



# Lao body part terms

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## Abstract

This article presents a description of nominal expressions for parts of the human body conventionalised in Lao, a Southwestern Tai language spoken in Laos, Northeast Thailand, and Northeast Cambodia. An inventory of around 170 Lao expressions is listed, with commentary where some notability is determined, usually based on explicit comparison to the metalanguage, English. Notes on aspects of the grammatical and semantic structure of the set of body part terms are provided, including a discussion of semantic relations pertaining among members of the set of body part terms. I conclude that the semantic relations which pertain between terms for different parts of the body not only include part/whole relations, but also relations of location, connectedness, and general association. Calling the whole system a ‘partonomy’ attributes greater centrality to the part/whole relation than is warranted.

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## 1. Parts of the body—the Lao inventory

Lao body part terms are in the class of NOUNS, according to morphosyntactic criteria. They appear as direct complements of verbs, occur in numeral classifier constructions, and are not freely combined with markers of aspect and/or modality (Enfield, 2004a,b). This section discusses the inventory of Lao body part terms. Some grammatical phenomena specific to expressions involving body parts are discussed in Section 2. Data were collected during field trips to Laos between 2001 and 2004 by elicitation using methods

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Table 1  
Lao terms for the face and its parts

Lao term	Translation	Comment
Simplex		
<i>naa5</i>	‘face’	
<i>taa3</i>	‘eye’	
<i>paak5</i>	‘mouth’	
<i>dang3</i>	‘nose’	
<i>kèem4</i>	‘cheek’	
<i>khiw4</i>	‘eyebrow’	
<i>sop2</i>	‘lip’	
<i>khaang2</i>	‘chin, jaw’	
<i>nuat5</i>	‘facial hair’	
<i>kamap2</i>	‘temple’	
Complex		
<i>khon3 taa3</i>	‘eyelash’	lit. ‘eye body.hair’
<i>naa5 phaak5</i>	‘forehead’	lit. ‘forehead face’
<i>nuaj1 taa3</i>	‘eyeball’	lit. ‘eye ball’
<i>nang3 taa3</i>	‘eyelid’ and ‘lower eyelid’	lit. ‘eye hide’
<i>hiim2 taa3</i>	edge of <i>nang3 taa3</i> ‘eye hide’	lit. ‘eye rim’
<i>taa3 dam3</i>	‘pupil-and-iris’	lit. ‘black eye’
<i>taa3 khaaw3</i>	‘white of the eye’	lit. ‘white eye’
<i>huu2 dang3</i>	‘nostril’	lit. ‘nose hole’
<i>piik5 dang3</i>	‘nostril flange’	lit. ‘nose wing’
<i>kêeng3 dang3</i>	‘area between nose and upper lip, where moustache grows’	lit. ‘nose <i>kêeng3</i> (i.e. <i>kêeng3</i> of the nose)’

described in the ‘Elicitation guide on parts of the body’ (Enfield, this volume), as well as by notes and observations in field work in Laos since 1990.

An expression is deemed to refer to a part of the body if native speakers report that it fits felicitously into the following frame:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) \_\_\_\_\_ *pên3 suan1 nùng1 khòong3 haang1-kaaj3*  
           is part one of body  
       ‘\_\_\_\_\_ is a part of the body’.

The inventory of terms is presented in the following four sub-sections, covering (1) the face and its parts, (2) external parts of the body, (3) internal parts of the body, and (4) other terms associated with the body. Terms are distinguished as to whether they are SIMPLEX (monomorphemic) or COMPLEX (formally polymorphemic).

### 1.1. The face and its parts

Table 1 lists Lao terms for the face and its parts.

Most of the 10 simplex terms, including one for the face itself, do not show obvious differences in meaning to English,<sup>2</sup> but there are two things to note. First, *khaang2* has no

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for key to orthographic convention.

<sup>2</sup> I assume the reader’s familiarity with the English inventory, but will try to be explicit about my judgment of the English terms’ extensional range where relevant, and where possible.

English equivalent. It refers to the whole lower section of jaw from below one ear to the point of the chin and along to below the other ear. Its extension goes beyond that of English *chin* (whose lateral extension is not wider than the mouth), but the term does not denote the idea of ‘jaw’ as a bone. This would be referred to using the expression *kaduuk5 khaang2* ‘jaw (bone)’, with *khaang2* as a modifier of *kaduuk5* ‘bone’. Second, *paak5* ‘mouth’, while not obviously different in extension to English *mouth*, reveals a more external or lips-oriented notion than that encoded in English *mouth* (cf. McClure, 1975, p. 84; Wierzbicka, 1980, pp. 80–83). This is revealed by occurrence of the term in collocations which would seem strange or at least marked in English, such as *paak5 tèèk5* (lit. broken mouth) ‘split or cracked mouth’ and *paak5 dèèng3* (red mouth) ‘mouth red from lipstick’ (cf. Wierzbicka, 1996, p. 386 for the same observation re: *usta* ‘mouth’ in Polish). These concepts are better expressed in English using *lips*, not *mouth*.

Among the 10 complex terms for parts of the face in Table 1, a few have no English equivalent. One is *kêèng3 dang3*, a noun phrase whose head is *kêèng3*, a word with no independent meaning outside this context. Its modifier is *dang3* ‘nose’. The part denoted by the whole expression is thus explicitly associated with the nose, the ‘*kêèng3* of the nose’. But it is not PART OF the nose. Speakers reject the following frame (cf. (1), above):

- (2) \**kêèng3-dang3*                      *pên3 suan1 nùng1 khòòng3 dang3*  
 area.between.nose.and.lip    be    part    one    of            nose  
 (The “nose *kêèng3*” is a part of the nose.)

If anything, the relation is one of location. This part is AT OR BELOW the nose.<sup>3</sup> It is not clear, however, that this location relation is encoded in the morphosyntactic structure of the expression. Simple nominal compounds express a broad array of semantic relations. In the case of *kêèng3 dang3*, the ENCODED relation between the referent and the nose itself is at the least one of ASSOCIATION, but there is no evidence that the nominal compound encodes any further specificity (cf. the range of relations covered in English nominal compounds such as *rice pot*, *spear head*, *village chief*, *ax handle*, *forest clearing*). See Section 3, below, for further discussion.

Two complex terms relating to the eye are *nang3 taa3* ‘eye hide’ and *hiim2 taa3* ‘eye rim’. There is no evidence that the relations [‘eye’:‘eye hide’] and [‘eye’:‘eye rim’] are anything more specific than ASSOCIATION. The former refers to the referent of English *eyelid* as well as to its counterpart below the iris (i.e. the ‘lower eyelid’). The latter refers to the rim of *nang3 taa3*, where it gives way to the visible part of the eyeball (i.e. the upper and lower parts along which the eyelashes grow, and on which mascara is typically applied). Again, with these two terms, it cannot be determined whether the relation between the head and the modifying element is one of ‘part’ or ‘possession’ or other. Speakers reject or are uncomfortable with the following:

- (3) ?*nang3 taa3/hiim2 taa3*    *pên3 suan1 nùng1 khòòng3 taa3*  
 hide eye/rim eye            be    part    one    of            eye  
 (The ‘eye hide’/‘eye rim’ is a part of the eye.)

<sup>3</sup> For some speakers, the *kêèng3 dang3* is above or at the top of the nose, just at or below the point between the eyebrows.

A second notable—but hardly surprising—finding in the complex terms in Table 1 is the non-observance of certain distinctions familiar from English and other languages. *Nuat5* ‘facial hair’ encodes no distinction between ‘moustache’ and ‘beard’. A second is the lack of distinction between ‘pupil’ and ‘iris’. A single distinction is made between visible parts of the eyeball, that between *taa3 dam3* the ‘black eye’ and *taa3 khaaw3* the ‘white eye’. Lao speakers have dark brown irises, meaning that perceptually there is a relatively subtle distinction between pupil and iris. Morphosyntactically, these expressions are interesting, since they are headed by *taa3* ‘eye’, although the whole expression does not refer to ‘an eye’ (just as in English a *forearm* is not an arm, and a *lower leg* is not a leg; see Sections 2 and 3 for further discussion).

An additional domain of interest in cross-linguistic data on conventions in categorization of the face and its parts concerns the vocabulary of facial expressions (usually associated with emotion), as well as conventional descriptions of faces which do not denote parts but otherwise do describe faces (e.g. for recognition of individuals). An example of the latter is *sop2 bòò hum4 khèw5* (lit. ‘lips not cover teeth’), which can be translated as ‘Her lips don’t cover her teeth’. The same situation is described in English as *She has buck teeth*. Another collocation is *kèem4 bòong1* (lit. ‘pierced cheek’) for ‘dimple’. These reveal different construals to English of the same set of phenomena, where the differences concern the feature of the designatum PROFILED by the expression (cf. Langacker, 1987; Chafe, 2000). Consider *khèw5 haang1* ‘tooth spaced.apart’, the conventional way of referring to having a gap between one’s teeth. Lao convention foregrounds the TEETH and their distance from each other, while the convention of English is to foreground the GAP between them.

I have elsewhere described Lao conventions for talking about facial expressions of emotion (Enfield, 2001). Examples include *naa5 buut5* (lit. ‘rotten face’; associated with negative emotional state), *hêt1 khiw4 còt5 kan3* (lit. ‘make eyebrows park together’; associated with thinking, puzzlement), *naa5 mèn3* (lit. ‘smelly face’, associated with disgust), and *taa3 tii1* (lit. ‘eyes held open’, associated with surprise, amazement; see Enfield, 2001, for discussion and further examples). While these expressions go beyond segmentation of the PARTS of the face, they are nevertheless conventional resources for talk about bodily phenomena (in this case, visually perceptible phenomena). They also point to an important component of the meaning of *naa5* ‘face’—i.e. that we can learn from it about others’ inner states.

## 1.2. External parts

Table 2 lists Lao terms for external parts of the body.

Three terms in Table 2 may be translated in different contexts using the English word *body*. Of these, only *haang1 kaaj3* refers generally to the human body, the highest node of the body partonomy. That is, only *haang1 kaaj3* ‘body’ may serve as the whole for which the terms discussed in this article are said to be parts (by the frame in (1), above). Both morphological components of *haang1 kaaj3* appear in other contexts—e.g. *khoong2 haang1* ‘structure’ (where *khoong2* refers to a ‘frame’), *kaaj3-ña-sin3* ‘gymnastics’ (where *sin3* means ‘art’), but neither normally occurs on its own.

*Too3* is close to English *body* in the sense of ‘trunk’; central part of the body, not including limbs and head’ (as in *There were cuts on his arms and legs, but none on his body*). It is

Table 2

## Lao terms for external parts of the body

Lao term	Translation	Comment
Simplex		
<i>too3</i>	‘body’	‘trunk’
<i>hun1</i>	‘body/figure’	
<i>khèèn3</i>	‘arm’	
<i>kaam4</i>	‘muscle, bicep/upper arm’	
<i>khaa3</i>	‘leg’	
<i>mùù2</i>	‘hand’	
<i>tiin3</i>	‘foot’	
<i>niv4</i>	‘digit (finger or toe)’	
<i>lêp1</i>	‘claw’	‘nail (of finger or toe)’
<i>khaw1</i>	‘knee’	
<i>khèèng1</i>	‘lower leg’	segment of leg from knee to ankle
<i>sòòk5</i>	‘elbow’	cf. synonym <i>khèèn3 sòòk5</i>
<i>hua3</i>	‘head’	
<i>phom3</i>	‘hair of the head’	
<i>kamòòm1</i>	‘crown of head’	part that is soft in babies
<i>còòm3</i>	‘peak’	area at crown of head, where hair follicles spiral
<i>huu3</i>	‘ear’	
<i>ngòòn1</i>	‘nape’	
<i>khòò2</i>	‘neck, throat’	
<i>khiing2</i>	‘torso’	
<i>khaang5</i>	‘side’	
<i>lang3</i>	‘back’	
<i>baa1</i>	‘shoulder’	horizontal area from neck to shoulder joint; = <i>baa1 laj1</i>
<i>qèèw3</i>	‘waist, lower back’	
<i>qek2</i>	‘upper chest’	
<i>nom2</i>	‘breast’	
<i>thòòng4</i>	‘belly’	
<i>kamoom2</i>	‘area above pubis’	
<i>kon4</i>	‘arse’	
<i>ham3</i>	‘testicles’	
<i>khooj2</i>	‘penis’	
<i>hii3</i>	‘vagina’	
<i>tèèt5</i>	‘clitoris’	
<i>sabùù3</i>	‘belly button’	
<i>khon3</i>	‘body hair’	
<i>phiw3</i>	‘skin’	
<i>nang3</i>	‘hide’	
<i>qên3</i>	‘sinews, visible/raised blood vessels’	
Complex		
<i>haang1 kaaj3</i>	‘body’	lit. ‘body frame’
<i>khii5 hèè4</i>	‘underarm, armpit’	lit. ‘hèè4 shit’
<i>naa5 thòòng4</i>	‘centre of belly at front’	lit. ‘belly face’
<i>thòòng4 nòòj4</i>	‘lower area of belly at front’	lit. ‘small belly’
<i>hua3 khaw1</i>	‘knee cap’	lit. ‘knee head’
<i>khaa3 phap1</i>	‘back of knee’	lit. ‘fold leg’
<i>khaa3 tooj4</i>	‘thigh’	lit. ‘thigh leg’
<i>kok2 khaa3</i>	‘thigh (joint)’	lit. ‘leg base’
<i>ngaw5 khaa3</i>	‘upper thigh’	lit. ‘leg branching root’

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Lao term	Translation	Comment
<i>kok2 khèèn3</i>	'shoulder (joint)'	lit. 'arm base'
<i>ngaw5 khèèn3</i>	'shoulder (top of arm), deltoids'	lit. 'arm branching root'
<i>san3 lang3</i>	'spine, muscles flanking spine'	lit. 'back ridge'
<i>hòòng1 lang3</i>	'depression running down alongside spine'	lit. 'back channel'
<i>hòòng1 qek2</i>	'depression running down centre of chest'	lit. 'chest channel'
<i>lòòt5 khòò2</i>	'oesophagus, Adam's apple'	lit. 'throat tube'
<i>calòòk4 khòò2</i>	'small depression at base of oesophagus and above sternum'	lit. 'throat <i>calòòk5</i> '
<i>hua3 nom2</i>	'nipple'	lit. 'breast head'
<i>baa1 laj1</i>	'horizontal area from neck to shoulder joint'	lit. 'shoulder'
<i>naa5 khèèng1</i>	'shin'	lit. 'lower leg face'
<i>biil khèèng1</i>	'calf'	lit. 'lower leg <i>biil</i> '
<i>son5 tiin3</i>	'heel'	lit. 'foot stub'
<i>son5 nòòng1</i>	'heel'	lit. ' <i>nòòng1</i> stub'
<i>tum1 mòòng4</i>	'ankle'	morphology unclear
<i>khòò5 khaa3</i>	'ankle joint'	lit. 'leg joint'
<i>lêp1 mùù2</i>	'fingernail'	lit. 'hand claw'
<i>lêp1 tiin3</i>	'toenail'	lit. 'foot claw'
<i>khèèn3 sòòk5</i>	'elbow'	lit. 'elbow arm'
<i>nìw4 kòòj4</i>	'little finger/toe'	lit. ' <i>kòòj4</i> digit'
<i>nìw4 naang2</i>	'ring finger/toe'	lit. ' <i>naang2</i> digit'
<i>nìw4 kaang3</i>	'middle finger/toe'	lit. 'middle digit'
<i>nìw4 sii4</i>	'index finger/second toe'	lit. 'pointing digit'
<i>nìw4 poo4</i>	'thumb/big toe'	lit. ' <i>poo4</i> digit'
<i>poo4 mùù2</i>	'thumb'	lit. 'hand <i>poo4</i> '
<i>poo4 tiin3</i>	'big toe'	lit. 'foot <i>poo4</i> '
<i>lang3 mùù2</i>	'back of the hand'	lit. 'hand back'
<i>san3 mùù2</i>	'outside edge of hand, from base of pinkie to wrist'	lit. 'hand ridge'
<i>faa3 mùù2</i>	'palm'	lit. 'hand lid'
<i>kok2 lêp1</i>	'nail root'	lit. 'nail base'
<i>paa3 lêp1</i>	'nail tip'	lit. 'nail tip'
<i>khòò5 mùù2</i>	'wrist'	lit. 'hand joint'
<i>khòò5 nìw4 mùù2</i>	'knuckle'	lit. 'hand digit joint'
<i>huu2 kon4</i>	'anus'	lit. 'arse hole'
<i>kon4 khii5</i>	'anus'	lit. 'shit(ting) arse'
<i>nang3 ham3</i>	'scrotum'	lit. 'testicle hide'
<i>nuaj1 ham3</i>	'testicle'	lit. 'testicle unit'
<i>paa3 khooj2</i>	'tip of penis'	lit. 'penis tip'
<i>hua3 khooj2</i>	'head of penis'	lit. 'penis head'
<i>kok2 khooj2</i>	'base of penis'	lit. 'penis base'
<i>nang3 khooj2</i>	'foreskin'	lit. 'penis hide'
<i>hiim2 hii3</i>	'labia'	lit. 'vagina rim'
<i>huu2 hii3</i>	'birth canal'	lit. 'vagina hole'
<i>qiil moq2</i>	'vagina (diminutive connotation)'	<i>moq1</i> plus female non-respect prefix <i>qiil-</i>

also used in certain contexts to refer to the overall body as having a certain size and shape.<sup>4</sup> Thus:

<sup>4</sup> The term *too3* is used with reference to animal bodies, and is also one of the most common nominal classifiers, used prototypically for counting animals (e.g. *muu3 saam3 too3* [pig three body] 'three pigs'). In the context of reference tracking and other types of nominal reference, *too3* has generalised into a 'residual' classifier (Enfield, 2004a).

- (4) *phua3 man2 too3 ñaj1*  
 husband 3SG body big  
 ‘Her husband (has a) big body (i.e. is of big build)’.

Speakers reject the use of *haang1 kaaj3* ‘body’ here.

The third ‘body’ term in Lao is *hun1*, best translated as *figure*. One can describe a person as having a *hun1 ñaj1* ‘big body/figure’ or *hun1 ngaam2* ‘good figure, nice body’. But one cannot say that the nose or the arm is ‘part of the *hun1*’. The word *hun1* also means ‘puppet, doll, mannequin’ in other contexts.

The terms *khaa3* ‘leg’, *khèn3* ‘arm’, *mù2* ‘hand’ and *tiin3* ‘foot’ do not appear to be different in meaning to their English equivalents. These are further discussed in Section 3, below, with reference to the issue of putative partonomic relations among them.

*Niw4* ‘digit’ is general with respect to its reference to fingers or toes. When required, a distinction between fingers and toes is made by adding either *mù2* ‘hand’ or *tiin3* ‘foot’ as a modifier, giving *niw4 mù2* ‘finger’ (lit. ‘hand digit’) and *niw4 tiin3* ‘toe’ (lit. ‘foot digit’). Each digit has a name, consisting of *niw4* in combination with a modifier. In two cases, the modifier is specific to that expression and does not occur elsewhere (*poo4* for thumb/big toe and *kòj4* for pinkie). Another two are descriptive (*kaang3* ‘middle’ for middle finger and *sii4* ‘point, stick out’ for index finger). The remaining term is *niw4 naang2* ‘ring finger’, in which the modifier is *naang2*, elsewhere meaning ‘girl, young woman’. Consultants differ as to whether they attribute any conceptual connection between the ring finger and the idea ‘girl, young woman’.

Nails are referred to using *lèp1* ‘claw’ (so glossed because it is also used for reference to animal claws). This term is not specific as to whether the nail belongs to a finger or a toe. When a distinction is required, the ‘digit’ word will not suffice, since it is also general with respect to whether it belongs to a hand versus a foot. As a consequence, the specific terms for nails are *lèp1 mù2* ‘HAND nail’ and *lèp1 tiin3* ‘FOOT nail’, not \**lèp1 niw4 (mù2)* ((hand) digit nail) (cf. Palmer and Nicodemus, 1985, p. 344).

Lao does not have an equivalent to English *shoulder*. Lao *baa1* or *baa1 laj1* refers to the flattish (i.e. horizontal) region between the base of the neck and the shoulder joint. This part of the body is covertly denoted by a carrying verb *bèk5*, which refers to carrying something by taking its weight on one’s *baa1*; i.e. ‘ON one’s shoulder’. English *shoulder* includes this part, but also includes the uppermost part of the arm directly adjoining the torso (McClure, 1975, p. 80). This latter part (i.e. deltoids and shoulder joint) is referred to in Lao as *ngaw5 khèn3* ‘arm branching-base’. English *shoulder* apparently centres at the joint between arm and torso and covers the area to both sides of this joint (hence the possibility of having a *dislocated shoulder*), while according to the conventions of Lao, the joint is where the *baa1 (laj1)* ends and the *ngaw5 khèn3* begins. A ‘dislocated shoulder’ cannot be described in Lao using *baa1*, and is expressed either as *ngaw5 khèn3 lot1* ‘arm branching-base dislocate’ or simply *khèn3 lot1* ‘arm dislocate’. These kinds of collocational restrictions can provide good evidence for semantic content, demonstrating a significant distinction between English *shoulder* and Lao *baa1* (despite the latter often being translated as *shoulder*).

Lao speakers conventionally distinguish, using simplex terms, between five different referents for what in English could be called *hair*. Two mentioned in the above section on the face and its parts are *khiw4* ‘eyebrow’ and *nuat5* ‘facial hair (moustache/beard)’. Three listed in Table 2 are the semantically general term *khon3* ‘body hair’ (which also refers

to fur and feathers), and the semantically specific terms *phom3* ‘head hair’ and *mòòj3* ‘pubic hair’. The latter is one of the rudest words in the Lao language. *Khìw4* ‘eyebrow’ is the only of the Lao terms for hair that allows modification by *n̄aj1* ‘big’, suggesting that the term refers to a THING made up of hair, while the other terms refer to hair as a MASS.

