

LAGHUU OR XÁ PHÓ, A NEW LANGUAGE OF THE YI GROUP

Jerold A. Edmondson and Lama Ziwo

University of Texas at Arlington

1.0. INTRODUCTION

While there have been several new discoveries of languages in the Tibeto-Burman family, there have been few that belong to the Yi group.¹ In this paper we wish to propose Laghuu as a new member of this linguistic grouping.

Laghuu [la²¹ɣu⁴⁴] or Xá Phó is spoken by about 1000 people in Lào Cai Province, Vietnam. We report here on the Laghuu of Sa Pa District in the village of Nậm Sà i, where there live 30 families (271 persons). It is located 15 km to the south and east of Sa Pa City in the valley below the highest mountain in Vietnam, Phan Si Pân (3198 m). See the map in Figure 1.

In Vietnam the Xá Phó belong officially to the Phù Lá nationality, which is found in scattered communities over Lào Cai, Lai Châu, Hà Giang, and Sơn La Provinces. According to EMPV 1978, the Phù Lá have a total population of about 3500. The Laghuu are called in some places the Flowery Phù Lá and in others the Black Phù Lá; they are found in Lào Cai Province in Bát Xát District at A Lù, in Bắc Thắng District, and in Sa Pa District at Nậm Sà i. The Laghuu of Nậm Sà i, Bát Xát, and Bắc Thắng now speak languages similar enough that our informant claimed that he was able to speak to people in Bắc Thắng District without difficulty. The Laghuu Bát Xát group, it is said, once lived at Bắc Thắng, but the two groups separated some decades ago.

It is still a little uncertain how this new group is to be designated. When we asked our informant how they call themselves, he responded without hesitation [la²¹ɣu⁴⁴], which we have chosen to use here. Abadie 1924 claims they call themselves *Lao-pa*. The Vietnamese and Hmong call them Xá Phó and apparently at some places the name Bờ Khô Pạ is in use (EMPV 1978). Needless to say, much more study is needed to determine where the Laghuu are located exactly and what names they use for themselves and others.

¹ A part of this research was supported by an NEH and NSF grant to the first author entitled "Languages of the Vietnam-China borderlands."

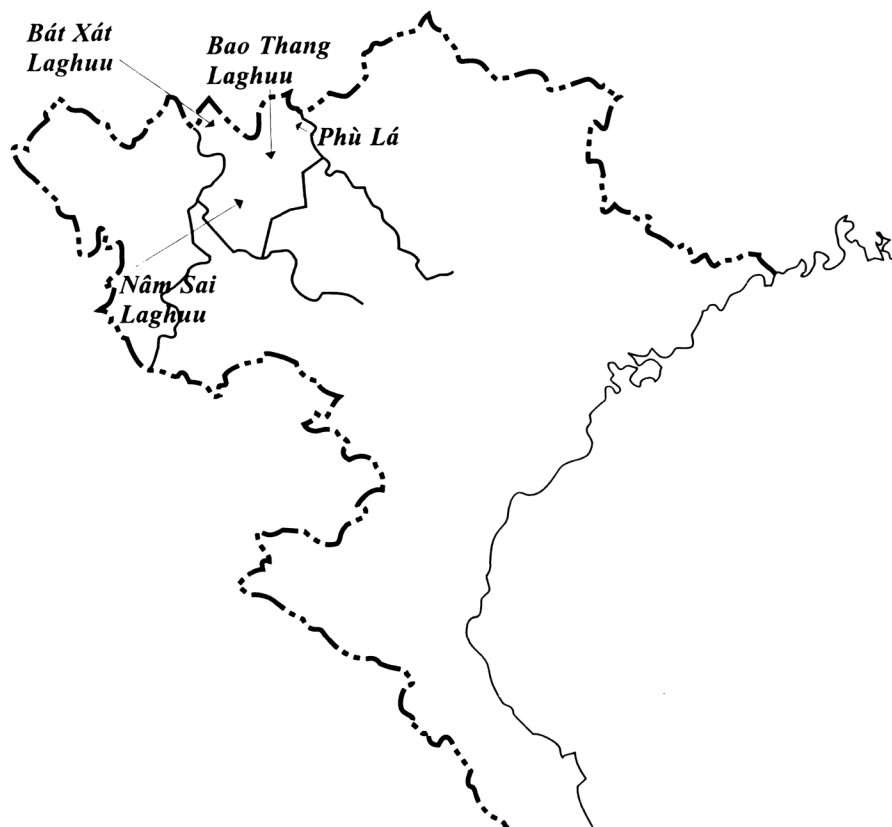


Figure 1. The location of Laghuu

The Laghuu recount that they once lived in Chinese territory, but the location of their former homeland is not known to them today. They believe they entered Vietnam through Lai Châu Province and spread out from there. They have no written tradition as far as is known.

