-kǐn*

tiger-lie-eat

‘fish trap made to catch fish that come along the water flow’



### 3.2 Metonymic model

A number of noun-noun compound words in the *part-whole/whole-part* compounding strategy reveal the metonymic model. They display that an object name or concept is employed as a compound member for that of the other member to which it is related, or of which it is a part. Examples are shown below where metonymic members are underlined.

(25) a. *kín-la:ŋ*

branch-body

‘body part’

b. *p<sup>h</sup>ak-nǎ:m*

vegetable-thorn

‘plant of the family Araceae, which has thorns’

c. *léút-sóp*

light-corpse

‘burn a corpse, cremate’



Also, the whole compound word is applied to a related object, action or event, as exemplified below.

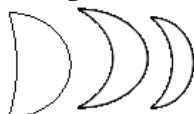
- (26) a. *lōŋ-kʰùan* [get down]-[yard]  
‘do some group activities in the yard, usually celebrations’



- b. *kʰaj-kók* [son-in-law]-first  
‘ceremonial leader who is usually be the first / oldest son-in-law’



- b. *bǝan-bín* moon-chipped  
‘period of the waning moon’



#### 4. Cultural concept & practices

Quite a number of compound words not limited to any compounding method are culturally relevant; namely, they are of, or relate to, artistic or social pursuits or events considered to be important or enlightened. We could not obtain their meanings from the mere composition of word members. Rather, to understand the meanings of such compounds is to understand the traditional ways of life and practices which can be expressed with large-size linguistic forms. Cultural compound terms could be accounted for in terms of traditional ways of life and ritual practices.

### 4.1 Traditional ways of life

Traditional ways of life reflected in word compounding include dress, food, things, and routines.

#### 4.1.1 Dress

One salient Tai Dam characteristic is that of women dressing in traditional black melon-pattern skirts and hair buns. Currently, they still wear traditional costumes at annual festivals and important traditional practices such as funerals, weddings, spirit worship and so on. Certain compound words reflect the characteristics of their clothes, as exemplified below.

(27) a. *sàa-hī:*

shirt-long

‘traditional costumes worn at ceremonies such as funerals, weddings and other important social events’



b. *sàa-tāj*

shirt-Tai

‘Tai Dam traditional male black shirt with long sleeves worn at important cultural events’



c. *sàa-kəm*

shirt-short

‘traditional female black shirt with long sleeves worn in important cultural events’



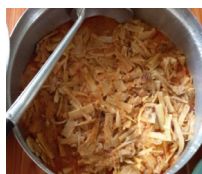
- d. *pàn-kàw* form-head  
‘tie up the hair in a bun, a traditional female hair style’



#### 4.1.2 Food

Tai Dam food also reflects their identity. Traditionally, they eat sticky rice and side-dishes of bamboo shoots cooked in various ways. Their favorite food also includes chili paste & vegetables, chopped preserved fish, and grilled fish. Compound words that display such the food are exemplified below.

- (28) a. *kě:ŋ-[nó:-sòm]* curry-[bamboo shoot-salty]  
‘red curry made of salted bamboo-shoot slices and chicken meat’



- b. *p<sup>h</sup>ák-tɕúp* vegetable-mix  
‘cooked chopped vegetables mixed with tiny fish pieces and chili’



- c. *[pǎ:-lɛʔ]-fák* [fish-salted]-chop  
‘chili paste cooked with chopped preserved (salted) fish served with some fresh vegetables’



- d. [pǎ:-pìŋ]-tóp]]-[[kóp-pìŋ]-ʔóʔ]  
 [[fish-grill]-rolled up]-[frog-grill]-stuffed]  
 [rolled up, grilled fish]-[stuffed grilled frog]  
 ‘great traditional food menu made from the combination of  
 rolled up, grilled fish and stuffed frogs as part of an oblation  
 to worship the spirits of their ancestors’



#### 4.1.3 Things

A number of compound words reveal things like utensils, tools, and other objects traditionally used in daily life. Examples are provided below.