*Tiin3* ‘foot’ is considered rude in certain circumstances and is often avoided. Upon entering a house as a guest in southern Laos, I was once invited to *sêt1 khaa3* ‘wipe (the) legs’ on the way in. The context (muddy shoes, doormat at the entrance to the house) clearly indicated that the intended referent was the feet, not the legs. Speakers I later consulted agree that to have referred explicitly to the feet in this case would have sounded *bòø muan1 huu3* ‘not nice (on the) ears’. Such avoidance is associated with a genuine disdain for the feet, maintained in Lao speakers’ cultural practices and beliefs. The feet are considered ‘low’, especially in contrast to the head, and there is a range of ways in which this is observed in everyday behaviour. For example, there are strict norms against using the feet for practical actions such as moving things or picking things up, pointing with the feet, or ‘crossing’ (i.e. stepping over) people or objects (especially food and religious or personal items). Feet are among the ‘low’ things that ideally should be kept in a low position, and especially should not touch or go above people’s heads.<sup>5</sup> I have more than once observed drivers of public transport vehicles apologise in advance to passengers for ‘going over their heads’ before stepping up onto the roof of the vehicle to attend to baggage. Similar beliefs among Thai speakers are taken to further extremes. When a high-ranking member of the Thai royal family travels across the city of Bangkok, police clear traffic on pedestrian overpasses and bridges en route, to ensure that no person will be physically above the royal personage as he or she travels through. These practices among Thai speakers are accompanied by the presence in Thai of higher register terms for the foot, *tháaw* for human feet and *fáa bàat* for royal feet (see Juntanamalaga, 1992). *Tiin* in Thai refers only to animal feet, or dysphemistically to human feet (cf. English *hoofs*). Many languages supply alternative terms for the same body part, encoding register differences or differences in connotation, often where the ‘lower’ term is also used for animals. Compare English *hands* versus *paws* or *mitts*, *teeth* versus *fangs*, *mouth* versus *snout* (cf. *cake hole*, *pie hole*, *kisser*), and of course the many terms for genitalia and their parts.<sup>6</sup> The two Lao terms for ‘heel’ differ in level of politeness, indexed by the presence or absence of the morpheme *tiin3* ‘foot’. While the expression *son4 tiin3* ‘foot stub’ is considered ‘not nice’, *son4 nòòng1*—where the modified *nòòng1* has no independent meaning—is not impolite.<sup>7</sup> The term for ‘ankle joint’ is *khòò5 khaa3*, literally ‘leg joint’. Its equivalent for the arm is *khòò5 mùù2* ‘HAND joint’ (not ‘arm joint’). When speakers were asked why the ankle is not called *khòò5 tiin3* ‘foot joint’, they replied that it would sound, again, ‘not nice’, due to presence of the word *tiin3* ‘foot’.

<sup>5</sup> Another is the *sin*, the traditional Lao women’s skirt. Custom has it that the *sin* must be stored in the home as close to the floor as possible.

<sup>6</sup> These terms do not always differ solely in register or connotation, but often encode additional distinctions in referential meaning such as shape, size, state, configuration, or function. Compare *titties* versus *jugs* versus *fun bags*, *widdler* versus *pecker* versus *rod*.

<sup>7</sup> Rude speech in Lao often includes gratuitous reference to the foot e.g. *jaal maa2 kuan3 tiin3 kui3* ‘Don’t bloody disturb me!’ (lit. ‘Don’t come and disturb my foot/feet’.) (Cf. Juntanamalaga, 1992, p. 169, on Thai.) The most offensive threats and insults refer to stepping on or kicking a person, especially a part of their body in the area of the head: *jap5 khòò2* ‘step on (your) neck’, *téq2 khòò2* ‘kick (your) neck’, *téq2 paak5* ‘kick (your) mouth’. These carry roughly the tone of English (*I’ll punch (your) fuckin’ head in*).

*Nang3* ‘hide’ refers to animal hide as well as to human skin in general. The term is regarded as inappropriate in register with respect to human skin where it can be seen as a flat, soft, even expanse, e.g. on the face, torso, or limbs. It is appropriate for flaps of skin or loose skin such as on the eyelids or the scrotum. *Phiw3* refers to a flat covering surface of human skin (although *nang3* also covers this).

*Khò2* ‘neck, throat’ is ambiguous, sometimes referring to the neck and sometimes referring to the throat. This is supported by the inability to get a general reading for *cép2 khò2* (sore neck/throat), which may mean ‘sore neck’ (e.g. from sleeping in an odd position) or ‘sore throat’ (e.g. from smoking).

Further terms of note are *khèng1* (‘lower leg’, the section of the leg analogous to the forearm, from knee to ankle, of which ‘shin’ and ‘calf’ are parts), *san3 mù2* ‘hand ridge’ (the outside edge of the hand from base of pinkie to wrist), *qèw3* (waist and lower back), *calòk5 khò2* (small depression where base of neck/throat meets sternum), and *qên3* (a broad category of tough, fibrous stringy tissue, both internal and external to the body, including sinews and gristle as well as visible blood vessels and the penis).

Among complex terms, a number of specifying elements recur. These include *ngaw5* ‘branching base’, *kok2* ‘base’, *paaj3* ‘tip’, *san3* ‘ridge’, *khò5* ‘joint’, and *hòng1* ‘groove, channel’. These terms are not derivationally productive. Thus, there are parts of the body such as the knee and elbow which could conceivably be described by *khò5* ‘joint’, but where conventional terms pre-empt such description. Lao speakers refer to the elbow using *sòk5* ‘elbow’ and not \**khò5 khèn3* (arm joint). But, unlike in English, there is no basic term for ‘wrist’, and this body part is referred to with *khò5 mù2* ‘hand joint’. The overall meanings of these polymorphemic expressions are lexically specified, not computed from the meaning of the parts (as in the case of, say, *left arm*). The term *khò5 mù2* ‘hand joint’ refers to the WRIST, and not just any joint associated with the hand (e.g. ‘knuckle’). Similarly, while one could imagine a number of candidates for referent of ‘ridge of the back’ and ‘ridge of the hand’, the ones actually picked out by the expressions *san3 lang3* ‘back ridge’ and *san3 mù2* ‘hand ridge’ are lexically specified.

### 1.3. Internal parts

Table 3 lists Lao terms for internal parts of the body.

If conceptual categories are built from experience, as I suppose they are, people’s concepts of internal parts of the body must be qualitatively different to those of their visible parts. People seldom if ever see or handle the internal parts of people’s bodies. Many people of course do regularly see and handle internal body parts of other animals. But what is the average person’s evidence that an animal’s insides are homologous to those of a human? I suggest that the linguistic conventions themselves play a role. English speakers do not doubt, I think, that a chicken’s *kidneys* are in some sense the same as a person’s *kidneys*. Lao speakers, however, balk at this suggestion. They have distinct terms: *taj3* for chickens and other animals, *maak5 khaj1 lang3* (literally ‘back egg fruit’) for people. Lao speakers I have consulted disagree as to whether people have *taj3*. Those who think they do are not quite sure. English speakers apparently assume that chickens and humans share this crucial body part. It may be that, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, common labelling with the word *kidney* is evidence in favour of this assumption.

