

Expressive Language in White Hmong

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The work begun here concerns the nature of a special class of morphemes found in Hmong, which are akin to what have been called *expressives* in other South East Asian and Malaysian languages<sup>2</sup>. These form a large class of morphemes with varying characteristics, which I attempt to characterize below. Others have noticed this class of morphemes, most especially Heimbach (1979), but the investigations have been primarily limited to compiling lists of them<sup>3</sup>. As far as I know, the work I begin here is the first investigation as to the principles organizing the entire class of post-verbal expressives. Martha Ratliff (unpublished) has done some good work on the sound and tone symbolism of the onomatopoeic post-verbal expressives (hereafter, **PVEs**). I will not be looking at the details of sound symbolism in this paper, though sound symbolism clearly plays an important role in expressive language, as I discuss in section three. Given the scope of the entire class of expressives and the space limitations here, I will look only sparingly at certain expressives which help exemplify particular points or sub-types of PVEs.

## 2. Post-verbal expressives

Hmong has three primary means of adding additional expressiveness or emphasis to the sentence: reduplicating the verb, adding post-verbal or sentence final intensive particles, or through the addition of a PVE, which I characterize in this paper. Reduplication and the use of intensive particles serve basically the same function: that of intensifying the meaning of other elements of the sentence. For this reason, the Hmong speaker can usually choose either strategy for approximately the same effect, and usually cannot use both strategies in the same sentence without sounding awkward or redundant. In contrast to intensive particles, PVEs add additional sense or meaning to the sentence, although what this difference is may often be very subtle. All of these processes are by their very nature optional, though they may be required to express any particular notion.

This part of the paper is divided into two main sections: a primarily syntactic description of PVE behavior, and a preliminary attempt at sorting out the various PVEs according to their semantics. Section 3 will discuss general issues involved in characterizing the class of PVEs and expressive language in general.

### 2.1. The syntactic characteristics of PVEs

The class of PVEs consists of a mixed bunch of morphemes with often differing behavior. Still, a few general characteristics can be given which enable us to decide whether a morpheme is a PVE or not. First, without exception, PVEs must follow a verb (or a verb used adverbially). This should

be considered a primary defining characteristic of the class. There is no requirement that the PVE occur clause-finally. Because of the SVO word-order in Hmong, this allows verbs which have been modified with PVEs to take objects:

- 1) Yawg ntaus kuv tus me-nyuam. "He hit my child."  
man hit 1ps CLF child
- 2) Yawg ntaus ntXHias kuv tus me-nyuam. "He spanked my child  
man hit PVE 1ps CLF child without warning,  
(just bam bam bam!)."

Verbs with PVEs cannot be modified by adverbial or adjectival verbs or even by intensive particles.

- 3) Yawg ntaus (\*ntXHias) kuv tus me-nyuam phem (hwv).  
man hit PVE 1ps CLF child badly PTC  
"He hit my child (really) badly."
- 4) \*Yawg ntaus ntXHias kuv tus me-nyuav hwv.

This is not what we might expect since, as in the above examples, there is often little or no semantic overlap between the PVE and the prohibited adverbial or intensive particle. It seems that PVE use monopolizes the verb's satellite positions to become the focal point of the quality of the verbal action, indeed of the sentence as a whole. This is in sharp contrast with intensive particles, which give the feeling of being less the focus of attention and add merely extra force to the expression of the verbal action.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the syntactic constraints on these post-verbal expressives is that they can neither be negated nor occur with a negated main verb.

- 5) Yawg tsis ntaus kuv tus me-nyuam. "He didn't hit my child."  
man NEG hit 1ps CLF child
- 6) \*Yawg ntaus tsis ntXHias kuv tus me-nyuam<sup>4</sup>.  
man hit NEG PVE 1ps CLF child
- 7) \*Yawg tsis ntaus ntXHias kuv tus me-nyuam.  
man NEG hit PVE 1ps CLF child

Adverbials (that is, adverbial verbs), may be negated:

- 8) Me-nyuam noj tsis qeeb tsis nrawm<sup>5</sup>.  
child eat NEG slowly NEG quickly  
"The child eats not too slowly, not too fast."

This should not be as surprising as some people I have spoken with seem to find it. Something similar to this restriction occurs in a variety of languages. Matisoff (1973) points out that in Lahu

Intensified adjectives...cannot be followed by [verb particles], and they are not negatable. (It is not surprising that negativity and intensification should be mutually antagonistic notions.)

These notions are potentially antagonistic, but obviously many if not most languages can have negated intensifiers. The intensifying particle **heev** in Hmong can be readily negated. However in Hmong, PVEs cannot be negated, so we can hypothesize that for Hmong, negativity and this type of expressivity are mutually antagonistic notions.

A similar, though weaker constraint on negation of expressive elements occurs on expressive elements in English. For example, if I am walking along the edge of a cliff, where falling would mean plummeting to my death, and my friend sees that I suddenly **dis**appear from view, it would not be very natural to say the latter of these two sentences.

9) It's alright, I didn't fall.

10) \*It's alright, I didn't plummet.

Similarly (to take an example from Hinds 1974), something may be a sin or not a sin, but something is either an abomination before God or the phrase is not applicable<sup>6</sup>.

PVEs also cannot occur with a verb which is in future tense. For example:

11) Yawg yuav ntaus kuv tus me-nyuam.      "He will hit my child."  
man will hit 1ps CLF child

12) \*Yawg yuav ntaus ntXHias kuv tus me-nyuam.  
PVE

However, PVEs can occur in representations of beliefs and thoughts even if they are contrary to fact.

13) Yawg xav tias kuv kwm ntXHias hauv dej mus lawm,  
man think COMP 1ps ford PVE into water go PERF  
tab-si kuv tsis tau mus.  
but 1ps NEG CMPLT go  
"He thinks that I forded the river against better judgement  
(because of the danger), but I didn't (cross the river)."

The clause which contradicts the belief can even precede the quoted belief:

14) Kuv tsis tau mus raws li yawg xav tias kuv kwm ntXHias  
1ps NEG CMPL go way NOM 3ps think COMP 1ps ford PVE  
hauv dej mus lawm.  
into water go PERF  
"I didn't do as he thought that I had rashly forded  
the river. (i.e. I didn't cross it.)"

I have been unable to find any way however to say the equivalent of "He thought that I rashly forded the river, but I didn't (I forded it wisely and appropriately)"<sup>7</sup>. That is, there seems to be no way that only the expressive part of a belief can be incorrect; the entire verbal action must be incorrect. These data imply that PVE use is strongly grounded in a realis mode. If it is not actually a true statement in the real world, it must be expressed as true within someone's beliefs or as asserted by someone as true, despite what may

really be the case.

Because a PVE's semantics sometimes seem so tied to those of the verb, it might be suspected that the PVE is actually part of a verb compound. This is reasonable given the restricted nature of PVEs: a PVE may combine with most, many, a few, or only one verb. Particularly when the PVE combines with very few main verbs it is tempting to consider it part of a compound. For example, with a PVE like **ntxhias** it is quite tempting to call its occurrences compounds. It is accepted by my informant in the following combinations, and probably very few others<sup>8</sup>.

15)

kam	+ ntxhias	"immediately willing"
agreeable		
nrov	+ ntxhias	"the making of a sudden loud noise"
make-noise		
kwm	+ ntxhias	"to readily ford dangerous water"
ford		
pob <sup>9</sup>	+ ntxhias	"to guarantee (typically on the spot)"
ua hluas	+ ntxhias	"to act young and desirable"
do young		[when normally not that way]
ntaus	+ ntxhias	"to hit without warning"
hit		
peem <sup>10</sup>	+ ntxhias	"to push into an area where one is not allowed"

However, a compounding analysis can't explain why the hypothetical verb + PVE compound can't be negated and why the compound can't be modified adverbially or intensified. Further, this doesn't explain why some PVEs are virtually unrestricted as to which verbs they can combine with--though these are far less common.

The selectional restrictions on which verb can combine with which PVE are not in any apparent way syntactically controlled. There are clear semantic principles motivating these restrictions with most PVEs, but, as with **ntxhias** above, there are a number of PVEs which cannot be explained with predictive accuracy. In the next section, I shall give a few case studies which demonstrate the semantic motivation behind the selectional restrictions.

## 2.2. Semantic sorting of PVEs

Using the syntactic criteria arrived at in the last section, we have a non-semantic means of deciding on membership in the class of PVEs. Most PVEs in Hmong divide into five semantic types.

16)

Onomatopoeic (nrov "to sound" + **toog** = "the sound of something heavy hitting the ground")

Color-descriptive (dawb "[to be] white" + **lig** = "to be off-white")

Emphatic (qias "to be dirty" + **ntsuav** = "to be disgustingly dirty")

Manner (chaws "to enter" + **nplho** = "to enter by ducking")

Aspect-like (tos "to wait" + **ntsoov** = "to wait steadfastly")

Because of the space limitations here, I will exemplify only two types, Aspect-like and Manner, as these are the most apt to be confusing. I do not mean to suggest that all PVEs will fit into one of these five types, but these seem to be the main ones encountered.

### 2.2.1. Aspect-like PVEs

I include in this grouping PVEs which convey senses of the verbal action which are traditionally called aspectual, such as completive, iterative and progressive, and those senses which are semantically related (constancy, continuing and sudden initiation of action). However, none of these aspectual categories are part of the aspectual system of Hmong, which employs **tau**, a pre-verbal completive particle, and **lawm**, a final perfective particle. These occur regularly and unrestrictedly and should be considered the 'proper' aspectual markers in Hmong. The 'aspect-like' PVEs are more akin to the only partially systematic particles **up** and **out** in the English **eat up**, **knock out**, etc.. Like **up** and **out**, these PVEs in Hmong are motivated in their use, but the verbs with which they occur are not predictable.

I will be considering here some of those aspectual PVEs which express or are associated with 'suddenness of action'. We have already seen **ntxhias** in section 2.1. It occurs with human subjects initiating an action unexpectedly, on the spot, and perhaps rashly, inappropriately, or against some sanction. While the morpheme has a reasonably unified sense, there are no apparent reasons why virtually any action could not be described as being performed in that way, and yet **ntxhias** is only used with a small number of verbs. Let us now consider two other PVEs which are of this generally 'sudden' nature: **dheev**, and **plaws**.

**Dheev**, which lacks any independent meaning, can only occur with verbs of mental activity and perception in humans:

17)

xav	+dheev	"to be struck with an idea"
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to think

pom	+dheev	"to suddenly notice"
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to see

tsim	+dheev	"to suddenly wake up"
------	--------	-----------------------

to awaken

[And so on]

The particular use of **dheev**, while regular, has no motivation from other

parts of the language. Which verbs it combines with must also be learned because it cannot be used with all verbs of mental activity:

- 18) \*Kuv paub                      dheev (lawm).  
       1ps to-understand              PERF  
 19) Kuv paub lawm.                "I got it. I understand now."

**Plaws** also combines with verbs according to a semantic principle, but it is not one that is as readily apparent.

- 20)  
 tawm            +plaws                "to suddenly come outside"  
       to come out  
 dim            +plaws                "to be suddenly freed, escape"  
       to be freed  
 sam            +plaws                "to jump upon"  
       to jump  
 phua           +plaws                "to split through (as through  
       to split                              a crowd)"  
 cig            +plaws                "to flame up"  
       to catch fire

There are many other verbs that **plaws** can combine with, but first let's consider those above. In all of these, there are two common elements (which the translations are designed to bring out): suddenness and translocation in space. This is most simply used with verbs like **tawm** and **dim** which inherently involve translocation, and gain the additional component of suddenness with additional emphasis on the change of location. **Sam** is inherently sudden, but does not necessarily involve a change in location (such as jumping up and down). The most salient type of relocation for a jump is to jump onto, that is, to land upon something<sup>11</sup>. There is also the highly salient notion of *to jump across (a stream, log, etc.)*, but Hmong has many words specifically for crossing and crossing over, so **plaws** fills a larger semantic gap by being applied the way it is. **Phua**, which by itself can be used as *to split (wood, etc.)* is basically a sudden action, but involves no translocation. With **plaws** it becomes extended to movement which can be seen as 'splitting' through a medium. **Cig** is used to describe something igniting. While fire can move both up and out, its moving up (*flaring up*) is certainly the more sudden and **cig plaws** accordingly describes that situation.

**Plaws** occurs with other verbs that now can be seen as metaphoric extensions of this basic notion of sudden translocation. For example, **kaj ntug plaws** (*daylight + plaws*) *daybreak*<sup>12</sup> is a highly salient change of state, conceptualized as a change of location (*from night into day*).

### 2.2.2. The Manner PVEs

As mentioned above, the Manner PVEs denote physical attributes of an action, e.g., loudly, in a straight manner, vertically, all acting together, and so on. There are surprisingly few of this type; usually a verb plus adverbial verb

construction is used with the second verb expressing a more specific manner than the first (like the English **go crawling**). This second verb is typically reduplicated for emphasis, which indicates that it is a verb and not a PVE.

- 21) Nws mus/nqa nkoov nkoov<sup>13</sup>. "He went/carried (something)  
 3ps go/carry be-stooped in a stooped manner."

The manners that are usually expressed with PVEs are those which are not typically expressed by verbs. For example, **pawg-lug** or sometimes just **pawg** does not appear as a verb, and has a distributional sense that is unlikely to be conveyed by a verb.

- 22) Tub rog zaum pawg-lug. "The soldiers sat all about  
 CLF soldier sit PVE (filling the area)."

This distributive sense cannot be applied to the temporal actions of verbs. That is, there is no way to use **pawg** in a sentence like the following.

- 23) Kuv saib ob yas xis-ne ua-ke. "I watched both movies together  
 1ps saw 2 CLF movie together (one after the other)"  
 24) \*Kuv saib pawg ob yas xis-ne.

In addition to occurring with verbs like **zaum**, **muaj to have**, and **nyob to reside, live**, **pawg(-lug)** can occur with **ua to make, do**. The effect and usefulness of this is that any social spatially-distributed action can be modified by **pawg**.

- 25) Tub rog noj mov ua pawg. "The soldiers ate rice together  
 CLF sold. eat rice do (about the area)."

**Tsees** is another PVE, but one with a far more restricted use: it only occurs with the verb **sawv to get up**. The fixed expression **sawv tsees** has a very specific sense or image associated with it. It is used to describe the situation when a person gets up having been roused by a noise or other unexpected happening which was beyond the subject's immediate vicinity. This is something like the English "getting up startled". However, no sense of haste or suddenness is necessarily conveyed in the person's getting up, from being roused. For example, **sawv tsees** can be used to describe a person who gets up to investigate a noise which just woke her up. Similarly, it is used in the expression

- 26) Nws sawv tsees (los) hais tias, "...."  
 3ps get-up PVE come say COMP  
 "He got up and said, '....' [In protest to what had just been said]"

Again, the sense expressed by the Manner PVE seems less likely to be readily expressible by available verbs than simple manner adverbials like *in a curled manner*. It is important to note that this is not because the manner is abstract. The manner can be quite concrete and grounded in a highly specific image. For example, **nkuj-nkis** is used to describe someone who is eating very slowly:



- 27) Yawg noj nkuj-nkis. "He is eating ('painfully') slowly."  
man eat

However, this use of **nkuj-nkis** is quite distinct from

- 28) Yawg noj qeeb qeeb. "He is eating very slowly."  
man eat slow

by virtue of being grounded in a specific image of eating with minute bites and scarcely swallowing any food. My informant describes this way of eating by bringing his hands to his mouth and making very small biting motions accompanied by a **tsk tsk** sound. And indeed this is the PVE used to describe the manner of eating used by rats. The physical action is not slow, but the result is that food is eaten slowly.

### 2.3. Expressive use

As the name suggests, expressives are used in image-rich and flowery language. They are certainly used in normal conversation and writing, but they seem to occur with a much higher frequency in literature (including oral literature). For example, the following, which is actually from a play, was taken by my informant to be a sentence in a very well written and beautiful love letter, where the use of PVEs greatly enhances the richness and hence the effect of the letter:

- 29) Nco tsoov hais-tias kuv txawm ncaim koj mus lawm los  
remember PVE COMP 1ps though separate 2ps go PERF come  
xij-peem, kuv lub siab yeej khi nraim rau ntawm koj mus kom kawg.  
however 1ps CLF liver still tie PVE to/with LOC 2ps go CAUSE finish  
"It is always on my mind that even though I left you behind and  
came here, my heart is still bound tightly to you until the very end."

The sense expressed by a particular PVE in a simple sentence in isolation is often not as strongly felt in more complex sentences or specific contexts. For example, in the following sentence, **tsees** certainly cannot be used to suggest that *every morning* the subject is startled into getting up (cf. (26)). Rather it seems to merely carry over some of the original flavor into this particular use, where it serves to emphasize the entry into the work day.

- 30) Tag-kis yawg sawv tsees noj mov tas nws cia li  
morning man get-up PVE eat rice CMPLT 3ps put-aside NOM  
rov-qab mus ua Suav zog lawm.  
return go do Chinese work PERF  
"Every morning, he gets up and eats, then he goes to  
work for the Chinese."

Learning to master the use of PVEs in Hmong is clearly a major prerequisite to learning how to speak expressively.

### 3. Towards characterizing expressives

Diffloth has suggested in his work that in addition to a characterization of language as having 'cognitive meaning', where sentential meaning is determined by well-defined relations between non-symbolic words with definite referents in the real world, we need a separate system for 'expressive' meaning. He bases this conclusion on his and others' work on ideophonic expressions in languages such as Semai and Korean. In these languages, minimal changes in the phonetic form of an expressive expression results in a significant and precise change of meaning according to sound-symbolic principles which are unique to each system. For example, in Korean, a medial -ll- in an expressive connotes a swaying or back-and-forth motion. There is a large system of expressives based around this sound, but to take just a few:

31)	
collong	"sound of many thin metallic objects hitting each other"
ccollong	"sound of larger heavier objects hitting each other from close together"
chollong	"water tossing (and possibly overflowing) in a shallow container"

[From: Diffloth (1972)]

To account for this linguistic behavior, which is so different from the behavior of 'normal' nouns and verbs, Diffloth invokes the notion of 'lexical discreteness'.

All noun and verb roots have one property in common which may be termed "lexical discreteness." That is, given a meaning and a corresponding root, any modification in the phonology of the root will give a completely different meaning (or a meaningless form), any modification of the meaning will correspond to a completely different root (or to no existing root). (Diffloth 1976, pp. 250-51)

The normal 'cognitive mode' of meaning is subject to this, but expressive meaning is not. This implies that it is not adequate to hold to a model of one-to-one word to meaning correspondences, as these meanings need to be described as networks of related and variable meanings. There is a fundamental difference between expressive and prosaic language, a difference that he calls "iconicity"<sup>14</sup>, to wit, the systematic use of sound symbolism in the linguistic forms to derive meaning. And it is this iconicity that "is the very *raison d'être* of the whole word class called Expressive (p. 50)."

Ratliff equates the Hmong expressive system with the expressive systems that Diffloth discusses. She has found a wide system of sound symbolism in Hmong's onomatopoeic expressions, and they too may not be fully subject to the principle of lexical discreteness and can be characterized as *iconic*<sup>15</sup>. However, these onomatopoeic expressives are not syntactically distinct from the other semantic classes of expressives which I outlined above. The entire class of expressives in Hmong are clearly akin to expressives in Korean, Japanese, and the Mon-Khmer languages. Certain expressives like **ntxhias** and **dheev**

are fully subject to the condition of lexical discreteness and are not sound-symbolic in any obvious *systematic* way. If we consider syntactic similarity an adequate means of characterizing this word class, and we believe that there are large sets of sound-symbolic expressives which belong to this word class that may not be fully subject to lexical discreteness, (thus akin to the expressives in Mon-Khmer and Korean) as Ratliff's work suggests, then we must question whether there is indeed a *separate* system of 'non-cognitive' meaning, as Diffloth has suggested. However, this expressive system in Hmong has a system of meaning which can be distinguished from that of the prosaic language. The meaning of a particular expressive is dependent upon the particular verb with which it is combined, and the total meaning of the V + PVE is seldom, if ever, completely decomposable. Further, unlike normal nouns and verbs, PVEs are consistently difficult to paraphrase or translate. A use of a PVE does not describe the world in a true or false way, rather its use is more or less appropriate depending upon the effect that the speaker is trying to create. The PVE system is used for nuances of expression beyond what is readily possible with the rest of the lexicon, and contains, not surprisingly, a large amount of sound-symbolic material. Some of this material will be fully onomatopoeic, as in **vwg** *roaring like the wind*, but much will be only partially so. For example **pl-** is used in the following onomatopoeic expressives [from Ratliff]:

32)

plig plawg	"a bird rising from its nest on the ground"
plig plog	"someone jumping into water"
plib pleb	"wood crackling"
plij plej	"a little popcorn popping in a big pan"
plij ploj	"bullet impact; bamboo bursting"
plij plooj	"heavy raindrops"

All of these have *suddenness* as a prominent feature, so it should not seem surprising that **plaws** is used for *sudden* motion through space, as we saw above.