- (29) a. p<sup>h</sup>ā:n-p<sup>h</sup>īan tray-tray  
 ‘tray or container for a set of food and drink provided as an  
 oblation for the spirits’



- b. bàŋ-nâm [bamboo section]-water  
 ‘bamboo section traditionally used for carrying water like a  
 bottle or bucket’

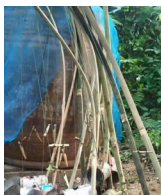


- c. ʔǎn-[m̀:-sǎ:lɿ:] CN-[grind-rice]  
 ‘rice grinder to make flour’





- d. *kabɔ̌p-nǎ:* [tube shaped container]-rat  
‘tube-shaped container used as a rat trap’



- e. *kʰɔ̌:-kút* hook-shorten  
‘triangular end of a roof made in a buffalo-horn shape, as a memorial to the buffalo obligation’



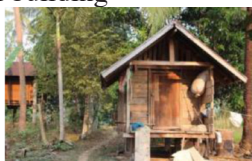
#### 4.1.4 Routines

In addition, a number of compound words reveal habitual tasks like rice farming, weaving, and basketwork.

- (30) a. *tʰiəŋ-nā:* hut-[rice field]  
‘little hut built for resting during the day while working in the rice fields’



- b. *tʰɔ̌:ŋ-lâw* barn-barn  
‘barn / a farm building’



- c. *tǎm-húʔ*  
‘weaving’

weave-loom



- d. *kalep-[mǎŋ-tʰě:n]* basket-[town-Than]  
‘style of basket weaving that originated in Than, a town in Vietnam’



## 4.2 Ritual practices

Activities, things, persons, places, beliefs and so on in ritual practices and ceremonies such as spirit-offerings, funerals, and weddings are also typically reflected in word compounding, as exemplified below.

- (31) a. *se:n-hǣan* sacrifice-house  
‘ceremony of making offering to house spirits’



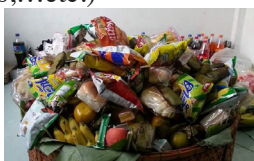
- b. *kalɔ:-hòŋ* corner-room  
‘room corner at the main house-post where the house spirit is believed to live’



- c. *mɛ:-mot* mother-ant  
'female ceremony expert'



- d. *p<sup>h</sup>ā:n-[lūŋ-tǎ:]* tray-[relatives on the father's side]  
'set of food provided as an oblation for the spirits of relatives on the father's side (Oblation trays are different in terms of the death types such as relatives on the father side, females, general spirits,...etc.)'



- e. *h̄an-hè:w* house-grave  
'house for the dead built for funerals, containing consumables and a basket hung in front as a signal to remind the deceased that the house is his/hers so that the dead can come and eat the offered food' (The structure is temporary and is not a tomb or crypt.)



- f. *t<sup>h</sup>óŋ-k̄:w* flag-funeral  
'spirit flag used as a funeral symbol during processions to the graveyard'



g. *ηān-póʔ*

money-loop

‘loops made from bamboo slices used as money for the dead to spend in their journey to heaven, Mueng Than’

h. *kǎn-dǝŋ*

eat-relate

‘wedding’

i. *khǎn-maʔ*

bowl-[palm fruit]

‘bowl for carrying the bride price such as money, jewelry, gold and other valuables traditionally including palm fruit and betel’



### 4.3 Play

This ethnic group is also well-known for a festival which is held at least once a year in many villages. In the festival, they perform the Tai Dam traditional dance with mouth-organ blowing. Sometimes they also perform a cloth-ball game in which cloth balls are thrown between young men and women. Compound words that reveal the activities and games are exemplified below.

