

A Comparative Phonology of Tai Phake and Tai Kammueng

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1. Introduction

Tai Phake in this Study is a minority language spoken in the State of Assam, India. There are ten villages where Tai Phake is spoken: i.e., Nam-Phake, Tipam-Phake, Bor-Phake, Munglang, Ning-kam, Phaneng, Manmo, Nonglai, Long and Lungkung. The Indian Census Report of 1971 gives 1,800 as the number of speakers of this language. The etymology of the term Phake or Phakial is very interesting. It is a combination of two words: Pha + ke, where 'pha' means 'rocky island' or 'king' or 'royal officer' and 'ke' means 'ancient' or 'old'. Thus Phake means 'ancestors of a very old dynasty' or 'wellers on a very old rocky island', or 'descendants of old royal officers' (Kingcom 1991-2). The data for the study of Tai Phake are collected from Ven. Gni ken Gohain and also from the Ph.D. dissertation of Wilaisak Kingcom (1992). The Tai Phake has its own script which is similar to the Tai Yai script in Burma.

Tai Kammueng or Khammueng is a northern Thai dialect spoken in the northern part of Thailand, in 8 provinces: i.e., Chiangmai, Chiangrai, Maehongson, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae and Nan. The speakers of this dialect numbered over 7 million in 1995. The native speakers of the Northern Thai Dialect refer to themselves as Khonmueng. [khonmiəŋ], which means 'the people of the town' or 'town people' and call their former kingdom 'Lanna' /lá:nna:/ or 'Lanna Thai'. The Lanna people refer to their language as 'Kammueng /kammīəŋ/, in which 'kam' means 'language' or 'word' while 'mueng' means 'town'. So Kammueng means 'town language', because the speakers are settled in the plains areas where they are surrounded by mountains or mountainous areas inhabited by varieties of hill-tribe people: i.e., Mong, Yao, Akha, Lahu, Lisu, Karen etc. The Northern Thai people are also sometimes called by Tai people 'Yuan' or 'Tai Yuan', both for the people and their language. Tai Kammueng has its own script, which is called Tua Mueng /tuami əŋ/. The Tua Mueng script is also sometimes called Tua Tham, which also refers to scripts in Laos, Northeastern Thailand, and in the Shan cities of Chiangtung in Burma and Chiangrung in Southern China.

The Tai language family was classified into two groups by myself in 1992, i.e. the Tai Group and the Thai Group. The Thai Group is spoken in Thailand (except the northern part of Thailand), Cambodia, Malaysia and Laos. The Tai Group is spoken in different countries such as China, Vietnam, the Shan State of Burma, as well as in Northern Thailand. Since the Tai Phake and Tai Kammueng dialects are classified in the same group, that is the Tai group, it would be very useful to find out some common features which are present in the two dialects.

2. Comparison of consonant phonemes

The comparison of consonant phonemes shows that Tai Phake has fifteen consonants and two semivowels while The Tai Kammueng or the Northern Tai Dialect has seventeen consonants and two semivowels. The two voiced stops /b d/ in Tai Kammueng are not present in Tai Phake. Nor is the voiceless fricative /f/, so that Tai Kammueng has three more consonants i.e. /b d f/, while these three phonemes are replaced by the phonemes /m/ /n/ and /ph/ respectively in Tai Phake.

The consonant phonemes of the two dialects are shown in the following chart.

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
plosive vl.unas. vl.as. vd.	-p- ph- (b-)		-t- th- (d-)	c-	-k- kh-	-ʔ-
Fricatives vl.		(f-)	s-			h-
Nasals vd.unas.	-m-		-n-	ɲ-	-ŋ-	
Lateral vd.unas.			l-			
Semivowels vd.unas.	-w-			-y-		

TP: /p, ph, t, c, th, k, kh, ʔ, s, h, m, n, ɲ, l, w, y/

TK: /p, ph, t, c, th, k, kh, ʔ, b, d, f, s, h, m, n, ɲ, l, w, y/

1) The phoneme /b/ is not found in Tai Phake and it is replaced by the phoneme /m/, for example:

Tai Phake

/mā:n/

/mēv/

/mā:/

/maw/

/mōt/

Tai Kammueng

/bā:n/ 'village'

/bēt/ 'hook'

/bā:/ 'shoulder'

/baw/ 'to be light'

/bō:t/ 'to be blind'

2) The consonant phoneme /d/ is not present and it is replaced by the phoneme /n/ as in

Tai Phake

/nam/

/nɛŋ/

/nɔ:n/

/naw/

/nāp/

/ni/

/nin/

/nom/

Tai Kammueng

/dam/ 'black'

/dɛ:ŋ/ 'red'

/diɔ:n/ 'month'

/darw/ 'star'

/dā:p/ 'sword'

/di:/ 'good'

/din/ 'soil'

/dom/ 'to smell'

3) The fricative /f/ is not found in Tai Phake and is replaced by the phoneme /ph/. For example:

Tai Phake

/phā:/

/phī/

/phǒn/

/phay/

/phǎn/

Tai Kammueng

/fā:/ 'sky'

/fī:/ 'pock'

/fǒn/ 'rain'

/fay/ 'fire'

/fǎn/ 'to dream'

4) The phonemes /p t c k/ in both Tai Phake and Tai Kammueng correspond to each other as the Tai group. These phonemes occur only in words in tone block 4 (A4, B4, C4, DS4 and DL4), i.e. in words beginning with low consonants in Tai Kammueng script. For example:

1) /p t c k/ = /p t c k/

Tai Phake

/pɔ̃/

/pî/

/lukca:y/

/tūt/

/tɔ̃ŋ/

/cá:ŋ/

/kû/

/ká/

/cɔ̃n/

/kam/

Tai Kammueng

/pɔ̃:/ 'father'

/pî:/ 'sister'

/lû:kca:y/ 'son'

/tû:t/ 'leprosy'

/tɔ̃:ŋ/ 'stomach'

/cá:ŋ/ 'elephant'

/kû:/ 'pair'

/ká:/ 'to trade'

/cɔ̃:n/ 'spoon'

/kam/ 'word' (cl.)

etc.

5) The phoneme /f/ is not found in Tai Phake, and it is replaced by the phoneme /ph/ in words with both high or low consonants /ph, f/ in Tai Kammueng script. For example:

Tai Phake

/phâ:/

/phă:/

/phâ:/

/phâ:/

/phĩn/

/phay/

/phâ:tin/

/phòk/

/makphĩt/

Tai Kammueng

/fă:/ 'sky'

/fă:/ 'wall'

/phă:/ 'big knife'

/phā:/ 'cloth'

/phĩ:n/ 'cl. of cloth'

/fay/ 'fire'

/fâ:tĩ:n/ 'sole'

/phîòk/ 'taro'

/phĩk/ 'chilli'

etc.

6) The phoneme /h/ is used in the same words and the same meaning in both the two languages in words beginning with both high and low consonant in the TK. script. For example: