

Word Formation in Liangmai

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to discuss three main word formation processes in Liangmai (ISO 639-3), a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by 70,800 speakers in Manipur and Nagaland in Northeast India. The main word formation processes in the language including affixation, compounding and reduplication are discussed. Structurally, most of the basic words are monosyllabic and these words take prefixes or suffixes to form different class of words. Most of the roots are bound and affixes are the determining factor of the class of the words.

Key Words: Liangmai, Tibeto-Burman, Word formation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Liangmai (ISO 639-3 njn) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken mainly in Manipur and Nagaland, two northeastern states in India. Burling (2003) classifies Liangmai under Zeme-Naga group. The term *Liangmai*¹ refers to both the language and its speakers.² The Liangmai people are largely settled in Tamei and Tousem sub divisions of Tamenglong district, Senapati district and Kanglatongbi of West Imphal district in Manipur. The Liangmais have been living in this area with their distinct traditional culture and language over a long period of time. According to the 2011 Ethnologue, currently, there are approximately 70,800 Liangmai speakers in Nagaland and Manipur.³ In Nagaland, the state government documents refer to Liangmai and Zeme collectively as Zeliang whereas in Manipur, both these tribes are recognised separately as Zeme and Liangmai. The majority of Liangmai speakers are found in Tamenglong district of Manipur and Peren district of Nagaland. A substantial number of Liangmais also live in Imphal, Dimapur and Kohima (the commercial and political capital of Nagaland). Despite the recent advances in modern science and technology as well as an increasingly wider use of Manipuri and Nagamese as a lingua franca, they still retained their distinct identity rather in a remarkable way, particularly in the Tamei and Tening Sub-divisions. However, in terms of education, and economy, the Liangmais are rather a marginalised community both in Manipur and Nagaland.

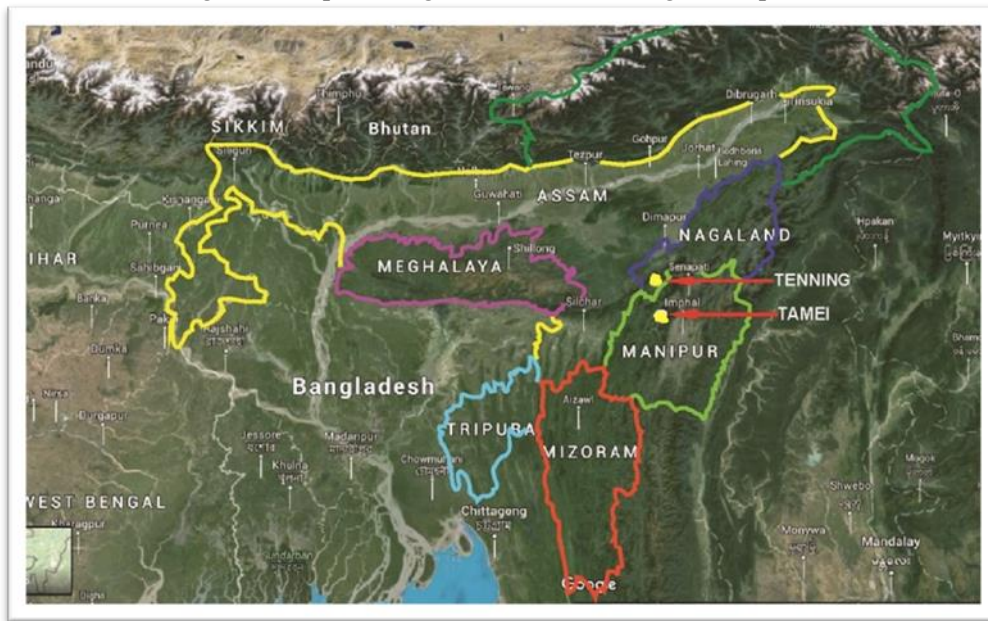
Before the arrival of the Christian missionaries, the Liangmais were not exposed to the outside world. Fishing, hunting, and jhum cultivation (shifting cultivation) constitute their main occupations. The economy of the Liangmai is thus agrarian in nature. The community follows a patriarchal and monogamous family system.

¹ The word *Liangmai* is made up of two words, *liang* and *mai*. While *liang* means support or grouped as one, *mai* means people. Thus, Liangmai means the people who have grouped themselves together in support of each other in order to live as one community or tribe.