It is unclear whether the term *khuan3* denotes a part of the body. Only some speakers are willing to accept it in the frame (1). A person has multiple *khuan3*, which are located at

Table 3  
Lao terms for internal parts of the body

Lao term	Translation	Comment
Simplex		
<i>saj5</i>	‘guts’	
<i>tap2</i>	‘liver’	
<i>taj3</i>	‘kidney’	
<i>pòt15</i>	‘lung’	
<i>samòng3</i>	‘brain’	
<i>ngùak4</i>	‘palate’	
<i>liin4</i>	‘tongue’	
<i>khèèw5</i>	‘tooth’	
<i>kaduuk5</i>	‘bone’	
<i>phung2</i>	‘stomach’	‘as whole organ’
<i>kaphòq1</i>	‘stomach’	‘inside of stomach’
<i>maam4</i>	‘spleen’	
<i>khuan3</i>	‘spirit’	
<i>siin4</i>	‘flesh’	
<i>nòng4</i>	‘placenta’	lit. ‘younger sibling’
Complex		
<i>hua3 caj3</i>	‘heart’	lit. ‘heart head’
<i>saj5 ting1</i>	‘appendix’	lit. ‘appendix gut’
<i>lam2 saj5</i>	‘intestines’	lit. ‘gut tube’
<i>phok1 niaw1</i>	‘bladder’	lit. ‘piss bladder’
<i>thong3 bìi3</i>	‘gall’	lit. ‘bile bag’
<i>sòng1 khòt14</i>	‘birth canal’	lit. ‘birth canal’
<i>mot1 luuk4</i>	‘uterus’	lit. ‘child uterus’
<i>saaj3 hèè1</i>	‘umbilical cord’	lit. ‘procession string’
<i>piik5 mot1 luuk4</i>	‘fallopian tube’	lit. ‘child uterus wing’
<i>paaj3 liin4</i>	‘tip of the tongue’	lit. ‘tongue tip’
<i>kok2 liin4</i>	‘root of the tongue’	lit. ‘tongue base’
<i>fèn2 khèèw5</i>	‘gum’	lit. ‘tooth gum’
<i>khèèw5 nam4 nom2</i>	‘milk tooth’	lit. ‘milk tooth’
<i>khèèw5 saaw2</i>	‘wisdom tooth’	lit. ‘20 tooth’
<i>khèèw5 kok2</i>	‘molar’	lit. ‘base tooth’
<i>thòt1 lùat4</i>	‘blood vessel’	lit. ‘blood pipe’
<i>kalook5 hua3</i>	‘skull’	lit. ‘head skull’
<i>lùak5 kaj1</i>	‘uvula’	lit. ‘chicken uvula’
<i>sèn5 pasaat5</i>	‘nerve’	lit. ‘nerve fiber’
<i>maak5 khaj1 lang3</i>	‘kidney’	lit. ‘back egg fruit’
<i>khaj3 man2</i>	‘fat’	synonym compound (both words mean ‘fat’)

various different points on the body, the most salient one (and the default reading of the term) being centred in the *còdm3*, the area at the top of the head where the hair follicles curl. The *khuan3* is partly independent of the physical person. People believe that it can get lost or left behind in certain situations, causing physical and psychological problems. The *khuan3* of very young children is especially vulnerable.

The word for the physical heart is *hua3 caj3*, where *hua3* means ‘head’ and *caj3* is a more general term meaning ‘core’ or ‘centre’. *Caj3* may sometimes be used alone to refer to the heart as an organ, but it is more often encountered in expressions referring to the ‘heart’ as a locus of emotion and other inner experience (Matisoff, 1986; Enfield, 2002). The term *caj3* ‘heart’ is involved in hundreds of expressions for emotion and personal

attributes. These are morphosyntactically of two forms, with *caj3* in either initial, or final position. Expressions with *caj3* in initial position describe inherent or enduring character traits, for example *caj3 dii3* (lit. heart good) ‘nice, considerate, generous’, *caj3 dam3* (lit. heart black) ‘evil, wicked, mean’, *caj3 kuang4* (lit. heart broad) ‘generous’. Expressions with *caj3* in final position describe temporary emotional states, for example *dii3 caj3* (lit. good heart) ‘happy’, *tok2 caj3* (lit. fall heart) ‘surprised, shocked’, *sia3 caj3* (lit. lost heart) ‘sad, regretful’ (cf. Diller and Juntanamalaga, 1990 on Thai).

#### 1.4. Other terms

Table 4 lists terms which are associated with the body but which are problematic or unacceptable in the ‘X is a part of the body’ frame ((1), above). These are bodily products such as blood, non-necessary features like birthmarks and scars, and notions such as *fist*

Table 4  
Further terms: not ‘parts of’ the body, but found in or on it

Lao term	Translation	Comment
Simplex		
<i>khii5</i>	‘shit’	
<i>ñiaw1</i>	‘piss’	
<i>lùat4</i>	‘blood’	
<i>bii3</i>	‘bile’	
<i>nòng3</i>	‘pus’	
<i>hùat1</i>	‘sweat’	
<i>lang2khèè2</i>	‘dandruff’	
<i>pèw4</i>	‘scar’	
<i>baat5</i>	‘cut, wound’	
<i>fii3</i>	‘boil’	
<i>siw3</i>	‘pimple’	
<i>tum1</i>	‘lump, skin eruption’	
<i>mùk1</i>	‘freckle’	lit. ‘ink’
<i>paan3</i>	‘birthmark’	
<i>tak2</i>	‘lap’	
<i>kampan4</i>	‘fist’	
Complex		
<i>khii5 dang3</i>	‘crusty snot’	lit. ‘nose <sub>1</sub> shit’
<i>khii5 muuk4</i>	‘runny snot’	lit. ‘nose <sub>2</sub> shit’
<i>khii5 huu3</i>	‘ear wax’	lit. ‘ear shit’
<i>khii5 taa3</i>	‘sleep’	lit. ‘eye shit’
<i>khii5 khaj2</i>	‘body grime’	lit. ‘moss shit’
<i>khii5 mèng2 van2</i>	‘freckle’	lit. ‘fly shit’
<i>khii5 katòt15</i>	‘wart’	lit. ‘wart shit’
<i>khii5 katheq1</i>	‘mucus’	lit. ‘mucus shit’
<i>nam4 taa3</i>	‘tears’	lit. ‘eye water’
<i>nam4 bèen4</i>	‘semen’	lit. ‘semen water’
<i>nam4 nom2</i>	‘milk’	lit. ‘breast water’
<i>nam4 laaj2</i>	‘saliva’	lit. ‘saliva water’
<i>khon3 dang3</i>	‘nostril hair’	lit. ‘nose body.hair’
<i>khon3 huu3</i>	‘ear hair’	lit. ‘ear body.hair’
<i>song2 phom3</i>	‘hairdo’	lit. ‘head.hair disposition’

and *lap* which exist only by virtue of adopting a certain posture (McClure, 1975, p. 85). While they are not PARTS OF the body, they are regarded by speakers as IN, ON, or COMING OUT OF the body.

*Khii5* ‘shit’ is widely used in lexical derivation in Lao (Enfield, 2004a). Some terms idiosyncratically include this morpheme where it has no clear semantic contribution (e.g. *khii5 hèè4* ‘armpit’; *hèè4* has no independent meaning). Other terms seem to be metaphoric, such as *khii5 mèèng2 van2* (lit. ‘fly shit’) for ‘freckle’. One large class of words in Lao featuring *khii5* ‘shit’ as a class term prefix consists of terms denoting waste products such as *khii5 lùaj1* ‘sawdust’ or *khii5 ñual* ‘garbage’. Among terms of this kind relating to the body, some are relatively transparent in meaning, such as *khii5 huu3* ‘ear shit’ (ear wax) and *khii5 taa3* ‘eye shit’ (sleep). Others are not. *Khii5 khaj2* ‘moss shit’, for example, has no equivalent in English apart from the technical term *sebum*. This ‘moss of the body’ refers to the oily secretion of the sebaceous glands that acts as a lubricant for the skin and hair.

Lao distinguishes two types of snot, both of which mean literally ‘nose shit’. *Khii5 dang3* ‘nose shit (crusty)’ refers to crusty snot which can be picked or scraped off (i.e. as complement of the verb *kèq2* ‘pick off, scrape’). This term features the element *dang3*, the everyday word for ‘nose’. *Khii5 muuk5* ‘nose shit (runny)’ features *muuk5*, a word which does not appear independently in Lao (but is cognate with Thai *camùuk*, the regular word for ‘nose’). Unlike *khii5 dang3* ‘nose shit (crusty)’, this term can appear as the complement of *sang1* ‘blow (the nose)’. This is another example of different perspectives being taken in Lao and English conventions for description of identical phenomena. English speakers *blow* and *pick* their NOSES, and do not *blow* or *pick* their SNOT. A Lao speaker, on the other hand, will *sang1 khii5 muuk4* ‘blow runny snot’ and/or *kèq2 khii5 dang3* ‘pick crusty snot’, rather than ?*sang1 dang3* (blow nose) or ?*kèq2 dang3* (pick nose). (*Kèq2 dang3* ‘pick nose’ is fine with the interpretation ‘pick at the outer surface of the nose’.)

*Nam4* ‘water, liquid’ is highly productive in derivation in Lao, and there are several terms among the liquid products of the body which feature this element. There are four such terms in Table 4 (denoting ‘tears’, ‘semen’, ‘milk’, and ‘saliva’). Most of the basic liquid-denoting terms (those denoting ‘piss’, ‘bile’, ‘pus’ and ‘sweat’) can optionally appear with *nam4* added as a ‘class term’ prefix (Enfield, 2004a). The only exception is *lùat4* ‘blood’.

An intriguing category consists of those terms which denote parts of the body IN SPECIFIC CONFIGURATIONS (McClure, 1975, p. 85). Examples from English include the nouns *fist*, *lap*, and *smile*. Lao has *tak2* ‘lap’, which like its English equivalent is often described in elicitation as a place where a child can sit. *Kampan4* ‘fist’ is a notion both physically and functionally determined, i.e. not just a hand in a certain configuration, but in that configuration for a certain purpose (typically hitting; this configurational body part is incorporated into the semantics of the English verb *punch*). Terms for gestures such as pointing or waving, and for facial expressions such as smiling or frowning in Lao (Enfield, 2001) are verbal expressions (e.g. *ñim4* ‘smile’, *sii4* (*mùù2*) ‘point (the hand)’, *ngel1 hua3* ‘toss (the head)’), and are not further discussed here.

Related to the issue of body part configuration is that of the human body as a standard of measure. A number of traditional Lao measure terms refer to parts of the body. Two terms—*khùùp4* ‘hand span’ and *vaa2* ‘arm span’—make reference to parts of the body in specific configurations (open hand and outstretched arms, respectively). Other measure terms involving body parts include *niw4* ‘inch’ (lit. ‘finger’) and *sòk5* ‘cubit’ (lit. ‘elbow’).

This concludes our sketch of the inventory of terms for parts of the body in Lao.<sup>8</sup> The discussion has been restricted to ‘literal’ meanings of the body part terms. Many terms considered to literally or prototypically refer to parts of the human body in Lao are also used for reference to (parts of) inanimate objects and other things. Examples include *hua3* ‘head’ (e.g. root vegetables, of a bed, of the evening), *kon4* ‘arse’ (e.g. base of a pot, boot of a car), *tiin3* ‘foot’ (e.g. of a mountain), *huu3* ‘ear’ (e.g. of a cup, bucket, pot, bag), *khaa3* ‘leg’ (e.g. of a table, tripod), *taa3* ‘eye’ (e.g. of a net), *paak5* ‘mouth’ (e.g. of a bottle, a river), *thòng4* ‘belly’ (e.g. of the sky), *khèw5* ‘tooth’ (e.g. of a comb, a cog), *naa5* ‘face’ (e.g. of a table, of a body of water), *lang3* ‘back’ (e.g. top of a cupboard, roof of a house), *haang3* ‘tail’ (e.g. of a river island). Some basic body part terms are not conventionally applied to (parts of) inanimates (e.g. *mùù2* ‘hand’, *khèn3* ‘arm’). Body part terms are sometimes used for reference to areas of spatial extension (e.g. *naa5* ‘face’/‘in front’, *lang3* ‘back’/‘behind’, *khaang5* ‘(to the) side’). Another area of reference to the body excluded from consideration in this paper is the COVERT categorization of the body and its parts. Verbs of donning and wearing may make reference to some categorization of parts of the body (Schaefer, 1985; cf. Lao *nung1* ‘put on/wear pants or shirt or jacket or any other clothing items classified by *too3* “body”’ versus *saj1* ‘put on/wear anything else on feet or head, or something less enclosing on the body, such as jewellery’). Finally, many verbs of action implicate or entail the involvement of various parts of the body (e.g. *têq2* ‘kick (with the foot)’, *son2* ‘butt (with the head)’, *mùù2* ‘open the eyes’, *mim2* ‘compress the lips’, *ngek1 hua3* ‘toss (the) head’, *sii4 mùù2* ‘point (with the) hand/finger’, *kom4* ‘bow, duck’). Exploration of these issues is reserved for another context.

We now turn to some observations concerning the grammatical behaviour of body part terms.

## 2. Grammatical observations

### 2.1. Body parts and classifiers

Lao features a grammatical system of nominal classification, which shows properties of a typical ‘numeral classifier’ system (Aikhenvald, 2000; Grinevald, 2000), with further extended functions (Enfield, 2004a). As nouns, body part terms are assigned classifiers for counting and for various pronominal references. For some body part terms, the appropriate classifier is *nuaj1* ‘three-dimensional unit’ (typically used for fruits and various other ‘assembled’ and transportable items like tables or computers), used with reference to eyes, testicles, kidneys, and the heart. ‘Two eyes’ may thus be expressed as *taa3 sòng3 nuaj1* (lit. ‘eye two unit’). For body part terms which refer to symmetrical parts, one on each side of the body—e.g. terms denoting arms, legs, eyes, cheeks, or ears—*bùang4* ‘side’ may be used. An alternative expression of ‘two eyes’ is thus *taa3 sòng3 bùang4* (lit. ‘eye two side’). It is also possible to use ‘repeater classifiers’, as in yet another rendering of ‘two eyes’ *taa3 sòng3 taa3* (lit. ‘eye two eye’) ‘two eyes’.

<sup>8</sup> Many if not most Lao terms for human body parts are also used with reference to animals. Some terms show equivalences not observed by English convention (e.g. *sop2* ‘lips’ for reference to a bird’s beak). Animal-specific terms include *kèt2* ‘scales (of a fish)’, *ngeep4* ‘gills (of a fish)’, *haang3* ‘tail’, and *piik5* ‘wing’.

