

VARIATION AND CULTURE IN LAIHOH PSYCHO-COLLOCATIONS

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ABSTRACT

As shown in previous research, psycho-collocations are a feature of Laiholh, a Tibeto-Burman language in the Kuki-Chin family, that are used to express emotions or physical feelings through metaphor. Because psycho-collocations use metaphor, they experience metaphor variation and can encode cultural information relevant to the understanding of their meanings. The present paper compares the psycho-collocations reported in a study published in 1998 to the psycho-collocations reported by a 21-year-old male speaker of Laiholh from a diaspora community in Indianapolis to show how much these psycho-collocations vary in use, in meaning, and in construction between speakers; furthermore, to show how the deeper cultural information encoded in certain psycho-collocations acts as context for a more meaningful understanding.

Key Terms— Psycho-collocation, metaphor variation, encoded cultural information

1. INTRODUCTION

Laiholh (also Lai, Hakha Lai, or Hakha Chin) belongs to the Kuki-Chin branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family and is primarily spoken in Chin state in Burma/Myanmar ([Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig, 2019](#)). There are over 23,000 refugees from Burma/Myanmar in Indiana with 19,000 of those refugees in the Indianapolis area alone, and 71% of those 19,000 refugees are of the Chin ethnic group ([Burmese American Community Institute 2018](#)). This paper addresses a feature of Laiholh called psycho-collocations, and it further addresses how numerous psycho-collocations in Laiholh vary in meaning, construction, or use between different speakers and how certain psycho-collocations in Laiholh need cultural context to fully understand their meanings.

A *psycho-collocation* is a feature of Laiholh described in [Kenneth VanBik \(1998\)](#), which is a feature also described in [James Matisoff \(1986\)](#) for many Southeast Asian languages. A psycho-collocation is a set combination of words that expresses an emotion or a state of being in which one of the words carries a direct psychological reference. Thus, psycho-collocations use metaphor—i.e., the understanding of one idea in terms of another—to express abstract ideas of emotions and physical feelings.

Furthermore, because psycho-collocations use metaphor, they are subject to metaphor variation. [Zoltán Kövecses \(2008\)](#) explains that metaphors can vary within a culture due to many factors such as regional variation or change over time. [Kövecses \(2008\)](#) also explains that metaphors can vary across different cultures as well, so, as Chin culture and American culture are different, psycho-collocations in Laiholh may encode unfamiliar cultural information which is necessary context to fully understand the meanings of certain psycho-collocations.

In the article that is the inspiration for this paper, [VanBik \(1998\)](#) presents a list of psycho-collocations in Laiholh, providing literal translations of the phrases alongside their meanings, which was inspired by previous research on psycho-collocations in [Matisoff \(1986\)](#). Furthermore, additional psycho-collocations were collected during this study that are not found in [VanBik \(1998\)](#). The present study investigates these psycho-collocations in the language of a 21-year-old male speaker of Laiholh from the diaspora community in Indianapolis with the following research questions: (1) Is there a difference in the psycho-collocations presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) and those in use by young speakers in this community?; (2) For the psycho-collocations in use by the language assistant, do they have the same meanings presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#)?; (3) Do any of these psycho-collocations encode unfamiliar cultural information as context that is necessary to understand the meaning of the psycho-collocation?

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents an overview of collocations, psycho-collocations, and metaphor variation as well as the relationships between those concepts. Section 3 explains how the data was gathered for this study. Section 4 presents items from [VanBik \(1998\)](#) in the romanized orthography with definitions provided by the language assistant, additional items presented by the language assistant, and a discussion about encoded cultural information seen in Laiholh psycho-collocations. Section 5 discusses the data and addresses other notes from the study. Section 6 includes closing remarks.