² The Constitution of India Order Amendment Act, 2011 of the Parliament formally recognizes the Liangmais as a tribe.

³ The Census data of Liangmai does not distinguish between Liangmai of Manipur and of Nagaland. The figure provided by the Ethnologue is rather doubtful.

Figure 1: Map showing the area where Liangmai is spoken



Liangmai belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur and Nagaland in North East India by 70,800 speakers. Liangmai is an agglutinative language having the characteristics of SOV language. The basic words in the language are mostly monosyllabic and new words are derived by different morphological processes. The main processes of word formation discussed in this paper are affixation, compounding and reduplication.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is primarily based on the data collected from Tamei sub division, Tamenglong district, Manipur. The primary data collected during the fieldwork include:

- (a) Phrases and sentences such as declarative, affixes (prefixes and suffixes), reduplication, etc.
- (b) Cultural texts (songs, stories, myths, fables, etc.) including socio-cultural information.

For the purpose of analysis, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) has been used to transcribe the data. The data used in this study was the recorded spontaneous texts produced by the native speakers using Audacity audio editing software. For recording of data, a high-quality portable audio recorder Olympus Multi Track PCM LS-100 handy audio recorder was used. Canon digital camera SX60 HS and Poco X3 pro smartphone were used for recording and taking the pictures. The collected data were transcribed phonetically using IPA and analysis was carried out in Praat (4.5.04) and Toolbox158. The recorded data was stored in HP Probook Core i7.

III. STRUCTURE OF MORPHEME IN LIANGMAI

A morpheme is the minimal distinctive unit of grammar and the central concern of morphology (Crystal 1997).⁴ The morphemes in Liangmai can be broadly divided into two classes: free and bound.

3.1 Free roots

Free roots in Liangmai are mainly found in the noun category. These are the roots which can occur independently without any grammatical affixes. However, all the Liangmai nouns are not free roots. In the noun category, free roots are mainly found in proper names, names of animals, plants, body parts etc. They are mostly monosyllabic in nature. A few examples of free roots in Liangmai are given below in table 1.

Body parts		Animals, birds and insects		Plants, fruits and vegetables	
Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
<i>pi</i>	'head'	<i>kəbak</i>	'pig'	<i>tsəpai</i>	'bamboo'
<i>h'am</i>	'hair'	<i>mətom</i>	'cow'	<i>kəbi</i>	'yam'
<i>ben</i>	'hand'	<i>təh'i</i>	'dog'	<i>təqai</i>	'thatch'
<i>zu</i>	'face'	<i>təman</i>	'fly'	<i>"zian"/zeng</i>	'mustard'
<i>mik</i>	'eye'	<i>təpeŋ</i>	'butterfly'	<i>kəbiu</i>	'ginger'

⁴David Crystal 1997, A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, Fourth Edition.

Table 1: Free roots in Liangmai

3.2 Bound Roots

Bound root cannot occur alone as words in isolation. It requires affixation in order to become full-fledged words. A few nouns in Liangmai are also in bound forms. Kinship terms and colour terms in Liangmai are all bound roots. Kinship terms are always prefixed with ə- and the colour terms are always prefixed with kə- and suffixed with -bo. This is illustrated with examples in table 2.

kə + tikbo prefix BR	kə-tik-bo	'black'
kə + kabo prefix BR	kə-ka-bo	'white'
kə + heŋbo prefix BR	kə + heŋ-bo	'red'

Table 2: Bound Roots

IV. DERIVATION BY AFFIXATION

The morphological process whereby grammatical or lexical information is added to a stem is known as affixation. An affix is a bound morpheme that is attached to a word stem to form a new word or word form. Affixation plays an important role in deriving new forms. Suffixation is more productive than prefixation word formation process in Liangmai. There are two types of affixations in Liangmai i.e. prefixation and suffixation. They are discussed in the following section.

4.1 Prefixation

The types of prefixes found in Liangmai are (1) pronominal prefix (2) non-pronominal prefix.

4.1.1 Pronominal Prefix

In Liangmai, there are three pronominal prefixes

- ə- '1st person pronominal prefix'
- nə- '2nd person pronominal prefix'
- pa- '3rd person pronominal prefix'

These pronominal prefixes are used in kinship terms, body parts and inalienable possession and ownership of things and properties etc. They always occur directly before the root. The examples are given below in table 3.

Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
ben	'hand'	ə-ben	'my hand'
piu	'father'	nə-piu	'your father'
pui	'mother'	pa-pui	'his mother'

Table 3: Pronominal prefixes in Liangmai

4.1.2 Non-Pronominal Prefix

Besides the pronominal prefix, there are other prefixes for forming new words. The non-pronominal prefixes in this language are discussed in the following section.

Prefix-tə-verb→Noun

The morpheme tə is prefixed to the verbs to derived nouns. This is shown in the following examples in table 4.

Prefix	Verb →		Noun	
Prefix	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
tə	zi	sleep	tə-zi	'bed'
tə	dui	liquid	tə-dui	'water'
tə	tan	hard	tə-tan	'strong'
tə	pi	head	tə-pi	'mithun's skull'

Table 4: Prefix tə-

Prefix kə-noun →Derived Noun

The prefix kə- is added to nouns to derived another noun as seen in the following table 5.

Prefix	Noun →	Derived noun
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Prefix	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
<i>kə</i>	<i>suŋ</i>	shade	<i>kə-suŋ</i>	'umbrella'
<i>kə</i>	<i>rim/rin</i>	smell	<i>kə-rim/rin</i>	'armpit smell'
<i>kə</i>	<i>bi</i>	root	<i>kə-bi</i>	'yam'
<i>kə</i>	<i>mun</i>	entrance	<i>kə-mun</i>	'door'

Table 5: Prefix *kə*-(a)

The prefix *kə*- can also be attached to the verbs and adjectives to form abstract nouns as can be seen in the following table 6.

PREFIX	VERB	GLOSS	NOUN	GLOSS
<i>kə</i>	<i>sai</i>	to die	<i>kə-sai</i>	'death'
<i>kə</i>	<i>thiu</i>	to be hot	<i>kə-thiu</i>	'heat'
<i>tə</i>	<i>siaŋ</i>	to curse	<i>tə-siaŋ</i>	'curse'
<i>tsə</i>	<i>lianŋ</i>	to be proud	<i>tsə-lianŋ</i>	'pride'
<i>kə</i>	<i>paŋ</i>	to be foolish	<i>kə-paŋ</i>	'foolishness'

Table 6: Prefix *kə*-(b)

Prefix *tsə*- →Noun

The prefix *tsə*- can also be attached to the verbs to derive concrete nouns.

Prefix	Noun →		Derived noun	
Prefix	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
<i>tsə</i>	<i>bam</i>	sit	<i>tsə-bam</i>	'seat'
<i>tsə</i>	<i>k^ha</i>	collect	<i>tsə-k^ha</i>	'tax collection'
<i>tsə</i>	<i>kuaŋ</i>	platter	<i>tsə-kuaŋ</i>	'plate'

Table 7: Prefix *tsə*-

Prefix *pə*- →Noun

Prefix	Noun →		Derived noun	
Prefix	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
<i>pə</i>	<i>lai</i>	burn	<i>pə-lai</i>	'burnt rice'
<i>pə</i>	<i>ri</i>	on	<i>pə-ri</i>	'on top'
<i>pə</i>	<i>kaŋ</i>	ball	<i>pə-kaŋ</i>	'round dish'

Table 8: Prefix *pə*-

4.2 DERIVATION BY SUFFIXATION

Suffixation is a very productive process of forming new words in Liangmai. New words can be formed by suffixing different morphemes as discussed in the following section.

Adverbs can be derived by suffixing *-ziu* to the verbs and this is a very productive process as seen in the examples in table 9.

Adjective	Gloss	suffix	Adverb	Gloss
<i>masən</i>	clear	<i>ziu</i>	<i>masən-ziu</i>	'clearly'
<i>ŋaowi</i>	beautiful	<i>ziu</i>	<i>ŋaowi-ziu</i>	'beautifully'
<i>hum</i>	sweet	<i>ziu</i>	<i>hum-ziu</i>	'sweetly'

Table 9: suffix *-ziu*

Agentive nouns are also derived from verbs by adding suffix *-mai* to the verb root. Consider the following examples.

VERB	GLOSS	AGENTIVE	NOUN	GLOSS
<i>lem</i>	dance	<i>mai</i>	<i>lem-mai</i>	'dancer'
<i>mə^hen</i>	'play'	<i>mai</i>	<i>mə^hen-mai</i>	'player'
<i>rao</i>	'write'	<i>mai</i>	<i>rao-mai</i>	'writer'

Table 10: suffix *-mai*

4.2.1 Derivation of Nouns Nominalizer *-bo*

Nouns can be derived from verbs and adjectives by suffixing the nominalizer *-bo* to verbs or adjectives as shown in the following examples in table 11.

