

Morphophonemic Changes in Daai Chin

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A. Introduction

1. The Daai Chin language

The Daai Chin language belongs to the Southern Branch of the Kukish Section of the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is spoken by approximately 30,000 people, in the townships of Matupi, Mindat, Kampelet, and Paletwa, in the Southern Chin Hills of Burma. Within the Chin language group Daai Chin is most closely related to Mūn Chin (also called Mindat Chin), Chin Pon (also called Ūt Pū) and Matu Chin.

Not all of the Daai Chin population call themselves "Daai". Only in recent years have young people, especially those with some school education, started to call themselves and their tribe "Daai". Some of the other names that have been used for the Daai Chins or part of the Daai Chins are: K'khyou, Ng'hmo Ye, Ng'xang, Kho Ng'lung, K'khyang.

The Daai Chin language comprises several dialects, whose boundaries have yet to be determined. This study is based on the dialect spoken in Kampelet township, particularly in Yang M'saai village and its surrounding area.*

2. Outline of phonology

2.1 Initial Consonants

		bilab.	alv.	pal.	vel.	glot.
stop	vl.	p	t		k	ʔ
	vl.asp.	p ^h	t ^h		k ^h	
	vd.	b	d			
fric.	vl.		s		x	h
	vl.asp.		s ^h			
nas.	vl.	hm	hn		hŋ	
	vd.	m	n		ŋ	
lat.	vl.		ɬ			
	vd.		l			
semivowels		w		y	ɣ	

Consonant modifications:

Palatalization: py, p^hy, ky, k^hy, hy, my, ny, ŋy, wy

Preglottalization (not implosion): can occur with all consonants

Prenasalization: can also occur with all consonants

2.2 Final Consonants

p [pʔ]	t [tʔ]	k [kʔ]
m	n	ŋ
w		y
wʔ [wʔkʔ]		yʔ

* The data for this paper was collected in Rangoon over several years time between 1975 and 1981. It is based on the speech of Chaing So, to whom I am greatly indebted, and partially checked against the speech of others from his village.

Dr. David Thomas and Paulette Hopple gave advice in the analysis and writing of the paper.

2.3 Vowels

	front	central	back	
			spread	round
high	i [i],[ɪ]		u	u [u],[ʊ]
mid	ɛ	ə		ɔ [ɔ],[ɒ]
low		a [a],[ʌ]		

Vowel modifications:

Length: all vowels may be short or long. Open syllable vowels are a little shorter than the long vowels.

Tone: plain level tone and tense high falling tone. The high tense tone does not occur on short syllables with final stop.

2.4. Syllable Structure

The general syllable pattern is (C₁) (C₂) (C₃) V (C₄), where:

C₁: ʔ, m

C₂: all initial consonants

C₃: ɣ

V: all vowels

C₄: all final consonants

Most morphemes in the Daai Chin language are monosyllabic.

B. Rules for Morphophonemic Changes in Noun-Compounding

In the Daai Chin language, phonologically conditioned changes in the morphemes follow certain rules. Since these rules can be seen most completely in the compound noun, they will be presented first in this paper in the compound nouns. These same rules also apply, though less fully, to other morpheme constructions, e.g. the numeral phrase, the prepositional phrase, and the verb phrase. There are also morphologically conditioned variants of verb stems to which some of these rules apply.

These morphophonemic changes take place at normal conversational speed, but in very slow speech or singing the morphemes retain their basic form without morphophonemic changes. But the verb stem variations of Verb Class II and Verb Class III retain their basic forms at all rates of speed.

1. Rule I. Vowel shortening

$$CV: + CVx > C\check{V}CVx$$

If the first member of compound is an open syllable, the longer vowel of the open syllable is shortened in compounding.

1. $k^h\text{ɔ}:$ $m\check{i}k$ $>$ $k^h\check{\text{ɔ}}m\check{i}k$
 earth eye 'sun'
2. $s^h\epsilon:$ $m\acute{u}:$ $>$ $s^h\check{\epsilon}m\acute{u}:$
 cow fur 'cow's hair'
3. $lu:$ $s^h\acute{a}m$ $>$ $l\check{u}s^h\acute{a}m$
 head hair, string 'hair of the head'
4. $k^h\text{ɔ}:$ $n\acute{u}:$ $>$ $k^h\check{\text{ɔ}}n\acute{u}:$
 foot big 'big toe'
5. $k^h\text{ɔ}:$ $ʔaay$ $>$ $k^h\check{\text{ɔ}}ʔaay$
 spirit chicken 'wild chicken'
6. $s^h\epsilon:$ $ʔ\check{\text{ɔ}}\eta$ $>$ $s^h\check{\epsilon}ʔ\check{\text{ɔ}}\eta$
 cow trading 'cow trading'

2. Rule II. Loss of high tense tone

2.1 Unconditional loss of high tense tone

$$\text{Rule IIa: } CV: + (?)CVx > C\bar{V}(?)CVx$$

If the first member of compound noun is an open syllable with high tense tone and is followed by a simple consonant or preglottalization, it always changes into a plain tone (unmarked in the transcription).

1. $l\acute{i}:$ $p\check{\text{ɔ}}k$ $>$ $l\check{i}p\check{\text{ɔ}}k$
 arrow bundle 'gun'
2. $l\acute{\text{ɔ}}:$ $\gamma\check{u}ʔ$ $>$ $l\check{\text{ɔ}}\gamma\check{u}ʔ$
 throat bone 'Adam's apple'
3. $m\acute{\text{ɔ}}:$ $s^h\acute{a}:$ $>$ $m\check{\text{ɔ}}s^h\acute{a}:$
 jungle meat 'meat of wild animals'