

## COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF LUE SYNTAX\*

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Studies of comparative Tai syntax are rare aside from a few studies of pronouns and classifiers. There is the rather complacent belief that there are few dramatic differences in syntax between dialects. The thesis of this article is that if we consider pragmatics along with semantic-syntactic structures, important distinctions are found. The differences are subtle ones, but they have important implications for linguistic theory and our understanding of Tai dialects in general.

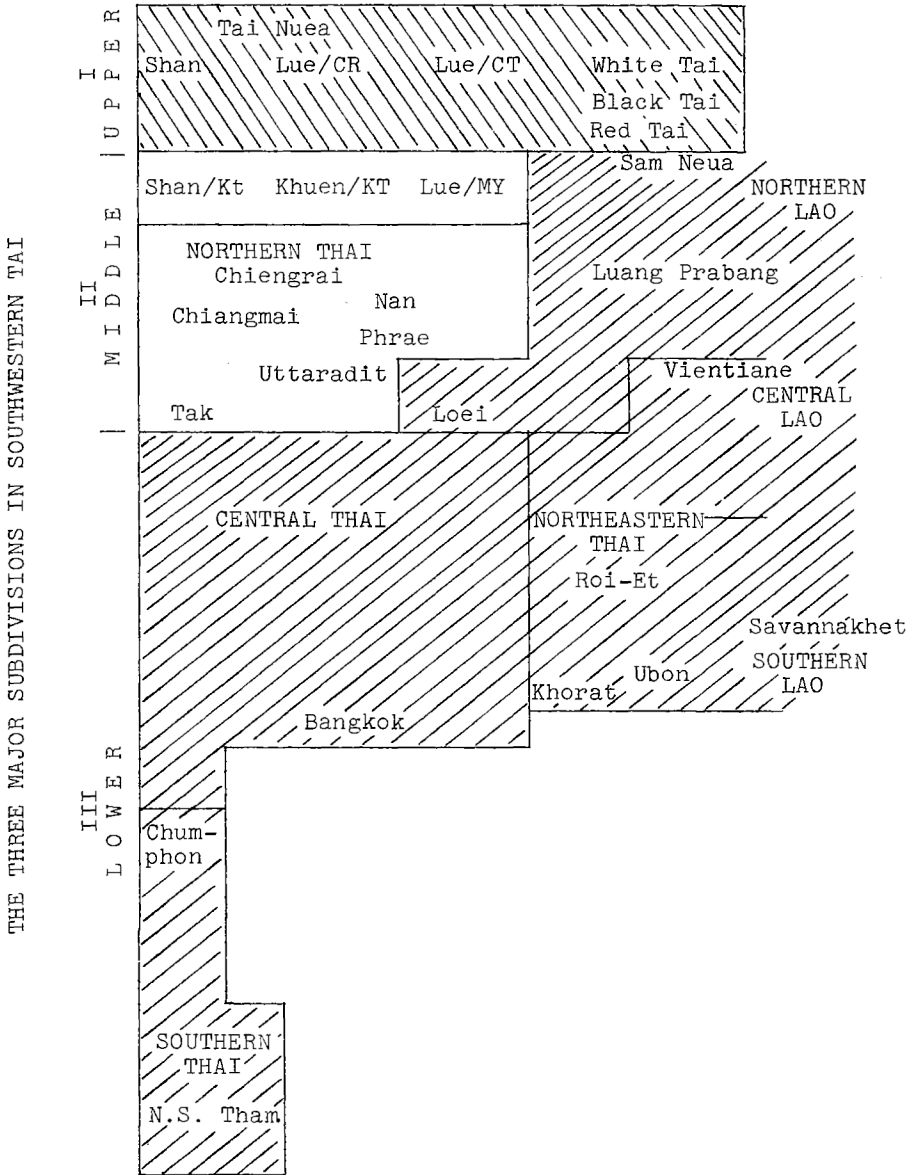
Tai-Lue, the focus of this analysis, is a Tai dialect whose centre is at Chieng Hung, in a region called Sipsong Panna in the southwestern part of Yunnan, China. It is a dialect whose phonological features overlap with neighbouring Shan to the west in Burma, with Northern Thai directly south in Thailand, and with White Tai spoken in adjacent areas of Laos and North Vietnam.

