Background information

In this paper the term 'Lawa' is referred to as the language of a tribal group whose population is estimated to be about 9,841¹ and is concentrated in two Northern provinces, Chiangmai and Maehongsorn.² Specifically the Lawa villages are found between Baw Luang, Hot district, Chiangmai province in the East and Maesariang district, Maehongsorn province in the West³. These Lawa or, as they call themselves, [l̄āwā], belong to different linguistic groups from the so-called ‘Lawa’ of Kanchanaburi province, from the ‘Luâ’ (Mal, Thin) of Nan province, and from the ‘Lawa’ (Chaobon, Nahkur)⁴ of Petchabun, Nakorn Rajseema and Chaiyaphum provinces. Historically, the Lawa are the descendants of the powerful Lawa whose kingdom was recorded in the early Northern Thai chronicles. The history of these Lawa has been a subject of discussion by many historians and anthropologists. For example, according to two Thai scholars, Sisawat and Khanthathatbamroong, the Lawa were once the lords of the land in the upper part of the Golden Peninsula before the southward

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* An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Symposium on Austro-Asiatic Languages, Helsingor, Denmark, October 24-26, 1979

** Mahidol University

1. The number was given by the Tribal Research Center in its reports, Tribal Population Summary in Thailand, 1979.

2. The Lawa population in Chiangmai is 7,139, consisting of 1,239 households in 19 villages. In Maehongsorn, the number is decreased to 2,570, consisting of 499 households in 13 villages. There is also a Lawa village in Chiangrai where there are only 132 Lawa and 29 households; cf. the above mentioned Tribal Population Summary in Thailand.

3. A vivid description of a two-day trek to these Lawa villages was given by the late Princess Viphavadee Rangsit in her article “นี่ เนื้อพระราชาที่มาถึงภูเขา” (when the Royal Aid comes to the hills) in her collected papers “รีเควสล่าร่ำ” (Different tastes), Bangkok, Prac Pittaya Press, 1971.

4. A description of the Chaobon language was done by Miss Payao Meemanas in her A Description of Chaobon (nahkur): an Austroasiatic Language in Thailand, an unpublished M.A. thesis, Southeast Asian Language Center, Mahidol University, 1979, 314 pages (in English).
migration of the Thai race from China. Gordon Young mentioned a story told to him by a great Wa chieftain who claimed that his people had journeyed thousands of years ago northward along the Mae Ping river and settled for a long time in what is now Chiangmai valley. Princess Viphavadee Rangsit believed that the Lawa once had attained a state of civilization whereby human society consisted of classes. The belief was based on her discovery in 1969 when she visited the Lawa village of Umphai in Chiangmai province where it was found that the Lawa community actually consists of four classes, i.e., (1) The samañ (royal blood), (2) the lam (mandarin), (3) the koyit (sorcerer and shaman) and (4) the ordinary lavi. Besides, from her observation of the crocodile motives carved on the pillars of an ancient ceremonial pavillion in that village together with the samañ's use of fish as their herald, she advanced the theory about the sea origin or the northward migration of the Lawa.

Linguistically speaking, the Lawa language belongs to the Palaungic branch of the Mon–Khmer family in the Austroasiatic Phylum. The Lawa language described in this paper is the one spoken in Ban Pa Pae village [yueŋ pɛ], Maesariang district, Maehongsorn province. The author has been working on this language since 1974 with the purpose of compiling a Lawa — Thai and Thai — Lawa dictionary. Even if more than 4,000 words together with phrases and sentences illustrating their usage have already been collected, the author always finds it difficult to finish the planned dictionary. New interesting words come up every time the author interviews her informants. Attracted by the richness of its vocabulary and by the poetic expression of this language, the author shifted her interest from the planned

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linguistic investigation to the study of the culture and literature of the Lawa. This paper is a report of part of her findings of such study.

In this paper an attempt will be made to give (a) a brief phonological description of the Ban Papae dialect; (b) a short account of the coming of age of Lawa adolescents together with courtship and marriage, all of which are entwined with ṃjà; (c) an analysis of different types of ṃjà; and (d) a translation of some selected texts of ṃjà.