Verbs/Adjectives	Gloss	Nominalizer	Derived nouns	Gloss
<i>tiu</i>	'eat'	<i>-bo</i>	<i>tiu-bo</i>	'eatables'

<i>tsunwi</i>	‘happy’	<i>-bo</i>	<i>tsunwi-bo</i>	‘happiness’
<i>rɪŋ</i>	‘to live’	<i>-bo</i>	<i>rɪŋ-bo</i>	‘life’
<i>sai</i>	‘to die’	<i>-bo</i>	<i>sai-bo</i>	‘death’

Table11: Nominalizer

This can be further explained with the help of the following sentences in (4) and (5).

- (4) *tsəlui t^hiu-bo se-pa-je*
 song sing-NMZ DEF-3SG-DECL
 ‘He is the one who sings.’ (singer)
- (5) *futbol mə^hen-bo se-pa-je*
 foot ball play-NMZ DEF-3SG-be-DECL
 ‘He is the one who plays football (player).’

4.2.2 Suffix -mai

The suffix *-mai* functions as a nominalizer and also functions as a habitual marker in the language as described in the following examples (6) to (8).

- (6) *tsəlui t^hiu-mai* ‘singer’
 song sing-NMZ
- (7) *tsəlem len-mai* ‘dancer’
 dance -NMZ
- (8) *tsəmai kamsat-mai* ‘killer’
 human kill-NMZ

This is further explained with the help of the following sentences in (9) and (10).

- (9) *i tsəlui thiū-mai -je*
 1SG song sing-NMZ-DECL
 ‘I am a singer.’
- (10) *i tsəmai-tu kamsat-mai-je*
 1SG human-ACC kill- NMZ-DECL
 ‘I am not a killer.’

4.2.3 Derivation of nouns from verbs by suffixing -bam

(i) Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, verbal nouns in Liangmai are derived from the verbs by adding the derivative suffix *-bam*.

Verb		noun	
<i>tad</i>	‘go’	<i>tad-bam</i>	‘walking’
<i>tiu</i>	‘eat’	<i>tiu-bam</i>	‘eating’
<i>sak</i>	‘drink’	<i>sak-bam</i>	‘drinking’
<i>ŋau</i>	‘see’	<i>ŋau-bam</i>	‘seeing’
<i>t^hiu</i>	‘sing’	<i>t^hiu-bam</i>	‘singing’

4.2.4 Derivation of nouns from verbs by suffixing -mai

Agentive nouns are also derived from verbs by adding the derivative suffix *-mai*.

<i>ken</i>	‘read’	<i>ken-mai</i>	‘reader’
<i>lem</i>	‘dance’	<i>lem-mai</i>	‘dancer’
<i>t^hiu</i>	‘sing’	<i>t^hiu-mai</i>	‘singer’
<i>rau</i>	‘write’	<i>rau-mai</i>	‘writer’

4.2.5 Derivation of Adverbs from Adjectives by suffixing -ziu

Adverbs are derived from adjectives by adding the derivative suffixes *-ziu*.

ADJ		ADV	
<i>məsan</i>	‘clear’	<i>məsan-ziu</i>	‘clearly’

hum	‘sweet’	hum- <i>ziu</i>	‘sweetly’
məla	‘easy’	məla- <i>ziu</i>	‘easily’
ɲauwi	‘beautiful’	ɲauwi- <i>ziu</i>	‘beautifully’
bin	‘light’	bin- <i>ziu</i>	‘lightly’

4.2.6 Derivation of Nouns from Adjectives and verbs by suffixing -bo.

In Liangmai, nouns are derived from adjectives by suffixing -bo. Some morphophonemic changes take place when nouns are derived from adjectives. This is illustrated with the help of the following examples in table 12.

