Laha reexamined

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A preliminary note on this North Vietnam language, based on very limited material gleaned from a 1972 Vietnamese source, is included in Benedict 1975 ("ATLC": [Introduction to Glossary] 186-900). A later Russian-Vietnamese work (Solntsev et al., eds. 1986) on one of the three known dialects, Khla-Phlao (KP)\(^1\), now provides excellent material for a full analysis of Laha, with findings as outlined below. Note must be made, however, of a major complicating factor: the language is spoken in an area (Than-Uyên, Thuận-Châu) well south of the China border and, along with the anticipated Vietnamese loans, displays marked influence from the neighboring White Tai and related languages, e.g., in KP the numerals above 'four' have been borrowed from Tai. This has yielded two lexical layers, an earlier Kadai-level along with a later Tai-level, yielding a variety of reflexes, with many problems still awaiting solution.

1. **Consonants.**

The Laha consonants are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p</th>
<th>pl</th>
<th>ph</th>
<th>phl</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>m</th>
<th>ml</th>
<th>v/w</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td>y-z</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>kl</td>
<td>kh</td>
<td>khl</td>
<td>ŋ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>h</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1**

Initial \(\mathbf{v-}\) is in complementary distribution with final \(\mathbf{-v}\); \(\mathbf{z-}\) is a free variant of \(\mathbf{y-}\) and is apparently earlier in some forms (see 'rain' under 9).

The consonantal pattern is of the Tai type, perhaps showing Tai influence, and the historical development is also similar, including \(^{**}b-\rightarrow\)

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\(^1\) For a list of language, reference, and other abbreviations, see the Appendix. [Ed.]
b-, *?d- > d- [d-]; also *?dz- > z- via *dz- (in 'rain'). Post-velars merged with velars, with both *kh- and *q(h)- (= PT *x-) > kh-, but *G- (= PT *ɣ-) > k- vs. *g- > kh-. The latter parallels */b- > pʰ- and */d- > th-, with p- or t- reflexes seemingly pointing to Tai loans, e.g., pā6 'carry on back', PT *ba (A2/B2). Note c- for */j- in cā1 'rough', PT *ja (A2) and the variation shown by the following:

1. Laha saav1 'early', PT *jaw (A2)
2. Laha se5 'male/man', SW/C-Tai (SW/CT) *jaay (A2) ~ NT *saay (A1)
3. Laha caak1 'pestle', PT *saak
4. Laha cot4 'tail', NT *cot 'end', SWT sut 'end', Buyang šut14 'tail'.

Note also s- for */z-:

5. Laha sə2 'straight/erect', PT *zə (C2).

Both p- and pʰ- show ties with PT *f- ~ *v-, with v- for PT *w-; also Laha h- corresponds to PT initial *r-, while Laha -l- corresponds to PT medial *r-.

2. **Vowels.**

The Laha vowels are shown in Table 2.

```
  u  i  iə  uə  iə
  o  ø  øə  øə
  a  ø  øə
  æ
  aa
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**Table 2**

This is essentially the basic Tai pattern, with diphthongs maintained but with a length distinction only for /a/. The actual rimes, however, tend to be idiosyncratic, with øə appearing at times for an anticipated *-i, -øə for *-u or *-aw, as well as -øə for *-av.
3. **Labial clusters/dyads.**

For dyads, the anticipated forms with medial -l- are found:

(6) Laha phɔŋ⁶ 'leech', PT *p-liŋ (A1)
(7) Laha plɔk⁴ 'bracelet', PT *p-lɔk 'ring, band'
(8) Laha bla² 'fish', PT *p-la (A1)³
(9) Laha phlɔŋ⁶ 'bee', PT *ph-liŋ (B1)
(10) Laha phlɛv⁴ 'sweep', PT *phɛv (B1) 'sweep, clean' (see Li 1977), for *ph-rev (B1).⁴ Here disambiguating cognates are lacking; Laha plays a key role.
(11) Laha phlɑat¹ 'slip/slide', PT *b-läat 'slip and fall'.

Note Laha phl- for a secondary cluster (as opposed to a dyad) in the following:

(12) Laha phla⁶ 'knife', PT *bra (B2) 'knife (dao), sword' (possibly an early loan).

Note also:

(13) Laha plaat⁴ 'blood', PT *lɔat⁵.

For PAT/PKD-level clusters (see the Table in Benedict 1991; also Benedict 1990a:75), the Laha reflexes vary:

(14) PAT/PKD *pr > Laha /t/ (ta³ 'eye')
(15) PAT/PKD *pl > Laha /ph/ (phəŋ⁵ 'die' ~ phəŋ² 'kill')
    (see under 9)
(16) PAT/PKD *pl > Laha /p/ (paal³ 'forest')
(17) PAT/PKD *br (preglottalized) > Laha /d/ (dəp 'unripe/raw')
(18) PAT/PKD *bl > Laha /th/ via *d (θəv⁴ 'ashes').

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² For the distinction between 'clusters' and 'dyads' (the latter reflecting disyllabic prototypes) see Benedict 1989a.
³ Note the Laha voiced initial.
⁴ For various reasons, Benedict and Li Fang Kuei use the symbols B and C for opposite tonal categories of Proto-Tai: Benedict's "B" corresponds to Li's "C" (written with məaj thoo in Siamese), while Benedict's "C" corresponds to Li's "B" (written with məaj pέek). This word 'sweep' is particularly confusing in this respect: as the Siamese spelling pirit phrɛw shows, this word belongs to Li's Tone *C₁, and is so marked in the text of Li 1977 (p. 64); however, in the Index to Li 1977 (p. 354) it is erroneously cited as "B1." [Ed.]
⁵ See Benedict 1989b.
4. **Final -1.**

See my forthcoming paper on Saek in *Comparative Kadai II* for details of comparisons with Saek -1 as well as White Sand Li -1.

5. **Tones.**

Laha has three high tones (including one glottalized: indicated by an underline, 55) and three low tones, with the following correspondences with Tai tones (*B/C = *C/B of F. K. Li; the numerals in the chart refer to the number of examples found for each Laha/PT tonal correspondence). See Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laha</th>
<th>1 /55/</th>
<th>2 /55/</th>
<th>3 /53/</th>
<th>4 /22/</th>
<th>5 /21/</th>
<th>6 /14/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PTaI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

Tone 5 shows some association with aspiration (initials: stop + h, h-, s-), especially for A1. There is only one exception:

(19) Laha น์ณ 'pond', PT *หนน (A1).

Syllables with *voiced initials and stopped finals (PTaI Tone *D2) correspond to Laha Tone 1 /55/, while stopped syllables with *voiceless initials (PTaI Tone *D1) correspond to Laha Tone 4 /22/ with a very consistent pattern, allowing, e.g., khot¹ 'curved/crooked', to be grouped with PT *gот 'bent, winding', rather than with PT *кот 'coil' ~ 'bent/curved'. Laha parallels Be in the tonal flipflop here; note also that, unlike TaI, the glottalized tone here (2) is completely dissociated from tone *B and linked rather with *A; this again parallels Be, where tone 1 ('low-rising legato tone with very conspicuous laryngeal constriction towards the