

De-intensifying intensifiers in North Khamniungan

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This paper investigates the occurrence of ABB modifier patterns in Wolam Ngio (Glottolog: [wola1254](#)), a North Khamniungan variety, along with the closely related standard Thang variety which serves as the standard dialect in India, as well as Kingphu Ngio spoken in neighbouring Myanmar. North Khamniungan shows the ABB pattern as one of many productive uses of reduplication. This paper builds upon previous work on the occurrence of reduplicated modifiers in languages of Northeast India in which the bare stem A is followed by an often reduplicated morpheme B~B, which may or may not be semantically transparent.

Keywords: Khamniungan, reduplication, intensifiers

1. Introduction

Throughout Northeast India and northwestern Myanmar, many languages show a particular pattern of reduplication of lexically specified modifiers which attach to stative verb stems for the purposes of intensification or slight changes in meaning. Such a construction is found in far-ranging varieties of Tibeto-Burman and Kra-Dai, and thus with little evidence of being genetically inherited. In this construction, the stative verb stem A is followed by an optionally reduplicated morpheme, B~B, which may or may not be semantically transparent. While such occurrences are typically referred to as intensifiers (van Dam 2018, 2020), the occurrences of this pattern are not strictly intensifying, but instead cover a wide range of meanings involving some modification of the bare adjectival meaning. As stated, such ABB patterned modifiers are widespread in Northeast India and the surrounding region, including in many of the Patkaian languages (van Dam & Das 2021). However, even within a single linguistic subgroup, such constructions are often absent in member languages. For example, within Patkaian, the ABB pattern is found in Tangsa but not Wancho. In Barish, also known as Bodo-Garo, the construction

occurs in Kokborok and Garo (Burling 2004: 93), but not in other closely related languages such as Boro, Atong or Rabha.¹ The scattered nature of this constructions occurrence in different languages and a lack of cognacy between the stems from one closely related language to the next, the distribution points to the pattern as a potential areal feature rather than a shared proto-Tibeto-Burman innovation or the result of direct borrowing of terms (van Dam & Muheim 2023). More work is needed in order to determine the likelihood of this as a purely areal feature, rather than one which was lost.

This paper builds on the existing literature on this construction, with a particular focus on Wolam Ngio (Glottolog: [wola1254](#)), a North Khamniungan (Glottolog: [nort3429](#)) variety first described in van Dam and Thaam (2023), along with the closely related Thang variety of Khamniungan (Glottolog: [than1260](#)) as well as Kingphu Ngio spoken in neighbouring Myanmar. Thang Ngio serves as the standard dialect in India, while Kingphu Ngio is derived from an older chronolect of Wolam Ngio. These three varieties form the North Khamniungan subgroup. The construction occurs in North Khamniungan as one of many productive uses of reduplication. Included in these functions are habitual TAM marking, echo locations, and universal quantification among other functions (Thaam, 2025). Whether or not the modifier reduplicates differs from language to language, and may be either fully present, as in Khamniungan, discussed below, or determined by metrical constraints as in some Tangsa-Nocte (Glottolog: [kony1249](#)) varieties (van Dam 2020). However, when reduplicated, it is full reduplication of the entire morpheme rather than partial reduplication of any sort of echo formation.

1.1 Data collection

Data for this study were collected from native speakers for the development of a northern Khamniungan dictionary and descriptive grammar by the authors in collaboration with members of the community. Primary data collection was done for Wolam dialect, however many speakers of Wolam dialect are fluent bidialectal speakers of Thang dialect which serves as the standard variety of Khamniungan. Examples provided here are in Wolam dialect unless otherwise specified. Thang, Wolam and Kingphu dialects have a high degree of lexical similarity and mutual intelligibility, although some differences are found. Kingphu dialect terms, where given, were collected in February 2025 in Woilan Kingphu, Sagaing Region, Myanmar.

1. Although lexically specified modifiers are much more widely attested including in language such as Rabha (Joseph 2007: 214).

