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1 Introduction

Jeffrey P. Williams

1 Introduction

The languages of Mainland Southeast Asia (Map 1) are resplendent with elaborate grammatical resources for fashioning elaborative expressions that convey emotions, senses, conditions, and perceptions that enrich discourse – both everyday and ritualized – and are grammatical works of art.[1] Over time, a sizeable terminological lexicon has been created to categorize or classify these resources, including echo words, phonaesthetic words, chameleon affixes, chiming derivatives, onomatopoeic forms, ideophones, and most notably expressives. As Diffloth (1979: 50) pointed out some time back now, 'expressives are easy to formally identify due to their particular morphology'.

Speakers of these languages employ significant and complex strategies for the expression of qualities and attributes, feelings and thoughts, and meta-commentary through the use of these formatives as components of grammar.[2] These aesthetic qualities of language, which are formed from grammatical capital, are emergent in the poetry of everyday speaking.

When we speak of the 'aesthetics of grammar' from a linguistic perspective, we face challenges. Neither the term 'aesthetics' nor the term 'grammar' is unencumbered by semantic baggage, although most readers will share general agreement on 'grammar'. While other disciplines such as anthropology and folklore have confronted the issues of the aesthetic in speech, their approaches have tended to revolve around the communicative aspects and not the grammatical ones.[3] The intent of this volume is not to stand in reinforcement of such a distinction, but instead to explore the mechanisms by which aesthetic qualities of speech – involving the formal and functional manipulation of articulatory

[1] In fact it has been suggested that the class of expressives is one of the defining features of Mainland Southeast Asia as a linguistic area (Matisoff 2001) and may conjoin a larger macro-area of South and Southeast Asia (Williams 1991).
[2] Burenhult (2005) asserts that Jahai is lacking in the category of 'expressives' that are diagnostically found in the Aslian branch of Austroasiatic (cf. Sidwell and Benjamin this volume).
[3] For one such example, see Knoblauch and Kotthoff's *Verbal Art across Cultures* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001).

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Map 1 Mainland Southeast Asia

features within phonotactic parameters by speakers and invoking patterns and principles whereby new and novel forms can be appreciated by listeners – are part of grammatical knowledge.

The essayists in this collection adopt an interpretative and explanatory stance in which 'aesthetics' holds fast to its original definition deriving from the Ancient Greek source *αἰσθητικός*; of or relating to sense perception, sensitive, perceptive – referring to 'things perceptible by the senses . . . as opposed to

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things thinkable' (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, Third Edition, December 2011); interpreting their data with reference to sensory experience of one type or another as involved in a sound–meaning nexus. The cline of sensory experience is, in some cases, grammatically instantiated by a cline of allomorphy as shown by the Jarai (Chamic, Austronesian/Vietnam) examples (1a–c) that follow.

(1a)	anĕt	'small'
(1b)	anĕt aneo	'very small'
(1c)	anĕt anot	'extremely small'

The echoant[4] allomorphs in (1b) and (1c) are not governed by continuum of beautified expressions, so (1c) is not seen as more pleasing than (1b) or vice versa. Instead, the allomorphy in (1) is aesthetically governed along a continuum of intensity of feeling. It is this type of sensory motivated allomorphy that is at the heart of the aesthetics of grammar.

The fundamental concept of an aesthetic component of grammar was outlined in the concluding paragraph of Gérard Diffloth's essay on iconicity of Bahnar (Mon-Khmer, Cambodia/Vietnam) expressives:

> Iconicity belongs to a different semiotic domain than the one usually described in our grammars. As far as expressives are concerned, the phonic and the meaning elements must be described in terms of certain elementary sensations. Iconicity consists here in exploiting similarities between the sensations of speech and other kinds of sensation. This kind of synaesthesia must be described in a distinct component of grammar, the esthetic component, which is distinct but not isolated, as it somehow must be plugged into the conventional components which have received much of the attention of theoreticians so far. (1994: 113)

As it will become evident from reading the essays collected herein, the authors are not all in agreement with Diffloth's suggestion that the aesthetic component is distinct within the grammar of a language. David Peterson and James Stanford, in particular, take a contrary view and contend that there is no need for a distinct component, even though their views are not necessarily in line with each other.

2 Defining the aesthetic in grammar

The following list provides a preliminary accounting of what features and properties are shared among the languages of the region in regards to what we are referring to as the aesthetic component of grammar.