2. BACKGROUND

[Matisoff \(1986\)](#) explains that psycho-collocations are a feature of many Southeast Asian languages and that this feature is not found in Standard Average European languages like English. VanBik says that, based on the volume of work done on psycho-collocations following [Matisoff \(1986\)](#), “it has become clear that ‘psycho-collocations’ are an essential feature of many languages in Southeast Asia” ([VanBik, 1998, p. 201](#)). Including research on Laiholh ([VanBik, 1998; 2010](#)), there are several articles dedicated to psycho-collocations in several Southeast Asian languages; for example, Burmese ([Vittrant, 2014](#)), Daakaka (Vanuatu) ([Prince, 2017](#)), Hmong ([Jaisser, 1990](#)), Jingpho ([Matisoff, 1986](#)), Lahu ([Matisoff, 1986](#)), Malay ([Oey, 1990](#)), Thai ([Matisoff, 1986](#)), and Tibetan ([Matisoff, 1986](#)) are all shown to have psycho-collocations. Psycho-collocations are defined and discussed in Subsection 2.1.

This study builds on the research done in [VanBik \(1998; 2010\)](#) by examining how psycho-collocations vary in meaning, construction, or use between different speakers. Furthermore, understanding the cultural context behind psycho-collocations where it is unfamiliar also better the understanding of psycho-collocations, Laiholh, Chin culture, and other relevant cultures. As [Kövecses \(2008\)](#) notes, understanding metaphorical thought is relevant to understanding culture. Variation and culture in metaphors are discussed in Subsection 2.2.

2.1. Psycho-Collocations

A *collocation* is a sequence of words that frequently co-occur, wherein the meaning of the sequence can be computed from the meanings of its component words ([Cruse, 1986](#)). A *psycho-collocation* is a type of collocation that contains an explicit psychological reference, often expressing an emotion or physical feeling. [VanBik \(2010\)](#) also describes psycho-collocations as a type of idiomatic expression. Thus, not only do these words frequently co-occur, they appear together to express a meaning separate from (but related to) its constituents using metaphor.

Matisoff (1986) defines a psycho-collocation as:

a polymorphemic expression referring as a whole to a mental process, quality, or state, one of whose constituents is a psycho-noun, i.e. a noun with explicit psychological reference (translatable by English words like HEART, MIND, SPIRIT, SOUL, TEMPER, NATURE, DISPOSITION, MOOD). The rest of the psycho-collocation contains morphemes (usually action verbs or adjectives) that complete the meaning. (Matisoff, 1986, p. 4)

VanBik (1998) sums up this definition by Matisoff with the following formula: *psycho-noun* plus *psycho-mate* equals *psycho-collocation*. In Laiholh, the psycho-noun is often a body part, usually *lung*—which is the heart or the liver, depending on context—, whereas the psycho-mate is usually a verb or an adjective that completes the expression (VanBik 1998). Example (1) uses the psycho-noun *lung* ‘heart-liver’ as a metaphor for emotions alongside its psycho-mate, *rawk* ‘to break down’. The first row is Laiholh transcribed in romanized orthography, the second row shows Leipzig glossing, and the third row is a free translation.

- (1) ka lung a rawk
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ break.down
 ‘I am hurt’ / ‘I am disappointed’

In English, a close equivalent would be the phrase *you broke my heart*, in which there is no literal breaking of a heart. In this case, *heart* is the noun that has explicit psychological reference to the direct object’s feelings. Altogether, *you broke my heart* is a psycho-collocation that means *you hurt my feelings*. Likewise, in Laiholh, in *ka lung a rawk*, there is no literal breaking down of a heart-liver. Like *heart* in English, *lung* refers to feelings.

2.2. Variation and Culture in Metaphors

Metaphor variation within a culture happens for many reasons, such as differential experience, a change in cultural context, or a change in experiential focus (Kövecses, 2008). This variation can be seen across different dimensions, such as across time, social groups, regions, subcultures, styles, and even between individuals. While this variation in metaphor refers to the variation of metaphors used by different speakers, many of the psycho-collocations in this study are used by both the language assistant and VanBik (1998), and the variation in those shared psycho-collocations lies in their differing meanings.

Furthermore, Kövecses (2008) argues that understanding metaphorical thought helps with understanding culture because not all languages and cultures make use of the same metaphors to express similar ideas.¹ Without the proper cultural context, a metaphor may be harder to fully understand. This is because, as explained by Farzad Sharifian (2013), metaphors can encode cultural information. Like example (1) in Subsection 2.1, Sharifian (2013) also uses *you broke my heart*, explaining that the use of *heart* comes from the culture that gave rise to the metaphor and

¹ Matisoff (1986) argues that psycho-collocations are “grounded in obvious psychological fact”, giving the example that the heart is the universal seat of emotions (p. 15). Sharifian (2013) mentions that the heart is not always the seat of emotions, giving the example of another language, Tok Pisin, which uses *belly* instead. Kövecses (2008) also argues that the universality of metaphors has been overemphasized. While none of these authors are directly responding to each other, these different perspectives reflect a change in approach to understanding metaphors and inspired this analysis of psycho-collocations.

how that culture conceptualized emotions and feelings. While studying psycho-collocations in Laiholh, I found that the language assistant provided cultural context that was missing from certain items in [VanBik \(1998\)](#), and that additional cultural context was crucial to understanding the meanings of those items. Thus, it is useful to analyze psycho-collocations in Laiholh for their cultural context to better understand Chin culture and differences that would lead to variation in these psycho-collocations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data was elicited from a language assistant over several 1-hour sessions at Indiana University and transcribed into a notebook using the Laiholh romanized orthography. The language assistant is a 21-year-old male speaker of Laiholh who grew up in Tlangkua, Chin State and is a member of the Indianapolis Chin community. The psycho-collocations used as elicitation prompts in this study came from [VanBik \(1998\)](#). The language assistant provided additional psycho-collocations which are also included in the data.

4. RESULTS

In total, there are 89 different psycho-collocations in the following data—83 of which come from [VanBik \(1998\)](#) and 6 of which were provided by the language assistant. For 33 items (see Appendix A), the language assistant provided a definition that is the same as the definition reported in [VanBik \(1998\)](#), which will be discussed in Subsection 4.1. The language assistant was unable to provide a definition for 9 items (see Appendix B), which will be discussed in Subsection 4.2. Subsections 4.3–4.8 contain a sum of 41 items for which the language assistant had a different definition compared to the definition presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#). Subsection 4.3 contains 10 items that have synonymous meanings between the language assistant and [VanBik \(1998\)](#) and where the language assistant reported shared intuitions with [VanBik \(1998\)](#), including items that do not differ in meaning but do differ in syntactic construction. Subsection 4.4 contains 4 items for which the language assistant reported a more negative connotation. Subsection 4.5 contains 2 items for which the language assistant reported a more positive connotation. Subsection 4.6 contains 4 items for which the language assistant reported a more intense meaning or extreme variety of the same emotion. Subsection 4.7 contains 21 items for which the language assistant reported a very different definition compared to the definition presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) with strong intuitions that the meanings are not the same. Subsection 4.8 contains the last 6 items, which are additional psycho-collocations that were provided by the language assistant. The final subsection, Subsection 4.9, reviews 2 of the previous items, for each of which the language assistant provided an expanded definition that relies on cultural information. For each item, the first row is Laiholh transcribed in romanized orthography, the second row shows Leipzig glossing, and the third row is a free translation. Additionally, some items contain a fourth row, which is an adaptation of the translation given in [VanBik \(1998\)](#).

4.1. Same Psycho-Collocations

For 33 of the 83 items (see Appendix A) that come from [VanBik \(1998\)](#), the language assistant provided the same definition as the definition in [VanBik \(1998\)](#). While this study is aimed at the variation in Laiholh psycho-collocations, overlap was expected for many definitions.

4.2. Undefined Psycho-Collocations

For 9 of the 83 items (see Appendix B) that come from [VanBik \(1998\)](#), the language assistant was unable to provide a definition. While this does not show variation in meaning, it does demonstrate that different speakers of Laiholh use and are familiar with different psycho-collocations.

4.3. Synonymous Psycho-Collocations

Items (2–11) are psycho-collocations for which the language assistant reported shared intuitions with and had a very similar definition compared to the definition presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) as well as psycho-collocations for which the language assistant reported the same definition as [VanBik \(1998\)](#) with a different construction. Each of these items shows a minor variation in the meaning or the construction of the psycho-collocation.

- (2) kan thluak a buai bai²
 1PL.POSS brain 3SG.SUBJ be.messy ?
 ‘We are confused’

- (3) mithmai a ngei
 eye.face 3SG.SUBJ have
 ‘He has a good reputation’
 ‘He is well respected’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 206](#))

- (4) ka hna a ngam
 1SG.POSS ear 3SG.SUBJ be.tame
 ‘I am at peace’ / ‘I am calm’
 ‘I am content / I am not worried’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 207](#))

- (5) a or a khu
 3SG.POSS throat 3SG.SUBJ smoke
 ‘He can eat anything’
 ‘He / She is gluttonous’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 209](#))

- (6) a or a kua
 3SG.POSS throat 3SG.SUBJ be.deep
 ‘He can eat anything’
 ‘He / She is gluttonous’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 210](#))

- (7) ka lung/thin/lungthin³ a dai

² For (2), the language assistant did not know what *bai* meant, but he said it was necessary. [VanBik \(1998\)](#) does not have *bai* as part of the psycho-collocation—it is just *kan thluak a buai* in [VanBik \(1998\)](#).

³ For (7), the language assistant preferred the construction *ka thin a dai* over the others and especially did not feel like it should be used with *lung*.

1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.quiet
 ‘I feel calm’

- (8) a lung a fak
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ ache
 ‘He is hurt’ / ‘He is sad’
 ‘He / She is bitter’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 212)

- (9) ka lung a mit
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ ?⁴
 ‘I feel dizzy’
 ‘I feel dizzy looking at you (you are spinning)’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 213)

- (10) ka lung a tho
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ rise
 ‘I am interested’
 ‘I am enthusiastic’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 214)

- (11) ka lung a ka ton
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ meet
 ‘He meets my expectations’
 ‘I am satisfied with him’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 215)

4.4. Pejorated Psycho-Collocations

Items (12–15) are psycho-collocations for which the language assistant reported a more negative meaning compared to the meaning presented in VanBik (1998). This pejoration shows a variation in meaning.

- (12) a kaa a nal
 3SG.POSS mouth 3SG.SUBJ slip
 ‘He lies a lot’
 ‘He / She is talkative’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 208)

- (13) an hmurka a sau
 3PL.POSS mouth.lip 3SG.SUBJ be.long
 ‘They talk when it is not time to talk’
 ‘They are talkative’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 208)

- (14) ka thin na ka kenh
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 2SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ hammer
 ‘You make me furious’ / ‘You piss me off’
 ‘You make me angry’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 215)

- (15) luak na chuak tuk

⁴ For (9), the language assistant had the intuition that *mit* is *eye*, but VanBik (1998) defines the term as *extinguish*.

vomit 2SG.OBJ come.out very
 ‘I hate you a lot’
 ‘He is too meddlesome’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 220)

4.5. Ameliorated Psycho-Collocations

Items (16–17) are psycho-collocations for which the language assistant reported a more positive meaning compared to the meaning presented in VanBik (1998). This amelioration shows a variation in meaning.

(16) a hmai a kau
 3SG.POSS face 3SG.SUBJ be.wide
 ‘He is not shy’
 ‘They are daring (*negative meaning*)’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 206)

(17) ka ha thi na thak
 1SG.POSS teeth blood 2SG.SUBJ itch
 ‘I want to squeeze you’
 ‘I can’t stand you’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 209)

4.6. Intensified Psycho-Collocations

Items (18–21) are psycho-collocations for which the language assistant reported a more intense or extreme meaning compared to the meaning presented in VanBik (1998). This increased intensity shows a variation in meaning.

(18) ka or a fok
 1SG.POSS throat 3SG.SUBJ protrude
 ‘I am salivating (thinking about food)’⁵
 ‘I want to eat’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 209)

(19) ka or na fok
 1SG.POSS throat 2SG.SUBJ protrude
 ‘I am salivating (thinking about you)’⁶
 ‘I desire you’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 209)

(20) a lung ah a lut
 3SG.POSS heart-liver LOC 3SG.SUBJ enter
 ‘He will remember it (because it went into his heart)’
 ‘He is interested’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 213)

(21) ka thin/lung na ka hnemh
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 2SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ comfort

⁵ The language assistant gave the context that this is what one might feel when thinking about limes.

⁶ The language assistant said that this is a “perverted” thing to say.

‘You comfort me’⁷

4.7. Different Psycho-Collocations

Items (22–42) are psycho-collocations for which the language assistant reported a different meaning compared to the meaning in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) with strong intuitions that the meanings are not the same. These different meanings and intuitions clearly show variation.

- (22) ka lu a ri
1SG.POSS head 3SG.SUBJ be.drunk
‘I feel dizzy’
‘I am confused’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 204](#))
- (23) ka hna a hnok
1SG.POSS ear 3SG.SUBJ be.tangled
‘I am a mess’
‘I feel bothered’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 206](#))
- (24) ka hnar no ruh a ka ttam
1SG.POSS nose young bone 3SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ bite
‘It gave me goosebumps’
‘It makes me sad’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 208](#))
- (25) ka ha thi a thak
1SG.POSS teeth blood 3SG.SUBJ itch
The feeling when one sees a cute baby or animal⁸
‘My teeth are on edge’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 209](#))
- (26) ka ha a⁹ za
1SG.POSS teeth 3SG.SUBJ tickle
‘My teeth tickle’ like the unpleasant feeling when one hears iron
scraping iron
‘I am soured on you’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 209](#))
- (27) a or a vuai
3SG.POSS throat 3SG.SUBJ be.satisfied
‘He ate enough’
‘He is satisfied’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 210](#))

⁷ While the definitions provided by the language assistant and in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) for (21) are the same, the language assistant reported that this phrase is very poetic and means something even sweeter than comfort. Furthermore, the language assistant provided the term *thin hnem tu* as what one would use for a romantic partner—literally, it means *heart-comforter*.

⁸ The language assistant explained that (25) has to do with playful aggression, referring to the urge to playfully pinch and squeeze something cute.

⁹ Example (26) was often reduced to *ka ha za* when spoken, eliding the subject marker.

- (28) a hnak kar ah a ka tenh
 3SG.POSS ribs between LOC 3SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ tuck
 'He cares about me'
 'He is concerned about me' (VanBik, 1998, p. 210)
- (29) a lung a fim
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.wise
 'He can take care of himself'
 'He is conscious' (VanBik, 1998, p. 212)
- (30) ka lung a hring
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.green
 'I am doubtful'
 'I am suspicious' (VanBik, 1998, p. 212)
- (31) a lung aa khiak
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ.REFL decide
 'He has made a decision'
 'He / She is determined (decisive)' (VanBik, 1998, p. 212)
- (32) ka lung a leng
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ visit
 'I feel nostalgic'
 'I feel lonely' (VanBik, 1998, p. 213)
- (33) kan lung aa lom
 1PL.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.happy
 'We are appreciative'
 'We are happy' (VanBik, 1998, p. 213)
- (34) a lung a puam
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.swollen
 'He is ignorant'
 'He / She is cocky / stubborn' (VanBik, 1998, p. 213)
- (35) a lung a rang
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.quick
 'He makes judgments quickly'
 'He / She is impatient' (VanBik, 1998, p. 213)
- (36) a thin a phang
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ worry
 'He is afraid'
 'He is worried' (VanBik, 1998, p. 216)
- (37) na ning a hngal

2SG.POSS heart 3SG.SUBJ know
 ‘You act in a taboo way’¹⁰
 ‘You are presumptuous’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 217)

(38) ka ning a zak
 1SG.POSS heart 3SG.SUBJ be.shy
 ‘I am shy’
 ‘I am ashamed’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 217)

(39) ka ai a puang¹¹
 1SG.POSS strength 3SG.SUBJ ?
 ‘I am frustrated’
 ‘I am extremely angry’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 218)

(40) ka thling na za
 1SG.POSS sap 2SG.SUBJ tickle
 ‘You make me ticklish’
 ‘I am soured by you (you look yucky!!)’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 219)

(41) kaa thlachiat
 1SG.SUBJ.REFL spirit.bad
 ‘I do not take revenge’
 ‘I am considerate’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 223)

(42) thlachiat ka ruat
 spirit.bad 1SG.SUBJ consider
 ‘I think broadly’
 ‘I am considerate / reluctant (to do anything bad)’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 223)

4.8. Additional Psycho-Collocations

Items (43–48) are additional psycho-collocations provided by the language assistant that are not found in VanBik (1998). These add to the body of Laiholh psycho-collocations, which will be useful for further studies.

(43) ka hna na ka hnawh
 1SG.POSS ear 2SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ clean.out
 ‘You bother me’

(44) a ka lei rawi
 3SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ tongue betray
 ‘He betrayed me’

¹⁰ The language assistant felt that (37) concerns breaking cultural norms and violating taboos. He explained that this could be used for someone who disrespects their elders or talks openly about sex.

¹¹ The language assistant did not understand *puang* in the context of (39), but VanBik (1998) defines it as *flare up*.

- (45) a lung aa hnem
3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ.REFL comfort
'He comforts himself'
- (46) a lung a var
3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.sharp/be.smart
'I am smart'
- (47) na tha a bek
1SG.POSS veins 3SG.SUBJ cling
'You cry too easily'
- (48) ka thla vai a kiang
1SG.POSS spirit wandering 3SG.SUBJ be.empty
'I feel nostalgic'¹²

4.9. Unfamiliar Cultural Context

Items (49–50) are psycho-collocations from Section 4.7 for which the language assistant provided additional cultural context. The context of the unfamiliar cultural information encoded in these psycho-collocations expands each of their meanings beyond the short phrase in the free translation line.

- (49) kaa thlachiat
1SG.SUBJ.REFL spirit.bad
'I do not take revenge'
'I am considerate' (VanBik, 1998, p. 223)

(49) is the same as (41). While the language assistant reported that his intuitions were in line with the definition presented in VanBik (1998), the language assistant felt it was missing context. He reported that usage of this psycho-collocation is related to the idea of not wanting to take people to court in Chin culture, preferring to spare others or settle matters personally. This does not have to be deserved or earned by the spared person—the language assistant explained that this is just how things are done. Furthermore, he reported that this cultural metaphor can be used in instances where one is just about to take revenge on a person but then spares the person at the last second.

- (50) thlachiat ka ruat
spirit.bad 1SG.SUBJ consider
'I think broadly'
'I am considerate / reluctant (to do anything bad)' (VanBik, 1998, p. 223)

(50) is the same as (42). The language assistant had very different intuitions about the meaning of this psycho-collocation and felt it needed context. The cultural information that the language assistant gave is that it is important and even obligatory to help immediate family in Chin culture.

¹² (48) closely resembles (92).

He explained that this psycho-collocation would describe someone who would help their distant relative even though they are not obligated to do so.

5. DISCUSSION

There were two major limitations in this study: (1) the data was provided by just one language assistant, and (2), in reviewing [VanBik \(1998\)](#), I found that I had missed some items.

However, the results do provide answers to the research questions presented in the Introduction. Is there a difference in the psycho-collocations presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) and those in use by young speakers in the diaspora community in Indianapolis? As evidenced by the results in Section 4.2, the answer is yes. Even though the language assistant was familiar with 74 of the 83 psycho-collocations (as shown in Sections 4.1 and 4.3–4.8) from [VanBik \(1998\)](#), he was still unfamiliar with 9 of them, which demonstrates the variation in psycho-collocations used between different speakers. For the psycho-collocations in use by the language assistant, do they have the same meanings presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#)? As evidenced by the results in Section 4.3 through Section 4.7, the answer is that they do not always have the same reported meanings, though the language assistant provided a radically different meaning for only a few psycho-collocations. Only 33 of the 83 psycho-collocations presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#) had an identical meaning for the language assistant. Do any of these psycho-collocations encode unfamiliar cultural information as context that is necessary to understand the meaning of the psycho-collocation? As evidenced by the results in Section 4.9, the answer is yes.