A brief phonological description of the Ban Pa Pae dialect11

Ban Pa Pae village12, situated in Tambon Ban Pa Pae, Mae Sariang district, Maehongsorn Province, consists of 284 Lawa living in 54 households. The majority of the population are animistic Buddhists and accept the sanañ as their leaders. Christian missionaries came to the village 20 years ago and converted a small number of the Lawa. Perhaps the greatest contribution by those missionaries to the Lawa was the introduction of the Roman and Thai alphabets as the means of writing Lawa13. As a result, the Lawa have been using these alphabets in their daily correspondences including the writing of ṃjà. Even if the widespread written language introduced by these missionaries was based on the pronunciation of people from another village, Ban La-up, the Ban Pa Pae people have no difficulty in using it as an effective means of correspondence because all of them know the systematic sound correspondence between the pronunciation of Ban La-up and their own.

In the phonological description that follows, IPA symbols are used with some exceptions: y = IPA j; ṅ = IPA n; m etc preglottalized.

Ban Pa Pae Lawa has 37 initial consonants as shown in the following chart.

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11. The phonological description is based on the pronunciation of the author’s principle informant, Khun Bunphob Bo? b, ages 31.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stops</th>
<th>bilabial</th>
<th>alveola</th>
<th>palatal</th>
<th>velar</th>
<th>glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voiceless unasp.</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiceless asp.</td>
<td>pʰ</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>cʰ</td>
<td>kʰ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
<td>y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prenasal.</td>
<td>m̄</td>
<td>n̄</td>
<td>ŋ̄</td>
<td>ŋ̄</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preglottalized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ȳ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Nasal        |         |         |         |       |         |
| voiceless    | hm       | hn      | hŋ̃     | hŋ    |         |
| preglottalized | m̄       | ñ̄      | ŋ̄      | ŋ̄    |         |

| Fricatives   |         |         |         |       |         |
| voiceless    | f        |         |         | h     |         |
| slit         |          |         |         | γ     |         |
| voiced       | v        |          |         |       |         |
| groove       | voiceless | s       |         | γ̃     |         |

| Laterals     |         |         |         |       |         |
| voiceless    |          |         |         |        |         |
| voiced       | l        |          |         |        |         |
| preglottalized |        |         |         | l      |         |
The Lawa Lomol Poetry

examples:

| p- | p\~n | bottle |
| t- | t\~m | egg |
| c- | cak | deer |
| k- | ka\~ | fish |
| \~ | \~i\~ | I |
| p\~ | p\~e\~n | white |
| t\~ | t\~u | mountain |
| c\~ | c\~tu\~n | foot |
| k\~ | k\~i\~u | to bite |
| b- | bak | small frog |
| y- | y\~a\~m | to weep |
| m\~ | m\~bok | to ride |
| n\~ | n\~do\~n | pot (cooking utensil) |
| n\~ | n\~caim | (finger) ring |
| n\~ | n\~g\~k | ugly |
| y- | y\~i\~a | medicine |
| m- | maic | good, beautiful |
| n- | nok | to make an offering to the spirits |
| n\~ | n\~i\~a\~ | house |
| n\~ | n\~o\~n | knee |
| h\~ | h\~n\~a\~n | to hear |
| h\~ | h\~nam | blood |
| h\~ | h\~noic | the narrow part of a piece of cloth |
| h\~ | h\~p\~o\~ | paddy, unhusked rice |
| m- | m\~o\~ | rope |
| n\~ | n\~o\~n | only one |
| n\~ | mah n\~o\~k | "Never mind!" |
| n\~ | n\~ai | eye |
| f- | f\~a\~ | monkey |
| h- | h\~e | bee |
| v- | vec | sword |
| \~ | \~a\~i\~h | turtle |
| \~ | \~o\~n | post, pillar |
| s- | sa\~n | elephant |
| h- | h\~la\~ | leaf |
Suriya Ratanakul

l-  laic  pig
l-  loŋ  boat

In Lawa /l/ and /y/ can function as the second consonant.

example

l — pl  plɔŋ  grass used for thatching
   kl  kloŋ  river, stream
   phl  phlok  elephant’s task
   khl  khłök  to lick
   mbl  mblyk  bracelet
   ngl  nglɔŋ  swamp
y — py  pyaŋ  roof
   ky  kyak  buffalo
   y — phy  phyuŋ  blanket
   khy  khyai  gold
   mby  mbymiŋ  horse
   ngy  ngymiŋ  to carry (two or more people)