## 2.2. Structure of compounds

The majority of noun–noun (N1–N2) compounds among the complex body part terms feature the ‘larger whole’ as modifier (N2), and the other component (whose referent is part of or connected to or located at or otherwise associated with the whole) as head, i.e. N1. Examples involving *dang3* ‘nose’ in N2 position (i.e. modifier) are illustrated here:

- (5) a. *kêêng3 dang3* ‘area between nose and upper lip’ (BELOW/ADJACENT TO the nose)  
 b. *piik5 dang3* ‘nose wing’ (PART OF the nose)  
 c. *khii5 dang3* ‘nose shit’ (FOUND/LOCATED IN the nose)

Two compounds are symmetrical: *haang1 kaaj3* ‘body’ and *khaj3 man2* ‘fat’. The two elements each refer to the whole, and no relation of association is relevant.

A number of complex body part terms display an exceptional grammatical structure, reversing the order of elements shown in (5). Whereas normally the whole entity of which the referent is associated is denoted by N2 (see (5a–c)), here it is denoted by N1. This is inconsistent with the usual status of N1 as phrasal head (cf. English *forearm*, which is not an arm, but part of an arm):

- (6) a. *naa5 phaak5* ‘forehead’ (lit. ‘forehead face’)  
 b. *khèèn3 sòòk5* ‘elbow’ (lit. ‘elbow arm’)  
 c. *khaa3 tooj4* ‘thigh’ (lit. ‘thigh leg’)  
 d. *khaa3 phap1* ‘back of knee’ (lit. ‘fold(ing) leg’)  
 e. *kon4 khii5* ‘anus’ (lit. ‘shit(ing) arse’)  
 f. *taa3 dam3* ‘pupil’ (lit. ‘black eye’; cf. *taa3 khiaw3* ‘blue eyes’)  
 g. *thòòng4 nòj4* ‘lower belly’ (lit. ‘small belly’)

While rare, this pattern is also attested in other areas of the nominal lexicon. For example, *khaj1 dèèng3* ‘yolk’ (lit. ‘red egg’); *khaj1 khaaw3* ‘egg white’ (lit. ‘white egg’).

## 2.3. ‘Body part syntax’: expressing possession in grammatical constructions

Certain grammatical constructions involving reference to a person and some part of that person’s body express a relationship of possession (Chappell and McGregor, 1995), without morphological expression of the possessive relationship. (Critically, this ‘possession’ relationship is between the body part and the PERSON, not the person’s BODY.) One type of construction is formally like a transitive sentence (i.e. is of the form NP1 V NP2), where the verb predicates either an action or an experience involving a part of the body, NP1 is a person, and NP2 is the relevant body part. More specific instantiations are:

- (7) Transitive frame (agent–V–theme)  
 NP1<sub>AGENT (PERSON)</sub> V NP2<sub>THEME (BODY PART)</sub>
- (8) *phen1 mùn2 taa3*  
 3sg open.eye eye  
 ‘He opened (his) eyes’.

- (9) Transitive frame (experiencer-V-locus)  
**NP<sub>1</sub>EXPERIENCER (PERSON) V NP<sub>2</sub>LOCUS (BODY PART)**
- (10) *phen1 khan2 khaa3*  
 3SG itch leg  
 ‘He itches (in the) legs’.
- (11) *kuu3 cêp2 lang3*  
 1SG sore back  
 ‘I (am) sore (in the) back’. ‘My back is sore’.

The construction as a whole entails a relation of possession of the body part by the grammatical subject. You can’t be sore in someone else’s back. You can’t use the verb *mùùm2* ‘open (the eyes)’ to describe someone opening someone else’s eyes.

The experience-denoting construction exemplified in (10) and (11) is not a regular transitive construction. A verb phrase such as *khan2 khaa3* ‘itch leg’ (in which *khaa3* ‘leg’ is not an undergoer but a LOCUS of experience) can itself take an additional nominal complement describing the STIMULUS of the experience. This structure incorporates a body part into a multi-participant predication, with roles corresponding to experiencer, locus of experience, and stimulus, in that order.

- (12) *phen1 khan2 khaa3 phaa5 hom1 maj1*  
 3SG itch leg blanket new  
 ‘He itches (in the) legs (from his) new blanket’.

A second type of construction takes the following form:

- (13) **NP<sub>1</sub>THEME (HUMAN) NP<sub>2</sub>BODY PART V<sub>ADJECTIVE</sub>**

This is akin to a topic-comment construction (Li and Thompson, 1976), in which a noun phrase in initial position is followed by what looks like a full clause with its own nominal subject and adjectival predicate. In the following example, *kuu3* ‘I’ is in initial position as the topic or ‘setting’ for the assertion *phom3 dam3* ‘(the) hair (is) black’:

- (14) *kuu3 phom3 dam3*  
 1SG hair black  
 ‘I am black-haired’. (lit. ‘I, [the] hair [is] black’.)

Here is another example:

- (15) *luuk4 caw4 khaa3 ñaaw2*  
 child 2SG leg long  
 ‘Your child is long-legged’. (lit. ‘Your child, [the] legs [are] long’.)

This looks like a topic-comment construction, and also like a nominal predicate construction. It differs from a typical topic-comment construction in that the sequence ‘NP<sub>BODY PART</sub> V’ functions as a predicate in itself, directly taking verbal marking:

- (16) *luuk4 caw4 bòø khaa3 ñaaw2*  
 child 2SG NEG leg long  
 ‘Your child isn’t long-legged’.

Superficially similar constructions cannot do this:

- (17) (a) *ton4 sak2 baj3 ñaj1*  
 tree teak leaf big  
 ‘The teak tree (has) big leaves’.  
 (b) *\*ton4 sak2 bòø baj3 nòðj4*  
 tree teak NEG leaf small  
 (The teak tree (does) not (have) small leaves.)  
 (c) *ton4 sak2 baj3 bòø nòðj4*  
 tree teak leaf NEG small  
 ‘The teak tree (does) not (have) small leaves’.

### 3. Semantic observations

#### 3.1. Semantic content of body part terms

Terms for parts of the body encode a range of different types of information (see introduction to this volume, Enfield, N.J., Majid, A., van Staden, M.). Previous authors such as Brown (1976) and Andersen (1978) among others, have stressed a perceptual basis for body part distinctions. As they have suggested, it is possible that the apparently significant cross-linguistic convergence of the meaning of many body part terms is due to a natural convergence on salient perceptible distinctions. These perceptible distinctions are also coupled with functional information, i.e. not only how a part of the body may be distinguished on the basis of how it looks and feels, but also by the actions and postures its structure affords its owner (e.g. legs being for walking, ears being for hearing) or an onlooker (e.g. face being for seeing what someone is thinking and/or feeling). It may be difficult to establish whether such specifications are encoded semantically or are simply part of one’s knowledge about those parts. It is hard to imagine knowing the word *leg* and not knowing that one’s legs figure centrally in walking.<sup>9</sup>

There are examples in Lao of explicit reference to function in the morphology of a complex expression. These include *khaa3 phap1* ‘back of the knee’ (literally ‘fold(ing) leg’, i.e. the ‘(part of) leg for folding’) and *kon4 khii5* ‘anus’ (literally ‘shit(ing) arse’, i.e. the ‘(part of) arse for shitting’).