[4] For echo word formation where roots and other non-meaningful morphs have multiple collocative allomorphs, I would suggest that a common term 'echoant' be used to categorize them on par with the use of the term 'reduplicants'.

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The aesthetic component of grammar:

i. is referential in the areas of sensory or perceptual intensity;
ii. is a mechanism to beautify speech in socially and culturally appropriate and meaningful ways;
iii. is manifested in everyday speaking as well as in ritualized, named genres;
iv. is productive or semi-productive and rich in multiple exponents; and
v. is psychologically real.

Taking a broad anthropologically situated view, the aesthetics of grammar is an ethnoscience of perception that is encoded in grammar and emergent in discourse.

To some extent the reluctance on the part of linguists to fully address these phenomena relies on the fact that expressives, echo words, and other variants *break frame*, in the sense of Goffman (1974), whereby part of the focus on the communicative act shifts from the referential to the non-referential – the listener is directed to the form of the utterance, its elegance, and the skill of the speaker in her/his ability to create a nuanced, and possibly novel, form to represent a feeling, a sensation, or an opinion. In part these constructions are evaluated in such a way that links grammaticality with euphony.

Most linguists would assert that grammaticality is independent of euphony. The manifestation of euphonic considerations in native speaker grammaticality judgements can be disconcerting. It is clear to anyone who has experience with the grammars of the languages of Mainland Southeast Asia, however, that the distinction between grammaticality and euphony is difficult to establish with native speakers. The contributions by Lundström, Hudak, Williams and Siu, and Khanittanan in this collection provide evidence of and insights into that issue.

This component reaches far deeper into the cognitive realm than simply a manifest concern for pleasing utterances. Jacob (1966) has commented on the prevalence of phonaesthetic reduplicative compounds in the 'plain language' of Khmer; meaning, those varieties used in everyday discourse and not delimited by genre. As she states, the Khmer people are keenly observant of how individuals move their bodies and/or limbs to do tasks and have numerous forms from which to make commentary. As Haiman acutely analyses the Khmer data in his chapter, the function of many Khmer aesthetic forms is decorative and the meanings are derived from context and not from lexicality. One could interpret this as a sort of 'keying' in the sense of Goffman's frame analytic approach to discourse. It is too soon to tell if indeed this is what is happening since we have no full discourse analyses of the use of expressives and other grammatically aesthetic forms in extended social interaction.

Equally important in emerging discussions of euphony are the connections between the appreciation and evaluation of speech in relation to sung, chanted, lamented, or otherwise modified human vocal sound. There are significant

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relationships between the aesthetics of spoken and sung texts in the languages and cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia as Lundström's chapter on Kammu beautifying techniques exemplifies significant relationships between vocalic replacements in both text types.

In a detailed and insightful study of Thai classical singing, Swangviboonpong (2003) discusses the Thai term *ŷyan*. In most dictionaries, its definition includes 'the speaking of a word', 'a pronouncement', or 'speech in a pleasing voice'. However, in the vocabulary of Thai classical music, *ŷyan* refers to the 'wordless vocalizations' that are positioned between sung words (Swangviboonpong 2003: 32).[5] They are meaningless in terms of the text but are instead aesthetically charged.

The formal relationship between *ŷyan* in Thai music and echo morphology in Thai grammar is striking. In both *ŷyan* and in derisive/approximative echo words the Thai vowels *y* [ʏ] and *ə* [ə] are prominent as rhymes.[6]

Placing this in larger context and following the lead of scholars such as Feld (1990), we really must begin to seriously consider the anthropology of sound as a transdisciplinary field that is a reflection of the reality of cultural evaluations of the soundscape of human existence, inclusive of language.

One thing that is clear from the upcoming descriptions and analyses in this volume is that the aesthetic component of grammar is both productive and complex. In most of the languages covered here, some of these processes, specifically echo word formation, produces extensive allomorphy. Following the lead of Matthews (1972, 1974) and in the current path of Bermúdez-Otero (2012), we can speak of this in terms of multiple exponence. For echo word formation where roots and other non-meaningful morphs have multiple collocative allomorphs, I would contend that a common term 'echoant' be used to categorize them on par with reduplicants. Grammatically aesthetic processes such as echo word formation are not only sensitive to prosodic and phonological structure they are governed by them. For instance, minor syllables, or presyllables, do not participate in morphophonological processes of grammatical aesthetics in the languages of Mainland Southeast Asia and it is relatively straightforward to exclude these by the fact of their non-moraic qualities (see Cho and King (2003) on syllabification of minor syllables).

