THE EMERGENCE OF LENGTH DISTINCTION OF MID-FRONT VOWEL e-ee IN THAI

Puttachart Dhananjayananda
Ph.D. Candidate
Dept. of Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University
Bangkok, Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

The Proto-Southwestern Tai vowel system, reconstructed by Li (1977: 259-261) and by Sarawit (1973: 97), shows the length distinction of all high vowels and mid-low vowels as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
  & i & ii & e & a & oo \\
  v & i & ii & u & " & " \\
  e & uu & & & & \\
  & " & o & & & \\
  & " & a & " & aa & "
\end{array}
\]

When compared to the vowel system of the daughter languages in Southwestern Tai group, it is found that in all the daughter languages except Thai, only the mid-low vowel a-aa possess the length distinction. The vowel system of the Thai language is different from those of other Tai languages in that it consists of nine pure vowels all of which contrast in length. Thai vowel system can be shown as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
  & i & ii & e & e & oo \\
  v & i & ii & u & e & e \\
  e & uu & " & " & " & " \\
  a & " & a & " & " & "
\end{array}
\]

Li (1977: 260-261) claims that the vowels ee e oo o might have been introduced into the Thai vowel system through borrowing or secondary developments.

In order to prove Li's claim, the documents of
the Sukhothai period (the Inscription) and of the present period (the Royal Institute Dictionary B.E.2525) are investigated. It is found that in the Sukhothai period only two written types are found to represent the voweles or ee: ⟨ɨ⟩  seaside; ⟨ɨː⟩ เหม "full", four written types are used, however, in the present period: ⟨ɨ⟩ เจดีย์ "pagoda"; ⟨ɨː⟩ เหตุ "cause"; ⟨ɨː́⟩ ดอก "to pluck"; ⟨ɨːɨ⟩ เที่ยม "to kick". It is hypothesized, therefore, that the length distinction of the vowel e-ee emerges at some time between the Sukhothai and the present period. The study to locate the more specific time of the emergence of length distinction of mid and low vowels in Thai is thus very interesting.

This study attempts to investigate the time when length distinction of mid-front vowel (e-ee) emerged, and to find out whether borrowing is the significant factor for such emergence.

**Research Methodology**

In this study, the written forms used for the vowel e-ee (⟨ɨ⟩; ⟨ɨː⟩; ⟨ɨː́⟩; ⟨ɨːɨ⟩, which may be accompanied with each markers: 'ː' 'ː̄' ') are drawn from ten selected documents during five periods (the Sukhothai, Ayudhaya, Beginning of Bangkok, Middle of Bangkok, and present period). After that the data are compared with lexical items in other Tai dialects and also in other languages in order that the types of words can be specified. Finally the emergence of length distinction of mid-front vowel e-ee is hypothesized.

**The Occurrence of Written Forms Used for e-ee**

The data are grouped according to 2 factors: forms and types of words.
First the data are put into 5 groups according to different forms of vowel e-e. This is to study the development of these written forms which are as follows:

1. \(<\text{-}\>\) : เข "to incline"
2. \(<\text{-} \#\>\) : เล่ "trick"
3. \(<\text{-} \#\><<\text{-} \#\>\) : เป็น "be"
4. \(<\text{−}\>\) : เชื "ball of cotton"
5. \(<\text{−}\>\) : เกื "short"

The third type above shows the variation of written forms \(<\text{-}\>\) and \(<\text{−}\>\).

The following table shows the count of different written forms of vowel e-e in 5 periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERIOD</th>
<th>B.E.</th>
<th>DOCUMENTS</th>
<th>WRITTEN FORMS USED FOR e - ee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(&lt;\text{-}&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(&lt;\text{-}&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukhothai</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Inscrip.I</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-1910</td>
<td>Srichum</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayudhya</td>
<td>2229</td>
<td>Kosa Paan</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2271</td>
<td>Pamok</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin.of</td>
<td>2347</td>
<td>3 Laws</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>2368-70</td>
<td>Rama III</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of</td>
<td>2397</td>
<td>Dict.Ling</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>2434</td>
<td>Dict.2434</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>2470</td>
<td>Dict.2470</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2525</td>
<td>Dict.2525</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1:** Occurrence of Written Forms Used For e-e \(<\text{-}\>\),\(<\text{-} \#\>\),\(<\text{-} \#\>\)~\(<\text{-} \#\>)\,\(<\text{−}\>\),\(<\text{−}\>\)

It is shown that only 2 forms \(<\text{-}\>\) and \(<\text{-} \#\>\) occur in the Sukhothai period. During the period of Ayudhya and Middle of Bangkok, there is the variation
of forms \(<\text{-}#, \text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\). And at the same time, there is the occurrence of the form \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\). The form \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) appears last in the Beginning of Bangkok period.

Second, in order to find out whether different written forms are dictated by different types of words, the data are grouped into 3 groups according to types of words as follows:

1. Cognates: the Tai cognates specified by Sarawit (1973) and Li (1977), for examples:
   - เจ็ด [cet] "seven"
   - เบื้อง [pleew] "flame"

2. New Formations: the words which are non-cognate or non-loanword, for examples:
   - ส่วนเกิด [sa-ket] "fragment"
   - เล็ก [leek] "man"

3. Loanwords: the words borrowed from other languages, for examples:
   - เขียน [sen] "to sign"
   - เทพาน [thee-vaa] "angel"

The table 2 (next page) shows the counts of types of words in different forms of vowel e-ee in 5 periods.

The data show that the form \(<\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) was first used for Pali and Sanskrit loanwords and later for new Thai words. The form \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) is used for cognates, new formations and loanwords. But at the time during the Ayudhya period and the Beginning of Bangkok period some cognates, new formations and loanwords gradually changed their written forms of vowel from \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) to \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\). There was a time when \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) occurred in free variation with \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\). However, between \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) and \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) the form \(<\text{-}^2\text{-}\text{#}\>>\) increases in more and more occurrences