The Laghuu have not been discussed much in print. We were able to find only two mentions of them, Abadie 1924 and a recent picture of the dress of the Laghuu in Hemmet (1995:42). Abadie (1924:185-186) says that they live on the right bank of the Red River among the (Black or White) Thai and the Giáy (Bouyei), to whom they are virtual slaves. He reports that they share “beaucoup d’analogies avec le dialecte fou-la” (Phù Lá); see above. To the best of our knowledge there have been no analyses of the Laghuu language in Vietnamese or in other languages. The National Centre for Social and Human Sciences, Linguistic Institute (Hanoi) has a short vocabulary list.

2.0. PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEM

In the following we will mostly be comparing and contrasting Laghuu with the Yi language and others in the Yi group to bring out more clearly its special features. One obvious feature of Laghuu is the word structure. While individual Laghuu morphemes are monosyllabic, words are typically disyllabic compounds, as in the other Yi languages. The syllable may be analyzed into an initial, a rhyme, and a tone. Initial consonants are not always obligatory. Stops occur with four manners of articulation—unaspirated, aspirated, voiced, and prenasalized voiced. Laghuu shares this property with Yi. Rhymes consist of a vocalic nucleus with optional diphthongal glide or nasal (sometimes only a nasalized vowel). There are no voiceless stop codas.

2.1. Initial consonants

The initial consonants of Laghuu are as follows:

p	ph	b	mb	m	f	v
t	th	d	nd	n		l
					s	z
tʃ	tʃh	dʒ	ndʒ	—	ʃ	ʒ
k	kh	g	ŋg	ŋ	x	ɣ
					h	ʔ
kl	khɬ	gl	ŋkhɬ			

p	pa ⁵⁵	ko ³³				'turtle'
ph	pha ³³	khla ³³				'cloth'
b	ba ³³	tu ⁴⁴				'chase'
mb	mba ³³					'father'
m	ma ³³	ya ³³				'garden'
f	fu ³³	ku ³³	[ma ³³]			'cliff'
v	va ³³	mbu ³³				'hammer; axe'
t	taŋ ³³	de ²⁴				'low'
th	thai ²⁴	zi ⁴⁴				'plow'
d	du ³³	[ba ⁴⁴]				'can; be able'
nd	ndau ²⁴					'guest'
n	na ³³	[va ⁴⁴]				'hear'
l	la ³³	khε ⁵⁵				'iron'
s	sa ³³	la ³³		se ²¹	[va ⁴⁴]	'cotton' 'dry in the sun'
z	za ³³	ɔ ²¹	pu ⁵⁵	ze ³³		'right [side]' 'house'
tʃ	tʃε ²¹	paŋ ²¹				'rope'
tʃh	tʃha ⁵⁵	muεŋ ³³				'salt'
dʒ	dʒa ³³	[va ⁴⁴]				'eat'
ndʒ	ndʒɔ ²¹					'bridge'
ɲ	ɲa ²⁴					'field (dry)'
ʃ	ʃi ⁴⁴	[ma ³³]				'tree'
ʒ	ʒi ²¹	ho ⁴⁴				'otter'
k	kaŋ ⁵⁵	to ³³				'drum'
kh	kha ⁵⁵	tʃa ⁵⁵				'bitter'
g	ge ²¹					'chew food'
ŋg	ŋga ⁵⁵	ma ³³				'wasp'
ŋ	ŋa ⁵⁵	də ³³				'pond'
x	xɔ ³³					'skirt'
ʏ	ʏu ²¹	me ⁴⁴				'pig'
h	he ²¹	tʃa ⁵⁵		hu ²¹		'wide' 'pull'
ʔ	ʔε ²¹			ʔεŋ ³³		'eight' 'hair; body'
kl	mi ⁴⁴	kla ³³				'firewood'
khɬ	khla ³³	ba ³³		khla ²⁴		'moon' 'tongue'
	le ²¹	khla ²⁴		khla ³³	si ⁵⁵	'hand' 'hip'
	khɬi ⁵⁵			khɬε ³³		'feces' 'hide'
	khɬɪ ⁵⁵	ma ⁴⁴				'four'
gl	a ³³	gla ⁴⁴				'taro'
ŋkɬ	tʃhe ⁵⁵	ŋkɬi ²¹	ɲi ²¹	va ³³		'shout; scream'