Adjectives		Derived Nouns	
Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
ɲausa	‘ugly’	ɲausa-bo	‘ugliness’
tsunsa	‘sad’	tsunsa-bo	‘sadness’
məra	‘sick’	məra-bo	‘sickness’
k ^h a	bitter	k ^h a-bo	‘bitterness’
sai	‘die’	sai-bo	‘death’
zi	‘sleep’	zi-bo	‘sleep’
tau	‘sit’	tau-bo	‘chair’
bai	‘hide’	bai-bo	‘hideout’

Table 12: Suffix -bo

VI. COMPOUNDING

Compounding refers to the joining together of existing words without the aid of any affixes. Compounding is a productive process in Liangmai, as in other Tibeto-Burman languages. Liangmai compound words are composed of basically two elements. The component parts of the newly-formed word usually occur as independent words in the language, but the compositional meanings of compound gradually become lexicalized. Compound words in Liangmai are mostly endocentric in nature and are generally made up of two constituent roots. These compound words fall into two distinct groups, namely right-headed and left-headed depending upon the nature of the constituent elements. In the following subsections, the different types of compounds in Liangmai are discussed.

5.1 Noun +Verb → Compound Noun

This type of compound nouns is composed of a noun and a verb to form a compound noun. Examples are given in the following table 13.

Noun		Verb →		Compound noun	
Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
pi	head	run	wear	pirun	‘cap’
mik	eye	run	wear	mikrun	‘spectacles’
əriak	book	ken	read	əriakken	‘study’

Table 13: Noun +Verb →Compound Noun

5.2 Adjective +noun → Compound Noun

Compound nouns can be formed by compounding an adjective and a simple noun where the adjective functions as the attribute of the noun.

Adjective		Noun →		Compound noun	
Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
suan	morning	tek	rice	suantek	‘breakfast’
nien	noon	tek	rice	nientek	‘lunch’
tsun	night	tek	rice	tsuntek	‘dinner’

Table 14: Adjective + Noun →Compound Noun

5.3 Verb +Verb →Verb compounds

Verbs are also compounded together which constitute a new verb having its own meaning. The compound verbs may be a combination of more than two verb roots. In this formation of compound verb, two simple verbs are joining together and imply the meaning of order or request based on the utterers, as well as intonation and contextual use. The examples are given in table 15.

VERB	VERB	COMPOUND VERB	GLOSS
<i>waŋ</i> 'come'	<i>kam</i> 'do'	<i>waŋkam</i>	'come and do'
<i>waŋ</i> 'come'	<i>tiu</i> 'eat'	<i>waŋtiu</i>	'come and eat'
<i>k^hoi</i> (take)	<i>waŋ</i> 'bring'	<i>k^hoiwaŋ</i>	'bring'
<i>masui</i> (kick)	<i>paŋ</i> 'break'	<i>masuipaŋ</i>	'kick and break'
<i>kep</i> (shoot)	<i>sat</i> 'to die'	<i>kamsat</i>	'shoot out'

Table 15: Verb + Verb → Verb compounds

5.4 Verb + Verb + verb → Verb compounds

In this process of verb compounding, three simple verbs are joined together. The simple verbs are mono-syllabic in form but when together they become polysyllabic and no addition or deletion occurs during combination.

VERB	VERB	VERB	COMPOUND VERB	GLOSS
<i>tiu</i> 'eat'	<i>loi</i> 'finish'	<i>kam</i> 'do'	<i>tiuloikam</i>	'eat and finished'
<i>pak</i> 'run'	<i>waŋ</i> 'come'	<i>khoi</i> 'take'	<i>pakwaŋk^hoi</i>	'run and take'
<i>masui</i> 'kick'	<i>pok</i> 'burst'	<i>taŋ</i> 'out'	<i>masuipoktaŋ</i>	'kick and burst'

Table 8: Verb + Verb + Verb → Verb compounds

5.5 ASSOCIATIVE COMPOUNDS

There are also compounds formed by juxtaposing two nouns to form a compound noun. The two constituents in this type of compound are of the same semantic field.

Noun		Noun →		Associative compound	
Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss	Liangmai	Gloss
<i>tingen</i>	sky	<i>di</i>	earth	<i>tingendi</i>	'heaven'
<i>t^hainai</i>	today	<i>sommai</i>	tomorrow	<i>t^hainai sommai</i>	'nowadays'
<i>tsək^hao</i>	animal	<i>rəm</i>	village	<i>tsək^hao rəm</i>	'animal kingdom'

Table 9: Associative Compounds

VI. REDUPLICATION

Reduplication is a morphological process in which a root or stem or part of it is repeated. As in other Tibeto-Burman languages, reduplication is a very productive process in Liangmai. It has many functions, some of which are formation of plurals nouns and pronouns, intensification of the action of a verb, intensification of adjectives and adverbs, and derivation of new words etc. Different kinds of reduplication in Liangmai are discussed in the following section.