2. Defining the pattern

The ABB pattern is defined in van Dam and Muheim (2023) for the purposes of analysis as having the following features. First, modifier morphemes are often but not always semantically opaque. In many cases, the meaning of the modifier will not be apparent based on etymological grounds, although some stems used as modifiers such as proto-Patkaian **lap* for ‘flash’ will be clear. The semantics of certain modifiers are recoverable through historical comparative work, such as reflexes of proto-Tibeto-Burman **s(y)im* (Matisoff 2003) occurring as a modifier on ‘black’ **njak₄* in Tangsa varieties, such as Joglei /n¹ak₄.sim₂/ (van Dam 2018: 53), but as a general term for ‘black’ in Garo and Dimasa (Benedict 1972: 81). Generally, however, such etymological origins will not be known to speakers, and the modifiers remain opaque.

Second, modifiers will be lexically specified, and typically limited to a single verbal stem. Certain examples will be found where there is overlap, as is the case with concepts ‘black’, ‘hard’ and ‘bitter’ in Tangsa-Nocte (van Dam 2018) which share some of their modifiers, and other cases occur where a single modifier morpheme may have the same function across a wide range of stems, as with the de-intensifier *#ro* in Tangsa-Nocte (ibid), but these are rare. Generic modifiers are incredibly uncommon. In (1),² the modifier *t^haŋ₃* is only applicable to ‘heavy’ *leŋ₃*, and cannot modify other stems.

- (1) *leŋ₃ t^haŋ₃~t^haŋ₃*
 heavy MOD~RED
 ‘slightly heavy’

Additionally, in many cases a single verbal stem will have a range of possible modifier morphemes. One such example is ‘black’ *naŋ₅*. As previously illustrated for colour terms in related Patkaian languages (van Dam 2018), the number of possible modifiers per stem appears to correspond to the potential ‘stage’ of a given concept in the language, following the initial proposal of and subsequent revisions by Berlin and Kay (1969) in which concepts such as ‘black’, ‘white’ and ‘red’ will occur in earlier stages than other basic colour terms.

Third, ABB patterned modifiers will occur only on simple verbal stems. Adjectives, generally speaking, are not a salient category in many of the languages of the region. Terms acting as basic modifiers and typically translated with adjectives

2. Subscript numerals refer to tone categories as given in van Dam and Thaam (2023, 2025). Superscript numerals refer to pitch height following the system of Chao (1930). Morphemes which are unmarked for tone are those for which the underlying toneme is difficult to determine. Such cases are explained where they occur.

tives in contact languages are instead often formed through nominalising stative verb stems: ‘to be/become big’ as a verbal stem is nominalised with a productive affix to function in the role of an adjective in English. Modified stems are typically within Dixon’s type-B set, covering things like dimension, age, colour, physical qualities, or value (Dixon 1977).

As to whether this feature is areal, a few features point to this as likely. First, its occurrence is inconsistent across closely-related languages. It is well attested in Tangsa-Nocte, the northernmost of three branches within Patkaian, but absent in Wancho, a prototypical Southwest Patkaian language. Again, it occurs in Khamniungan, discussed here, but Khamniungan and Wancho are otherwise much more closely related to each other than either are to Tangsa-Nocte varieties (van Dam, in press). It is also well attested in Northeast Indian varieties of Kra-Dai such as Tai Phake and Tai Khamti, languages which have a long history of contact with Tibeto-Burman languages of the region. Furthermore, while there is notable semantic overlap – as mentioned, ‘black’, ‘hard’ and ‘bitter’ often share some of their modifiers (van Dam 2018) – many of the semantically opaque modifiers do not consistently reconstruct to protolanguages. Transparent modifiers such as ‘flash’ **lap* do reconstruct and occur cross-varietally with a greater frequency, but the majority of modifiers are entirely opaque to modern speakers, even in cases where now-lost semantics can be recovered through cross-linguistic comparison.³ There are also some cases where the modifier found in some varieties of Tibeto-Burman is a near-perfect match to one in Assamese, as is the case with *phut phut* for ‘speckled’ or ‘spotted’ occurring both in Assamese and frequently in Tibeto-Burman varieties as part of the ABB pattern on some colour terms.

