

PROBLEMS OF PHONE ASSIGNMENT IN THE DESCRIPTION OF THAILAND LISU PHONOLOGY

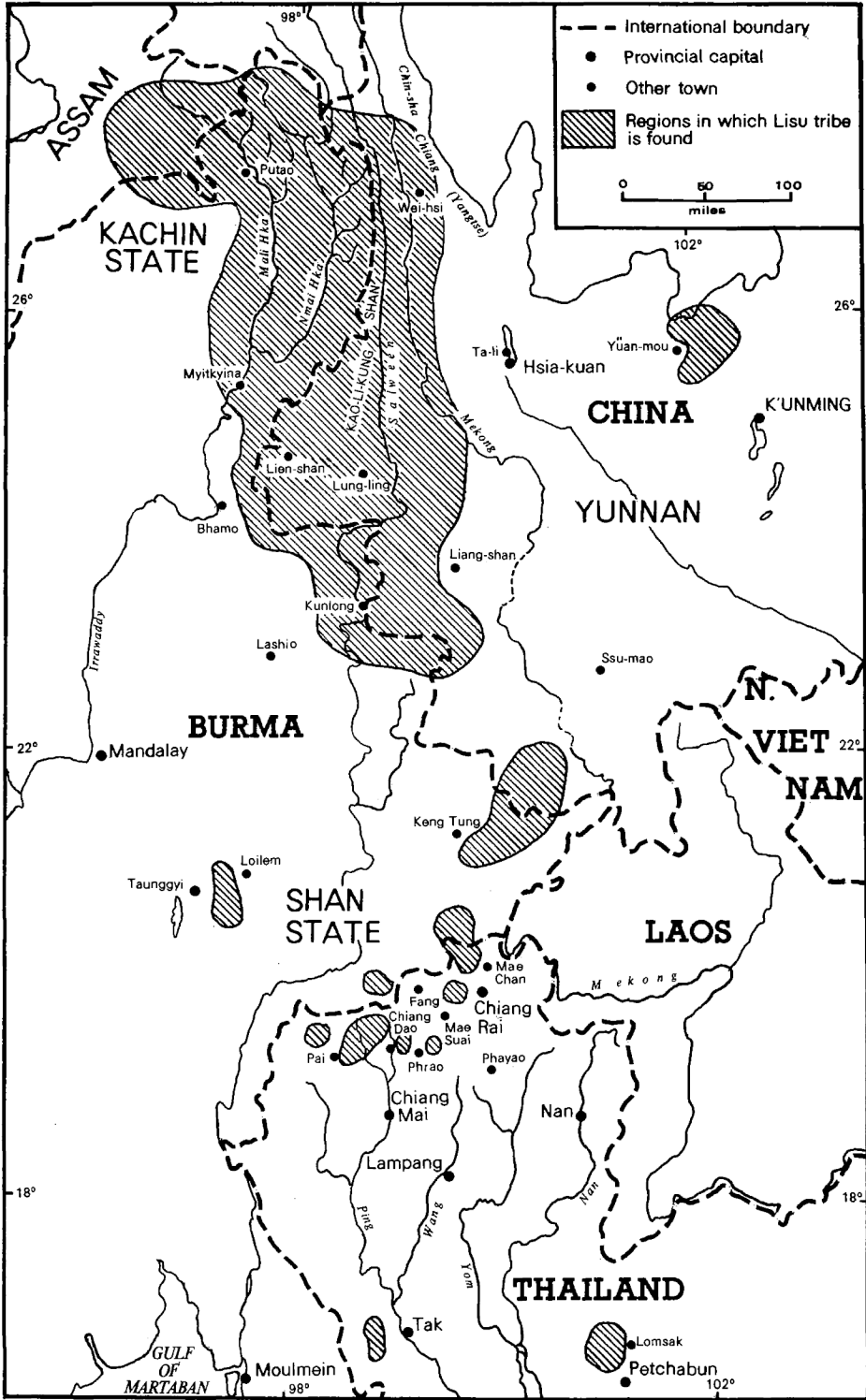
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0. INTRODUCTION

