

## The World View of Zhuang People as Reflected in Proverbs

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เกี่ยวกับสุภาษิตจ้วงซึ่งสะท้อนโลกทัศน์ของชาวจ้วงที่อาศัยอยู่ในประเทศจีน สุภาษิตจ้วงสามารถแบ่งออกได้เป็น 5 แบบโดยใช้เกณฑ์เนื้อหาความคิดที่สะท้อนอยู่ในสุภาษิตจ้วง ได้แก่ สุภาษิตที่แสดงเหตุผลในการมีชีวิตอยู่ สุภาษิตที่สอนชาวจ้วงว่าควรประพฤติตัวอย่างใดในสังคม สุภาษิตที่แสดงการดิ้นรนของชนชั้น สุภาษิตที่ถ่ายทอดประสบการณ์ในการผลิต และสุภาษิตที่พยากรณ์อากาศ ทางด้านไวยากรณ์ สุภาษิตจ้วงแบ่งออกได้เป็น 2 รูปแบบ ได้แก่ แบบเดี่ยวและแบบประสม สุภาษิตที่มีไวยากรณ์แบบเดี่ยวประกอบด้วยภาคแสดงเพียงหนึ่งเดียว ส่วนสุภาษิตที่มีไวยากรณ์แบบประสมประกอบด้วยอนุพากย์ 2 อนุพากย์ซึ่งมีความสัมพันธ์ทางความหมาย 2 ประการ คือ การเชื่อมความ หรือการเป็นเงื่อนไข การสัมผัสเป็นรูปแบบทางเสียงซึ่งเป็นลักษณะเฉพาะของสุภาษิตจ้วง ประกอบด้วยการสัมผัสภายในและการสัมผัสตอนท้าย

### Abstract

This paper describes Zhuang proverbs which reflect the world view of Zhuang people residing in China. In terms of ideological content reflected by them, Zhuang proverbs are categorized into five types. They are proverbs bringing to light reasons for living; proverbs teaching Zhuang people how to behave in society; proverbs depicting class struggle; proverbs passing on production experience; and proverbs forecasting weather. Syntactically, Zhuang proverbs are classified into two patterns, simple and compound. The former has a single predicate whereas the latter is composed of two clauses which are semantically related in two ways, namely, coordinative or conditional. Rhyming is the phonological pattern which is typical of Zhuang proverbs. There are two rhyming patterns, internal rhyming and ending rhyming.

## 1. Introduction

This paper presents the world view of Zhuang people as reflected in the proverbs of the Zhuang people in China.<sup>1</sup> The Zhuang is the largest of all the ethnic minority groups in China, with a population of 17 million as of 2001. The Zhuang people are found mainly in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and in Wenshan Zhuang-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. In addition, some Zhuang are scattered throughout Lianshan Zhuang-Yao Autonomous County in Guangdong Province, Qiandongnan Miao-Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou Province, Jianhua Yao Autonomous County in Hunan Province, the southern part of Guizhou and the northern part of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Qin 1995). Zhuang language belongs to the Tai language group of the Tai-Kadai language family.<sup>2</sup> It is divided into two main varieties, the northern variety and the southern variety. This paper describes proverbs of the northern variety of the Zhuang language.

## 2. Methodology

A proverb is defined as “a popular short saying, with words of advice or warning” (Hornby 1974:684). Proverbs usually reflect the world view of people. They portray the way people view themselves in relation to their environments.

As Zhuang proverbs are similar to Zhuang idioms, the first step is to distinguish Zhuang proverbs from Zhuang idioms by using the definition above and identifying their syntactic structure. That is, Zhuang idioms are a single word group which is typically made up of nouns, verbs or adjectives while Zhuang proverbs contain more than two compound sentences or clauses, most of which are coordinate. Rhyming is a common feature of Zhuang proverbs whereas this feature is not typical of Zhuang idioms. A contrastive pattern of Zhuang idioms and Zhuang proverbs is exemplified in table 1.

