

TIBETO-BURMAN LANGUAGES OF PDR LAO*

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According to the official classification of ethnic groups in PDR Lao, there are 47 distinct groups; seven of these are Tibeto-Burman (TB). In some cases, linguistically distinct groups are classified together; in other cases, groups lumped together elsewhere are distinguished in PDR Lao. The official romanisation of the ethnic names, autonyms where different, officially listed subgroups as enumerated in the 1995 census, and the 1985 and 1995 estimated populations of these seven TB groups are given in Table 1 below. Most are spoken in the northernmost area of PDR Lao; for maps, see Wurm and Hattori (1983) or Moseley (1994).

Group	Autonym	Subgroups	Population 1985/1995
Ko	Akha	Ko Phen, Ko Chi Cho, Pou Ly, Pa Na, Phou Khoua, Lou Ma, Oe Pa, Chy Piau, Mou Chy, Mou Toe, Py Xo, Py Lou, O Ma, Ma Mouang, Kong Sat	58,500/62,000
Phu Noy	Phunoi	Xèng, Phay, Lao Pane, Phong Xet, Phou Nhot, Ban Tang, Ta Pat, Cha Ho	23,618/27,000
Mou Xoe	Lahu	Mou Xoe Dam, Mou Xoe Khao, Mou Xoe Dèng	9,200/10,500
Kuy	Lahoshi	Kuy Soung, Kuy Louang	6,493/4,700
Sy La	Sila	Sy La, Sy Da	1,518/1,720
Lo Lo	Alu		842/1,000
Ha Nhy	Hani		727/830

Table 1. Recognised TB ethnic groups of PDR Lao

Several of these languages are well-described; others are virtually unknown. Bradley (1977a, 1979b/1991) summarises the subgrouping of the Southern Loloish languages represented here. Akha, Hani and Sila are closely related

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Loloish languages represented here. Akha, Hani and Sila are closely related and are all Akoid languages. Phunoi is a Bisoid language related to Bisu of China and Thailand, also known as Pyen in Myanmar; and more closely to Công of Vietnam, cited as 'Khong' in Lefèvre-Pontalis (1892); a brief description is found in Bradley (1977b), and further data on Bisu in Bradley (1988) among other sources. Lefèvre-Pontalis (1892) provides a wordlist of Sila, under an alternative name 'Asong'; very limited data on this language is available in some Vietnamese sources, and I have a short Sila wordlist recorded for me by members of the Institute of Ethnography in 1991.

There are at least two other Southern Loloish languages spoken in PDR Lao by small groups lumped together with others. One is Pana, also sometimes known as Phana or Bana. Linguistically, this is closely related to Sila; both were also formerly known as Kai Pai. Most Pana speak Akha, and they are classified as Akha for census purposes; some Pana also speak Lahu. The only linguistic data available is Lefèvre-Pontalis (1892).

Another is Khatu, which is also spoken in China by a much larger group and has been described by Hansson (1989) and more briefly in Li and Wang (1986). In PDR Lao this has been incorrectly lumped with the Mon-Khmer Katu group of southern PDR Lao for census purposes. Khatu is closely related to Piyo of China and Mpi of Thailand; a wordlist of the former is available in Li and Wang (1986) and the latter has been well described in Duanghom (1976).

Lahu and Lahoshi (Yellow Lahu) are closely related; the former is superbly described by Matisoff (1973, among many other sources), and the latter is more briefly discussed in Bradley (1979a).

The only ethnic group on which no linguistic data is available is the Alu. The most likely connection is with the Lalo/Alu or "Western Yi" subgroup of the Yi (former Lolo) in China, which is found mainly far to the north, around Weishan (formerly known as Menghua) in west central Yunnan; an extensive vocabulary is available in Chen et al. (1985). The nearby "Yi" in China are speakers of "Southern Yi" Nisu varieties. Both Lahu and Lalo ('Menghua Lolo') are classified as Central Yi in Bradley (1979b/1991).

1. SUBGROUPS AND OTHER GROUPS

Within most of the larger groups, there are various named subgroups; the same subgroups often have different names depending on what language is being spoken and by whom. Clan names, village names, and names of local leaders, especially among the Akha and Phunoi, are also often given as subgroup names. The Lao term Kha 'slave' was formerly prefixed to many of these names; certain alternative names are those used by the valley Tai groups (Shan, Lue, Lao).