This implies that rather than two separate systems of meaning in Hmong expressives--one subject to the condition of lexical discreteness and one which is not--there is just one system of expressive meaning which can vary as to the degree of sound-symbolism in the morphemes. The greater the sound-symbolism, the less subject to Diffloth's notion of lexical discreteness the morphemes become. In other words, the class of PVEs includes non-iconic, semi-iconic, as well as fully iconic words. Thus the class of expressives in Hmong implies that it may be wiser to view iconic words as lying at one end of a continuum with non-sound-symbolic words at the other, than to view the two as belonging to disparate systems. This gives us the further, perhaps more complicated problem of how to integrate the variety of expressive forms into a single linguistic description.

1. Before beginning this paper, I would like to thank all those who have helped me with their discussions and support, especially: Susan Herring, Annie Jaisser, Jim Matisoff, M. C. O'Connor, Martha Ratliff, and Leonard Talmy. More than anyone else, I wish to thank Mr. Ma Xiong (Mab Xyob) without whom this paper would not be possible, and who has helped me tremendously in learning about his language. This paper is essentially excerpted from my M.A. thesis in Linguistics at UC Berkeley.
2. cf. Diffloth (1972, 1976)
3. Ts'au Ts'ui-yŭn (1972) has also looked at expressives in Blue Hmong. He argues that these expressives are words in contrast with "non-grammatical" interjectives and sound effects. I trust that I needn't prove to the reader that these expressives are indeed *words*. Unfortunately for the present study, I have been able to find few clear examples in Blue Hmong with cognates in White Hmong, and many of the examples in Blue Hmong are thereby difficult to compare.
4. **Tsis** the negative marker, occurs before the verb or noun it negates, while adverbial and adjectival verbs, as well as PVEs, occur after the verb or noun they negate.
5. Note that **tsis qeeb** (not slowly) would not normally be used when not compared with **tsis nrawm** (not quickly) because **tsis qeeb** and **nrawm** mean effectively the same thing and it would be more natural to say simply **Me-nyuam noj nrawm**.
6. English does allow expressive phrases and lexical items to be negated given a context allowing exact contradiction of the expressive element ("No! It is NOT an 'abomination before God'! How can you say such a thing?") or metalinguistic negation (He didn't cross the stream with 'gut-wrenching fear', merely understandably strong concern.) In Hmong, such negation strategies are less common and appear to not be used at all with expressives.
7. Of course, there would be other ways to express this general notion, but none which actually make use of the expressive.
8. Heimbach lists a couple of others which are not accepted by my informant.
9. **Pob** alone, is a noun *ball*. It does not appear to be used as an independent verb. Thus it looks very much like a compound that has frozen historically; however, all the other verbs in this list appear in isolation.
10. Heimbach translates **peem** as *to force oneself to do something one feels physically unable to do*. However, in my data, I have no examples of independent use of **peem**.
11. This is the definition that Heimbach gives, however this may not be a very common use, in fact, my informant does not use the verb **sam** except in the fixed collocation with **plhaws** when it means *to mount* (a

horse or buffalo). Bertrais (1964) also gives this meaning: **sam plhaw rau saum nees sauter d'un coup sur le cheval**. (Note there is often a middle/low tone alternation in connected speech.) It takes a certain amount of attention to not confuse **plaws** with **plhaws**, and it is certainly possible that the two are related.

12. **Kaj ntug plaws** may at first glance seem to violate the constraint that PVEs follow only verbs. However, historically at least, **ntug** seems to function as a verb, where **kaj** is a noun meaning *light* as in **kaj hlis moonlight**. While **ntug** no longer seems to be used without following **kaj**, it is easy to imagine that it once had a broader use as a main verb.
13. Heimbach includes **nkoov** in his list of "post-verbal intensifiers", and it is easy to see how one might think that it is a PVE, since it is typically used in conjunction with another verb. In addition to being reduplicatable, **nkoov** can occur after a verb + noun:

Yawg noj mov nkoov nkoov.

man eat rice

"The man ate the rice stooped over (it)."

This further indicates that **nkoov** is actually a verb.

14. On the notion of iconicity he follows Jakobson (1966) who was in turn pursuing the ideas of Charles Pierce before him.
15. I am not aware of any clear phonological differences between these expressives and the rest of the Hmong vocabulary, other than the fact that there is often clear sound-symbolism in the case of the expressives. Of course, the final results on Hmong Expressive Phonology are far from in.

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