SAEK REVISITED

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This article is intended to complement Professor Gedney's 1970 article on 'The Saek Language of Nakhon Phanom Province', in which he describes the phonological structure of Saek. In this paper I will discuss some word classes such as personal pronouns, sentence particles, question words and classifiers.

I. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Like other Thai dialects, Saek has different words to mean *'I', 'you'* and the third person. Also like most Thai dialects spoken in the provinces of Thailand, Saek has a less elaborate system of personal pronouns than Standard Thai. This is certainly due to or related to the social structure of the community and the use of personal pronouns reflects this structure. In selecting the suitable personal pronoun in Saek, one has to consider "age" and "type of relation" of the speaker, the hearer, and the third person. Unlike Standard Thai, any personal pronoun in Saek can be used by both male and female speakers. Saek has the following personal pronouns:

First Person	*Second Person*	*Third Person*
1. $hɔy^5$	1. caw^3	1. vua^5
2. $phaan^1$	2. $ʔay^3$	2. raw^6
3. $hiiŋ^5$	3. $ʔay^3$	3. man^6
4. kuu^6	4. $mɨŋ^6$	
5. ruu^4	5. $ʔay^3$	

Table I

[hɔy⁵] 'I' indicates politeness, It is used when the speaker wants to show respect and politeness toward the hearer who, normally, is older or unacquainted.

[phaan¹] 'I' is used when the hearer is about the same age as the speaker.

[hiiŋ⁵] 'I' is used among people of the same age to show intimacy.

[ruu⁴] 'I' has the same usage as [hiiŋ⁵].

[kuu⁶] 'I' indicates intimacy. It is used when the speaker is older or about the same age as the hearer.

[caw³] 'you' indicates politeness. It is used when the hearer is older than the speaker or when the hearer is a stranger.

[ʔay³] 'you' is used when the speaker and the hearer are about the same age. They can be friends or strangers.

[mɨŋ⁶] 'you' indicates intimacy. It is used when the hearer is younger or about the same age as the speaker.

[vua⁵] 'he, she' is used to refer to a respected or older third person.

[raw⁶] 'he, she' refers to third person in general.

[man⁶] 'he, she, it' refers to a younger third person.

[phaan¹], [hiiŋ⁵] and [ruu⁴] may be used interchangeably. They have no difference in meaning.

Each Saek personal pronoun refers to only one person, that is, plurality is not expressed in this class of words. When there is a need to indicate plurality, either [muu²] 'group' or [phuak⁵] 'group' is added in front of each personal pronoun, for example, [muu² ruu⁴] 'we', [phuak⁵ ruu⁵] 'they'. Or the word [kin⁶] 'each other' follows the verb to indicate that there is more than person performing the action of the verb, for example, [man⁶ mok⁴ kin⁶] 'They beat each other'.

The first and the second person pronouns go in pairs as indicated by the numerical order in Table I above. That is, the selection of one form of 'I' determines the choice for the form of 'you'. It would sound peculiar if the expected partner of the pair were not used.

[raw⁶] which is used as a first and second person in many other dialects is used as a third person pronoun in this dialect. Is it possible that [raw] was once used as a first, second, and third person, which is like present usage of kinship terms and personal names?

II. NAMES, KIN TERMS, AND TITLES

Personal names and kinship terms can also be used as personal pro-
nouns, but they have a wider usage. That is, they can be used either
as a first person, a second person or a third person. Person names in
Saek are not different from those in Standard Thai or other Thai dialects
but what is conspicuous is that Saek person names are considered old-
fashioned by the speakers of Standard Thai whose names are created daily
based on Sanskrit. The following are kinship terms in Saek:

    [yaa³ – thuat³] *paternal great-grandmother*
    [puu² – thuat³]
    [ʔaay⁴ – thuat³]
    [oon⁴ – thuat³]

