Review of *Baheng-yu Yanjiu* (巴哼语研究) [Research on the Pahng language] by Mao Zongwu (毛宗武) and Li Yunbing (李云兵). 1997. Shanghai Far East Publishers. 344pp.

Pahng is a Hmong-Mien language spoken in Southern Guangxi China and Northern Vietnam. It has long been recognized that Pahng is of great potential importance in Hmong-Mien comparative studies as well as in general linguistic theory, but this potential has remained unrealized due to inadequate documentation. Although scattered pieces of data on the Pahng language have been available to the general linguistic community at least since Chang Kun's fieldwork in the 1940s (Chang 1947, etc.)—to say nothing of Bonifacy's (1905) word list of Na-e—it is only very recently that descriptive work on Pahng has moved beyond spartan word lists and vague pronouncements. During the nineteen-nineties, several scholars produced important work advancing the cause of Pahng linguistic studies: Edmondson's (1992) work on the phonetics of Pahng and the comparison of Pahng dialects, Wang Fushi and Mao Zongwu's (1995) reconstruction of Proto-Hmong-Mien (which employed extensive data from two Pahng dialects), Mao Zongwu's brief sketch of Pahng (Mao 1996), and Niederer's (1997) article on comparative Pahng. Despite this work, almost no information was available regarding the details of Pahng syntax, morphology, or phonology (outside of bare phonological inventories and phonotactics). While controversies continued regarding the genetic position of Pahng within Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao), no text, lexicon, or usable grammatical description of Pahng was forthcoming.

This state of affairs has fundamentally changed with the publication of Mao Zongwu and Li Yunbing's new book on Pahng. *Bahengyu Yanjiu* (巴哼语研究 , *Research on the Pahng Language*), part of the series *Zhongguo Xin Faxian Yuyan Yanjiu Congshu* (中国薪发现语言研究丛书 , Research on Newly Discovered Languages) edited by Sun Hongkai 孙宏开 , touches on most aspects of Pahng grammar and provides in-depth information on several facets of this fascinating language. The descriptions are based upon three language varieties: Wenjie Pahng, Gundong Pahng, and Haoxingshan Hmnai (which our authors consider to be a dialect of Pahng).

The first chapter presents phonological inventories of each of the Pahng language varieties included in the volume. These are concise, but nevertheless include examples of each phonemic contrast posited as well as some explanatory notes which often provide interesting phonetic information. The section on Hmnai also gives examples of tone sandhi, illustrating an interesting pattern where native words show anticipatory tone sandhi, but modern loan-words from Chinese show perseveratory tone sandhi patterns (13-14). Unfortunately, there is little or no discussion of tone sandhi in Pahng proper, so that it is not quite clear whether the sample dialects even feature tone sandhi, and if they do, what tone sandhi is like in these languages.

The second chapter discusses the structure of the Pahng lexicon, includes a section on morphology as well as a discussion of Chinese loanwords in Pahng. Like many Hmongic languages (and indeed, many languages of Southeast Asia), Pahng has a system of iambic noun prefixes. Mao and Li give an excellent overview of the Pahng nominal prefix system, providing copious examples and discussing

the semantic parameters that govern the appearance of individual prefixes. This data should prove useful in determining to what extent such a system of prefixes can be reconstructed for Proto-Hmongic, since Pahng stands genetically apart from the core-Hmongic languages (a fact that will be discussed farther below).

The third chapter is mostly devoted to syntactic issues, including grammatical categories, structure of basic phrases, and sentence structure. This section is lamentably brief, but is a welcome contribution given the paucity of literature on Pahng syntax. Fortunately, though, there is also a fairly long Pahng text at the end of the book (almost twenty pages of interlinearized text [pp. 315-335] with an idiomatic translation [pp. 335-340]) which can further aid a researcher's investigations of Pahng syntax. While the fifty pages of Chapter 3 (33-83) may seem like little space in which to address such a massive subject area as syntax, but compared to the void that was Pahng syntactic studies prior to the publication of this book, the contribution is significant. While the section is quite short, it increases our knowledge of Pahng grammar many times over. The discussion, while terse, covers most things a syntactic sketch could be expected to cover and brings to light a number of interesting phenomena, particularly in behavior of Pahng pronouns.

The strongest parts of the book are the fourth and fifth chapters, which discuss the genetic relationships between dialects of Pahng and the genetic place of Pahng within the Hmong-Mien family respectively. In Chapter 4, the authors provide solid support for their classification of the speech varieties employed in the book. All that is missing is a discussion of the other Pahng varieties documented by

Chinese, Vietnamese, and Western scholars (for example, Bonifacy 1904, Chang 1947, Nguyen 1972, Edmondson 1992) and their place within this classificatory scheme. The discussion of the wider genetic affiliation of Pahng is rigorously supported and insightful. While the authors are cautious and tentative on many points, they display no more caution than is demanded by the controversy that has previously surrounded this subject.

Pahng was once classified by Chinese scholars as part of the Bunu group, which was treated as part of Mienic (Yao) by Mao, Meng, and Zheng (1982) in their sketch of Mienic languages. This classification was based upon cultural factors, the Bunu as a people sharing certain cultural affinities with the Mien. Politically, Bunu are treated as part of the Yao nationality, along with the Mienic-speaking people-groups. But linguistically, Bunu is clearly closer to Hmongic than to Mienic, and Strecker (1987a, 1987b), among others, proposed that Bunu be classified as part of Western Hmongic. Since Pahng is clearly not part of this group (at least according to linguistic criteria), he placed it in a separate top level group under Hmongic (in company Hmnai, Jiongnai, and Yunuo) and later proposed, in response to a suggestion by Benedict (1986), that Na-e/Pahng too constituted an independent branch of Hmong-Mien[1]. Wang Fushi, while acknowledging that Bunu and Pahng were closer to Hmongic that to Mienic, wished for various reasons to keep Bunu separate from the rest of Hmongic

1. Actually, Strecker (1987b) suggested that Pahng (including Na-e), Hmnai, Yunuo, and She (Ho Nte) should all be elevated to the status of separate branches without providing a clear reason for doing so other than Mao, Meng, and Zheng's (1982:117) vague pronouncement that these languages "have almost reached the status of separate *yu*."