Additionally, this study left me with a few notes from the language assistant. (1) He taught me about *khoih*, which is used in (70). We had multiple discussions about what *khoih* means, which is not simply *provoke*. It is used for peeling something off as in peeling off a scab but not peeling off a sticker. He also used it in *cangai a khoih*, which is to catch crabs in their holes. It can be used for removing seeds from apples but *not* removing the pit from an avocado, and it is also used as *khoih!* to mean *give it to me!* (2) When I asked if there was an equivalent of the folkloric mare—a malicious being that sits on the chest of sleeping people, related to the condition of sleep paralysis—in Laiholh, he told me that it is called *mumangnenh*, which is elucidated in *mang* ‘dream’ and *nenh* ‘pressure’. (3) He told me that he was excited to share our work because he said that not a lot of speakers of Laiholh think about these phrases literally but also that, for many of these phrases, there are no literal counterparts. (4) Most importantly, toward the beginning of the study, when eliciting (23), the language assistant told me that it was a psycho-collocation that he used to use, and he told me that it made him feel nostalgic but also made him feel sad that he had been losing part(s) of his language. This moment inspired me more than any other to work with psycho-collocations, especially in recording more of them, and there were many others that he said that he had used in the past but no longer used. Though, because many of their meanings do not have alternate ways to be expressed, he also felt that many of them were not in danger of being lost. Still, it led to the question: Which psycho-collocations *are* being lost?

6. CONCLUSION

Altogether, the results of this study are evidence that psycho-collocations in Laiholh show variation akin to metaphor variation in both meaning and construction between speakers, that different speakers may be unfamiliar with certain psycho-collocations, and that psycho-collocations can encode extensive cultural information.

In the future, this data could be used to elicit data from more speakers of Laiholh for an even better understanding of how psycho-collocations vary across speakers. Section 4.8 aids this possibility by providing additional psycho-collocations to test thanks to the language assistant. This study also does not determine why such variation exists. Do psycho-collocations vary between speakers of Laiholh because of differences in age? Because of differences in dialect? Because of another factor? If psycho-collocations vary in usage, do certain groups have unique psycho-collocations? Furthermore, is Kenneth VanBik familiar with the psycho-collocations provided by the language assistant in Section 4.8? If not, that is greater evidence for variation in use of psycho-collocations. Do the psycho-collocations shared by the language assistant and VanBik (1998) vary among other speakers? Would interviewing more speakers of Laiholh reveal more psycho-collocations? Are certain psycho-collocations more resistant to variation than others? Are there other psycho-collocations that encode unfamiliar cultural information? Outside of Laiholh, do psycho-collocations in other languages vary in the same ways? For the same reasons? These questions will be addressed and studied in future research.

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APPENDIX A

Items (51–83) are psycho-collocations that have the same definition reported by the language assistant and in [VanBik \(1998\)](#).

- (51) na thluak a chia tuk
2SG.POSS brain 3SG.SUBJ be.bad very
'You are very unintelligent'
- (52) an thluak a ttha
3PL.POSS brain 3SG.SUBJ be.good
'They are intelligent'
- (53) ka mit a ku
1SG.POSS eye 3SG.SUBJ be.sleepy
'I am sleepy'
- (54) ka mit a thi
1SG.POSS eye 3SG.OBJ die
'I want it'
- (55) an hmai a panh
3PL.POSS face 3SG.SUBJ be.bright
'They are cheerful'
- (56) a hmai a chia
3SG.POSS face 3SG.SUBJ be.bad
'He is unhappy'
- (57) an mithmai a panh
3PL.POSS eye.face 3SG.SUBJ be.bright
'They are cheerful' / 'Their faces are bright'
- (58) a kaa a dak
3SG.POSS mouth 3SG.SUBJ quack
'He is talkative'
- (59) a kaa a thaw
3SG.POSS mouth 3SG.SUBJ be.delicious
'His appetite is good'

- (60) a hmurka a ttha
 3SG.POSS mouth.lip 3SG.SUBJ be.good
 ‘He is friendly’
- (61) ka di a riam
 1SG.POSS drool 3SG.SUBJ cut
 ‘I am satisfied’
- (62) ka lung a rawk
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ break.down
 ‘I am hurt’ / ‘I am disappointed’¹³
- (63) a lung/thin aa domh
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ.REF hold
 ‘He is worried’
- (64) ka lung a dong
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ end
 ‘I give up’
- (65) ka lung a fiang/piang
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.clear
 ‘I understand’
- (66) ka lungre a thai
 1SG.POSS ?¹⁴ 3SG.SUBJ know
 ‘I am worried’
- (67) ka lung a tling
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.complete
 ‘I agree’
- (68) ka lung a vaivuan
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ wander.float
 ‘I am confused’
- (69) ka thin a hang
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ ?¹⁵
 ‘I am angry’

¹³ Item (62) is identical to item (1) in Section 2.

