Some Comments on Benedict's
"Miao-Yao Enigma: the Na-e Language"

David Strecker

1. Preface

Up to now we have thought that the Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao) family comprised three branches:

  Hmongic (Miao and Bunu Yao)
  Ho Nte (She)
  Mienic (Yao proper)

Now Benedict has presented evidence for a possible fourth branch: Na-e.

Benedict's remarks have inspired me to review the current classification schemes for Hmong-Mien. I would like to propose the following system of subgrouping:

I. Hmongic
   A. Eastern Guizhou (Purnell's "Eastern")
   B. West Hunan (Purnell's "Northern")
   C. Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan (Purnell's "Central" and "Western")
      1. Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan (Purnell's "West A")
      2. Northeast Yunnan
      3. Guiyang
      4. Huishui
      5. Mashan
      6. Luobo River
      7. Eastern
      8. Pu Nu (Tung Nu)
      9. Nu Nu
      10. Pu No
      11. Nao Klao
      12. Nu Mhou
   D. Unclassified: nine major groups.

II. Pa Hng (including Na-e)

III. Hm Nai

IV. Kiong Nai

V. Yu Nuo

VI. Ho Nte

VII. Mienic
   A. Mien-Kim
      1. Mien (Iu Mien)
      2. Mun (Kim Mun)
VII. Mienic, continued.
A. Mien-Kim, continued.
  3. Biao Mon
B. Biao-Chao
  1. Biao Min
  2. Chao Kong Meng
C. Dzao Min

This schema is taken directly from recent Chinese and
Soviet publications except that I have split up the Funuic
(Bunu Yao) subdivision of Hmongic. On the one hand, I have
put Fu Nu (Tung Nu), Nu Nu, Pu No, Nao Kiao, and Nu Mhou into
the Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan branch of Hmongic, a possibility
which has already been considered by such people as Kun Chang,
Wang Fushi, and Martha Ratliff. On the other hand, I have
 provisionally elevated Pa Hng, Hm Nai, Kiong Nai, and Yu Nuo
to the status of independent branches of Hmong-Mien, carrying
one step further the suggestion made by Mao, Meng, and Zheng
(1982:127) that these languages "have almost reached the
status of separate yu", that is separate major subdivisions
of a language family.

Na-e turns out to be simply a southern outlier of the
Pa Hng group; see the map. This was first pointed out by
Haudricourt (1954:564/1972:197; 1971:38, 43). See also Bene-
dict (1975:xxi). In addition to Bonifacy's article, we have
the following sources for Pa Hng:

1. Mao, Meng, and Zheng (1982:118, 121-123): dialect of
   Wenjie, Sanjiang County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous
   Region.

2. Institute for the Study of Minority Languages (1959),
cited in Moskalev (1978:15). Locality not specified,
but appears to be the same dialect as that described
by Mao, Meng, and Zheng, or one very close to it.

   near Yongcong, in the southeastern corner of Guizhou
   Province. In the literature this dialect is various-
   ly known as "Yung-ts'ung", "Hsi-shan-chieh", or
   "Tahua Yao".

4. Chen (1984:17, dialect #13): dialect of Gundong,
   Liping County, Guizhou Province.

Benedict has expressed fears that Na-e may have died out
since the early recording by Bonifacy. But we have reason to
hope that the language may still be spoken. Nguyen (1985:2)
cites a recent publication by the Institute of Ethnology in
Hanoi which lists a Hmong-Mien language called Pâten. I
think this must be the same name as Bonifacy's "Pâ-teh",
that is, Na-e. We will need to go through Vietnamese lin-
guistic journals such as Ngôn-ngữ and Dân-tộc-học to see
whether more material on Na-e has become available.

Pa Hng splits into two groups, Northern and Southern, which differ in the development of certain initials and finals:

Northern: Xishanjie, Gundong
Southern: Wenjie, Institute wordlist, Na-e

In this paper I will outline very briefly some of the evidence for Haudricourt's assignment of Na-e to the Pa Hng group and I will outline very briefly some additional evidence for Benedict's proposal that Na-e -- or, rather, the Pa Hng group -- separated from Hmongic at an early date.

2. Transcription

All forms in this paper are written in IPA, except for Na-e, for which I retain Bonifacy's transcription. Note the following equivalents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bonifacy</th>
<th>IPA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t'</td>
<td>[t]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c'</td>
<td>[tʃ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n'</td>
<td>[ŋ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>[j]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>[y]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bonifacy transcribes four tones in Na-e:

1: level. Occurs in all historical tone categories and appears to represent cases where Bonifacy simply failed to hear the tone.

2: descending, like Vietnamese huyên (low falling). Historically A2, B1, B2, C2, and D2, probably representing several different tones which Bonifacy failed to distinguish.

3: acute, like Vietnamese sắc (high rising). Historically C1 and D1.


3. Evidence that Na-e belongs to the Pa Hng group

Characteristics shared by Na-e and Pa Hng include the following:

(1) *r becomes yod, e.g. Na-e yô l 'stone'; Xishanjie [jø 33] 'dragon'.

(2) Velar and uvular initials merge into a single series, realized phonetically as uvular in Wenjie and the Institute wordlist and as velar in the other dialects. For