3. Basic colour terms in northern Khamniungan

While the ABB pattern is common across stative verbs functioning as nominal modifiers and not at all limited to colour terms in any of the languages for which this feature has been investigated, by focusing on basic colour terminology we are able to get a good overview of the constructions including any semantic effects of reduplication. Therefore this and the following section focus primarily on colour terms for the purpose of illustration. A more expansive list of modifiers is given in later sections. It is worth briefly discussing the colour terminology in Khamniungan in particular. In language groups such as Tangsa-Nocte, ABB constructions

3. A similar pattern is found in Sinitic, with examples from Mandarin such as *lěng bīngbīng* for ‘ice cold’ or *liàng jīngjīng* for ‘sparkling like crystal’, for which the semantics are often entirely transparent and composed of otherwise common morphemes, such as ‘ice’ on ‘ice cold’.

provide a way to add nuance to colour descriptions for what are otherwise very small inventories of only 3 or 4 basic colour terms.

As in Tangsa-Nocte, the inventory of basic colour terms in Khamniungan is relatively small. ‘Black’ and ‘white’ have basic terms, *naʔ*₅ and *t^hai*₄ respectively. ‘Red’ also has a basic monomorphemic term *hiŋ*₄ or *seŋ*₄ in Thang dialect. ‘Green’ is directly referencing grass, *haŋ*₄*na* or *saŋ*₄*nia* in Thang.⁴ ‘Blue’ exists as *naʔ*₅*k^hao*₃, but formed through appending a modifier to ‘black’ in Wolam. This is one of the few cases where basic adjectives differ between Wolam and Thang dialects, where Thang has a monomorphemic stem *t^han*₄. A term for ‘yellow’ also occurs, *am*₂*t^hu*₄, the semantic head being homophonous with ‘mango’ *am*₂. Based on the hierarchy of Berlin and Kay (1969), this indicates a Stage II inventory, compared to much of Patkaian which has also developed distinct terms for ‘green’ and, in some cases, ‘yellow’.

Kumar et al. (1974) offer a different set of terms in the standard Thang dialect. These are <tsüamleng> for ‘yellow’, <poicheko> for ‘brown’ (which is instead only used for ‘grey’ in the author’s dialect), <sangnyashinko> for ‘blue’ compared to <asangnya> for ‘green’, and <thsamshialeng> for ‘violet’. Kumar’s <sangya> is cognate with Wolam *haŋ*₄*na*, and <sangnyashinko> builds upon this term. The morpheme <ko> where it occurs is an attributive marker, sometimes called an adjectival marker (van Dam & Thaam 2023). Kumar et al.’s ‘brown’ <poiche> is cognate with *poi*₄*te*₄ in Wolam, where it is commonly used for ‘grey’ and not attested for ‘brown’, nor is it typically used for ‘brown’ in Thang despite the glossing in Kumar et al.

4. Notable features of ABB modifiers in Khamniungan

Lexically specified modifiers / intensifiers only occur on ‘black’, ‘white’, and ‘red’. These are the only colours for which the stem is monosyllabic, and arguably the only colour terms that qualify as basic according to Berlin and Kay (1969). Other colour terms such as ‘green’ or ‘yellow’ are derived. In the case of ‘green’ *haŋ*₄*na*, this is derived from ‘grass’ *haŋ*₄, although the second syllable is semantically opaque. As a disyllabic stem, *haŋ*₄*na~na* is not grammatical. ‘Yellow’ *am*₂*t^hu*₄ is of uncertain origin, but will not be able to take any such modifier. The disyllabic

4. Tone sandhi patterns are still not fully understood for Wolam Khamniungan. With the nominalising prefix, the tones are realised as [a²².haŋ₄²².na₂⁵³], whereas without the prefix the realisation is as [haŋ₄²².na₃⁵¹]. Where tones are unmarked, it is due to uncertainty regarding the underlying toneme.

colour terms are also unable to reduplicate. For ‘green’, $ha\eta_4.na \sim na$ is not possible, nor is $am_2.t^hu_4 \sim t^hu_4$ for ‘yellow’.

Khiamniungan shows a feature on ABB reduplicated forms that differs from many of the languages previously investigated for this construction. Namely, reduplication of the modifier morpheme often lessens the intensity of the colour term. The bare stem for ‘red’ $hi\eta_4$ is given in (2) along with the lexically specified modifier liu_2 , which has no meaning on its own, along with the attributive marker ko_0 . Here the modifier acts as an intensifier.