Table 1. Examples

2.2 Rhymes

A rhyme consists of a nuclear vowel plus glide and/or nasal coda. The vowels are:

i	ɭ	u	u
	ə		o
ɛ			ɔ
			a

Examples:

ɭ	khɭ ³³	‘four’		
i	mi ²¹ ne ²⁴	‘cat’		
u	mu ³³ ɳɛ ³³ khu ³³ ba ³³	‘wind’		
u	mu ²⁴ pa ²¹	‘horse’		
ə	ɳə ⁴⁴ pa ²¹	‘buffalo’		
o	mo ³³ tho ²⁴	‘sky’		
ɛ	me ²¹ tʃho ⁵⁵ ma ³³	‘window’		
ɔ	mɔ ³³ li ²¹ va ⁴⁴	‘rain’		
a	ma ³³ po ³³	‘raft’	ma ⁴⁴ ma ³³	‘bamboo’

2.3 Nasal codas

Nasal codas are /-m -n -ŋ/. The labial and dental nasal codas occur with much less frequency than the velar.

m	mom ³³	‘fishnet’
n	tin ³³ ɳaŋ ³³	‘field (wet)’
ŋ	moŋ ³³ tʃhu ⁵⁵ tʃhu ²¹ va ⁴⁴	‘fog’

2.4 Glide elements

Glide elements /-i -u/ occur in a few words.

ai	thai ²⁴ zi ⁴⁴	‘plow’	pai ⁵⁵	‘bag / sack’
au	ndau ²⁴	‘guest’		
ui	bui ³³	‘mat’		

2.5 Tones

There are five tones in Laghuu. See Figure 2. This language does not appear to have noticeable tense/lax voice quality contrast.

55	pa ⁵⁵	kɔ ³³	'turtle'	tʃhi ⁵⁵	pi ³³	'ginger'
44	a ³³	tʃhi ⁴⁴	'hog deer; sambar deer'			
33	a ³³	tʃhi ³³	'barking deer'	bɔ ³³	tʃhɔ ³³	'fly' (n.)
21	tʃhi ²¹	ka ³³	va ⁴⁴	'wake up'		
24	bɔ ²⁴	ma ³³	'forest'			

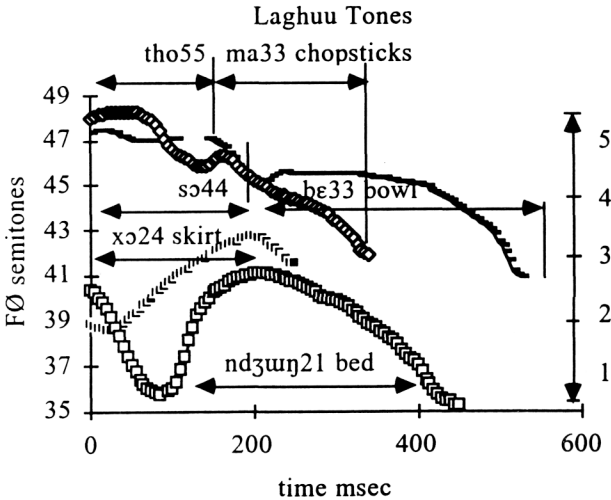


Figure 2. Pitch trajectories for **tho⁵⁵ ma³³** 'chopsticks'; **sɔ⁴⁴ be³³** 'bowl'; **xɔ²⁴** 'skirt'; and **ndʒuŋ²¹** 'bed'

3.0. LEXICON

3.1. Examples of Laghuu lexicon compared to other Yi languages

In Table 2 we provide a limited number of comparative examples from related languages. The data are from Huang Bufan et al. 1992.

