

NOTES ON TAI NUEA

For our knowledge of languages of the Tai family spoken in various parts of southern China we owe more to Fang-kuei Li than to any other scholar. We are indebted to him not only for the number of dialects he has recorded and analyzed, but especially for the quantity, and the fine accuracy, of his data. It therefore seems fitting on this occasion to attempt to make an additional contribution to our knowledge of Tai dialects spoken in China by presenting a corpus of data on Tai Nuea, a Tai dialect on which we had until very recently virtually no information. It will, however, be quickly apparent that the data presented here, the result of very hasty and brief fieldwork, are not in a class as regards either quality or detail with the kind of data Fang-kuei Li has consistently presented.

Tai Nuea is spoken in a number of small areas located, in general, to the north of the Lue-speaking

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area in Sipsongpanna, Yunnan, more or less directly north of the northernmost part of Thailand.

The dialect of Tai Nuea under consideration here is spoken at $myŋ^4 vo^2$, literally 'Mine Town', said to be named for the salt mines ($vo^2 ky^1$) there, in Sipsongpanna. This locality is, according to one informant, about fifteen Chinese miles west of Ningerh (Puerh), and according to another informant about forty kilometers east of Mungka, or Mengka, all considerably to the north of the Lue-speaking center of Cheng Hung. The speakers call themselves and their speech $tay^4 ly^1$, literally 'Northern Tai'.¹

Two $myŋ^4 vo^2$ informants, A and B, were interviewed at Mae Sai, Chiengrai Province, Thailand, on 22 August 1964. A is named $voj^1 kew^3$, and B is named $pan^3 tuy^1 van^2$. Since their data are not distinguished in my notes, their forms are here all labeled simply A. On 2, 3, and 4 December 1964 a third informant, C, was interviewed at Mae Sai. His name is $ho^5 saam^5$, and he says that he is a relative of A but is not acquainted with B.

The speech of these informants, A-B (identified in the wordlist as A), and C, is virtually identical.

Most differences will be seen to represent mere accidents of some expressions having been recorded only for A and others only for C. Real differences between A and C do, however, occasionally appear, for example, for 'water buffalo' A-B always have $xaay^4$, while C usually has $kaay^4$, sometimes $xaay^4$.

I have more detailed data from another Tai Nuea speaker born near Keng Tung, Burma, of parents who came from $myŋ^4 vo^2$. His tonal system closely

resembles, structurally as well as phonetically, that of ABC, but in other respects his speech frequently shows marked deviation. For example, he sometimes has contrasting final ϵ and e , and \circ and o , whereas ABC have only front e and back o in syllable-final position. Also his initial consonants are not always in agreement with ABC. It is assumed that, although he was trying to give the speech of his parents, this has been seriously contaminated by the Khün and Shan dialects of the area where he was born and raised. Regretfully, therefore, I have omitted his data here, although it fills many lacunae in the ABC material, because a form recorded from him cannot be taken as certain evidence of its shape in genuine $m\gamma\eta^4$ vo^2 speech, or even of the occurrence of the form at $m\gamma\eta^4$ vo^2 . His material would be interesting for a different kind of study, a sociolinguistic investigation of the influences of surrounding dialects on this transported Tai Nuea dialect. We do not yet have enough information on the various dialects concerned to do a very good job of such an investigation.

The original intention in this paper was to give a brief sketch of Tai Nuea, showing some of the most striking features of this dialect: (1) tonal coalescence in words of the type of pi^1 'year' (Siamese pii^1 , Lue of Chieng Hung pi^1) and pi^1 'older sibling' (Siamese $phii^3$, Lue of Chieng Hung pi^5); (2) coalescence in final position (though not medially) of the vowels of words like me^4 'wife' (Siamese mia^1 , Lue of Chieng Hing me^4) and me^5 'mother' (Siamese mee^3 , Lue of Chieng Hung me^5), and similarly in back-position coalescence of the vowels of words like pho^5

'husband' (Siamese *phua*⁵, Lue of Chieng Hung *pho*¹) and *po*¹ 'father' (Siamese *phoo*³, Lue of Chieng Hung *po*⁵); and (3) a palatal nasal initial *n* where other dialects have the velar nasal initial *ŋ*, as in *ɲɲn*⁴ 'silver' (Siamese *ɲɲn*¹, Lue of Chieng Hung *ɲɲn*⁴) or *ɲu*⁴ 'snake' (Siamese *ɲuu*¹, Lue of Chieng Hung *ɲu*⁴).

But, while the data were being worked up for the present paper, Jimmy Harris's article on three varieties of his Tai dialect (Harris 1975) appeared. His data are much more complete and detailed than mine. They agree with mine in showing in all three of his dialects the tonal coalescence and the vowel coalescences mentioned above, and one of his dialects (TN) has initial *y* in many of the words where my *mɲŋ*⁴ *vo*² informants have initial *n* corresponding to *ŋ* in other Tai languages.

I have therefore altered my original purpose in this paper, and will present all² my Tai Nuea data from the three informants ABC, preceded by a phonological inventory. Because my periods of fieldwork with these Tai Nuea informants were so brief, the data leave much to be desired. Many common words are missing because we simply did not get that far in my questionnaire, or skipped items and then never had a chance to get back to them.³ And it would be surprising if further study did not turn up numerous recording errors in this meager material because I had no opportunity to do the usual indexing and rechecking.

Comparison of my material presented here (with Harris's wordlists in Harris 1975) shows some interesting differences. And both his data and mine