Final consonants: Lawa has both open syllables and closed syllable. Open syllables occurs only after long vowels. Closed syllable can have the following 10 consonants as final consonants:

example

- p  ?aop  cooked rice
- t  ?ait  to be
- c  laic  pig
- k  ?ak  crossbow
- ?  khoŋ  tree
- h  maîh  nose
- m  ?oam  salty
- n  kuən  child
- ŋ  mbîŋ  mud
- ŋ  kloŋ  river, stream

Vowels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>front</th>
<th>central-back</th>
<th>back</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mid-high
mid  e   ə   o
low  ë   a   ɔ

Lawa has a nine-vowel types. It is the author's hypothesis that the mid-high /w/ may have been recently introduced. It is found only in 9 words, all of which are undoubtedly Thai (or Kam Muang) loan words.

examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lawa</th>
<th>Thai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>khwŋ</td>
<td>khinj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twk</td>
<td>tit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kwt</td>
<td>kiit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vwn</td>
<td>waŋ weŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swk</td>
<td>sik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diphthongs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lawa</th>
<th>Thai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ia</td>
<td>ia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ei</td>
<td>ei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eo</td>
<td>eo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>ai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ai</td>
<td>ai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ao</td>
<td>ao</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Syllables

Most Lawa words are monosyllabic. Disyllabic words have a preliminary syllable and a main syllable. Preliminary syllable receives no stress. This first vowel position is filled by only two vowels (a and ə). ə is more frequent than a. It is a neutralization of all points of vowel articulation. However, when reduplication (such as in an onomatopoea) is present, any short vowel may occur. The second syllable, the main syllable, receives stress. It may be filled by all vowel phonemes.

Coming of Age in Ban Pa Pae

Unlike the Meo, the Yao, the Lisu or the Akha, the Lawa do not enjoy festivities. They are more repressive and subtle in their emotional expressions. In our relationship with them, their mannerism, slight facial expression and other bodily
signs must always be taken into account. Therefore one should not be surprised that the coming of age ceremony of the Lawa adolescents is much simpler than that of other tribes. Tradition was established with the belief that after the age of puberty, these Lawa boys and girls would become young adults, ready for courtship and marriage and for taking up social responsibilities (e.g. making and receiving social visits and reciting ləsom lə at funerals). In this tradition the coming of age of the girls is more defined than that of the boys. For a girl to come of age she must be 13 years old and in accordance with the need of the community where she lives. If, on that specific period there exists in the community a large number of unmarried debutantes, to use the Western terminology, whom the community could ask to recite the ləsom lə in funeral ceremonies, her coming of age can be postponed for 6 months or a year if she so desires. On the contrary, if on that time there are few maidens, the girl’s coming of age can be hastened to the age of 12. Such decision is made partially by the girl herself and by the elder maidens of the community. If the girl’s older sister has just been married and if the number of the older maidens in the community is much limited, the girl will recite or ask to be taught ləsom lə. This indicates her readiness to assume social duties. If her intention is in accordance with the wishes of the older maidens in the community, a piece of meat will be sent to the girl’s house, indicating the latter’s willingness to accept her in their circle. With this sign, the girl is ready to welcome night visits from young boys and to assume social duties by participating in funeral ceremonies. A knowledge of ləsom lə is required for these two occasions.

As for the boys, when they are 12 or 13 years old, they need no encouragement nor social approval of their behavior on the matter of their coming of age. Usually, boys go where people are gathering, be it at a house-warming or funeral. They hear and learn the ləsom lə recited by their older brothers in the community. When a boy acquires the ləsom lə skill, he starts paying night visits to the “visitable” girls.15

Coming of age and courtship among the Lawa are not sexual orgies as

14. For example, if when the author’s linguistic informant wanted to work with her, he would be dressed in his best suit walking leisurely with his friendly cleaned-shaven face. But if he did not want to be bothered his dress was shabby and he sat serenely in the garden.