4.0. THE AFFILIATION OF THE LAGHUU

The above table of words highlights the special features of Laghuu, by showing some comparisons with the standard Yi (Nosu) of Xide in Sichuan Province, with the Yi (Lalupa) language of Nanjian in West-Central Yunnan,² with the Hani of Lüchun in Yunnan, and with Written Burmese. In regard first to the question of the relationship of Laghuu to other groups within the Phù Lá

² We picked this place since they use the self designation Lawu [la²¹ lu³³ pa²¹], which is somewhat reminiscent of Laghuu.

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Laghuu</i>	<i>Yi (Nosu)</i>	<i>Yi (Lalupa)</i>	<i>Hani</i>	<i>Written Burmese</i>
'one'	[ɣ]a ²¹	tshɿ ³³	tshɿ ²¹	tɕhi ³¹	tas ⁴
'two'	ni ²¹	ɲi ²¹	ɲi ²¹	ɲi ³³	hnas ⁴
'three'	sɔ ³³	sɔ ³³	sɔ ³³	sɔ ³³	tθum ³
'four'	khtɿ ³³	lɿ ³³	ʎɿ ³³	ɕ ³³	le ³
'five'	ɲa ³³	ɲu ³³	ɲa ²¹	ɲa ³³	ɲa ³
'six'	khu ²¹	fu ⁵⁵	kho ²¹	kɥ ³¹	khro ⁴
'seven'	si ²¹	ʂɿ ²¹	xu ²¹	ʂɿ ³¹	khu ³ hnas ⁴
'eight'	ʔe ²¹	hi ⁵⁵	hi ²¹	ɕe ³¹	hras ⁴
'nine'	ku ³³	gu ³³	kɥ ³³	ɣø ³¹	ko ³
'ten'	tshu ²¹	tshi ³³	tchi ⁵⁵	tshe ⁵⁵	sha ²
'moon'	khta ³³ ba ³³	ʔo ²¹ bo ³³	xa ³³ bo ³³	ba ³³ la ³³	la ¹
'sky'	mo ³³ thu ⁴⁴	mo ³³ m ³³	m ²¹ du ⁵⁵	ɔ ³¹	mo ³
'sun'	ne ³³ gw ³³	gw ³³ zu ³³	a ⁵⁵ m ²¹ ɣu ⁵⁵	no ⁵⁵ ma ³³	ne ²
'mountain'	bo ²¹ khtu ³³	bo ³³	ku ⁵⁵ dzɔ ²¹	xɔ ⁵⁵ the ⁴⁴	tɔŋ ²
'salt'	tʃha ⁵⁵ muɛŋ ³³	tshu ³³	tsha ²¹ bo ³³	tsha ³¹ dɿ ³¹	sha ³
'tree'	ʃi ⁴⁴ ma ³³	sɿ ³³ bo ³³	sɿ ³³ dzɿ ³³	a ⁵⁵ bo ⁵⁵	tθas ⁴ paŋ
'dog'	tʃhi ³³ me ⁴⁴	khɥ ³³	a ⁵⁵ khɥ ²¹	a ³¹ khɥ ³¹	khwe ³
'otter'	ʒi ²¹ ho ⁴⁴	ʂo ⁴⁴ zu ³³	ma ²¹	u ⁵⁵ sɔ ⁵⁵	phjam ²
'fish'	ɲa ⁵⁵ me ⁴⁴	hu ³³	ʔa ²¹	ɲa ³¹ de ⁵⁵	ɲa ³
'frog'	a ²¹ pa ²⁴	ɔ ⁵⁵ pa ³³	ʔu ⁵⁵ pa ²¹	xa ³¹ pha ³¹	pha ³
'tongue'	khta ³³ be ³³	ʔa ³³ ni ³³	ʔa ⁵⁵	la ⁵⁵ ma ³³	hlja ²
'I'	ɲa ³³	ɲa ³³	ɲa ⁵⁵	ɲa ⁵⁵	ɲa ²
'you'	nu ³³	nu ³³	ɲ ⁵⁵	no ⁵⁵	maŋ ³
'firewood'	mi ⁴⁴ kla ³³	sɿ ³³	sɿ ³³	sɿ ⁴⁴ ku ⁵⁵	thaŋ ³
'shout'	tʃhe ⁵⁵ ŋkhti ²¹ ɲi ²¹	ku ³³	ku ⁵⁵	ku ⁵⁵	ɔ ²
'fire'	mi ⁴⁴	m ²¹ tu ⁵⁵	a ⁵⁵ tu ⁵⁵	mi ³¹ dza ³¹	mi ³
'bridge'	dʒɔ ²¹	dzi ³³	ɣo ²¹ dzy ⁵⁵	lɔ ⁵⁵ dzɔ ⁵⁵	tam ²
'silver'	khu ²¹ ke ²¹ ke ⁵⁵	tchu ³³	fu ⁵⁵	phju ⁵⁵	ɲwe ²
'copper'	ŋgiŋ ³³ pa ⁵⁵	dzɿ ³³	gw ²¹	gw ³¹	kre ³