- (2) $hi\eta_4 liu_2$
 red MOD
 ‘deeply red’

The same modifier which acts as an intensifier in (2) de-intensifies the meaning when occurring in the constructions seen in (3).

- (3) $hi\eta_4 liu_2 \sim liu_2$
 red MOD~RED
 ‘pink’

The same pattern occurs with ‘black’, for which multiple modifiers are attested. In each, the use of the single modifier intensifies the blackness, but when reduplicated, the intensity is lessened. In (4) and (5) the modifier $t^hi\eta_3$ changes the stem to mean ‘blackish’ or ‘not fully black’, but referring specifically to black as a colour.⁵

- (4) $na?_5 t^hi\eta_3$
 black MOD
 ‘deeply black’ (colour)

- (5) $na?_5 t^hi\eta_3 \sim t^hi\eta_3$
 black MOD~RED
 ‘blackish’

In (6) and (7) the concept of ‘black’ still refers to colour, but with the modifier $tjik_5$ the meaning is darker than $na?_5.t^hi\eta_3$ in (3). The term $na?_5.tjik_5$ would be used to refer to charcoal, or when commenting on one’s complexion being particularly dark.

5. Superscript H represents a high pitch target. Where used here, it represents morphemes for which the underlying toneme is not certain.

- (6) $naʔ_5 \text{ jik}_5$
 black MOD
 ‘deeply black’ (colour)
- (7) $naʔ_5 \text{ tfik}_5 \sim \text{tfik}_5$
 black MOD~RED
 ‘blackish’

A third modifier k^him_3 is also attested for ‘black’ referring not to colour but darkness. As $naʔ_5 \cdot k^him_3$ in (8) and (9) this would refer to the darkness of clouds before a heavy rain, or the darkness of the sky.

- (8) $naʔ_5 \text{ k}^him_3$
 black MOD
 ‘fully devoid of light’
- (9) $naʔ_5 \text{ k}^him_3 \sim \text{k}^him_3$
 black MOD~RED
 ‘dark of dusk’

This hints at one of the difficulties of colour term elicitation cross linguistically; the universality of foci such as the sky or clouds having a colour rather than lightness values is not guaranteed. Thus $naʔ_5 \cdot k^him_3$ is explicitly not about colour, but rather the amount of light.

Syntactically these types of phrases are used adjectivally, requiring an attributive marker $-ko_0$. This is a different strategy of nominalisation than the typical a_0 -nominalising prefix found throughout Patkaian and languages of the region more generally. In a sentence, such constructions occur as seen in (10) and (11).

- (10) $t^hiŋ_1 \cdot mia_3 \cdot k^hau_4 \text{ } naʔ_5 \text{ } k^hao_3 \sim k^hao_3 \text{ } -ko_0 \text{ } piŋ_2 \text{ } -tʃi_2$
 cloud black MOD~RED ATT spread PRES
 ‘The dark clouds are spreading’
- (11) $t^hiŋ_1 \cdot mia_3 \cdot k^hau_4 \text{ } naʔ_5 \text{ } k^hao_3 \text{ } -ko_0 \text{ } piŋ_2 \text{ } -tʃi_2$
 cloud black MOD ATT spread- PRES
 ‘The very dark clouds are spreading’

Modifier phrases cannot have reduplication if acting as a simple adjective in a noun phrase with nominaliser a_0 -. The constructions are still possible with the modifier, but without reduplication. Instead, attributiviser $-ko_0$ would be necessary. Examples with nominaliser a_0 - are shown in Examples (12) through (15), where reduplication is marked as ungrammatical.