Table 1. A Contrastive Pattern of the Zhuang Idiom and the Zhuang Proverb

ZHUANG PROVERB	ZHUANG IDIOM
[me:u <sup>42</sup> la:u <sup>33</sup> li <sup>55</sup> tok <sup>55</sup> yin <sup>42</sup> ]	[ma <sup>33</sup> kan <sup>55</sup> ]
<i>meuz laux lij doek ringj</i> ,	<i>max gaenj</i>
cat old also fall kitchen cupboard	horse rapid
[tu <sup>42</sup> lin <sup>42</sup> li <sup>55</sup> tok <sup>55</sup> ta:t <sup>44</sup> ]	[ʔbou <sup>55</sup> ʔdaɣ <sup>55</sup> hau <sup>55</sup> θin <sup>42</sup> ]
<i>duzlingz lij doek dat</i> .	<i>mbouj ndaej haeuj singz</i>
monkey also fall cliff	not can enter city
‘Even the wise are not always free from error.’	‘More haste, less speed’

The Zhuang proverb has two compound clauses which are coordinative without an overt conjunction. The last word of the first clause, i.e., [yin<sup>42</sup>] *ringj* ‘kitchen cupboard’ rhymes with the second syllable of the first word of the second clause, i.e., [(tu<sup>42</sup>)lin<sup>42</sup>] (*duz*)lingz ‘monkey’. This proverb encourages Zhuang people not to be defeated by failures. The Zhuang idiom has two clauses which have

concessive relation. These two clauses are condensed into a succession of words whose meaning is not obtained through knowledge of the individual meanings of the constituent words but through interpretation of them as a whole.

The next step is data compilation. The Zhuang data were drawn from the second author, a native speaker of the Zhuang vernacular of Hawyiengz, Mashan county, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The data were checked with other native speakers in the same area. The next step is to transcribe the compiled Zhuang proverbs in phonetic symbols and Zhuang romanization<sup>3</sup>. The word by word gloss is based on *Northern Zhuang-Chinese-English Dictionary* (Burusphat and Qin 2006) compiled by the authors.

This study approaches Zhuang proverb formation from a synchronic perspective. It is claimed that the world view of Zhuang people is reflected in proverbs which have a typical syntactic structure. Therefore, the following step is to extract the world view of the Zhuang people as depicted in the proverbs. The final step is to analyze the syntactic structure of Zhuang proverbs by using the structuralist approach “which views the grammar of a language primarily as a system of relations” (Trask 1993:262). Then the rhyming pattern is characterized.

### 3. World view

Zhuang proverbs reflect the world view of Zhuang people. They feature the opinions, attitudes, thoughts or observations on way of life and society of the Zhuang people. Zhuang proverbs, popular among Zhuang people, consist of fixed sentences with profound implications. In general, they can bring to light objective reasons and play a great educative role in the lives of Zhuang people as exemplified in example (1).

- (1) [te:ŋ<sup>24</sup>    pai<sup>42</sup>    ɬa:t<sup>44</sup>]  
*Deng    baez    cat,*  
suffer   once   be fooled
- [ha:k<sup>21</sup>    ʔba:t<sup>44</sup>    kva:i<sup>24</sup>]  
*Hag    mbat    gvai*  
learn   once   wise  
‘A fall into the pit, a gain in your wit.’

Zhuang people have created many rich and varied proverbs in their long history. In terms of ideological content, these proverbs can be categorized into the following five types:

#### 3.1 Bringing to light reasons for living

The proverbs of this type teach Zhuang people how to have a quality of life as well as encourage Zhuang people when they fail, as seen in examples (2)-(3).

- (2) [pe:n<sup>42</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> pa:u<sup>21</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> ŋau<sup>42</sup>]  
*Benj mbouj bauh mbouj ŋgaeuz,*  
 board not plane not smooth
- [fai<sup>33</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> lat<sup>55</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> θo<sup>21</sup>]  
*Faex mbouj laet mbouj soh.*  
 log not whittle not straight  
 'If a person is not educated, he will not be useful.'

- (3) [pou<sup>33</sup> pa:ŋ<sup>24</sup> pou<sup>33</sup> ɸi<sup>55</sup> ʔa:k<sup>44</sup>]  
*Boux bang boux cij ak,*  
 person help person just strong
- [pou<sup>33</sup> ha:ŋ<sup>32</sup> pou<sup>33</sup> ɸan<sup>21</sup> ji:k<sup>21</sup>]  
*Boux hangz boux caenh yieg.*  
 person bully person just weak  
 'There is unity in strength.'

### 3.2 How to behave in Zhuang society

This type of proverb teaches Zhuang people how to conduct themselves in society as exemplified in examples (4)-(7).

- (4) [kva<sup>44</sup> ki:u<sup>42</sup> kai<sup>55</sup> vut<sup>55</sup> tuŋ<sup>33</sup>]  
*Gvaq giuz gaej vut dwngx,*  
 pass bridge do not throw walking stick
- [kva<sup>44</sup> tuŋ<sup>55</sup> kai<sup>55</sup> lum<sup>42</sup> θo<sup>24</sup>]  
*Gvaq dwngj gaej lumz so.*  
 pass ridge do not forget spade  
 'When you drink the water, think of those who dug the well.'
- (5) [ʔi<sup>55</sup> ʔau<sup>24</sup> vun<sup>42</sup> ʔoŋ<sup>42</sup> ʔam<sup>33</sup>]  
*Ij aeu vunz roengz raemx,*  
 want make person go down water
- [po:n<sup>55</sup> fan<sup>21</sup> θi:n<sup>24</sup> tu:t<sup>44</sup> ha:i<sup>42</sup>]  
*Bonjfaenh sien duet haiz.*  
 oneself first take off shoes  
 'Set an example.'

- (6) [ma<sup>24</sup> pjo:m<sup>24</sup> nin<sup>42</sup> kɯn<sup>42</sup> ɕa<sup>21</sup>]  
*Ma byom ninz gwnz cah,*  
 dog thin sleep up thorn thicket
- [ma:i<sup>21</sup> ŋa<sup>21</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>55</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> kɯn<sup>24</sup>]  
*Maih ngah cungj mbouj gwn.*  
 even if hungry also not eat  
 ‘Die rather than accept a handout.’
- (7) [pou<sup>33</sup> kan<sup>33</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> la:u<sup>24</sup> nit<sup>55</sup>]  
*Boux gaenx mbouj lau nit,*  
 person diligent not fear cold
- [pou<sup>33</sup> kik<sup>55</sup> ɕi<sup>33</sup> la:u<sup>24</sup> fuɯn<sup>24</sup>]  
*Boux gik cixl au fwn.*  
 person sluggard must fear rain  
 ‘The sluggard fears fatigue, and the diligent braves hardship.’

### 3.3 Depicting class struggle

As mentioned earlier, Zhuang is an ethnic minority group in China. In ancient times, Zhuang people inhabited a large area of South China as reported in ancient Han Chinese history books. Later, they were conquered by the Han. In spite of official Chinese policy which favors the languages and cultures of ethnic minority groups, there is a class discrimination against the conquered population (Burusphat and Zhou 2000) as reflected in the Zhuang proverbs below.

- (8) [vun<sup>42</sup> fou<sup>42</sup> θim<sup>24</sup> ja:k<sup>44</sup>]  
*Vunz fouz sim yak,*  
 people rich heart fierce
- [vun<sup>42</sup> ho<sup>55</sup> θim<sup>24</sup> θo<sup>21</sup>]  
*Vunz hoj sim soh.*  
 people poor heart straight  
 ‘The rich are evil, and the poor are kind.’
- (9) [ku:n<sup>24</sup> yi:u<sup>24</sup> toŋ<sup>42</sup> θiŋ<sup>24</sup>]  
*Guen riu doengz sing,*  
 official laugh same sound
- [mi:n<sup>42</sup> tai<sup>55</sup> toŋ<sup>42</sup> pa:k<sup>24</sup>]  
*Minz daej doengz bak.*  
 common people cry same mouth

‘Bureaucrats shield one another, and common people stand together through thick and thin.’