15. There is no definite age specifying when he should pay these visits. If he is precocious, he can start paying visits at the age of 14-15 years. If he is shy, he can postpone this social duty a little longer. However, these visits are a must for all Lawa boys. If any boy has never paid such a visit he becomes “odd” in the eyes of people in the community. This is because the visit is essentially social and not necessarily a courtship. Of course the visit might turn into courtship later.
many tourists seem to believe. There is no “special” rendez-vous for the young Lawa. The boy has to visit the girl in her own one-room house where all family members sleep together. Only a fireplace is between the girl’s sleeping quarter and her parents’. Both the visitor and the girl are each conscious of the social aspect of the visit. Both consider the visit as a duty. For the boy it is his duty to pay a visit to every “visitable” girl at least once. Similarly for the girl it is her duty to welcome the guest. Hence they treat each other with good manners and each talks to the other in lasom le. Only a serious illness can be used as an excuse for the girl’s unwillingness to talk in lasom le with her guest. If the boy feels attached to her, he will increase his visits and use the lasom le as a means of courtship. In addition, as a sign of his love a small gift such as a box of matches or a beautiful sea shell filled with tobacco will be given to the girl. Unless the girl likes him his gift will not be accepted. The giving, refusal or acceptance of the gift all are done by means of the lasom le. When both of them are sure of their feelings for each other, the suiter will give the girl of his choice a “big gift”. The gift is a beautiful object such as a comb or jewelry plus cash of at least 20 baht. The acceptance of this gift indicates her willingness to be his bride. A marriage ceremony will take place later. After marriage the lasom le will no longer be used by the couple. Marriage is considered by the Lawa as the zenith of adulthood and the door to old age.

An analysis of different types of lasom le

Lasom le is Lawa poetry used by the Lawa adolescents in their social visits and courtships and by the young unmarried Lawa in a funeral ceremony. The theme of lasom le therefore varies in accordance with the occasion of its use. At a funeral ceremony the lasom le is usually recited by groups of boys and girls taking turns with each other. The lasom le for the funeral ceremony can be recited only on that particular occasion. A fine is imposed by the sanañ on those who break this tradition. Married people will recite the lasom le only when they are asked to instruct the lasom le to the young Lawa at a funeral ceremony. In this case it is the boy that needs such instruction more than the girl. This is because usually the girl takes her social duties more seriously than the boy. She learns about all lasom le of different themes from the older maidens of the village before her willingness to come of age.

We may classify lasom le into six kinds each with a single different theme. Our classification does not include what is known as lasom ñē which not only has various traditional themes but also leaves room for innovative themes. The 6 lasom le are as follow:
1. **lāsom lēnā ʔit luəŋ** “in the direction of, side”; ʔit means “tradition”. Lāsom luəŋ ʔit is a traditional poetry recited only during a funeral ceremony. Its text is traditionally fixed and cannot be changed nor improvised.

2. **lāsom kam khuih** kam is the Kam Muəŋ loan word meaning “word, language”. Khuih means “to desire”. The main theme of this lāsom is an expression of the reciters’s desire, e.g., love, the wish for happiness and prosperity for the girl, the desire to be able to give beautiful presents. Lāsom kam khuih consists of 10 different texts.

3. **lāsom ʔdoiʔ? ein kheʔ** ʔdoiʔ means “to climb, to walk along the narrow path of the rough mountain trail”; ?ein means “to come back, to return”; kheʔ means “back, at the back of”. The theme of this lāsom is a description of the difficulty of the reciter’s journey and his desire to return to his beloved. The lāsom ʔdoiʔ? ein kheʔ is usually recited by the boy in his first night visit to the girl and also when he has to depart from her by making a rather long journey from the village (e.g. to Chiengmai). Lāsom ʔdoiʔ? ein kheʔ consists of 10 texts.

4. **lāsom hāo ka** hāo means “to go”; ka is a loan word from Kam Muəŋ, Chiengmai dialect, meaning “to do business”. This lāsom has as its main theme a description of how the reciter did business in another place. In the Lawa tradition, to do business means also to “sell one’s labour”. In the present day Lawa village there is not enough fertile land for the whole population. Therefore Lawa men tend to go “selling” their labour outside the village twice a year, usually in September after rice planting, and in February or March after the harvest. There are 7 texts of lāsom hāo ka.

5. **lāsom ʔaok hāo ʔaok** means “to bring someone along”; hāo means “to go”. This lāsom is the reciter’s invitation of his beloved to go with him to other places. In his invitation the girl is assured of having a pleasant journey. The invitation is only formal, because no Lawa girls will go out with their suitors unless they are married. Lāsom ʔaok hāo may therefore be regarded as an expression of the reciter’s wish for his beloved to share a delightful experience (i.e. making a journey) with him. Lāsom ʔaok hāo consists of 6 texts.