- (12) tam₄ a₀-naʔ₅ k^hao₃ no₄ ...
 building NMLZ-black MOD DET
 ‘the blue building...’
- (13) * tam₄ a₀-naʔ₅ k^hao₃~k^hao₃ no₄ ...
 building NMLZ-black MOD~RED DET
 intended: ‘the blue building...’
- (14) tam₄ a₀-naʔ₅ k^hao₃ suŋ₂
 building NMLZ-black MOD big
 ‘the blue building is big’
- (15) * tam₄ a₀-naʔ₅ k^hao₃~k^hao₃ suŋ₂
 building NMLZ-black MOD~RED big
 intended: ‘the blue building is big’

Reduplication is also not possible in comparative statements. In Example (16), the sentence was elicited to mean that ‘the light blue building is bigger than the dark blue building’ to determine if such a reduplicative construction could occur. Instead, the attention is placed on the darker house described as ‘not bigger’.

- (16) t^ha₄.tu₄ tsə₀-naʔ₅-k^hao₃ kuŋ₄ suŋ₂-t^hu₄
 very NEG-black-MOD NEG.AGR big-CMPR
 ‘the light blue [building] is bigger than the dark blue [building]’

The reason use of nominaliser *a₀-* is not possible is that the presence of this prefix on a stative verb immediately following a noun results in the formation of a noun phrase. In such phrases, the verb stem takes on an adjectival role. The example in (17) is a complete utterance, while (18) is a noun phrase and not a complete utterance.

- (17) tam₄ suŋ₂
 building big
 ‘the building is big’
- (18) tam₄ a₀-suŋ₂
 building NMLZ-big
 ‘the big building...’

Returning to the basic colour terms, as is typical in languages of the region, ‘blue’ is typically a less basic term in Tibeto-Burman languages than other basic colour concepts, in line with the findings of Berlin and Kay (1969). In northern Khamniungan, it is a modified form of ‘black’, *naʔ₅.k^hao₃*, following the same stem-modifier pattern otherwise described here. It is also the only disyllabic colour term which shows reduplication of the second stem, the remaining disyllabic

colour terms being derived from other nouns and therefore not basic. ‘Blue’ terms are shown in (19) through (21), again showing the same pattern as other ‘black’ terms as well as ‘red’ terms where reduplication of the modifier lessens the intensity. The de-intensifying effect of reduplication is an otherwise as-yet undescribed function in the literature on Northeast Indian ABB modifier constructions.

- (19) $naʔ_5 \quad k^h ao_3$
 black MOD
 ‘blue’
- (20) $naʔ_5 \quad k^h ao_3$
 black MOD
 ‘deep blue’
- (21) $naʔ_5 \quad k^h ao_3 \sim k^h ao_3$
 black MOD~RED
 ‘light blue’

The semantics of modifier $k^h ao_3$ are unclear. Superficially it resembles ‘smoke’ $k^h auʔ_4$, a common origin for ‘blue’ words in the Northeast, but without the expected glottal stop and a different tone.⁶

The de-intensifying effects of reduplication are not limited to colour terms. In (22) and (23), the same is shown to occur for ‘heavy’ $leʔ_3$.

- (22) $leʔ_3 \quad t^h aŋ_3$
 heavy MOD
 ‘very heavy’
- (23) $leʔ_3 \quad t^h aŋ_3 \sim t^h aŋ_3$
 heavy MOD~RED
 ‘not so heavy’

The same can be shown for ‘hard’ $tʃo_3$ as in (24) and (25). Both with and without the modifier, $tʃo_3$ is also able to mean ‘rough’, a case of a common semantic overlap of ABB modifiers.

- (24) $tʃoʔ_3 \quad t^h e_3$
 hard MOD
 ‘very hard’

6. The tone change from the 22: contour of tone 4 to the 52: contour of tone 3 could be explained through assimilation to the rising contour of tone 5, and the glottal stop may simply have been lost, except that the tone in the reduplicated form is still the falling contour of tone 3. The ‘smoke’ morpheme $k^h auʔ_4$ also occurs in $t^h iŋ_1.mia_3.k^h aoʔ_4$, a term for cloud, rather than the tone 3 morpheme used in ‘blue’.

- (25) tʃoʔ₃ t^he₃~t^he₃
 hard MOD~RED
 ‘not so hard’

Additionally, in a different syntactic context, the attributive instead functions as a manner or adverbial marker, resulting in the meaning ‘tenderly’ instead.