Given that we are dealing with linguistic structures and processes, it is important to provide evidence of the cognitive reality of the component of aesthetic grammar. Bermúdez-Otero (2012) provides a loose, operational definition of cognitive reality in which a morphophonological pattern is psychologically real

[5] The ability to use *ŷyan* is an important indicator of musical competency in Thai classical singing and organized *sătam chátn* competitions that measure this ability (Swangviboonpong 2003).

[6] According to Swangviboonpong (2003: 36) in *ŷyan*, *əə* [əː] is most commonly used and can have the following variants: *əə, həə, ŋəə, əəŋ, and ŋəəj*.

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if speakers broaden it to new items – even if only irregularly – whether evidenced in language change or in experimental tasks. While the contributors here do not tackle this issue directly in their chapters, the psychological reality of the aesthetic component of grammar is demonstrable through evidence of extension through language contact and change as Williams and Siu show for Jarai. Equally, the complex and nuanced patterns shown in all of the languages herein attest to the linguistically significant generalizations that can be made in this arena.

This volume links the aesthetic with the grammatical. The nexus of these two components of human cognition occupies a netherworld in regards to language description and theory, while as the contributors to this volume repeatedly demonstrate, the grammatically aesthetic devices that are employed by speakers are drawn from the traditional components of grammar, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Their contributions represent a modern linkage of Jakobson's (1960) emotive and poetic functions of language. Through the processes of reduplication and echo word formation we find grammatical – or morphological – level parallelism on par with sentential parallelism that is found in many Austronesian languages/cultures of insular Southeast Asia (see Fox 1988).

In his exposition of a discourse centred approach to language and culture, Sherzer (1987) focuses on the discourse contexts of echo word constructions in Bhojpuri as one of his extended examples of where meaningful intersections of language and culture are manifested. Sherzer is interested in the use of echo words as mediation between language and culture, as an enablement of culture through the resources of grammar (1987: 302). Sherzer's discourse instantiation echoes Diffloth's (1979: 55) comment that, 'Many Expressives are created on the spur of the moment, and their meaning is tied to a fleeting sensation which arose on a certain occasion.'

Treatments of the aesthetic component of grammar

While there are seemingly two disparate approaches to how to handle grammatically aesthetic forms in language, the overlap between the basic treatments is remarkably similar. On the one hand, there is the view espoused by Gérard Diffloth (1972, 1976, 1979), through his pioneering contributions to Mon-Khmer. He brought to the fore the opulent field of grammatical aesthetics in languages of Mainland Southeast Asia and was the first to use the term 'expressives' for a separate class of complex words in the languages of Southeast Asia that appeared to have no comparable class in the Indo-European language family (1972).[7]

[7] This assertion would prove false since many of the Indo-Aryan languages have equally complex and productive word formation processes that contribute to the aesthetic mode of utterances; typically, these are referred to as 'echo morphology' in the grammars of those languages.

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The ephemeral and somewhat open-ended categorization of expressives has led to their seclusion and exoticization within the broad bin of grammatical categories. Diffloth's and some of his followers' approach has been to group these phenomena together into a single, large class within a distinct yet undefined aesthetic component of grammar. This has created, even within the field of Southeast Asian linguistics, a somewhat implicit attempt to relegate 'expressive morphology' to the realms of poetry and literary prose. In fact Judith Jacob (1979) stated that the occurrence of morphology devices, such as reduplication, in Khmer is only found in poetry. From what Haiman presents in this volume and elsewhere (2009), it is clear that the use of elaboration or decoration (in Haiman's terminology) is more widespread and productive in conversational Khmer than what has been purported in the literature.[8]

On the other hand, there are the formal grammarians – scholars such as Inkelas and Zoll (2005), McCarthy, Kimper, and Mullin (2012), Pullum and Rawlins (2007), Raimy (2009), and most dramatically Zwicky and Pullum (1987) – who seek to maintain strict compartmentalization of plain morphology from 'expressive' morphology. They contend that in most cases, these two types of morphology are not assumable under a single component.[9] Inkelas and Zoll (2005: 204) make the following claim regarding alliterative and rhyming processes in morphology:

> While alliteration and rhyme clearly seem to play a role in processing and are aesthetically pleasing, the evidence suggests that rhyming, alliteration, and other similar correspondences do not play a significant role in productive morphology.

Formal modelling is difficult to capture although there is a quickly emerging body of formal accounts dealing with 'expressives' (cf. Potts et al. 2009, Zwicky and Pullum 1987, Cruse 1986, Potts 2007). The ill-starred conclusion of all of those accounts is that 'expressives' are somehow special and do not fit either within the traditional morphological component of grammar nor the descriptive dimension of meaning, or that they are not part of productive morphology as Inkelas and Zoll contend. In other words, expressives, which are only ill defined in most of these accounts, appear to be extragrammatical. If we allow ourselves to be convinced by these arguments, we will forever marginalize and exoticize languages (as well as speakers) such as Khmer, Vietnamese, Thai, and many other minority languages of Southeast Asia and

[8] Paul Sidwell also points out inconsistencies in the treatment of this kind of morphology in the Austroasiatic linguistics literature.

[9] Zwicky and Pullum (1987: 334) contend that Pacoh (a Bahnaric member of Mon-Khmer) possesses ideophonic formations akin to *shm-* reduplication in certain varieties of English. I would counter their claim that description of these formative processes calls for separate description from 'garden variety' morphology. It is more convenient in a purely formalistic account to remove these formative processes from consideration; however, it is completely arbitrary.

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beyond where expressive morphology, in Zwicky and Pullum's sense, is central to the grammar. As Enfield (2005: 189) aptly states,

> The productivity and internal complexity of elaborative morpholexicon in MSEA languages should weaken claims that these languages lack morphology. One just has to know where to look.

In spite of the formal and functional richness and intricacy of these grammatical resources, they are relatively understudied and especially little understood from an areal, comparative perspective. The present collection provides a first step towards a comparative understanding of the aesthetics of grammar in the languages of the Mainland Southeast Asian linguistic area.

3 Organization of the volume

The authors of each chapter explore this distinct component of grammar – the aesthetic – in various ways, drawing on first-hand experiences either as native or near-native speakers or as field linguists with extensive research experience. Their contributions will provide the foundation for the architecture of theoretical infrastructure regarding the role of aesthetics in cognitive grammars.

The contributors were selected to provide data/analyses that cover the five major language families of the region; namely, Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, Hmong-Mien, and Austronesian. These contributions provide the descriptive and analytical foundation for the architecture of theoretical infrastructure regarding the role of aesthetics in cognitive grammars.

The range of approaches found in these chapters is great. Some contributors, like Stanford (Sui), cast the aesthetic phenomena in a formal mould while others, such as Khanittanan (Central Thai), provide a sociolinguistic account of the aesthetic. In spite of the variety of approaches and tacts, each contributor relies on first-hand linguistic experience either as a linguist native speaker or as a co-collaborator with native speakers. The threads that join this disparate grouping together are the phenomena themselves.

Part I leads off with chapters that document and analyse members of the Austroasiatic family in Southeast Asia and beyond. **Paul Sidwell** provides a timely and useful survey of what is known and not known about the broad and imprecisely defined category of 'expressives' in Austroasiatic. He includes data from the Munda family as well, relying on Anderson's (2008) documentation. The chapter presents some of the inconsistencies in description, characterization, and analysis of expressives as the grouping is referenced in the Austroasiatic literature. In spite of rather impressive linguistic documentation in some branches, such as Palaungic, the accounts are formally oriented and as such these kinds of phenomena go undiscussed. Sidwell stresses the need for more textured descriptions of representative speech in his chapter.

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Geoffrey Benjamin adopts what would be for some a heretical approach to the relationship between sound and meaning in his nuanced analyses of grammatical aesthetics in Temiar. He makes a convincing case for the felt quality of iconicity as opposed to an intellectual, or cognitive, quality. Benjamin's contribution is the most anthropological of those included in this volume, going beyond the grammatical. He adopts the late Alfred Gell's (1979) notions of *a priori* and *a posteriori* iconic motivation, viewing these as condensed notions and not as fully articulated concepts.

In Temiar, expressives constitute a distinctive basic word-class parallel to verbs and nouns, and are concerned as much with connotational as with denotational meaning. Expressives in Temiar are voluntary additions to utterances that would still make sense without their appearance. As Benjamin points out, one can speak 'good' Temiar without ever using an expressive but such speech would risk sounding 'uninvolved and unemotional'.