¹⁴ The language assistant did not know what *lungre* in item (17) meant, but he did not agree with the definition of *heart-dry* given in VanBik (1998).

¹⁵ The language assistant did not know what *hang* meant in the context of item (21). VanBik (1998) provides the definition *become liquid* for *hang*.

- (70) ka thin na ka khoih
1SG.POSS heart-liver 2SG.SUBJ 1SG.OBJ provoke¹⁶
You provoke me.
- (71) a thin a lin
3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.hot
'He feels worried, helpless, and angry'
- (72) ka thin/lung/lungthin a nem
1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.soft
'I am calm'
- (73) ka thin a sau
1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.long
'I am patient'
- (74) ka thin a tawi
1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.short
'I am impatient'
- (75) a thin a chia
3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.bad
'He has a bad temper'
- (76) ka ning¹⁷ a ttih
1SG.POSS *heart 3SG.SUBJ be.afraid
'I am afraid'
- (77) ka tha a ba
1SG.POSS veins 3SG.SUBJ be.tired
'I am tired'
- (78) ka tha a thu
1SG.POSS veins 3SG.SUBJ stink
'I am lazy'
- (79) ka tha a chia
1SG.POSS veins 3SG.SUBJ be.bad
'I am discouraged'
- (80) ka tha a tthawng
1SG.POSS veins 3SG.SUBJ be.strong

¹⁶ The word *khoih* is discussed in the Conclusion. The language assistant described it as *to peel off* (a scab).

¹⁷ VanBik (1998) notes that *ning* comes from Proto-Tibeto-Burman and that it is only found in this form in psycho-collocations. This use of *ning* can also be found in items (37) and (38).

‘I am strong’

- (81) ka zaang na fak
 1SG.POSS strength 2SG.SUBJ be.painful
 ‘I pity you’

- (82) ka thling a kik
 1SG.POSS sap 3SG.SUBJ be.cold
 ‘I feel afraid of heights’

- (83) ka thling a za
 1SG.POSS sap 3SG.SUBJ tickle
 ‘I am ticklish’

APPENDIX B

Items (84–92) are psycho-collocations with which the language assistant was unfamiliar and was thus unable to provide a definition. Instead, the following items are shown with the definitions presented in [VanBik \(1998\)](#).

- (84) kan thluak a bu
 1PL.POSS brain 3SG.SUBJ be.crowded
 ‘We are not unintelligent’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 205](#))

- (85) mitpar a ngei
 ? 3SG.SUBJ have
 ‘He is fickle (=a womanizer)’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 205](#))¹⁸

- (86) a lung a hmeh
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ press
 ‘It makes him sad’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 212](#))

- (87) a lung aa sak
 3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ.REFL be.swollen
 ‘He / She is comforting himself / herself’ ([VanBik, 1998, p. 214](#))

- (88) ka lung a thi
 1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ die

¹⁸ The language assistant reported that he had heard (77) before; however, he did not have a strong intuition as to what it means. Furthermore, he was unsure of the definition of *mitpar*. It seems to be a combination of *eye* and *flower*, but the language assistant explained that it may have something to do with eyebrows or eyelashes.

‘I am settled’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 214)¹⁹

- (89) ka lung a tte
1SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ fork/branch
‘I am indecisive’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 215)

- (90) a thin a ttha
3SG.POSS heart-liver 3SG.SUBJ be.good
‘He is good’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 216)²⁰

- (91) a un aa thu
3SG.POSS sulking 3SG.SUBJ.REFL stink
‘He / She is touchy’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 221)

- (92) ka thla a vai
1SG.POSS spirit 3SG.SUBJ wander
‘I feel lonely’ (VanBik, 1998, p. 223)²¹

¹⁹ The language assistant had heard of (80), but he did not know what it meant.

²⁰ The opposite of (75), the language assistant explained that, while (90) made sense, he had never heard this used before.

²¹ (84) stood out because the language assistant reported feeling spooked by the psycho-collocation, which gave him goosebumps and made him imagine his spirit leaving his body.