The potential for overlap of modifiers for certain stems has been pointed out previously in the literature, including the use of common modifiers for ‘hard’ and ‘rough’ in Tangsa-Nocte (van Dam 2018). In northern Khamniungan, rather than just sharing modifiers, the terms display colexification; ‘hard’ is also used to mean ‘rough’, and ‘smooth’ is likewise used for ‘soft’.

5. False ABB candidates

In certain cases, patterns occur in Khamniungan which appear similar to the ABB construction, but with additional morphological features. For example, (26) gives an example where the colour term is nominalised, something which has previously been said is not possible in the ABB pattern.

- (26) a₀-hiŋ₄ lao₂~lao₂
 NMLZ-red MOD~RED
 ‘speckled red’

This particular modifier, *lao₂~lao₂*, also applies to multiple different colour terms, which is again unexpected. In (27) it is on ‘red’ but could also apply to other colours such as ‘white’ in (28). Additionally, in the reduplicated form, it is able to take the attributive marker *-ko₀* in (28).

- (27) a₀-t^hai₄ lao₂~lao₂
 NMLZ-white speckle~RED
 ‘speckled white’
- (28) a₀-t^hai₄ lao₂~lao₂ ko₀
 NMLZ-white speckle~RED ATT
 ‘speckled white’

However, this is complicated by the added difficulty in analysing the meanings in context. In (29) and (30) two terms for ‘spotting’ are given in different contexts.

- (29) me₄.lo₃.t^hu₄ n₀.taʔ [k^ha₃-nai a₀-hiŋ₄] [pik₃.tsoʔ₄ pik₃.tsoʔ₄ ko₀ suŋ₅]
 boy COMP face-LOC NMLZ-red spotting RED ATT to.be
 ta₂=m₄
 have-REAL
 ‘red spots (viral pox) are on the boy’s face’

Here it would first appear that ‘spotting’ *pik.tso’~pik.tso’-ko* is modifying ‘red’ *a-hing*. Instead it may be interpreted as an adverbial modifier of *sung* ‘to be’, as indicated by the brackets. This analysis is not without valid criticisms. Take for example the sentence in (30), where the same analysis would require that the adverbial spotting somehow refers to the act of buying.

- (30) ŋo₃ p^haʔ₄.kut₄ no₄ a₀-hiŋ₄ lao₂~lao₂ ko₀ tfoʔ₃ ta₂=m₄
 1SG shirt DET NMLZ-red spotting~RED ATT buy have-REAL
 ‘I bought a shirt with white spots’

A number of verbs including *suŋ₅* ‘to be’, *tfoʔ₃* ‘to buy’ and *noi₃* ‘to sit’ form similar constructions with *tai*, the underlying verb in *ta=m* meaning ‘to have’.⁷ It may be a feature of such constructions that result in the unexpected pattern of reduplication. Regardless of the exact explanation, *lao₂* can not be analysed as belonging to the ABB pattern, as is also evidenced by (29) where reduplication is on a disyllabic *piktso’*, thus more closely resembling the present progressive or habitual V~V-*ko₀* construction. At any rate one cannot nominalise proper ABB constructions. For example, the stem *naʔ₅* cannot be nominalised *naʔ₅.k^hao₃* when occurring in the reduplicative pattern.

Compare the spotting examples to other modified terms which cannot reduplicate, such as in (20) but with ‘blue’, a modified version of ‘black’ which can take reduplication of the modifier as discussed above. The reason for this is that *lao₂~lao₂* here is not functioning as a modifier in an ABB pattern, but is rather a verb on its own, referring to the action of spotting. The ungrammaticality of the construction in (29) also applies to other modified stems, not only ‘blue’.

7. The bare form of the verb ‘to have’ is *tai₂* in Wolam, with the realis marker =*an* assimilating to a bilabial due to the now-lost /u/ vowel on the stem, retained in Thang Ngio as *taiu₂*. This assimilation indicates that Wolam Ngio lost the /u/ which is common in Thang, rather than Thang innovating it. As another example, ‘thank you’ between Thang, Wolam and Kingphu is *t^haiu₄.mei₃ sai₂*, *t^hai₄.mi₃ hai₂*, and *thai₄.mi₃ sei₂* respectively, the latter two having lost the /u/ from many stems. This can be clearly established as a loss due to the shift to a bilabial coda in Wolam prior to loss of /u/.