    [phɔɔ⁵] *father*   [mee⁵] *mother*
    [ʔooŋ⁵] *grandfather*   [taa⁶] *maternal grandfather*
    [yaa³]   *maternal grandmother*   [ʔaay⁴] *maternal grandmother*
    [puu²]   *paternal grandfather*   [yaa³] *paternal grandfather*
    [luŋ⁴]   *mother's or father's older brother*
    [paa³]   *mother's or father's older sister*
    [ʔaaw³] *father's younger brother*
    [ʔɔɔ³]   *father's younger sister*
    [ʔææŋ¹] *eldest son*
    [cii³]   *eldest daughter*
    [phii⁵] *older sibling*
    [nuaŋ³] *younger sibling*
    [lɨk³]   *offspring*
    [laan²] *grandchild*
    [leen¹] *great-grandchild*
    [lɔɔt²] *great-great-grandchild*

The last six kinship terms may take the suffix [baaw⁴] *'male'* or
[saaw⁴] *'female'* to indicate gender; for example, [lɨk³-baaw⁴] *'son'*
and [laan²-saaw⁴] *'granddaughter'*. They can also take the suffix
[khwooy⁴] *'male-in-law'* and [khwəə³] *'female-in-law'* to indicate rela-
tionship by marriage; for example, [lɨk³-khwooy⁴] *'son-in-law'*, and
[laan²-khwəə³] *'wife of a grandson'*. Saek has different titles for old
people, young people, and children. [thaw³] which means *'old'* is used
in front of old people's names to show politeness or respect; for ex-
ample, [thaw³-maa⁶] *'Mr Maa'* or [thaw³-sii¹] *'Mrs See'*. [threem³] is
used in front of younger people's names. Like [thaw³], [threem³] may be
used either before a male or a female name. Boys and girls get different
titles: [ʔææŋ³] is used preceding a boy's name and [naaŋ⁴] before a

girl's name. What is noticeable here is that Saek children have sepa-
rate titles but as they grow up they share the same titles.

III. SENTENCE PARTICLES

Marvin Brown describes *sentence particles*, the label often applied
to short words which are added at the end of sentences, functioning in a
way comparable to English intonation. Those particles never occur alone
to convey meaning. They may be used to indicate an urge, a command, or
to form questions.

There are two question particles in Saek, [haa^3] and [he?^{4}-boo^2].
These two words turn statements into questions when added at the end
of the sentence.

These two words can be used interchangeably, for example:

[mee^3 yuu^2 raan^4 he?^{4}-boo^2]

 mother to be home   question particle

 Is mother home?

[mee^3 yuu^2 raan^4 haa^3]

 mother to be home   question particle

 Is mother home?

[mak^4 he?^{4}-boo^2]

 to like   question particle

 Do you like it?

[mak^4 haa^3]

 to like   question particle

 Do you like it?

[yuu^4 nam^4 phan^3 haa^3]

 to swim to be able   question particle

 Do you swim?

[si^2-hit^2 he?^{4}-boo^2]

 will do   question particle

 Are you going to do it?

The following are some other final particles in Saek.

[na^6-khay^4] is added at the end of a positive command to make it
sound stronger and show the urge of the speaker.

[riik^5 ræɛŋ^4 ræɛŋ^4 na^6-khay^4]

 to call loud   loud   particle

 Call him loudly!

[tak⁴ nam⁶   thræ² - thræ²   na⁶-khay⁴]
to dip water soft   soft   particle
Dip up the water softly!

[ʔaw¹   din¹-som³ pay¹ kuan⁶ nam⁶   na⁶-khay⁴]
to take alum   go stir water particle
Stir some alum in the water!

[ʔiil³] is also added at the end of a positive command. Though it shows the urge of the speaker, it is different from [na⁶-khay⁴] in that it adds a sympathetic feeling of the speaker towards the listener. Thus, it is mostly used when the speaker is older or superior to the listener. The word is pronounced [ʔiit³] by younger speakers.

[thuu¹   raan⁴ ʔiil³]
to clean house particle
Clean the floor!