- (32) a. *lōŋ-kʰuāŋ* [get down]-[playground]  
‘do some group activities in the playground, usually celebrations’



- b. *Ṗin-kò:n* play-[cloth ball]  
‘cloth-ball-throwing game traditionally held for young people to find a marriage partner’



- c. *maṛ-kò:n* [round object]-lump  
‘round object made from cloth for the traditional throwing game played by young men and women in finding marriage partners’



- d. *fṛ:n-kē:n* dance-[bamboo mouth organ]  
‘traditional dance with mouth-organ blowing’



## 5. Folk wisdom

Similarly, certain compound words of any compounding method reveal Tai Dam folk wisdom. By “folk wisdom” we mean wisdom, knowledge, beliefs and experience associated with, or traditional to, the common

people of a country. We should bear in mind that what is called wisdom is not a mere item of knowledge. Wisdom is like a traditional ‘philosophy’ of life that helps people live more comfortably, to earn something more easily and to work more effectively. This ‘philosophy’ is uniquely individual, but is based on the individual’s personal background and society’s norms. With a little more wisdom, we can avoid problems and trouble. We gain more wisdom as we have more life experiences. Examples of Tai Dam compound words that imply their wisdom are shown below.

(33) a. *lǔm-lit*

pit-leap

‘pit for trapping fish, often made in a temporary waterway because during the cold season the water decreases and thus fish trying to escape for a new water source will fall into the pit, resulting in getting a lot of fish without much effort’



b. *lā:n-k<sup>h</sup>àw*

yard-rice

‘rice yard coated with wet buffalo’s dung in order that it is smoother and not dusty so that the paddy dried on it will not get damp’



c. *bàŋ-wīan*

[bamboo section]-gyrate

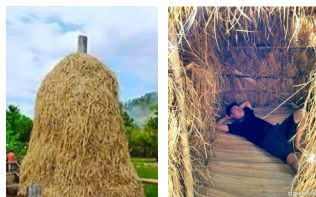
‘bamboo walking tool for infants – two small bamboo sections tied together in a right angle with an end planted into the soil, used as an infant walking tool (with no cost) by catching the handle and safely walking forward in the same place’



d. *kǝ:ŋ-fɿak*

pile-straw

‘hayrick / haystack made as a warm room to sleep in in cold weather’



e. *fák-ǰěw*

sheath-waist

‘male carry-on pocket worn as a belt / pouch’



## Conclusion

Word compounding in Tai Dam could be discussed in two basic ways: syntactic and semi-syntactic compounding. The syntactic compounding method further displays three strategies: synthetic, verb-verb, and noun-noun compounding. The synthetic strategy is a compound formation that imitates clausal/phrasal constructions such as simple clauses, non-simple clauses, nominalization, and phrases. Compound words imitating clausal structures conveys a variety of heads such as agent subject, dative subject, instrument subject, patient subject, patient object, instrument adverbial, locative adverbial, temporal adverbial, intransitive action verb, transitive action verb, topic element, noun head, verb head and compound nominalizers.

The verb-verb strategy displays a different synthetic relation such as main-complement. The noun-noun strategy displays various semantic patterns such as basic-subordinate, shape-item, item-shape, part-whole, whole-part, item-location, item-purpose, item-compared, possessed-possessor, possessor-possessed, artifact-material, material-artifact, kin-gender, kin-age, kin-rank and kin-item. As for the semi-syntactic compounding method, it displays lexical relations such as reduplicative, synonymous, similar, member and opposite.

Word compounding in Tai Dam reflects certain Tai Dam world views and culture such as the folk taxonomic system of spatial entities, complex categorization, conceptualization, cultural concepts & practices, and folk wisdom.

The complicated methods seen in Tai Dam word compounding and their reflection of world views and culture have implied that the Tai Dam culture, like every other culture, is prestigious in its value. No culture is more prestigious than others. Realizing this could be the best way for multi-cultural countries, as stated by Wasi (2012),

*“Regarding culture as the concept, every community or country is equally prestigious. No one is more prestigious than others since cultures vary and local cultures are not centralized and are accepted in their own values. This is the best way to carry on multi-culture communities and make them stronger and durable.”*

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