- (10) [kai<sup>55</sup> ɕau<sup>44</sup> kuk<sup>55</sup> ɕam<sup>21</sup> nin<sup>42</sup>]  
*Gaej caeuq guk caemh ninz,*  
do not with tiger together sleep

[kai<sup>55</sup> ɕau<sup>44</sup> liŋ<sup>42</sup> ɕam<sup>21</sup> ʔo:ŋ<sup>42</sup>]  
*Gaej caeuq lingz caemh rongz.*  
do not with monkey together cage

‘Draw a distinction between your friends and your enemies.’

### 3.4 Passing on production experience

Indigenous knowledge and folk wisdom have been transferred to the younger generation through such proverbs as shown in (11)-(12).

- (11) [taŋ<sup>42</sup> pe:k<sup>21</sup>lo<sup>21</sup> ɕau<sup>24</sup>fan<sup>24</sup>]  
*Daengz begloh caeufaen,*  
up to White Dew(15<sup>th</sup> solar term) Autumnal Equinox(16<sup>th</sup> solar term)

[ko<sup>24</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> pan<sup>42</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>55</sup> ʔo:k<sup>44</sup>]  
*Go mbouj baenz cungj ok.*  
rice plant not grow also out

‘Paddy must form ears by White Dew and Autumnal Equinox.’

- (12) [ʔdam<sup>24</sup> na<sup>42</sup> kva<sup>44</sup> ha<sup>44</sup>ɕi<sup>33</sup>]  
*Ndaem naz gvaq haqci,*  
plant field pass Summer Solstice (10<sup>th</sup> solar term)

[ta<sup>33</sup> ɕei<sup>44</sup> ʔdai<sup>55</sup> ʔde:u<sup>24</sup>]  
*Dax seiq ndaej ndeu.*  
plant four gain one

‘If you plant crops after the Summer Solstice, you will harvest only one-fourth the field.’

### 3.5 Weather forecast

Zhuang people mainly engage in rice cultivation so seasonal changes play an important role in Zhuang agricultural culture. They associated weather changes with natural surroundings and summed up weather patterns as in the proverbs (13)-(18).

- (13) [pi:ŋ<sup>42</sup> pei<sup>21</sup> ku<sup>21</sup> hau<sup>24</sup>]  
*Bienghbeih guh haw,*  
 dragonfly do fair
- [fuŋ<sup>24</sup> ɕou<sup>21</sup> ʔi<sup>55</sup> tau<sup>55</sup>]  
*Fwn couh ij daeuj.*  
 rain once will come  
 ‘Dragonflies gathering is a sign of coming rain.’
- (14) [fu<sup>55</sup> pan<sup>42</sup> kjap<sup>55</sup> pja<sup>24</sup> lei<sup>33</sup>]  
*Fwj baenz gyaep byaleix,*  
 cloud become scale carp
- [ʔbuŋ<sup>24</sup> ʔdei<sup>24</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> mi<sup>42</sup> fuŋ<sup>24</sup>]  
*Mbwn ndei mbouj miz fwn.*  
 sky fine not have rain  
 ‘Carp scale-shaped clouds are a sign of a fine day coming.’
- (15) [hat<sup>55</sup> mi<sup>42</sup> mo<sup>55</sup> lo<sup>33</sup> ŋon<sup>42</sup> te<sup>24</sup> ʔdit<sup>55</sup>]  
*haet miz mojlox ngoenz de ndit.*  
 morning have fog day that sunshine  
 ‘A foggy morning is a sign of a sunny day.’
- (16) [muŋ<sup>42</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>44</sup> fuŋ<sup>24</sup> tok<sup>55</sup> ɣam<sup>33</sup> tum<sup>42</sup> ɣuŋ<sup>21</sup>]  
*Muengzcuŋq fwn doek raemx dumh rungh,*  
 planting season (9<sup>th</sup> solar term) rain fall water flood valley
- [muŋ<sup>42</sup> ɕuŋ<sup>44</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> fuŋ<sup>24</sup> fei<sup>42</sup> ɕom<sup>21</sup> ɣuŋ<sup>21</sup>]  
*Muengzcuŋq mbouj fwn feiz coemh rungh.*  
 planting season no rain fire burn valley  
 ‘When it rains in the planting season, some places are in flood;  
 when it does not rain in the planting season, some places are in drought.’
- (17) [ɣok<sup>21</sup> ka<sup>24</sup> kvaŋ<sup>42</sup>]  
*Roegga gvaengz,*  
 crow gather
- [jak<sup>55</sup> taŋ<sup>42</sup> nit<sup>55</sup>]  
*Yaek daengz nit.*  
 will arrive cold  
 ‘Crows gathering is a sign of coming cold.’

- (18) [yan<sup>24</sup> tu<sup>42</sup> me:u<sup>42</sup> kat<sup>55</sup> yum<sup>24</sup>]  
*Raen duzmeuz gaet rum,*  
 see cat gnaw stone mortar
- [θei<sup>42</sup> te:m<sup>24</sup> fiun<sup>24</sup> ɕou<sup>21</sup> tau<sup>55</sup>]  
*Seizdem fwn couh daeuj.*  
 a moment rain will come  
 ‘Cats gnawing a stone mortar is a sign of coming cold.’

#### 4. Syntactic pattern

Based on their internal structure, Zhuang proverbs are syntactically classified into two types, that is, simple pattern and compound pattern.<sup>4</sup>

##### 4.1 Simple pattern

Proverbs with the simple pattern have one predicate. The proverbs which are formed by simple sentences are few. Examples (11) and (19) show single-predicate proverbs.

- (19) [lok<sup>21</sup> ni:t<sup>21</sup> lok<sup>21</sup>]  
*Loeg nyied loeg,*  
 six month six
- [lɯk<sup>21</sup> ta:u<sup>42</sup> tok<sup>55</sup> la<sup>55</sup> ko<sup>24</sup>]  
*Lwgdauz doek laj go.*  
 peach fall down peach tree  
 ‘Peaches must fall in June.’  
 (Weather Forecast)

##### 4.2 Compound pattern

Zhuang proverbs are mainly in the form of compound sentences. These compound sentences are composed of two clauses which are semantically related in two ways, namely, coordinative or conditional. Most Zhuang proverbs have coordinative clauses. The two ways of semantic relation are exemplified in examples (20) and (21) respectively.

- (20) [yok<sup>21</sup> ta:m<sup>24</sup> kum<sup>24</sup> ɲa:i<sup>21</sup> ta:i<sup>24</sup>]  
*Roeg dam gwn ngaih dai,*  
 bird greed eat easy die



[vun<sup>42</sup> ta:m<sup>24</sup> ɕa:i<sup>42</sup> ɲa:i<sup>21</sup> miŋ<sup>21</sup>]

*Vunz dam caiz haih mingh.*

mankind greed money lose life

'The person who is greedy for money invites troubles easily.

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(21) [ʔbou<sup>55</sup> la:u<sup>24</sup> nit<sup>55</sup> la:u<sup>24</sup> fɯn<sup>24</sup>]

*Mbouj lau nit lau fwn,*

not fear cold fear rain

[ɕou<sup>21</sup> mi<sup>42</sup> kɯn<sup>24</sup> mi<sup>42</sup> taŋ<sup>55</sup>]

*Couh miz gwn miz daenj.*

just have food have clothes

'If you bear hardships and endure hard work,

you will have ample food and clothing.'

(Bringing to light reasons for living)

Compound sentences usually have parallel structures. In the use of parallel structures a certain word is repeated in a series of parallel structures. The repetition of words may be within the same clause or different clauses. The number of syllables in each clause of a compound sentence is similar or identical ranging from three to five. Five-syllable clauses seem to be typical of Zhuang proverbs. Example (21) illustrates a parallel structure having a reduplicative pattern which is formed by repetition of the word [la:u<sup>24</sup>] *lau* in the first clause and [mi<sup>42</sup>] *miz* in the second clause. The reduplicative pattern in Example (22) is formed by repeating a part of compound sentence within different clauses. The word [ʔbou<sup>55</sup>] *mbouj* in the first clause is repeated in the second clause.

(22) [fɯŋ<sup>42</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> kap<sup>21</sup> kop<sup>55</sup>]

*Fwngz mbouj gaeb goep,*

hand not catch frog

[ʔbou<sup>55</sup> la:u<sup>24</sup> pja<sup>55</sup> ɕe:k<sup>44</sup>]

*Mbouj lau byaj cek.*

not fear thunder strike

'If you never do a deed that troubles your conscience,

you will have no misgivings.'

(Bringing to light reasons for living)

While proverbs containing two clauses are common, four-clause proverbs are also found as seen in example (23).

- (23) [θa:i<sup>55</sup>toŋ<sup>42</sup> jou<sup>44</sup> pa:i<sup>21</sup> θai<sup>24</sup>]  
*Saijdoengz youq baih sae,*  
 rainbow be side west
- [lam<sup>33</sup>θei<sup>42</sup> fɯn<sup>24</sup> ɬou<sup>21</sup> tok<sup>55</sup>]  
*Laemxseiz fwn couh doek,*  
 possible rain will fall
- [θa:i<sup>55</sup>toŋ<sup>42</sup> jou<sup>44</sup> pa:i<sup>21</sup> toŋ<sup>24</sup>]  
*Saijdoengz youq baih doeng,*  
 rainbow be side east
- [kja:ŋ<sup>24</sup>ŋon<sup>42</sup> ɕiŋ<sup>33</sup> ʔdit<sup>55</sup> ʔda:t<sup>44</sup>]  
*Gyangngoengz cingx ndit ndat.*  
 sun fine sunlight hot  
 'If the rainbow arises in the west, it will rain;  
 if the rainbow arises in the east, it will be fine.'  
 (Weather Forecast)

## 5. Phonological pattern

Rhyming is a phonological technique for the creation of Zhuang proverbs. There are two rhyming patterns, that is, internal rhyming and ending rhyming. The former shows the outstanding characteristics of Zhuang rhyming structure.

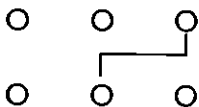
### 5.1 Internal rhyming

Internal rhyming is that the word at the end of the first clause rhymes with the one in the middle of the second clause. The rhyming word of the second clause may be the second or the third word. In rhyming, the final nasals [-m, -n] and [-ŋ] can rhyme with one another, and as can the final stops [-p, -t, -k]. The following examples show a stanza of rhyming patterns varied by the number of words per line.

#### 5.1.1 Three word stanza

The three-word stanza usually has the last word of the first line rhyming with the second word of the second line, as in figure 1. Example (24) shows the three-word stanza rhyming pattern. The word [ɕat<sup>44</sup>] *cat* at the end of the first clause rhymes with [ʔba:t<sup>44</sup>] *mbat* in the middle of the second clause.

Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the three word stanza.

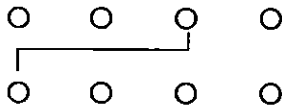


- (24) [te:ŋ<sup>24</sup> pai<sup>42</sup> ɕa:t<sup>44</sup>]  
*Deng baez cat,*  
 suffer once be fooled
- [ha:k<sup>21</sup> ʔba:t<sup>44</sup> kva:i<sup>24</sup>]  
*Hag mbat gvai*  
 learn once wise  
 ‘A fall into the pit, a gain in your wit.’  
 (Bringing to light reasons for living)

#### 5.1.2 Four word stanza

Figure 2 illustrates a four-word stanza rhyming pattern. In example (25) the word [kja<sup>55</sup>] *gyaj* at the end of the first clause rhymes with the second word of the following clause, i.e., [ma<sup>55</sup>] *maj*.

Figure 2. Diagram illustrating the four word stanza.