[kin¹   ʔiil³]
to eat particle
Eat it!

[diʔ⁴] is used in negative sentences to soften them. To native speakers, a negative sentence without this particle sounds harsh and almost impolite.

[boo² pay¹   diʔ⁴]
not to go particle
I am not going.

[boo² kin¹   diʔ⁴]
not to eat particle
No, I won't eat it.

[vaw⁴ boo² nak⁴   diʔ⁴]
light not heavy particle
No, it is light; it is not heavy.

[ʔiit⁴] is used at the end of a statement to show that whatever the speaker is doing is not important or does not take any particular energy.

[pay¹ tham²   sak⁴ ʔiit⁴]
to go to visit just particle
I am going to visit him (a little).

[yak⁴   phia³   ʔiit⁴]
to wash blouse particle
I am washing (a little).

[het² lææ⁶-ŋaay⁴   ʔⅈⅈt⁴]
to do things to eat with rice particle
I am cooking (a little).

Other question words such as *'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why',*
and *'how'* are used in the same manner as other Thai dialects.

[thaa⁴] ∿ [ʔan⁶-thaa⁴] *'what'*
[het² (ʔan⁶) thaa⁴ yuu²]
to do   what   in the process
What are you doing?

[naŋ² rⅈaŋ⁵ (ʔan⁶)-thaa⁴]
movie story   what
What is the title of the movie?

[mⅈⅈ⁴   vⅈak⁵   (ʔan⁶)-thaa⁴]
to have business   what
What can I do for you?

[nəə⁴] *'where, which', 'who'*
[aw²   thua⁴   nəə⁴]
to take noun classifier which
Which one do you want?

[maa⁶   trææ⁴ nəə⁴]
to come from   where
Where do you come from?

[hun⁴ nəə² maa⁴]
man   which come
Who came? ∿ Which person came?

[dəə¹] *'who'*
[mæn³ dəə¹ hun⁴ sɔɔ³   ʔaay⁶]
who   come to see grandma
Who came to see grandma?

[taa⁶   traaw² nam⁴ dəə¹]
grandpa speak   with who
With whom is grandpa speaking?

[nəə⁴] may be compounded with [pan²] to mean *'how much'.*
[gaw³ kⅈ⁶-loo⁴ nⅈŋ⁶ pan²-nəə⁴]
rice kilo   one   how much
How much is rice a kilogram?

[phlak⁴   nii²   kwaay¹   pan²-nəə⁴]
vegetable   this   to sell   how much
How much is this vegetable?

IV. NOUN CLASSIFIERS

Noun classifiers in Saek fall into two main categories: human beings
and objects. The distinction between these two categories is very clear.
That is, classifiers used for human beings are never used for objects
and vice versa. Animals, trees, and fruits do not have special classi-
fiers. These nouns are partly repeated to serve as their own classi-
fiers. For example:

[<u>thua</u>⁴-paw⁶   saam²   <u>thua</u>⁴]   *'Three crabs'*
 crab   *three*   *classifier*

[<u>thua</u>⁴-mææw⁴   cæt⁴   <u>thua</u>⁴]   *'Seven cats'*
 cat   *seven*   *classifier*

[<u>thua</u>⁴-lian¹   sip⁴   <u>thua</u>⁴]   *'Ten eels'*
 eel   *ten*   *classifier*

[<u>maak</u>²-miaŋ⁵   sɔɔŋ²   <u>maak</u>²]   *'Two mangoes'*
 mango   *two*   *classifier*

[<u>maak</u>²-kiaŋ³   saam²   <u>maak</u>²]   *'Three oranges'*
 orange   *three*   *classifier*

[<u>khoo</u>⁴-lam⁶-ñay⁶   sɔɔŋ²   <u>khoo</u>⁴]   *'Two lam-yai trees'*
 lam-yai tree   *two*   *classifier*

[<u>khoo</u>-maak²-miaŋ⁵   saam²   <u>khoo</u>⁴]   *'Three mango trees'*
 mango tree   *three*   *classifier*

For the human category, Saek has two classifiers: [hun⁴] and [ʔoŋ⁶].
The former is used with ordinary people and the latter is used with
monks. For example:

[nuaŋ⁵   sɔɔŋ²   hun⁴]   *'Two younger siblings'*
 young sibling *two*   *classifier*

[phii⁵   saam²   hun⁴]   *'Three older siblings'*
 older sibling *three* *classifier*

[phra?⁴   sɔɔŋ²   ʔoŋ¹]   *'Two monks'*
 monk   *two*   *classifier*

Unlike the surrounding Lao dialects which are rich in noun classi-
fiers for objects, Saek has only one classifier for this category [ʔan¹].
All objects regardless of shape, size, or function share the same

classifier. However, a part of some nouns, as an alternative to [ʔan¹],
may be repeated to serve as their own classifiers. For example:

   [koŋ³ - kæɛw³   sɔɔŋ² ʔan¹]   *'Two drinking glasses'*
   drinking glass   two   classifier

   [mɔɔ² rɔk⁴ ʔan¹]   *'Six pots'*
   pot   six   classifier

   [pak⁴-tuu⁶-bɔŋ² sɔɔŋ² ʔan¹]   *'Two windows'*
   window   two   classifier

   [læm⁵-kim¹ sɔɔŋ² <u>læm⁵</u>]   *'Two needles'*
   needle   two   classifier

   [læm⁵-rua¹ sɔɔŋ² <u>læm⁵</u>]   *'Two boats'*
   boat   two   classifier

   [phɨɨn¹-phia³ sɔɔŋ² <u>phɨɨn¹</u>]   *'Two blouses'*
   blouse   two   classifier

   [saay¹-sɔɔy² sii² <u>saay¹</u>]   *'Four necklaces'*
   necklace   four   classifier

The underlined classifiers may be used interchangeably with [ʔan¹].

The first syllable of compound nouns above, e.g. *needle, boat,* may be
dropped. Thus one can say either [læm⁵-kim¹] or [kim¹] for *'needle'*,
[læm⁵-rua¹] or [rua¹] for *'boat'*, [phɨɨn¹-phia³] or [phia³] for *'blouse'*
and [saay¹-sɔɔy²] or [sɔɔy²] for *'necklace'*. The five compound nouns
above might at first seem strange to speakers of other Thai dialects but
the process of dropping the first syllable is certainly not foreign. In
Standard Thai this process also occurs, for example, the words for
'onion' and *'garlic'* are [hǔa-hɔ̌ɔm] or [hɔ̌ɔm] and [hǔa-kra-thiam] or
[kra-thiam] respectively. The classifier of these two nouns is, of
course, [hǔa]. In many Lao dialects, the word for *umbrella* is [khan-hom]
or [hom], and the classifier for this noun is [khan]. If a speaker of
Standard Thai sits down to think of this type of word, a long list can
be produced.

From the evidence above, I would like to propose that noun classi-
fiers are not new features in the Thai language. Rather they have been
in the languages for a long time but with a different word order. They
used to be in front of nouns and some still are. Currently, this order
has been reversed. Classifiers are used after nouns and numbers.
[ʔan], the most common classifier in the Thai languages, must have been
a relative pronoun which meant *'who', 'which',* or *'that'*.

V. THE STABILITY OF SAEK

   Saek speakers have been decreasing in number and this process will
probably go on until the Saek language disappears. This is because
younger Saek people have more or less stopped using it. They have
started to speak local Lao dialects which are spoken by the majority in
their province. In addition to this, there are two other main reasons.
One is that the Saek people have tended to move away from their villages
in order to work. In doing this, they have to discard their own language
for whatever dialect prevails in their new surrounding. Intermarriage
is the second factor in the disappearance of the Saek language. When
one parent does not speak Saek, it follows almost naturally that children
will not speak it either. Saek may indeed die out in another thirty to
fifty years as Professor Gedney has predicted.