Table 2

nationality, Nguyễn Văn Huy (1975:422) notes that Laghuu for 82 basic items:

- shares 62.2% in common with Phù Lá A Lù (Flowery Phù Lá)
- shares 46.3% in common with Phù Lá Lùng Phìn (of Mường Khương)
- shares 42.7% in common with Phù Lá Nàn Xín.

This evidence suggests that other peoples called Phù Lá speak a language that is closely affiliated to that spoken by the people we have studied.³ In regard to relationships wider afield one might note, that if Lalupa represents Bradley's "Western Yi" or Lalo/Alu, then Laghuu and Lalo/Alu are also not particularly closely allied. Still, there appears to be quite a high level of cognation between many Laghuu and Yi-Burmese roots. While sharing many common features, Laghuu also shows many interesting and informative special characteristics:

- (1) The presence of clusters, especially **kl**, **khɬ**, **gl**, and **ŋkhɬ**. Many of these show regular correspondences to Yi. For example, the **khɬ** usually corresponds to Yi (Xide) **ɬ** or **l**, as in **khta³³ ba³³** (Laghuu) vs. **to²¹ bo³³** (Xide) 'moon', **khta³³ be³³** vs. **la³³ ni³³** 'tongue', **khɬɿ³³** vs. **lɿ³³** 'four', suggesting that the Yi dental fricative might have split or derived from a more complex structure, since **khɬ** sometimes occurs in Laghuu in items that show **tʂh** in Yi (Xide), e.g., **khɬi⁵⁵** (Laghuu) vs. **tʂɿ³³** (Xide) 'feces'.
- (2) The nasal onset of prenasalized consonants is weak in comparison to those of Yi. Phonologically, the distribution of these nasals is also different from Yi. So, for example, Laghuu nasals can appear not only with affricates but also with fricatives, whereas in Yi they appear only with affricates. Also, the frequency of prenasalized obstruents in Laghuu is much lower than in Yi.
- (3) As for word structure, Laghuu words are regularly polysyllabic, e.g., **khu²¹ ke²¹ ke⁵⁵** 'silver', **tʃha³³ muɛŋ³³** 'salt'; in Yi these words are strictly monosyllabic (**tchu³³** and **tshu³³**, respectively). Also Laghuu **tʃhi⁵⁵ bu²¹ tʃhi⁵⁵ kha³³ la⁴⁴** 'navel' corresponds to Yi **tcho³³ bu²¹ di³³**.
- (4) Nasal codas /-m -n -ŋ/ often appear in Laghuu, e.g., **mom³³** 'fishnet'; **bom²⁴ pa³³** 'monkey'; **tʃha⁴⁴ muɛŋ³³** 'salt'; **tʃhiŋ²¹ de³³ le⁴⁴** 'goat'. Nasal codas are not commonly found in other Yi languages. Hani and Lahu have some nasalized vowels; Jinuo has only -ŋ codas, according to Huang et al. 1992.
- (5) There are five distinctive tones in this language (see Figure 2). There is also a tone sandhi phenomenon where 21 becomes 24, before

³ In fieldwork carried out in July 1999 we have been able to confirm that Phù Lá is indeed close to Laghuu and more distant from the Yi languages of Vietnam, such as Flowery Lolo (of Ha Giang Province). Phù Lá has the same distinctive clusters as Laghuu, but is nevertheless quite distinct lexically and phonologically.

another syllable with a 33 tone, for example, **a²⁴ dɛ³³** ‘brother’. A 55 tone often develops a falling component at the end of a word, becoming 54 or 53.