At least one Lao term—*khuan3* ‘spirit’—includes ONLY information about ‘function’, lacking any perception-based component whatsoever. Lao native speakers are clear about where it may be located (e.g. on top of the head, at the coil of the hair follicles), and can

<sup>9</sup> Relevant to this question are the range of idiomatic references to body parts which pick out precisely these functional components of meaning. For example, *I nearly potted the black but it didn’t quite have the legs* picks out the ‘for transport’ component of *legs*; *He has eyes in the back of his head* picks out the ‘for seeing’ component of *eyes*; *He gave me a hand* picks out the ‘for doing’ component of *hand*; *I saw the disappointment in his face* picks out the ‘revealing of internal state’ component of *face*.

say many things about its nature and function. But no perceptual image of the *khuan3* can be derived from visual or proprioceptive experience (and while anyone may have a mental image of it, this image is not made accessible publicly, and therefore cannot be part of the conventional word meaning—cf. the Punjabi term *kɔDDi* ‘organ in the chest cavity deemed to be responsible for sickness’ (Majid, this volume).

### 3.2. Semantic relations among body part terms

Each term listed in Tables 1–3 is a ‘part of the body’, as determined by the frame (1). However, relations below that level—i.e. AMONG the body part terms—are many and varied. There is no neat unifying set of semantic interrelationships among all the terms (as argued, for example, by Swanson and Witkowski, 1977, p. 324; *pace* Brown, 1976; Andersen, 1978). Instead, as discussed in the introduction to this issue, and as has come up occasionally in above sections, there are various types of semantic relation, including part–whole, possession, attachment, location, and general association (cf. McClure, 1975). This section provides examples of these in Lao, and illustrates their formal manifestation.

The part/whole relationship applies in a number of the Lao cases. For example, both *khèng1* ‘lower leg’ and *kok2 khaa3* ‘thigh’ (lit. ‘leg base’) are truly parts of *khaa3* ‘leg’. The evidence for this is firstly that the relationships may be expressed using the frame in (1), above. For example:

- (18) *khèng1 pèn3 suan1 nùng1 khòng3 khaa3*  
 lower leg is part one of leg  
 ‘The lower leg is a part of the leg’.

A second piece of evidence is an entailment test, as follows. If I cut a man’s *khèng1* ‘lower leg’, it entails that I have cut his *khaa3* ‘leg’. Both of these tests provide evidence that *tin3* ‘foot’ is NOT ‘part of’ *khaa3* ‘leg’.

Expression of the relationship of possession in Lao is possible using a main verb *mii2* ‘have’:

- (19) *kuu3 mii2 lot1 ñaj1/taa3 khiaw3/qaaj4*  
 1SG have car big/eye green/older\_brother  
 ‘I have a big car/green eyes/an older brother’.

or a possessive noun phrase construction:

- (20) *lot1 ñaj1/taa3 khiaw3/qaaj4 khòng3 kuu3*  
 car big/eye green/older\_brother of 1SG  
 ‘my big car/green eyes/older brother’

Body part terms described in this paper may all fit into both of these constructions, as long as the possessor in question is a PERSON, not a person’s BODY (Swanson and Witkowski, 1977).

For relationships between parts of the body, it is odd in Lao to use either of the possessive constructions in (19) and (20). The relations between ‘hand’ and ‘arm’, or between ‘face’ and ‘eye’ are not ones of possession, as demonstrated by the oddity of the following examples:

- (21) (a) ?*khèn3* *mii2* *mù2*  
 arm have hand  
 (The/an arm has a hand.)  
 (b) ?*naa5* *mii2* *taa3*  
 face have eye  
 (The/a face has eyes.)
- (22) (a) \**mù2* *khòng3* *khèn3*  
 hand of arm  
 (the hand of the arm)  
 (b) \**taa3* *khòng3* *naa5*  
 eye of face  
 (the eye(s) of the face)

The relation of physical attachment or connection is commonly expressed in Lao by means of a verb *tò1* ‘attach, connect’ in combination with the relational particle *kap2* ‘with’, in an expression meaning ‘connecting to’, ‘joined to’, ‘continuing from’. This expression is appropriate for describing the relation between ‘hand’ and ‘arm’, but not that between ‘nose’ and ‘face’:

- (23) (a) *mù2* *tò1* *kap2* *khèn3*  
 hand connect with arm  
 ‘The hand is connected to the arm’.  
 (b) \**dang3* *tò1* *kap2* *naa5*  
 nose connect with face  
 (the nose is connected to the face)

The nose/face relation is felicitously described in terms of LOCATION (cf. Palmer and Nicodemus, 1985), as is the hand/arm relation:

- (24) (a) *dang3* *juu1* *kaang3* *naa5*  
 nose at centre face  
 (the nose is in the middle of the face)  
 (b) *mù2* *juu1* *paaj3* *khèn3*  
 hand at end arm  
 (the hand is at the end of the arm)

It is possible that most if not all relations between body parts are expressible in terms of location. Consider the relations *mù2* ‘hand’/*khèn3* ‘arm’ and *tiin3* ‘foot’/*khaa3* ‘leg’. One hypothesis is that *mù2* ‘hand’ and *tiin3* ‘foot’ are PARTS OF *khèn3* ‘arm’ and *khaa3* ‘leg’, respectively. A second is that *mù2* ‘hand’ and *tiin3* ‘foot’ are ATTACHED TO *khèn3* ‘arm’ and *khaa3* ‘leg’, respectively. A third possibility—the correct one, I argue—is that the relation is one of location. While either relation of possession or attachment is AVAILABLE AS AN INTERPRETATION of the hand/arm foot/leg relation, neither is semantically or otherwise inherently specified. Both possession and attachment are COMPATIBLE with the location relationship, but they are not entailed by it. A similar argument was made above with respect to the relation of ASSOCIATION, likely to be the only relation general enough to cover the range of semantic relations encoded by the N1–N2 compounds found in complex body part terminology.

In this section I have pointed out several types of semantic relationship that pertain between Lao terms for parts of the body, along with ways of identifying and expressing them. It is beyond the scope of the present context to establish the full set of relationships between all the body part terms, but I have provided an outline of the kinds of structures available for doing this in Lao. The main point of this section has been to draw attention to the fact that under the hood of this putative partonomy lies a textured and heterogeneous semantic domain.

#### 4. Conclusion

The inventory of Lao terms for parts of the body described in this article represents one actual solution to a community's collective and historical problem of establishing public conventions for conceptual coordination within a complex phenomenological domain. Many Lao terms have meanings which are similar, if not identical, to those observed in other languages such as English. Some terms are less familiar from a non-Lao perspective. This is true especially where culture-related connotations come into play, such as in the avoidance in Lao of explicit reference to the feet. The Lao data demonstrate that the lexical domain of body partonomy, while unified by its definition with reference to the human body, shows considerable variation in internal structure. The semantic relations which pertain between terms for different parts of the body not only include part/whole relations, but also relations of location, connectedness, and general association. Calling the whole system a 'partonomy' attributes greater centrality to the part/whole relation than is warranted.

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#### Appendix

There is no standard Romanisation of Lao. Examples are transcribed according to the following conventions:

Consonants					Vowels			Tones
<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>				<i>i</i>	<i>u</i>	1. Mid level	
<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>q</i> (glottal stop)		<i>ù</i> (unrounded)	2. High rising	
<i>ph</i>	<i>th</i>		<i>kh</i>		<i>ê</i>	<i>e</i>	3. Low rising	
<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ñ</i>	<i>ng</i>		<i>è</i>	<i>a</i>	4. High falling	
<i>f</i>	<i>s</i>		<i>h</i>		<i>ò</i>		5. Low falling	
<i>w</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>j</i>					ø. Unstressed	

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