

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

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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 Pán (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 Bảo Thắng District, and in Sa Pa District at Nậm Sà.i. The Laghuu of Nậm Sà.i, Bát Xát, and Bảo Thắng now speak languages similar enough that our informant claimed that he was able to speak to people in Bảo Thắng District without difficulty. The Laghuu Bát Xát group, it is said, once lived at Bảo 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.

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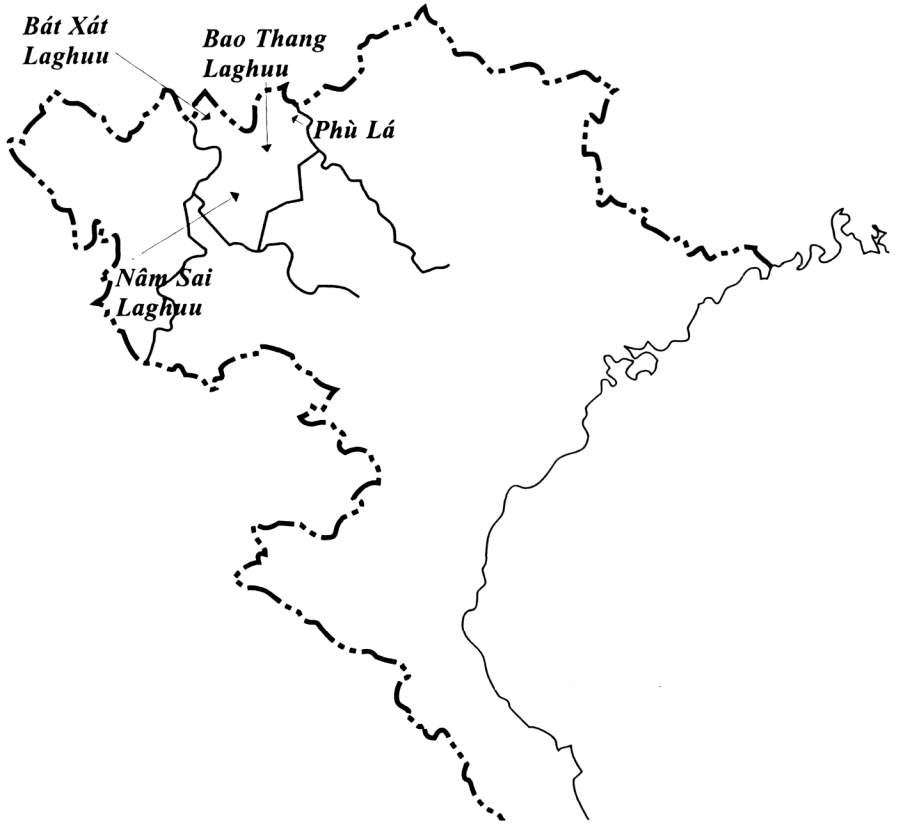


Figure 1. The location of Laghuu

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	s	l
						z
tʃ	tʃh	dʒ	ndʒ	—	ʃ	ʒ
k	kh	g	ŋg	ŋ	x	ɣ
					h	ʔ
kl	khł	gl	ŋkhł			

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	ke ⁵⁵			'iron'
s	sa ³³	la ³³			'cotton'
z	za ³³	ɔ ²¹	pu ⁵⁵	se ²¹ [va ⁴⁴]	'right [side]' 'dry in the sun'
tʃ	tʃe ²¹	paŋ ²¹		ze ³³	'house'
tʃh	tʃha ⁵⁵	muɛŋ ³³			'rope'
dʒ	dʒa ³³	[va ⁴⁴]			'salt'
ndʒ	ndʒɔ ²¹				'eat'
ɲ	ɲa ²⁴				'bridge'
ʃ	ʃi ⁴⁴	[ma ³³]			'field (dry)'
ʒ	ʒi ²¹	ho ⁴⁴			'tree'
k	kaŋ ⁵⁵	to ³³			'otter'
kh	kha ⁵⁵	tʃa ⁵⁵			'drum'
g	ge ²¹				'bitter'
ŋg	ŋga ⁵⁵	ma ³³			'chew food'
ŋ	ŋa ⁵⁵	da ³³			'wasp'
x	xɔ ³³				'pond'
ɣ	ɣu ²¹	me ⁴⁴			'skirt'
h	he ²¹	tʃa ⁵⁵			'pig'
ʔ	ʔe ²¹			hu ²¹	'wide'
kl	mi ⁴⁴	kla ³³		ʔeŋ ³³	'pull'
khɬ	khla ³³	ba ³³			'eight'
	le ²¹	khla ²⁴			'hair; body'
	khɬi ⁵⁵				'firewood'
	khɬi ⁵⁵	ma ⁴⁴			'moon'
gl	a ³³	gla ⁴⁴			'hand'
ŋkht	tʃhe ⁵⁵	ŋkhtɬi ²¹	ni ²¹	va ³³	'feces'
					'four'
					'taro'
					'shout; scream'
					'tongue'
					'hip'
					'hide'

Table 1. Examples