The collection of names used to refer to the Akha include some exonyms such as Puli, the Shan name for the Jeu-g'oe Akha, the dominant subgroup in northwestern PDR Lao and many adjacent areas of Myanmar and Thailand; it also includes the usual collection of clan names and village names often found in the literature on the Akha. For example, Pusang (Pou Sang, Poussang) appears to be a village name, but is identified as an Akha subgroup in Chazee (1995) with population estimated at 1,850. Other subgroup names not cited in the 1995 census list but found elsewhere include Boche, Nuki or Nuquay, Nuchi, Rala, Chapo, Mukuy and Choepia. A more distinct subgroup, which still thinks of itself as Akha, is the Akui, cited in some sources as Keu, with an estimated population of 2,000 in PDR Lao, considerably more in China and Myanmar, and a few in Thailand. Their speech is quite distinct from other varieties of Akha, but nearly all also speak Akha as a second dialect. More descriptive work is needed to work out the dialects and subgroups of Akha in PDR Lao.

The traditional history of the Phunoi indicates that they came from the west of where they now are concentrated, near Muong Sing, and before that from elsewhere; most of the Bisu are concentrated far to the north of this, but also in the traditional Lue-dominated area of Sipsongphanna. Some of the Phunoi 'subgroup' names are village names, others are clan names or local exonyms. More work is needed to clarify the Phunoi dialect situation.

The Lahu of northwestern PDR Lao are a very small portion of the overall Lahu population which is concentrated in China and Myanmar. Mou Xoe (Museu) is a Tai name for this group,¹ said to be derived from their proficiency as hunters. The Lahu are divided into two recognised ethnic groups in PDR Lao, all of whom live in the northwest. The larger is the Mou Xoe who are mainly White Lahu (Lahu Hpu, also formerly and sometimes still known as Lahu Kulao), with a few Red Lahu (Lahu Nyi, hence the term Museu Deng) and Black Lahu (Lahu Na or Museu Dam). Two villages of White Lahu also live in Thailand, but otherwise this group is only found in PDR Lao; they are followers of a former messiah. The Red Lahu are also followers of a series of messiahs, and are concentrated in northern Thailand and adjacent areas of Myanmar. Some of the Red Lahu in PDR Lao are also known as Ca Phi (Mr. Dog), probably from the name of a headman which also became a village name. The Black Lahu are the largest subgroup within the Lahu as a whole, but constitute only a small portion of those in PDR Lao. Black, White and Red Lahu speak quite similar dialects; for details see Bradley (1979a).

The smaller subgroup of Lahu in PDR Lao is the Kuy; this is a Lue/Shan term for the Yellow Lahu (Laho Shi). There are two subgroups within the Laho

¹ Supposedly originally from Burmese *mu' hsôu* (WB *mu' chûi*) 'hunter'. [Ed.]

Shi of PDR Lao; one calls themselves Laho Adaw-aga or Lahu Aga, while other Yellow Lahu groups sometimes call them Laho Ahpubele ‘bent gourd Lahu’, because they traditionally wore a small curved gourd around their necks. They are also known in PDR Lao as Kuy Soung; their speech is similar to that of the Laho Shi Bankeo of Myanmar and some of the other Laho Shi of China. The other subgroup is variously known in Myanmar and Thailand as Laho Shi Banlan, in China as Laho (Shi) Nankeo, and in PDR Lao as Kuy Luang (Yellow Kuy). Part of this subgroup, which is Christian, migrated from PDR Lao to the USA after 1975, and now lives in California; for details see Matisoff (1992). Bradley (1979a) provides a description of Laho Shi Banlan and Laho Shi Bakeo, which are linguistically somewhat different both from each other, and even more so from Black/Red/White Lahu. Nearly all Yellow Lahu can also speak or at least understand Black Lahu, which is the lingua franca dialect.

The Sila are also sometimes cited as Sida, which is probably just an alternative phonetic representation of the same name. Traditional Sila history suggests that the Sila of Vietnam originated from the west, in what is now PDR Lao. The Hani in PDR Lao are said to be very recent arrivals from elsewhere, probably from Vietnam to the east; several of the other small groups such as Khatu and Pana are also traditionally reported to have come from China.

Considerable confusion has been introduced with respect to TB and other languages in PDR Lao by the recent preparation of several new attempts at classification. The most widely distributed of these is Chazee (1995) which contains some interesting data but is rather eclectic. Others have been produced by the Institute of Culture of the Ministry of Information and Culture and scholars associated with it. These appear all to be related and to some extent derived from each other. A provisional compilation of all of them as well as various older sources such as Aymé (1930) has been prepared for the World Bank by Chamberlain (1996).

2. TRANSNATIONAL GROUPS AND NAMES

As indicated above, many of the minorities of PDR Lao also live in the surrounding countries. In some cases the classification is different; elsewhere, especially in China, there is a tendency to merge smaller groups into larger nationalities. There are also major differences in the names used to refer to these groups, which has sometimes led to confusion. The following table illustrates some of these terminological differences for the TB groups of PDR Lao.