Lisu is a Tibeto-Burman language belonging to the Lolo group in which Lahu, Akha and I (Nosu) are also members. There are at least five major dialects of Lisu found in the border areas between Burma and China, and Burma and Thailand (see map). Some of these dialects are mutually unintelligible, even though they share a large common vocabulary. This is because some of the dialects have one set of post-positions, conjunctions and other grammatical markers, while other dialects have completely different sets. The dialect described in this paper is the most aberrant in all probability, being heavily Sinicised, but it is the only major dialect spoken in Northern Thailand.¹

The phonology of the Thailand dialect presents a number of problems for a phonemic analysis. Many of these problems have to do with the impossibility of assigning phones to phonemes in a unique way, while others are concerned with the item-and-arrangement nature of phonemic theory. In many of these problems the criteria usually associated with phonemics requires that one assign to a phoneme an allophone consisting not of a discrete "segment" of speech, i.e. not a phone, but of a characteristic or phonetic feature of a phone, the other features of which are assigned to other phonemes. In all of these cases a theory of phonology which is based on phonological rules of the item-and-process type would prove to be far more adequate. These rules would achieve the same sort of results for the phonology that sandhi rules achieve for morpho-phonemics.

The problems discussed in this paper have not been dealt with specifically in the descriptions which have been produced thus far,²



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but in fact the differences between these descriptions are usually related to one or other of the problems dealt with here. In order to discuss the problems within the framework of the phonology of Lisu as a whole, I will first outline one possible phonemic solution, and base the discussion on this. As the problems are identified, suggestions will be made about the ways the original solution can be modified.

1. A PROVISIONAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PHONEMIC SYSTEM

1.1 INITIAL CONSONANTS

	Labial	Simple Alveolar	Complex Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops: voiceless unaspirated	p	t	ts	c*	k	ʔ
voiceless aspirated	ph	th	tsh	ch*	kh	
voiced	b	d	dz	j*	g	
Fricatives: voiceless	f	s		ʃ*	x*	h
voiced	v*	z		y*	ɣ	
Nasals	m	n		ɲ*	ŋ	
Lateral		l		ʎ*		

(Items marked * are problematical and will be discussed.)

EXAMPLES supporting above analysis of initial consonants:

pa	tá	tsa	cá	ká	ʔa
<i>exchange</i>	<i>deposit</i>	<i>vine</i>	<i>cook</i>	<i>stab</i>	<i>waft</i>
pha	tha	tsha	chá	kha	
<i>glide</i>	<i>here</i>	<i>hot</i>	<i>rob</i>	<i>copulate</i>	
ba	da	dza	ja	gá	gá
<i>in milk</i>	<i>clever</i>	<i>rice</i>	<i>cold</i>	<i>dawdling</i>	
fà	sa		ʃa	xá	ha
<i>infected</i>	<i>easy</i>		<i>clean</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>send</i>
vă	zà		ɣà	ʎà	
<i>love-charm</i>	<i>son</i>		<i>homespun</i>	<i>weave</i>	

ma na nǎ nǎ
ripen *sore* *satiated* *overturn*

la lǎ
come *bright*

Unassigned phone: [u̇], e.g. [uǎ] 'a snare'

1.2 SYLLABLE NUCLEI

1.21 Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i*	ɨ*	u
Mid	e*	ə	ɔ
Low	æ		a

Unassigned phones: [∅] [ẏ⁺] [ẏ^u]

EXAMPLES supporting vowel analysis:

phi tɨ phù
seedless *stretched* *picture*

phe phə phɔ phɔ
divorce *loosen* *flabby*

phǎ pha
brush past *glide*

EXAMPLES of unassigned phones: [ph∅³] 'bladder'

[ph^fẏ⁺3] 'drift'

[ph^fẏ^u3] 'silver'

1.22 Syllabic Nasals

/n̩/, e.g. /n̩khə tsf/ 'night-time'

1.3 SEMI-VOWELS (PRE-NUCLEAR)

/y/ /w/

EXAMPLES: /phya/ 'fan out'; /swǎ/ 'castrated'.