In his chapter, **John Haiman** looks at non-referential morphology in Khmer. A passing but important point that he makes is in regards to the antiquity of the use of non-referential morphology in Khmer, citing the use of the decorative /-am-/ infix in Old Khmer inscriptions. Haiman provides a clever endolinguistic term for these kinds of pseudomorphemes: *bo'ri'va:sap*, which is derived from the Neo-Sanskrit *parivārasabda* 'retinue word'. Haiman refers to these as 'servant words' throughout his chapter. His claim is that this kind of morphology does not contribute to meaning but instead to elegance of expression. Haiman's contention is that these linguistic forms have their closest analogues in art, music, and ritual.

Marc Brunelle and **Lê Thị Xuyến** identify three types of sound symbolism in Vietnamese (ideophonic, phonaesthemic, and phonological), which are not mutually exclusive. The authors demonstrate that each type can and does interact with the others to form new constructions. Vietnamese grammar evidences a high frequency of sound symbolic mechanisms and Brunelle and Xuyến establish a typology of their distributions, proposing mechanisms to account for the development, maintenance, and widespread use of sound symbolic expressions in the language.

Justin Watkins explores aesthetic aspects of Wa grammar. Wa a member of the Palaungic branch of northern Mon-Khmer exhibits the typical Southeast Asian linguistic area of having extensive grammatical resources to describe the movement or manipulation of objects. Watkins' data is drawn heavily from the genre of proverbs as is Hudak's data for Red Thai in Chapter 8. As Watkins details in his contribution, Wa grammar permits a wide array of euphonic patterns in compounds that give speakers considerable creative licence to semantically hone constructions, such as the five possible four-syllable expressions that all mean 'neighbour'.

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Håkan Lundström broadens the scope of this volume through his chapter 'Beautifying techniques in Kammu vocal genres' in which he examines the intimate linguistic relationships between poetic singing and eloquent speech. When the different vocal genres are ordered on a scale spanning from 'speech' to 'song' it becomes evident that there is no sharp boundary between the two. As Lundström points out, it might be more useful to conceptualize these issues in terms of degrees or levels or modes of speech – or degrees or levels or modes of song for that matter. He uses the term 'vocal genre' rather than 'song', making it easier to recognize the continuum that spans from daily speech via polite speech, prayer, recitation, and chant to song.

Part II represents accounts of grammatical aesthetics in the Tai-Kadai language family. The coverage of the family includes information on Central Thai (Siamese), several Tai languages (Red, Black, and others), as well as Sui, which is spoken widely in southern China as well. **Tom Hudak** explores the grammatical mechanisms used to frame single line proverbs in several Tai languages, including Central Thai (Siamese). He identifies three grammatical resources that are employed in Tai proverbs: (i) metricality, (ii) rhyme, and (iii) syntactic parallelism. As he points out in his chapter, some Tai languages employ only two of these while others employ all three. One important aspect of Hudak's analysis is his extension into the realm of larger narrative structures, which are made up of proverbs. Not surprisingly, these more substantial texts employ the same mechanisms of metricality, rhyme, and parallelism.

In his chapter 'Lexicalized poetry in Sui', **James Stanford** explores the use of adjective intensifiers in the genre of lexicalized poetry in Sui, a Tai-Kadai language of southwestern China. Sui adjective intensifiers are a frequent and vibrant part of daily discourse, commonly observed in everyday conversation as well as in traditional story telling. He presents extensive data from his fieldwork on Sui to document forms and patterns in other spatial and social dialects, including clan-based lects. As Stanford contends,

> Not only is it the case that poetic devices are found in everyday speech in all languages, but certain languages have extensive poetic effects *systematically embedded within the lexicon*. For these languages, large and systematic sectors of the lexicon have 'poetic' patterns, e.g. Sui adjective intensifiers.

Sanford's study examines inter-speaker and cross-dialectal elaborations, consequently taking our understanding of Sui adjectives intensifiers beyond any single speaker's lexicon and into wider possibilities of community grammatical knowledge as a whole.

In her chapter **Wilaiwan Khanittanan** discusses how individual Thai speakers are continuously creating aesthetic expressions, especially those involving alliteration and vocalic rhyming, to capture meanings in context. The processes that give rise to forms are active and productive, and widely used in daily

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