

A Second Discussion of the Genetic Classification of the Kam-Tai Languages: A Reply to Benedict

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Which family do the Kam-Tai languages (Benedict's Kadai languages) belong to? In an earlier paper (Luo 1983) presented at the Fifteenth Annual International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, I presented a view which contrasts with that of Benedict. In 1984, in a paper entitled "Identification of the Cognates Between Chinese and Dai" presented to the Linguistic Society of Beijing, I restated this viewpoint. This paper presents the points of contrast between my position and that of Benedict.¹

Problems of Basic Word Stock

Benedict and I agree that part of the word stock of the modern Kadai languages relates to the Indonesian [IN] and Austro-Tai [AT] languages, while another part of the word stock relates to the Sino-Tibetan [ST] languages. Benedict, however, labels only those words that are related to Indonesian as "basic," whereas all those words that are related to Sino-Tibetan he regards as "cultural borrowings," which were either borrowed from Chinese or which Chinese borrowed from Austro-Tai. From this, Benedict concludes that the Kam-Tai languages have a genetic link not with the Sino-Tibetan languages, but with the Indonesian stock.

Our concept of basic vocabulary is the same as that of Benedict. That is, the basic vocabulary is composed of the "nuclear" elements in a language. But, we disagree considerably on the specifics and on the extent of the basic word stock. The basic word stock is the most stable part of the lexicon, containing all the root words as its core and representing the most important things and activities, such as words for natural phenomena: mountain, water, wind, rain, fire, sun, moon, land; important animals and plants: ox (cow), horse, pig, chicken, bird, fish, tree, grass, flower, and others; parts of the body: head, chest, mouth, eye, lungs, hand, arm, foot, leg; important kinship terms: father, mother, son, daughter, and so forth; basic actions: eat, speak, see, fly, come, and so forth; basic adjectives: big,

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small, white, and others; pronouns and adverbs: I, you, he, she, and so forth; and the cardinal numbers.

The Kam-Tai [KT] and the Sino-Tibetan languages share many of the above basic words, which are not “cultural” words at all but rather are core vocabulary including words such as: wind, bird, crow, horse, ox, ride, lungs, meat, liverwort (苔), red (赤), salty (鹹), and so on. Even among the thirty pairs of correspondences which Benedict proposed as “real nuclear lexical elements” in his paper “Thai, Kadai and Indonesian: A New Alignment in Southeastern Asia” (1942), thirteen of these sets can be shown to be Sino-Tibetan [ST] through comparisons with Tibeto-Burman [TB], Miao-Yao [MY] languages, and Chinese words in ancient books.

'moon' KT **blüān* IN **bulan*

Ch. 月敦他昆切 **thən*/ **thuən*² 'moonlight'³

(cf. Lei Pian <<类篇>>)

'water' KT **nam* IN **danum*

Ch. 沱 乃泰切 **hnjəm*/ **ɣjəm* 'turbid, water without waves'⁴

(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>, Guahg Yun <<廣韻>>)

'fire' KT **vai* IN **apuy*

Ch. 火毀 許偉切 **xwjd*/ **xjwei* 'fire' Amoy *hue*³, *he*³

(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

'bird' KT **nok* IN **manuk* 'chicken, bird'

Ch. 鳥 **tjagw*/ **tieu*- **nieu* Hakka (Chang Ding) *tiau*³

Barish (TB) **dau*, Karen **tho*

M. *neu*⁶, *noŋ*⁶ Y. *no*⁸

'head' KT **hrua* IN **ulu*'~*hulu*

T. *u*² 53 (polite expression, term of respect)

M. *fhu*³, *hu*³

'lungs' KT **pot* IN **pu*'*uh* 'heart'

Ch. 肺 **phjəd*/ **phjwäi*

M. *ŋt̚su*⁷, *mpy*⁵, *mplu*⁵

'grandfather' KT **pu* IN **ə*(*m*)*pi*

Ch. 父 **bjwo*/ **bju* 'father'

² The reconstruction of the pronunciation of Chinese characters is based on Li Fang-kuei. The form in front of the slanted line is Archaic Chinese, while the form following the slanted line is Ancient Chinese.

³ Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

⁴ Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

T. *phu-bo* Garo *bu* Lushei *pu* Kachin *phu* 'brother'

'black' KT *ʔdām IN *i(n)təm
Ch. 黑甚 (于檻切) *jram/*jam 'dark black'⁵
(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

'blind' KT *ʔbot IN *buta'
Ch. 父見 (莫結切) *mit/*miet 'cannot see' Amoy *biaiʔ*, *biʔ*

'die' KT *tai IN *matay~patay
Ch. 歹台 (徒亥切) *dəd/*dai 'danger'⁶
(cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

'eat' KT *kin IN *ka'-*ka'an-*ka'i
Ch. 𪔐 (九件切) *kjan/*kjən 'eat'
(cf. Buo Ya <<博雅>>)

'this' KT *ni IN *ini
Hakka (Chang Ding) *nrʔ*, *trʔ* Min *ɬrʔ*
T. *ti* Pumi *di*, *uti* M. *ŋrʔ* Y. *na:rʔ*

'I' KT *ku (term of respect) IN *aku
Ch. 𪔐𪔐 *kwag/*kuo (kings use this term)

In addition to the above, we found numerous basic Kadai words with ST but not Indonesian cognates, which are not discussed in the glossary of Benedict's *Austro-Thai: Language and Culture* (1975).

Parts of the body and excrement

'leg' KT Thai *kha*¹, Dai *xa*¹, Zhuang *ka*¹, Kam-Sui *pa*¹,
Maonan *pja*¹, Gelao *qua*, Li *ha*¹
Ch. 𪔐𪔐 (*khragw/*khau 'a part of shin near the foot'
(cf. Ci Hai <<辞海>>) Min *kha*¹
T. *khri* 'seat' Nasi *khui*, Asi *khi*, Sani *tshə*
M. (Bunu) *lau*¹, Y. *tsau*⁵

'excrement' KT Thai, Dai *khɿ*³, Dai *xɿ*³, Zhuang *haɿ*⁴, Kam *ɛ*⁴,
Mulao *ɕɛ*³, Gelao *qɔ*, Sui *qɛ*⁴, Lakkia *kwɛɿ*⁴, Li *ha:r*³
Ch. 屎 (式視切) *sthjid/*ʃrʔ excrement'

⁵ Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

⁶ Cited in Zhang Yuansheng and Wang Wei (1980).

- T. *skyag-pa*, Kanauri *khō <kli*, B. *khye*, Jingpho *khji*,
 Bai *si*, Asi *thi*, Lisu *khi*, Jino *khui*
 M. *qa*⁵, Y. *sa*³

Natural phenomena, animals, and plants

- 'fog' KT Thai, Dai *mək*⁷, Zhuang *mək*⁷, Gelao *mpu*, Kam
*mun*², Sui *mon*¹, Maonan *mu:n*¹
 Ch. 雾 (莫浮切) **mjəgw*/**mjəu* 'fog' Amoy *bəŋ*², *bə*²,
 (cf. Er Ya <<尔雅>>)
 T. *smugs-pa*, B. *muik* 'dark' Lepcha *muk* 'heavy fog',
 Bai *muukō* Lushei *mu:k* 'dark'

- 'pig' KT Thai, Dai *mu*¹ Zhuang *mou*¹, Kam *ŋu*⁵, Gelao
mpa, Li *pau*⁴
 Ch. 猪巴 **prag*/**pa* 'big pig, female pig'
 T. *phag*, Mikir *phak*, Chiang *pa*, Nasi *bo*, B. *wak*,
 Dulung *wa*², Lushei *vok*
 M. *mpa*⁵, *pa*⁵

- 'tree/wood' KT Thai, Dai, Maonan, Mulao, Sui *ma*⁴, Kam *mə*⁴, Zhuang
*fai*⁴, Buyi *va*⁴, Gelao *tai*, Lakkia *tse*⁵, Li *tsha*¹
 Ch. 木 (房未切) **bjəd*/**bjwěi* 'wood'
 (cf. Shuo Wen <<说文>>)

Basic actions

- 'fly' KT Thai, Dai, Zhuang, Buyi *bin*¹, Kam *pən*³, Sui *vjən*³,
 Maonan *vin*³, Mulao *fən*³, Lakkia *pon*⁵, Li *ben*¹
 Ch. 羽分 **pjən*/**phjuən* 'the appearance of flying'
 (cf. Guang Yin <<廣音韻>>)
 Written Tibetan *fiṇur*, Spoken Tibetan *phir*, W. Burmese
pyan, Spoken Burmese *pjā*, W. Bailang pyam, Lahu *po*,
 Jino *pɛ*, Nasi *mbi*, Lisu *be*, Hani *bjə*, Yi *vo*, Bai *fɿ*

- 'separate' KT Thai, Dai *pha*⁵
 Ch. 石皮 **phuar*/**phuā*
 B. *prà*, Kachin *bra* 'scatter', Kanauri *bra* 'branch'
 M. *pha*⁵, Y. *phr*⁵

- 'change' KT Thai *plen*⁵, Dai *pen*⁵, Zhuang, Buyi, Lakkia *pɪ:n*⁵,
 Kam *pjin*⁵, Sui, Mulao *pjen*⁵, Maonan *pjən*⁵
 Ch. 变 **pjian*/**pjiän* 'change'