Some of the adjectives and interrogative pronouns undergoes complete reduplication to form different kinds of meaning of the words. A few adjectives reduplicate to form adverbs in Liangmai. If the adjective reduplicates, the adverb suffix immediately follows the adjective to form an adverb, for example:

- (13) *koi-koi-na waŋ-lo*
slow-slow-ADV come-IMP
'Come slowly.'
- (14) *nahmai-duŋ rim-rim-ziu waŋ*
boy-PL silent-silent-ADV come
'Boys came silently.'

Some of the interrogative pronouns reduplicate to show plurality in Liangmai as shown in the following examples.

- (15) *sao + sao + lo sao-sao-lo*
who + who + Q 'who (plural)'
dega + dega + lo dega-degal-lo
where + where + Q 'where (plural)'
de + de + lo de-de-lo
what + de + Q 'what (plural)'

Some examples are illustrated in the following sentences in (16) to (18).

- (16) *sao-sao tsək^hi-ga bam-lo*
who-RUDP house-LOC EXIST-Q
'Who are there in the home?'
- (17) *dega-dega naŋ tad ra-lo*
where-where 2SG-go-FUT-Q

‘Where will you go?’

- (18) *naŋ* *de-de* *luni-lo*
 2SG what-what want-Q
 ‘What do you want?’

Expressives

Expressives are also found in Liangmai. They are formed by the process of complete reduplication as shown in the following examples.

- (19) *ʰa* *ʰa* ‘calling sound of hen or chicken’
 kruŋ *kruŋ* ‘sound of thunder’
 tet *tet* ‘small raining sound’
 prum *prum* ‘sound of slapping’
 ha *ha* ‘sound of laugh’

6.1 REDUPLICATION OF NOUNS

Nouns are reduplicated in Liangmai to show distributiveness and also to form plural as shown in the following examples in table 16.

Noun	Gloss	Reduplicate	Gloss
<i>tsəki</i>	house	<i>tsəki ~tsəki</i>	‘house to house’
<i>pəbəm</i>	place	<i>pəbəm~pəbəm</i>	‘place to place’
<i>impui</i>	road	<i>impui~impui</i>	‘roads’

Table 10: Reduplication of Nouns

6.2 REDUPLICATION IN ADJECTIVES

Adjectives can be reduplicated to intensify the degree of the action and therefore become an adverb as illustrated in the examples.

Adjective	Gloss	Reduplicate	Gloss
<i>koi</i>	slow	<i>koi~koi</i>	‘slowly’
<i>hum</i>	sweet	<i>hum~hum</i>	‘sweetly’
<i>heŋ</i>	red	<i>heŋ~heŋ</i>	‘very red’

Table 11: Reduplication in Adjectives

6.3 REDUPLICATION IN VERBS

Verbs can be reduplicated and this generally indicates regular action, or action repeated simultaneity.

Verb	Gloss		Gloss
<i>tsəlem</i>	dance	<i>tsəlem~tsəlem</i>	‘always/still dance’
<i>nui</i>	laugh	<i>nui~nui</i>	‘always/still laugh’

Table 12: Reduplication in Verbs

6.4 REDUPLICATION OF ADVERBS

Adverbs can also be reduplicated and the meaning is for emphasis or urgency.

Adverb	Gloss		Gloss
<i>məniziu</i>	slowly	<i>məniziu~məniziu</i>	‘very slowly’
<i>incəŋziu</i>	honestly	<i>humziu~ incəŋziu</i>	‘very honestly’

Table 13: Reduplication of Adverbs

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses three types of word formation processes commonly employed in the formation of words in Liangmai, viz. affixation, compounding and reduplication. It is found that Liangmai has large number of words derived though the process of affixation. Liangmai employs a large number of affixes to form new words. Suffixation seems to be more productive in deriving new word class than prefixation. Compounding is another productive process of word formation in the language. Compounds are mostly endocentric in nature. Liangmai also reduplicates words and the resulting word for various purposes. Reduplication of lexical items can be both class chaining and class maintain. Therefore, reduplication is also an important word formation process in the language.

Abbreviations:

ACC: Accusative

ADJ: Adjective
ADV: Adverb
DECL: Declarative
DEF: Definite marker
FUT: Future
IMP: Imperative
LOC: Locative
NMZ: Nominalizer
PL: Plural
Q: Question
RUDP: Reduplication
SG: Singular

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