

The position of Tak Bai in Tai dialects

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Introduction

Tak Bai is a Tai dialect spoken by people in certain areas of the Pattani and Narathiwat provinces, and by a Tai minority group in the Kelantan and Terengganu states of Malaysia. It is first mentioned by J. Marvin Brown (1965) in "From ancient Thai to modern dialects," that Tak Bai and Southern Thai belonged to the same main group, Southern Thai, and derived from the same parent, Sukhothai (see Diagram 1). Since then, the position of Tak Bai among the South-western Tai dialects has been controversial.

William J. Gedney (1965:108), in his "Review of J. Marvin Brown: From ancient Thai to modern dialects" considered that Tak Bai shares the same two-way tonal split type with Shan, Phu Tai (at Sakon Nakhon and Wanonniwat), the Lao dialect of Vientiane, the North Eastern Thai dialects of Lom Sak and Khon Sawan, and the Yo dialect (at Sakon Nakhon).

Based on the two-way split of the original three tones into six, depending on the voiced/voiceless nature of the initials at the time of split, Fang Kuei Li (1977:44) has grouped Tak Bai among other South-western Tai dialects such as Lue, White Tai, Black Tai, and Sam Nuea. He noted that "This type is rare in Thailand, but Tak Bai, situated far southward, seems to show this type and is therefore interesting, both typologically and geographically."

Using a hypothetical set of tone shapes, David Strecker (1979) has classified Tak Bai among dialects in the Lan Na group which consists of the Kam Muang dialects, Tak dialects, Lao Yuan, Phuan, Lao Xieng Khouang, Nyo (Tha Uthen), Western Nung, Lao Ngao, Nam Bac and many others.

Through personal correspondence with James R. Chamberlain in 1983, Chailert Kitprasert (1985:221-224), mentioned that Chamberlain did not accept Strecker's hypothesis that Tak Bai came from Lan Na, realizing that tone shapes can be easily borrowed, but patterns of splits and coalescences (which are much more stable) cannot.

Chailert (1985:231-234) has also mentioned Anthony Diller's suggestions (through personal correspondence with Chailert in 1983) that Tak Bai, Northern

Thai and Lao varieties might be related. Diller also gave the extract from the **Hikayat Patani** saying “In the reign of King Cakkraphat before the Burmese invasion of 1564 war prisoners from Lan Chang were sent to the Pattani area. They were settled in a village called Bandang Parit.”

Chailert concluded that the Tak Bai linguistic position among the Tai dialects was quite elusive. Linguists using different approaches have placed Tak Bai in different groups; however, Tak Bai is not identified with Southern Thai. Further research on Tak Bai’s linguistic position is thus called for.

Research methodology

The methodology used in the study was that of descriptive and comparative linguistics. Fieldwork on Tak Bai, Black Tai, Phuan, and Phu Thai was conducted. The Tak Bai data were collected from 10 villages of Tak Bai sub-dialects: 5 from Pattani and Narathiwat provinces, Thailand, and 5 from Kelantan state, Malaysia. A wordlist of 2,051 entries was elicited from 4 main informants (2 from Narathiwat and 2 from Kelantan) and the phonetic realization of tonemes was obtained from 10 informants. The same wordlist was also used in collecting data for Black Tai (in Loei), Phuan (in Nongkhai), and Phu Tai (9 sub-dialects in Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Kalasin, Yasothorn, and Roi-Et). Their vocabularies and phonological systems were analysed and described. The linguistic data of four Thai dialects, i.e. Northern, Central, North-eastern and Southern Thai, were drawn from several sources. Following this, a comparative study of such Tai dialects was carried out.

In comparing Tak Bai and other Tai dialects under study, four criteria are used in establishing their genetic relationship: development of the Proto-Tai initial voiced stops; tonal splitting and coalescences; vowel lengthening; and certain lexical items.

Tak Bai phonological inventory

Consonant Phonemes: There are 22 initial consonants, 15 consonant clusters: /pl- pr- phl- phr- tr- kr- kl- kw- khr- khl- khw- ml- br- thr- ŋw-/, and 9 final consonants: /-p -t -k -ʔ -m -n -ŋ -w -j/. The phonemic consonant chart is as follows: (The system is that of the Tak Bai dialect from Ban Pawai, Sungai Padi district, Narathiwat province.)

vl-asp	p	t	c	k	ʔ
Stops vl+asp	ph	th	ch	kh	
vd	b	d			
Nasals	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricatives	f	s			h
Semivowels	w		j		
Roll		r			
Lateral		l			

Vowel Phonemes : There are 18 monophthongs: 9 short vowels and 9 long vowels, and 3 diphthongs : *ia uua ua*. The phonemic vowel chart is as follows:

	Front		Central		Back	
High	i	i:	ɯ	ɯ:	u	u:
Mid	e	e:	ʌ	ʌ:	o	o:
Low	ɛ	ɛ:	a	a:	ɔ	ɔ:

Tonemes: There are 6 tones occurring in smooth syllables. Four of them have their allotones in checked syllables. The tone system is demonstrated in Gedney’s Tone Boxes as follows:

	A	B	C	DS	DL
1					
2	/1/	/3/	/5/	/1/	/3/
3					
4	/2/	/4/	/6/	/2/	/4/

/1/ =

/2/ =

/3/ =

/4/ =

/5/ =

/6/ =

The linguistic criteria used in this study

1. Development of the Proto-Tai initial voiced stops

The original voiced stops may become voiceless unaspirated stops: **b *d *g* > *p t k*; hence the P-group, or voiceless aspirated stops: **b *d *g* > *ph th kh*; hence the PH-group.

2. Tonal split and coalescence

The tonal splitting in the modern dialects of Tai may be bifurcation (two-way splitting) or trifurcation (three-way splitting). Bifurcation or two-way splitting divides the three Proto-Tai tones **A *B *C* into six tones, along the lines of proto voiced versus voiceless consonants. Trifurcation or three-way splitting divides the Proto-Tai tones **A *B *C* according to the classes of initial consonants, High, Mid, and Low (the three classes of Siamese initial consonants as defined in the writing system).

The B-DL coalescence feature: B=DL versus B # DL is taken as a classification criterion.

3. Vowel lengthening

Vowel length was not distinctive in Proto-Tai, and vowel lengthening is viewed as a subsequent development in South-western Tai. Generally, vowels are lengthened in open syllables (Li 1977:260). In this article, the lengthening of high vowels in closed syllables in the dialects under study was investigated and compared.

4. Certain lexicon

Some lexical items are found among the Tak Bai dialects, but are absent from Southern Thai. Such items are similar to those of Northern and North Eastern Thai dialects. These lexical items have to be verified; they may point to the historical relationship between Tak Bai and other Tai dialects.

The relationship between Tak Bai and other South-western Tai dialects

The comparative data on Tak Bai, Central Thai, Southern Thai, North-eastern Thai, Northern Thai, Black Tai, Phuan, and Phu Tai are as follows: