Who are the Moken and MokLen on the Islands and Coasts of the Andaman Sea?

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0. Introduction. This paper distinguishes between two closely related groups of people, who speak Austronesian languages in Southern Thailand and Burma (Myanmar): the Moken and the MokLen. The Moken are semi-nomadic sea people, but the MokLen are land-based. To help the reader distinguish between Moken and MokLen, I will use capital 'O' and 'L' in Moken and MokLen throughout this paper. If you keep in mind the dichotomy between Ocean (Moken) and Land (MokLen), you will get less confused by these two similar names. Both groups share many linguistic and cultural characteristics, but enough linguistic and cultural differentiation has occurred to support the conclusion that they not only speak separate languages, but should be considered culturally distinct as well. In sections 1 and 2, we will try to answer the question posed in the title of this paper by looking at present-day linguistic and cultural similarities and differences. Section 3 deals with historical considerations.

Previous Research. The early 1980's saw a great advance in Moken and MokLen linguistics through the efforts of four Master's degree students at Mahidol University. Veena (1980) described the Southern Jadiak dialect spoken at Rawai, Phuket. Pensiri (1982) described one dialect of MokLen at Lampi. Sorat (1981) surveyed ten Moken, MokLen, and Urak Lawoi' speech communities, and Sudarat (1984) used the historical-comparative method to reconstruct a proto-language for Moken, MokLen, and Urak Lawoi'. In addition to these sources, the three most important works on Moken are Lewis (1960), Sophier (1965), and Say Bay (1989).

Lewis (1960) collected a number of old published and unpublished texts in Dung Moken that were recorded between 1844 and 1936, and then compiled a word list from these texts. Sophier (1965) made a comparative study of sea nomadism across island Southeast Asia from an anthropological perspective. Say Bay (1989) is the
only recent linguistic study that we have on Burmese MOken (Dung). There are no descriptions available on the Jait, Lebi, and Niawi dialects of MOken. Court (1971) provides a word list comparing MOken and MokLen with grammatical notes. Hogan (1972) still stands as one of the most comprehensive comparisons of MOken, MokLen, and Urak Lawoi. Pattemore and Hogan (1989) present convincing sociological, historical, and linguistic arguments to establish that the origins of the Urak Lawoi are independent of the MOken and MokLen. The Urak Lawoi live between Phuket and the Malaysian border; they speak a dialect of Malay, which has been heavily influenced by Thai. For a longer literature review on these languages see Hogan (1972:207-10). My forthcoming dissertation will first provide linguistic descriptions of MOken and MokLen followed by a historical-comparative study of the place of MOken and MokLen within the Austronesian language family. I hope to expand the scope of Sudarat's (1984) study to look for other Western Austronesian languages that may subgroup with MOken and MokLen.

1. Present-Day Situation.

1.1. Demographics.

1.1.1. Location of MOken and MokLen Speech Communities.

The area in which MOken and MokLen are spoken extends approximately 650 kilometers from Phi Phi Island (Krabi Province) in Thailand to Tavoy Island in Burma (Myanmar). In Burma, MOken speakers live throughout the Mergui Archipelago in the Andaman Sea. Their distribution is interrupted in Thailand, however, by the juxtaposition of MokLen speakers between the northern and southern groups of Jadiak MOken. The MokLen live along the west coast of Peninsular Thailand. The northernmost MokLen-speaking villages are found on Phra Thong Island, off the mouth of the Takuapa River. Most MokLen villages are centered in two districts of Phang-nga Province in Thailand--Amphur Takuapa and Amphur Thai Muang. The southernmost MokLen-speaking villages are located near the north end of Phuket Island. At their southernmost limit, the MOken live in the Urak Lawoi villages of Rawai on Phuket Island and at Phi Phi Island near Phuket. Pattemore and Hogan (1989:76) note that these MOken have 'come since the time of World War 2, fleeing the Japanese at first and subsequently being joined by relatives, mainly from Burma.' The MOken also live at several locations just south of Thailand's border with Burma--in Ranong and on Sin Hai, Luuk Plaaj and Surin Islands (Hogan 1972:210).
Ivanoff (1985:174) divides the MOken in Burma into five groups and gives the names of their island bases: Dung (Ross Island), Jait (Owen Island), Lebi (Sullivan and Lampi Islands), Niawi (St. James Island), and Chadiak (St. Mathew's Island). Say Bay (1989:4) lists these same groups as MOken dialects, but rewrites Chadiak as Jadiak. For maps on the locations of MOken and MokLen speech communities see Hogan (1972:211), Makboon (1981:VII), Ivanoff (1985:175), and Say Bay (1989:3a).