There are several distinctive properties of Laghuu that argue for its being regarded as a separate language. These include both phonological and lexical evidence. The first phonological feature is that Laghuu has velar clusters, which are not found in any other Yi Branch language.⁴ Evidence from Tibetan confirms the presence of original clusters in such words as, e.g., ‘moon’ Laghuu **khla³³ ba³³** vs. Written Tibetan **zla ba**. The second feature to mention is tone. Laghuu has five tones, which is a large number for a Yi language. Only Sani Yi possesses so many. More typical for Yi are three tones, e.g., at Xide, Weishan, and Nanhua. Outside Yi proper, we note that Hani has four, and Lahu as well as Jinuo have seven.⁵ Finally, Laghuu words regularly have four or even more syllables, which is greater than in most Yi Branch languages. Laghuu also possesses many distinctive lexical items that overlap only in part with Yi languages. To give just a few examples: Laghuu has ‘day’ **ɛ⁵⁵ a³³ ni²¹ ba⁴⁴** vs. **ni²¹** in Xide Yi; ‘grass’ **ja³³ ɲo³³** vs. Xide **bu⁵⁵**. We have not as yet had an opportunity to examine the lexicon of Laghuu in any detail, but we believe that shared basic vocabulary with Yi may not exceed sixty percent. Also, one important trait of all Yi communities is the presence of the traditional Yi writing system. Laghuu fails to possess this important cultural feature. We thus are inclined to believe for the moment that Laghuu represents a language situated close to Yi but nevertheless represents a language that cannot be regarded as belonging to the Yi complex. Still, there remains much to be learned about the Laghuu.

⁴ The most similar clusters to these elsewhere in Yi seem to be the dental clusters /t d/ of Sani.

⁵ The term “Yi” is used in this paper in a narrower sense than the traditional scope of the term “Loloish,” which does include languages like Hani, Lisu, and Lahu. [Ed.]

REFERENCES

- ABADIE, Maurice. 1924. *Les races du Haut Tonkin de Phong Thô à Lang Son*. Paris: Société d'Éditions Géographiques, Maritimes, et Coloniales.
- BRADLEY, David. 1995. "Grammaticalisation of extent in Mran-Ni." *LTBA* 18.1:11-28.
- _____. 1996. "Tibeto-Burman languages of PDR Lao." *LTBA* 19.1:19-27.
- DEMG. 1975. *Về vấn đề xác định thành phần các dân tộc thiểu số ở miền bắc Việt Nam* [On determining the ethnic minority groupings of northern Vietnam.]. Viện Dân tộc học, Ủy ban khoa học xã hội Việt Nam [Institute of Ethnography, National Center for Social Sciences of Vietnam]. Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất bản Khoa học Xã hội [Social Sciences Publishing House.] [Abbreviated reference: DEMG.]
- EMPV. 1978. *Các dân tộc ít người ở Việt Nam (Các tỉnh phía Bắc)* [Ethnic minority peoples of Vietnam (the northern provinces)] . [Abbreviated reference: EMPV.]
- HEMMET, Christine. 1995. *Montagnards des pays d'Indochine*. Paris: Éditions Sépia.
- HUANG Bufan et al. 1992. *Zàng-Miǎn yǔzú yǔyán cǐhuì*. Beijing: Mǐnzú Xuéyuàn Chūbǎnshè. [Abbreviated reference: ZMYYC.]
- LUNET DE LAJONQUIÈRE, Étienne Edmond. 1906. *Ethnographie du Tonkin septentrional*. Rédigée sur l'ordre de M. P. Beau. Paris: E. Leroux.
- NGUYỄN Văn Huy. 1975. "Bước Đầu Tìm hiểu mối Quan Hệ Tộc Người Giữa Hai Nhóm Phù Lá và «Xà Phó»." ["First steps to understanding the differences between the Xa Pho and other Pho La groups."] In DEMG, 415-28.