6. **lāsom pua leŋaʔ** pua means “to ask for something”; leŋaʔ means “to play”. The theme of this lāsom is the reciter’s asking permission to talk with, to play with, to be in the presence of the other. This lāsom is usually recited by both the boy and the girl who are not familiar to each other. The reciter may also use this lāsom to ask the other to teach him (or her) lāsom ʔa adding that he (she) has
The Lawa Ləsom ĳ Poetry

only a little knowledge about it. Ləsom puə leŋa? has 4 texts.

All these 6 Ləsom ĳ have a definite number of texts composed by anonymous Lawa poets handed down from generation to generation in the form of oral literature and are kept alive by the young Lawa. The texts of these 6 Ləsom ĳ cannot be revised nor can they be changed. Only by learning these texts by heart can the Lawa adolescents perform their social functions properly.

As stated before there is another Ləsom ĳ (i.e. Ləsom ŋįi) which leaves room for innovative themes to be composed by contemporary Lawa poets, Ləsom ŋįi means "miscellaneous Ləsom". There is no definite text for Ləsom ŋįi, and the reciter can put in any theme appropriate to his feelings on a particular occasion. For example Khun Bunphob, the author's principal informant, once in sympathy for his people, composed a Ləsom ŋįi expressing his feelings for the misery and poverty of his people in the village.

The fact that there exists in Lawa culture different kinds of subtle Ləsom ĳ is probably an indication of the high culture of this tribal group whose Kingdom once dominated the Golden Penninsula. At present anyone who visits the Lawa village in Ban Pa Pae will see poverty and misery, the same conditions witnessed in other hill tribes in Thailand. But poor as they are these people carry their long lasting traditions within their hearts. These living traditions are expressed in the subtle Ləsom ĳ.

A translations of some selected texts

1. "nilem ?e? ləpəo mai me? ʔa?"
2. "nədah ?e? yum haic nǐŋ yo? kloŋ"
3. "cak me? nǐŋ thu la? aom nədu hle?"
5. "me? bìk nǐŋ giək chîk ləhəŋ"
6. "pat nəh ləŋlaŋ la? aom sə? aom səŋgyọŋ"
7. "pat nəh loŋloŋ la? aom kloŋ ʔa?"
9. "nədaip nəh nǐŋ ?e? lehain naŋsi"
10. "tit nəh samoiŋ khyoiŋ samo?"
11. "səkʊ kuaŋ nədo? khyoiŋ nəgo? phui"
12. "khiʔəh mah ləməbiŋ məbyiŋ laih loŋ"
13. "khiʔəh mah səŋgyọŋ məbyiŋ laih pe"
Suriya Ratanakul

khīh ṭe? mbyiṅ ṭe? mai kyaṅ klo? (14)
khīh ṭe? mbyiṅ phyo? mai sēmaŋ (15)
khīh phyo? haŋhaŋ sēmaŋ yo? āe (16)
khīh phyo? hehē tok kekho? (17)

etc.

**translation and explanation** This text belongs to lāsom puə ləŋa?.

(1) - nī som when
- ṭe? I (poetic term. As an ordinary word for the first person singular pronoun is ə ai?).
- lā pōo to splash water (poetic expression; in everyday language the phrase pōo lə ə aom is used instead).
- mai with, together
- me? you
- ə a? big

A rough translation of the first verse would be *when I am playing water-splashing with you*. Such is the boy's subtle way of comparing the recitation of lāsom ə e to water — splashing game.

(2) - nā dah if
- yum to die
- haic to dry up
- yo? to be without
- nī tū at
- kloŋ a stream, a river

A rough translation of this second verse would be *if I die within a dried up stream*. The literal meaning of this verse is: reciting a lāsom ə e to you is like playing water — splashing in a stream if there is no more water the stream would dry up and thus cease to be a stream. Similarly if all of my knowledge is spent in reciting lāsom ə e to you, please .

(3) - cak to bring water into one's field
- thu mountain
- lə aom water
- nā du a waterway
- ṭe? rain

This discourse continues from the second verse. "Please bring rainwater from the
mountain through the waterway’.

(4) - ɪɡoŋ
to die of malnutrition (in human beings) or to
die of the lack of water and fertilizer (in plants)
- phye?
cultivated land

A direct translation of this fourth verse would be *If I am dried up and die without a place for cultivation*. Here it should be noted that the boy is comparing himself to a tree which must die if there is no earth to sustain its roots.

(5) - bīk
to explore a land, to be a pioneer
- ɲiak
a narrow trail where two ranges of mountain
meet
- chīk
a rice field
- ɿæŋɛŋ
is an adjective whose use is restricted only to
qualifying the word “chīk”. ɿæŋɛŋ means (a
ricefield) where only rain water is used as
means of cultivation.

The fifth verse is the boy’s begging the girl to open up the narrow trail between the pressing mountains and make it a place for cultivation.

(6) - pat
to flow (used with water only)
- neʃ
always, never cease
- laŋlaŋ
continuously, on and on
- saŋəm
archaic word whose meaning is unknown to
the author’s informants.
- saŋɡyọŋ
the name of a river of which the location is
unknown to the author’s informants.

The direct meaning of this sixth verse is *water flows continuously in saŋɡyọŋ river*. Literally the boy is imploring the girl to be generous and help him unceasingly like the flow of water in saŋɡyọŋ river.

(7) - loŋloŋ
an onomatopoe imitating the sound of the
running water.

The direct meaning of this seventh verse is *water flows continuously in a large river*.

In summary the literal meaning of the sixth and seventh verses is the boy’s request for the continuation of the exchange of ləsom ɿe.

(8) - mə̀n
 to count
- ləha
joint, node (of bamboo)
The direct meaning of this eighth verse is *to count continuously the frequent joints of bamboo at me*. Literally this also is the request to continue the exchange of ลสำมย.

(9) - ล้วย  
- น้ด้วย 
- น้าцы  

archaic word whose meaning is unknown to the author's informants.  

The meaning of the ninth verse is not clear. Generally speaking it is the request for the continuation of the recitation of ลสำมย. What is worth mentioning in this ninth verse is the word ‘‘น้าцы’’. If we interpret the word น้าцы as referring to knowledge, this verse can be considered as the boy’s humble request for the girl to teach him the knowledge which she has. If the word ‘‘น้าцы’’ is referred to ‘‘a written text’’ or to ‘‘an orthography’’, it can be speculated that ลสำมย had once been recorded in written language before the introduction of orthography by the Christian missionaries in the 1950’s. This hypothesis is entertained because the author believes that this ลสำมย was composed more than 30 years ago since there are many archaic words in this verse, the meaning of which is unknown even to older informants (50–60 years old).

(10) - ติ 
- สำมอย 
- กิ้งอย 
- สำมอย 

to attach (a Thai loan word)  

A direct translation of this tenth verse is ‘‘Please continue to attach a star to every piece of rock’’. This is the boy’s subtle way of complimenting the girl. His words are compared to a worthless objects such as a rock and her words to celestial objects i.e. the stars. He asks the girl to shed the stardust of her words on his earthly clumsy words so that he would become more enchanting.

(11) - สำโค 
- คุณ น้ดย 
- น้กย 
- ผู้ 

man, human-being  

A direct translation of this eleventh verse would be ‘‘Please teach every child’’. In this verse the boy is comparing himself to a child waiting for instruction from a teacher. Please note from this eleventh verse that on this occasion there must be
more than one boy. Therefore originally this verse was probably composed with the purpose of being recited in public such as during the funeral ceremony where a group of boy take turns in reciting the laṣom às with a group of girls. This belief is based on the fact that in Lawa tradition many suiters cannot woo a girl at the same time, each in his own way, trying to capture her attention. People look down on anyone who does this. Therefore the only occasion where several boys can recite a laṣom às to gether is public ceremony such as the warming up of a new house and particularly the funeral.

(12) - khīsh
- mah
- laowelbin
- mbyin
- laih
- loŋ

A direct translation of this twelveth verse is *Let (you) be like the Mae Ping river where a boat can go down.*

(13) - mbyiŋ
- pe

A direct translation of this thirteenth verse would be *Let (you) be like the sàøyọg river where a raft can go down.* Literally the twelveth and thirteenth verses convey the boy’s request for the girl’s generosity.

(14) - lœh
- kyaŋ kloŋ

A direct translation of this fourteenth verse is *Let (me) be as loud as the kyaŋ kloŋ drum.* A literal translation would be an expression of the boy’s wish or his solicitation of help from some spirits to make him famous.

(15) - phyoŋ
- sœmaŋ

A direct translation of this fifteenth verse is *Let (me) be as famous as the sœmaŋ.*
as the keeper of Lawa traditions he has many obligations. He must also observe a special code of manner such as never to utter any abusive language. There are female samaŋ and male samaŋ. A samaŋ's daughter is entitled to receive a higher "bride price" and better gifts than ordinary brides.