1.1.2 Population. Ivanoff (1986:11,6) estimates the MokLen population at 3,000 people, and the MOken population at 2,000. My own estimate is based on a revision of Bishop and Peterson's (1987) figure. I estimate the MokLen population at 2,500, but have insufficient data to estimate the MOken population. Sopher (1965:171) provides estimates on Burmese MOken populations between the years 1826 to 1939.

1.2. Linguistic Situation.

1.2.1. Dialects of the Same Language or Separate Languages? Researchers disagree on whether MOken and MokLen are dialects of the same language or different languages (see Makboon 1981, Hogan 1972, and Say Bay 1989). Until further evidence is available, my working position will be that they are separate languages. This position is being adopted based on interviews that I have conducted in Thai and MokLen concerning MokLen encounters with MOken speakers. One of my MokLen informants at Ko Nok reported that when he met a Surin Island MOken, he had to speak Thai because he could only understand a few words of MOken. A MOken informant reported that when a MokLen woman began living at Surin Island, she could only understand a little MOken speech after hearing it one year, and still had trouble understanding it after hearing it many years. These reports parallel the findings of Bishop and Peterson (1987:8):

The MokLen definitely perceive their language as a separate language from MOken. The MokLen consistently referred to themselves as being different from the sea people (MOken) and [said] theirs was the 'true' language which the sea people have mixed with Malay.

The mutual intelligibility testing done by Bishop and Peterson (1987:4-7) also supports the position taken above.
1.2.2. Present-Day Language Contact. The present-day ethnolinguistic situation in Southern Thailand and Burma is very complicated. The Moken are in contact with Burmese, Malay, MokLen, Thai, Urak Lawoi', Chinese and possibly Karen and Mon speech communities. Ivanoff (1986:13) states that few Moken speak or understand Burmese, many speak and understand Thai, but all speak and understand Malay. Ivanoff adds that Dun and Jait dialect speakers in Burma speak more Burmese than other Moken. Therefore, some Moken speakers are quadri-lingual, and many are trilingual, while MokLen speakers are usually bilingual. MokLen people over twenty-five years of age are fully bilingual in MokLen and Southern Thai. Some educated MokLen can speak Central (Bangkok) Thai in addition to Southern Thai. Many MokLen children do not speak MokLen, but have a passive understanding of it.

The MokLen are in contact with Thai, Chinese, Moken, and Urak Lawoi' speech communities. MokLen villages are frequently adjacent to Thai-Muslim communities, but these people rarely speak Malay. Interethnic marriages are fairly common between Thai and MokLen people. I have also encountered several MokLen people with Chinese family names. MokLen people can be easily identified because they have only a limited set of family names: Nawarar, Nathalee, Samutwarrii, and variations of this name (e.g. Chansamutwarri or Hanwarri). Moken speakers are frequently named Klaathalee or Hanthalee, although there is overlap between Moken and MokLen family names.

1.2.3. Language Convergence. MokLen-Thai bilingualism is the primary cause of the MokLen language's convergence toward Southern Thai. I would estimate that thirty to forty percent of the MokLen vocabulary consists of Thai words already. Loan translations from Thai into MokLen are abundant. The MokLen expression for 'never mind' is [pın (a)网约 hah], which literally means 'is what not'. This illustrates an important syntactic difference between MokLen and Thai. The Thai literal translation for mai pen rai is 'not is what'. Lewis (1960:48) notes a similar loan translation into Moken from Burmese for the same expression (Dung Moken a-tewot-ha from Burmese a-twet-ma-shi-a 'never mind'). This example also illustrates several other points: 1) Changes in vowel height are often exhibited in MokLen words borrowed from Thai. 2) Both Thai and MokLen have optional syllable dropping (indicated by parentheses), which may have originally been borrowed from Mon-Khmer (Larish 1991). 3) The study of the MokLen language is important to Thai historical studies. To some Thai