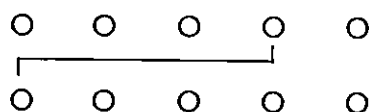


- (25) [hau<sup>33</sup> ʔdei<sup>24</sup> paŋ<sup>21</sup> kja<sup>55</sup>]  
*Haeux ndei baengh gyaj,*  
 rice good rely on seedling
- [lɯk<sup>21</sup> ma<sup>55</sup> paŋ<sup>21</sup> me<sup>21</sup>]  
*Lwg maj baengh meh.*  
 son grow rely on mother  
 ‘Good paddy depends on a strong seedling,  
 A child’s growth depends on an excellent mother.’  
 (Bringing to light reasons for living)

#### 5.1.3 Five word stanza

In this rhyming pattern, the last word of the first clause rhymes with the second (as in figure 3) or the third word of the second clause. In example 26 the last word of the first clause, [ɕa:k<sup>21</sup>] *cag*, rhymes with the second word of the following clause, [ma:k<sup>44</sup>] *mak*.

Figure 3. Diagram illustrating the five word stanza.



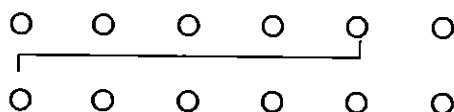
- (26) [ke:u<sup>24</sup> mai<sup>24</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> pan<sup>42</sup> ɕa:k<sup>21</sup>]  
*Geu mae mbouj baenz cag,*  
 piece thread not become rope

[ko<sup>24</sup> ma:k<sup>44</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> pan<sup>42</sup> ʈu:n<sup>24</sup>]  
*Go mak mbouj baenz suen.*  
 single fruit not become garden  
 ‘It is difficult to achieve anything without support.’  
 (Bringing to light reasons for living)

#### 5.1.4 Six word stanza

The rhyming pattern of the six-word stanza dictates the last word of the first clause rhyming with the second word of the second clause. Figure 5 illustrates the six-word stanza in which the last word of the first line rhymes with the second word of the second line. In example (27), the last word of the first clause, [ʔe:u<sup>44</sup>va:ŋ<sup>24</sup>] *euqvang*, rhymes with the second word of the following clause, [taŋ<sup>42</sup>] *daengz*.

Figure 5. Diagram illustrating the six word stanza.



- (27) [ku<sup>21</sup> vun<sup>42</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> ku<sup>21</sup> vun<sup>42</sup> ʔe:u<sup>44</sup>va:ŋ<sup>24</sup>]  
*Guh vunz mbouj guh vunz euqvang,*  
 do people not do people stubborn

[ka:ŋ<sup>55</sup> taŋ<sup>42</sup> pa:k<sup>44</sup> ɕa:n<sup>24</sup> va:ŋ<sup>24</sup> tɯ:ŋ<sup>42</sup>ta:u<sup>21</sup>]  
*Gangj daengz bak cang vang dwengzdauh.*  
 speak till mouth storehouse assert fertilizer house  
 ‘Be honest.’  
 (How to behave in Zhuang society)

## 5.2 Ending rhyming

In ending rhyming, the word at the end of the first clause rhymes with the one at the end of the second clause regardless of the number of words in each clause. Example (28) shows a three word stanza in which the last word of the first line, [kja<sup>24</sup>] *gya*, rhymes with the last word of the second line, [ɣa<sup>44</sup>] *raq*.

- (28) [mot<sup>21</sup> pu:n<sup>24</sup> kja<sup>24</sup>]  
*Moed buen gya,*  
 ant move home
- [mi<sup>42</sup> ftun<sup>24</sup> ɣa<sup>44</sup>]  
*Miz fwn raq*  
 have rain shower  
 ‘Ants moving is a sign of a coming shower.’  
 (Weather forecast)

Examples (29) and (30) exemplify five word stanzas in which the last words of the first lines, i.e., [fei<sup>42</sup>] *feiz* and [me<sup>21</sup>] *meh* rhyme with the last words of the second lines, i.e., [θei<sup>42</sup>] *sei* and [ce<sup>21</sup>] *ceh* respectively.

- (29) [ti<sup>42</sup> ti:t<sup>44</sup> ʔau<sup>24</sup> jau<sup>55</sup> fei<sup>42</sup>]  
*Diz diet aeu yawj feiz,*  
 forge iron need look fire
- [ʔdam<sup>24</sup> na<sup>24</sup> ɕa:u<sup>24</sup> jau<sup>55</sup> θei<sup>42</sup>]  
*Ndaem naz cau yawj seiz.*  
 plant field worry look time  
 ‘In forging iron you must pay attention to temperature control,  
 and in planting crops you must choose the right season.’  
 (Passing on production experience)
- (30) [ŋa<sup>21</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> ka<sup>55</sup> kai<sup>44</sup> me<sup>21</sup>]  
*Ngah mbouj gaj gaeq meh,*  
 hungry not kill chicken female
- [ʔi:k<sup>44</sup> ʔbou<sup>55</sup> ku:n<sup>24</sup> hau<sup>33</sup> ce<sup>21</sup>]  
*Iek mbouj gwn haeu ceh.*  
 hungry not eat rice seed  
 ‘Even if you are very greedy, you don’t kill the hen;  
 even if you are very hungry, you don’t eat rice seeds.’  
 (How to behave in Zhuang society)

## 6. Conclusion

In terms of ideological content reflected by them, Zhuang proverbs are categorized into five types, namely, proverbs bringing to light reasons for living; proverbs teaching Zhuang people how to behave in society; proverbs depicting class struggle; proverbs passing on production experience; and proverbs describing weather patterns. The syntactic patterns of Zhuang proverbs include simple pattern and compound pattern. The simple pattern has one predicate whereas the compound pattern consists of two clauses which are semantically related in two ways, coordinative or conditional. The phonological technique which is typical of Zhuang proverbs is rhyme which is categorized into internal rhyme and ending rhyme.

Proverbs are not limited to Zhuang culture. They are the common aesthetic that pervades all of the Tai languages as stated by Hudak (2008: 406) below:

Proverbs, also common to the Tai languages, incorporate both rhyming and reduplicative techniques to create pleasing sounds. But added to these phonological techniques are parallel structures and similar or identical syllable number per line to create a cohesive and tightly structured unit. While the number of syllables per line varies, five is a fairly common number, probably because Tai phrases tend to fall into phonological and syntactic groups of five syllables. The number of lines per proverb also varies but in a large number of cases two lines predominate with the end syllable of the first line rhyming with either the second or third syllable of the following line, effectively creating a rhyming couplet, which as we will see later is a basic component in the creation of formal verse.

In addition to proverbs, Tai languages also share other common aesthetics such as elaborate expressions, poems and songs. Those who can use this aesthetical aspect of language are highly respected in the society as affirmed by Prasithrathsint (2008:402) where she notes, “Tai people value rhetoric ability, metaphor and wordiness in their speech.”

## Notes

*Acknowledgments.* This paper is a part of *the Northern Zhuang-Chinese-Thai-English Dictionary* (Burusphat and Qin 2006) which has been revised for a journal publication. We thank Richard Hiam for editing the first draft of the paper and Li Fanglan for reviewing the paper.

1. An overview of Zhuang language is given in Luo (2008).
2. See a detailed classification of Tai languages in Edmondson and Solnit (1997).
3. Zhuang people and other Tai-Kadai groups such as Bouyei, Kam, Hlai do not have traditional writing system. Before 1950, local sorcerers of Zhuang, Bouyei, Kam and some other groups used Chinese characters to write their languages. Twenty percent of the symbols were reconstructed by using Chinese characters or parts of them.

These days, some local Zhuang, Bouyei, and Kam sorcerers still use this kind of writing system. In 1956, the Chinese government and linguistic scholars devised the Zhuang writing system which is in a Romanized form (Burusphat 2008).

4. All examples in section 4 will be followed by different types of world view.

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