Still another dialect of Lue is spoken at Moeng Yong, Burma. In terms of tonal splits and minor phonological features, it is identical to Tai-Khuen of Kentung, Burma and the Thai dialects of Northern Thailand. For a clear picture of these relationships, a suggested alignment of dialects in Southwestern Tai appears on the following page.







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\* From Chapter V of my dissertation: *The Linguistic and Memory Structure of Tai-Lue Oral Narrative*. (1976) Reproduced by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor.

SUGGESTED ALIGNMENT OF DIALECTS IN SOUTHWESTERN TAI



The general shape of the tones of Chieng Rung are shown in the following diagram using both a system of numbered tones and their description in words along with the scheme used often in phonological description of Chinese tones. In the latter system, a pitch level of 5 is high and 1 is low; 3 would be in the mid range.

	*A	*B	*C	*D-long	*D-short
*vl (yin)	1 high-level  55	2 mid-rising  35	3 low, glot., slt. rise  13	=2	=1
*vd (yang)	4 fall-ing  5	5 mid-level  3	6 low, level, slt. rise  13	=5	=5
	Smooth Syllables			Checked Syllables	

In this matrix, the maximum number of six tones are found on the smooth syllables. The tones on the checked syllables are matched up with their nearest counterparts in the class of smooth syllables. As explained elsewhere, the tones of the smooth and checked are conditioned by different variables so that they stand in complementary distribution. The tones shown here, then, are phonemic, not phonetic. In some works, e.g. Purnell (1963), it is not always clear whether the tones which are enumerated are phonemic or not. Closer examination reveals that the seven tones of Northern Thai, for example, are phonetic; only six can be isolated on free syllables.

The data on which the comparative study of Tai syntax comes is based on a variety of sources. One is my own study of orally composed chanted narratives called /khap<sup>1</sup> lɔ̄<sup>6</sup>/ 'to sing in the Lue manner'. This material, referred to later, is that of two male singers: an older man of about 60 (Text I) and a younger man of about 40 (Text II). Otherwise the data are from my field notes or those of others whose names are cited.

Particular attention will be paid to utterance final particles. Definite underlying semantic-syntactic differences exist and form a marked communication boundary between dialects despite innocent-looking minor surface changes in lexical shapes.

The negative and the negative interrogative (question particles) are the most outstanding illustrations of special aspects of Lue syntax that shall be dealt with. In addition, comment will be made concerning the semantic-syntactic contrast involving word change between Siamese and Lue use of 'can' vs. 'to be able to'. Finally, discourse level syntactic functioning of pronouns and particles which punctuate clause and paragraph divisions in the Lue narrative will be discussed.

#### A. Interrogative forms

Lue questions and related responses entail presuppositions that do not exactly parallel either Siamese or Northern Thai usage. The word order is, for the most part, the same: question particles are utterance final. It is best to examine some of the Lue rules on their own terms before making any comparisons with other dialects.

##### (1) -aa<sup>5</sup>, -aa<sup>4</sup>

The first particle, -aa<sup>5</sup>, is used in interrogative utterances that call for information, i.e. the usual yes-no type of question. It is used in structures that do not have other question words such as wh-forms: 'what, where, why, how', etc. Where the Lue equivalent of the English wh-forms appears, the tone of the question particle changes from tone 5 (mid level) to tone 4 (mid falling). Some examples are:

(a) dii<sup>1</sup> -aa<sup>5</sup>  
good Q-Pt.

'Is it good?'

(b) pin<sup>1</sup> kun<sup>4</sup> tii<sup>5</sup> nay<sup>1</sup> -aa<sup>4</sup>  
be person place where Q-Pt.

'Where are you from?'

##### (2) -aa<sup>5</sup> vs. kaa<sup>4</sup>

The final question particle, explained above, contrasts with kaa<sup>4</sup> in that the latter is used in questions with an underlying presupposition: 'I assume that it is the case that', or 'right?', as glossed in the example given below. The particle kaa<sup>4</sup> is used both in the initiating question and in the expected response. The underlying presupposition can be confirmed or refuted with an affirmative or negative response. In its confirmative function, kaa<sup>4</sup> has the force of a mildly emphatic particle. The following examples are illustrative but not completely so. More data are needed.

(a) kin<sup>1</sup> kaa<sup>4</sup> (Question)  
eat, right?

'(someone) eat, right?'