In this fifteenth verse the boy expresses his wish to be as famous as a samaŋ.

(16) - haŋhaŋ This word has no meaning. It is put here to fill the required number of words in a verse (5-7 words with a majority of 6 words), and also to rhyme with the word samaŋ in the preceding verse.

- ṭo a cock’s crow. The use of this word is restricted only to the cause where it crows because it sees a spirit.

- ṭe chicken, cock, hen

- samaŋ ṭo ṭe Is the name of a Lawa princess (samaŋ) in the past. She was so beautiful and her hair was so long that when she wanted to comb it she had to stand on a rock so that her hair would not touch the ground. Later this princess decided to marry a spirit. Since then, whenever she comb her hair, cocks crow in the same manner as when they see a spirit.

In the sixteenth verse the boy expresses his wish to be as famous as that princess whose name is still known among the Lawa today.

(17) - hshɛ This word has no meaning. It is put here so that this verses have the required number of words. It also rhymes with the last word of the sixteenth verse.

- tɔk like, as

- kekhoʔ chief of the foresters

The seventeenth verse expresses the boy's wish to be as famous as the chief of the foresters.
The Lawa Lsom ś Poetry

bot som khonm nīg kat — lsom y'ok hāo

ⁿdah mīn mōi khyes yuh ta' nē (1)
ⁿdah mīn mōi mbye chom ta' nēt (2)

niem y'ok me? hāo m'əo lələn (3)

y'ok təo kyiəh tho? yo? ləyə (4)

y'ok təo hāo puc nīg yo? tain (5)

y'ok təo ?əin plaiə lələn həin pui (6)

y'ok təo som g'ia? khet vî? kloŋ (7)

niem y'ok me? hāo m'əo lələn (9)

pat kəe ləko? chan yəək y'ok (10)

pat kəe n'əog te? chan yəək kloŋ (11)

niem y'ok me? hāo m'əo lələn (12)

hāo m'ət məi me? pən ləkhiə? (13)

hāo thəə? məi me? pən lələn (14)

hāo nə? məi me? nam hoi na (15)

hāo pən məi pa hoi nəe (16)

hāo som ləkə tʰəm lə'nəuic (17)

hāo ?ən ləkə hoïə ləphaom (18)

hāo som ləkə tʰəm khəiən kho? (19)

hāo pən ləkə ko? khəiən kloŋ (20)

hāo som phi yia m'biə ləlaŋ (21)

hāo som phi tan phya? setu? (22)

toh yə? viət qia? som phi tan (23)

toh yə? viət m'blam kiz tan ōm (24)

etc.

Translation and explanation

(1) — ^dah
- mīn
- mōi
- khyes
- yuh ta'ne

if
like, as......as (Thai loan word).
word

as it was already mentioned
archaic expression, unknown to the author's informants

The whole meaning of this first verse is if it is like the word that was already agreed.
They might have talked about their trip to the town.

(2) - mbye as it was already mentioned.
- chəm sweet, appealing, charming. Sex appeal is probably not included in the meaning.
- taʔnet like ‘taʔne’, this is an archaic word whose meaning is unknown to the author’s informants.

The meaning of this second verse is if it is like the word that was nicely agreed.

(3) - nəəm when
- ʔəək to bring
- meʔ you
- həə to go
- mboə to spin cotton
- lalaïŋ instrument for cotton spinning

This third verse means if you come with me, (your trip will be like) cotton-spinning. Cotton spinning is considered a delightful work to most Lawa girls.

(4) - təə not
- kyəiŋ maiden
- thoʔ little, not the eldest
- yoʔ to see
- layiə painful experiences such as lack of food or hardship during a journey etc.

In this verse the boy promises not to bring the girl (whom he regards as his younger sister) to trouble.

(5) - pəɕic to take off (one’s dress, shoes etc.)
- nɨŋ at
- yoʔ lack, without
- taiŋ cloth weaving

A direct translation of this verse would be will not let you be without clothes, because there is no cloth weaving. Literally the boy promises not to let the girl be in trouble without any clothes on.

(6) - ʔəiŋ to return, to come back
- plaĩŋ starving, lack of rice, lack of water
- lalaïŋ among
- həən a large number of
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- phui people

Literally this verse means that the boy will not take the girl to starvation among a large number of people who have enough to eat.

(7) - som to eat rice
   - ḋgiəʔ to eat only rice without even salt
   - khet archaic word whose meaning is unknown to the author's informants
   - viə a kind of vegetable
   - kloŋ a stream, a river

In this verse the boy promises that he will not take the girl to eat rice with that kind of vegetable only.

(8) - ṇəŋ only, alone
   - pon to eat rice with other kind of food
   - phoŋ bamboo shoot
   - naʔ sour

The boy promises not to take the girl to eat rice with sour bamboo shoots.

(9) - repetition of the third verse
(10) - paŋ although
     - kae to have
     - lakoʔ husked rice
     - chan to intend
     - yiak elder brother

The boy indicates his willingness to take some rice grain with him.

(11) - ndoŋ cooking pot
    - teʔ earth
    - kləm to carry

The boy says "I have an earthen cooking pot which I will carry with me to cook rice for you during our journey so that you will not starve."

(12) repetition of the third verse
(13) - mbit to take a wood to bar water, to use earth as a barrier to water in a river until the water dries up. This is done in order to catch fish.
     - lakhiə the dried up place in a stream where there is a barrier for fish catching.
The boy says "I will go to make a barrier in a river with you and eat the fish from that barrier with you." He does not talk directly about fish. To mention the two words whose meanings are related to fishcatching is enough. Besides, ṭakhīŋ rhymes nicely with the following word ṭhīŋ.

(14) ṭhīŋ
  ṭhīlăn
  to cast a fishing net
  a kind of big fish which is delicious to eat.

The boy says "I will go casting nets with you and eat this delicious fish with you."

(15) ṭhōŋ
  ṭhōm
  ṭhō̄
  ṭah
  ṭô
  to drink
  water (Thai word náam)
  head (Thai word hūa)
  rice field (Thai word)

"I will go and drink water with you at the head (starting point) of the rice field."

(16) ṭpă
  ṭhō̄
  ṭô
  ṭhū̄y
  ṭô̄y
  fish (Thai word)
  stream (Thai word hūy)
  small (Thai word nōy)

"I will go and eat fish from the small stream with you."

(17) ṭlă̄kă
  ṭhīm
  ṭlă̄nūić
  in front of, in place ahead
  ripe
  fully, really (used only to qualify ripe fruit and fat pigs)

In this verse the boy persuades the girl to go with him where ripe fruits are waiting for them.

(18) ṭchē
  ṭhôic
  ṭlă̄phaom
  to take
  to feel satisfied
  heart

He continues his persuasion. The girl is encouraged to go and seek satisfaction in the future with him.

(19) ṭhîyūi
  every

"Every tree that we will meet on our way ahead will have ripe fruit. Let us go and eat them."

(20) ṭkă̄ŋ
  ṭkō̄
  ṭkō̄ŋm
  water animals such as fish, shrimps, crabs and turtles

"In every stream that lies ahead, there are plenty of water animals, let us go and eat them."
The Lawa Ləsəm lə Poetry

(21) - phiyiə easily available things
     - mbiə thin membrane inside a piece of bamboo.
     When the Lawa roast glutinous rice in a bamboo section, this thin membrane will envelop the glutinous rice, making the glutinous rice delicious, according to the Lawa.
     - lələŋ glutinous rice roasted in a section of bamboo shoot

“Let us go and eat easily available and delicious thing such as bamboorice.”

(22) - phitan what is offered to monks
     - phyaʔ novice
     - sətuʔ monk

“Let us go and eat food that was offered to novices and monks”. In Buddhist festivities, food will be offered to monks and novices more than they can take. This is because people want the rest to be shared to other people who come to participate in the ceremony. The boy in this Ləsəm lə invites the girl to go with him to a buddhist monastery during a ceremony and partake in such food.

(23) - toh to meet. In everyday usage this word is lətoh. The presyllable is reduced here in accordance with the rhythm of the Ləsəm lə.
     - viət a buddhist monastery
     - ņiəŋ the Shan

“Let us go to see the Shan monasteries and partake of the food offered there.”

(24) - məblam the Burmese
     - səm the Northern Thai

“Let us go to see the Burmese monasteries and partake of the food offered by the Northern Thai.”

The full text of this Ləsəm comprised of 64 verses. The above text and translation are only examples.
Suriya Ratanakul

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