Lao	Autonym	China	Thailand	Vietnam	Myanmar
Ko	Akha	Aini	Ikaw	-	Kaw
Phou Noy	Phunoi	Bisu	Bisu	Công	Pyen
Mou Xoe	Lahu	Lahu	Museu	Lahu/Coxung	Muhso
Kuy	Lahoshi	Lahu	Museu	-	Muhso
Sy La	Sila	-	-	Sila	-
Lo Lo	Alu	Yi	-	Lô Lô	-
Ha Nhy	Hani	Hani	-	Ha Nhi	-
Ka Do	Khatu	Kaduo	-	-	-
Pa Na	Pana	-	-	-	-

Table 2. Names for TB minority groups in PDR Lao and elsewhere

The table below gives comparable population information for these groups. Population figures in parentheses are for closely related groups.

Official name (Autonym)	PDR Lao 1995 est.	Thailand 1992	Vietnam 1993	China 1990	Myanmar est.
Ko (Akha)	62,000	32,041	0	250,000	200,000
Phou Noy (Phunoi)	27,000	(400)	(1,300)	(6,000)	(?)
Mou Xoe/Kuy (Laho)	15,200	57,144	(5,400)	411,476	200,000
Sy La (Sila)	1,720	0	600	0	0
Lo Lo (Alu)	1,000	0	3,200	6,572,173	0
Ha Nhy (Hani)	830	0	12,500	700,000	0
Ka Do (Khatu)	200	0	0	80,000	0
Pa Na (Pana)	350 ²	0	0	(?)	0

Table 3. TB groups in PDR Lao and adjacent countries

In China the Ko (Akha) and Ha Nhy (Hani) are grouped together, along with the Ka Do (Khatu) and other groups, within the Hani nationality. The population composition of the Hani nationality in China is not exactly known, but my estimates are given in the above table; the total Hani population there, including several other subgroups, was 1,253,952 in 1990.

The Phou Noy are found only in PDR Lao, but two very similar groups live elsewhere. The Bisu live in China, Myanmar and Thailand; the Bisu language

² This figure is from Chazee (1995), who incorrectly classifies Pana as Miao (Hmong).

is dying in Thailand and may be dead in Myanmar, where the last report was over a hundred years ago. In China the Bisu are also classified as members of the Hani nationality; in Thailand they are included in the general category of Lawa or Lua³ which also includes a variety of other small Mon-Khmer (MK) and TB groups. Bisu and Phou Noy are not mutually intelligible, but are very closely related. *Công*, spoken in Vietnam to the east of the Phou Noy area, is linguistically closer to Phou Noy.

There are no separate population statistics on the subgroups of the Lahu other than in PDR Lao. Linguistically more distinct is the eastern Coxung (Vietnam) or Kucong (China) subgroup, who comprise all of the Lahu in Vietnam and about 50,000 of those in China. They were amalgamated into the Lahu nationality in China in 1987; none live in PDR Lao.

The term Lolo has gone out of use in China, where the new post-1950 term Yi is used instead. For details see Bradley (forthcoming a). In China the Yi nationality includes a large number of very distinct languages; in Vietnam two of the "Southern Yi" groups are recognised as separate nationalities, the Lô Lô and the Phú Lả. In PDR Lao, as noted above, the Lo Lo are most probably of the "Western Yi" subgroup, whose language is also endangered in China despite its large population of approximately 500,000; the other six million Yi in China speak other related languages, or only Chinese.

3. CONCLUSION

Minority language policy differs from country to country in the region, and may change from time to time. Bradley (1987) considers China's handling of language policy for Loloish TB languages; this country has provided something of a regional model for policy in others with a similar political system. Bradley (1994) contrasts the policy in Thailand and China as it affects these groups, and Bradley (forthcoming b) discusses linguistic policies in the wider regional context. Minority policy in PDR Lao is being developed, and may present opportunities to improve the status of minorities and their languages.

Some of the smallest groups in PDR Lao are transnational minorities (Bradley 1983) who live in much larger numbers elsewhere, like the Ha Nhy, Ka Do and Lo Lo. The languages of others, like the Sy La and Pa Na, are very much at risk, and they are being absorbed into larger minorities such as the Ko. Thus descriptive linguistic work is urgent, as for other endangered languages around the world.

At an international conference held by UNESCO and the Institute of Culture of the Lao Ministry of Information and Culture in Vientiane in October 1996, it

³ "Lua" is the Northern Thai pronunciation corresponding to standard Thai "Lawa".

was decided to establish two language and culture centres: one at Attapeu in the south, where a variety of Tai as well as MK languages are spoken; and one at Phongsaly in the north, where most of the TB languages of PDR Lao are spoken. One of the goals of these centres is to promote such descriptive linguistic studies.

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