- (31) * a₀-na₅ k^hao₃~k^hao₃
 NMLZ-black MOD~RED

The permissibility of the patterns in (19)–(21) is also seen elsewhere. Previously in (1) the modifier *lap* ‘flash’ was appended to ‘white’ to mean glistening white, reproduced here in (32). Here it is strictly an ABB construction as defined above. However, as in (33) it can also occur both with the nominaliser as well as the attributive *ko₀*.

- (32) * t^hai₄ lap₂~lap₂
 white flash~RED
 intended: ‘glistening white’

- (33) a₀-t^hai₄ lap₂~lap₂
 NMLZ-white flash~RED
 ‘glistening white’

The reason this is not possible in (32) is that the construction would function as an ABB phrase, where *lap₂* would be a reduplicated modifier and the verbal stem would translate as ‘being bright’, but *lap₂* cannot function as a modifier in Wolam despite being such in other Patkaian languages which have the ABB modifier construction. Modifiers are generally a closed class, lexically specified by the stems to which they can attach. In (33), *lap₂* instead acts as the primary verb stem, reduplicated as part of the aforementioned habitual or progressive V~V-*ko₀* construction. This construction is a common way of conveying that an action is ongoing or habitual in Khamniungan. Were it grammatical, (32) would act as an adjective, whereas (33) is verbal, or in the case of sentences such as (29) and (30) adverbially modifying another primary verb.

Example (33) helps with the resolution of (29) and (30) with semantics that are clearer for English glossing purposes. Example (34) shows *lap₂* ‘flash’ functioning adverbially and without a colour term to modify. Here there can be no question that the target is *hao₄* ‘to flow’. In (35), the addition of a colour term renders the sentence ungrammatical.

- (34) hai₄.mon₄ lap₂~lap₂ ko₀ hao₄-tʃi₂
 river flash~RED ATT flow-PRES
 ‘the river flows glisteningly’
- (35) * hai₄.mon₄ a₀-t^hai₄ lap₂~lap₂ ko₀ hao₄-tʃi₂
 river NMLZ-white flash~RED ATT flow-PRES
 ‘the river flows with glistening whiteness’

Finally, another construction occurs in Khamniungan which presents an atypical case of reduplication that is likewise not part of the ABB pattern, but still refers to adjectival forms. The reduplicated construction is shown in (36).

(36) $hi\eta_4 \sim hi\eta_4 \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 red~RED like ATT
 'redlike'

(37) $*hi\eta_4 \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 red like ATT
 'redlike'

(38) $a_0-hi\eta_4 \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 NMLZ-red like ATT
 'redlike'

Importantly, this construction requires reduplication with the stem 'red' $hi\eta_4$ when the nominaliser is not present. The example in (37) is ungrammatical, while (38) where reduplication is absent but the nominalising prefix a_0- is present is fine.

Surprisingly perhaps, the same pattern does not work when reduplicated for other basic colour terms. In (39) through (41), other colour term stems are given where the only grammatical forms involve the presence of the nominaliser prefix, but no reduplication.

(39) $a_0-\eta a_2^? \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 NMLZ-black like ATT
 'blacklike'

(40) $a_0-t^h ai_4 \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 NMLZ-white like ATT
 'whitelike'

(41) $a_0-ha\eta_4 \eta a \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 NMLZ-green like ATT
 'greenlike'

Compare the ungrammatical forms in (42) and (43) which mirror (36) but are not grammatically acceptable.

(42) $*\eta a_2^? \sim \eta a_2^? \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 black~RED like ATT
 intended: 'blacklike'

(43) $*ha\eta_4 \eta a \sim ha\eta_4 \eta a \quad \text{fin}_4 \quad ko_0$
 green~RED like ATT
 intended: 'greenlike'

Why ‘red’ can include reduplication as in (34) for this construction is uncertain, and unfortunately at the present time no explanation can be given.

6. Sample word list

Table 1 provides a few examples of terms which fit the ABB pattern between Wolam and Thang dialects, some of them given above. For each term given, they can occur as either ABB or AB pattern, where the form with reduplication of the second morpheme has a de-intensified meaning. Furthermore, in most cases the head (A) of each form is able to function on its own as a basic verb, or productively compound with other stems. Some forms are less common, for example the reduplicated form of ‘soft’ *he₄.jan₄* is less commonly used than that without reduplication, but is still grammatically correct. Standard Thang dialect Khamniungan forms are given where they differ from Wolam Ngio. Thang forms with an arrow are phonemically identical to the Wolam form. A handful of terms in the table above do not have Thang counterparts. One is ‘blue’ *naʔ₅.k^hao₃* for which Thang instead has *t^han₄*, and the other is for ‘black’ *naʔ₅.tʃik₅* which is not used in Thang. ‘Soft’ *he₄.jan₄* also does not occur in Thang Ngio, *ʃe₄.t^hup₄* being used instead. All other forms are cognate between varieties.

Table 1. Selected terms in Wolam and Thang dialects

Wolam	Thang	gloss	Wolam	Thang	gloss
<i>he₄.jan₄</i>	<i>(ʃe₄.t^hup₄)</i>	‘soft’	<i>naʔ₅.k^hao₃</i>	<i>(t^han₄)</i>	‘blue’
<i>he₄.tik₅</i>	<i>he₄.tʃek₅</i>	‘acrid’	<i>naʔ₅.k^him₃</i>	<i>naʔ₅.k^hem₃</i>	‘black’
<i>im₄.tan₃</i>	<i>hem₄.tan₃</i>	‘scentless’	<i>naʔ₅.tʃ^hin₃</i>	←	‘black’
<i>hin₄.liu₂</i>	<i>ʃen₄.liu₂</i>	‘red’	<i>naʔ₅.tʃik₅</i>		‘black’
<i>ku₄.hak₅</i>	<i>kou₄.sak₅</i>	‘bitter’	<i>tan₄.hip₄</i>	<i>tan₄.ʃep₄</i>	‘cold (weather)’
<i>leʔ₃.t^han₃</i>	<i>leʔ₃.tsan₃</i>	‘heavy’	<i>tsu₄.man₄</i>	←	‘tickly’
<i>tʃoʔ₃.t^he₃</i>	<i>tsoʔ₃.tʃ^he₃</i>	‘hard, rough’	<i>nai₂.nik₅</i>	<i>nai₂.nek₅</i>	‘silly’
<i>mon₄.ʃi₄</i>	←	‘round’	<i>li₂.tip₅</i>	<i>li₂.tsep₅</i>	‘Mute’

‘Mute’ *li₂.tip₅* is a slight exception to the pattern as *li₂* no longer has a verbal function in Wolam, and instead means ‘tongue’, despite originally have verbal semantics in Tibeto-Burman for ‘lick’.

7. Conclusion

The primarily ABB pattern described above is largely consistent with that of other Patkaian languages as described in the literature (van Dam 2018, 2020) in that reduplicated modifiers attach to a stative verb which would normally be nominalised with a prefix to function as an adjective or nominal predicate, as in Tangsa-Nocte. What's more, the modifiers are lexically specified and cover a wide range of functions beyond straightforward intensification.

In Tangsa-Nocte (van Dam 2020), the presence or absence of reduplication on the modifier is governed by metrical patterns in the sentence, but does not change the meaning. In Khamniungan, the meaning changes, and reduplication results in a less intense form of the non-reduplicated meaning. Additionally, the more intense form will typically have the attributive marker *-ko* when intensified. Thus, *naʔ₅.k^hao₃* is 'blue' where *k^hao₃* is a reduplicatable modifier of *naʔ₅* 'black'. When reduplicating the modifier as *naʔ₅.k^hao₃~k^hao₃*, it means a lighter less intense blue. Adding the attributive without reduplication, thus *naʔ₅.k^hao₃*, the meaning is an intensely deep blue.

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Abbreviations

ATT	attributiviser
CMP	comparative marker
ECHO	echo formation, partial reduplication of previous morpheme
INT	intensifier
MOD	modifier without intensifying function
REAL	realis
RED	full reduplication of previous morpheme

Other abbreviations follow standard Leipzig glossing.

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