

Chinese Hmu or Hmu Chinese?

– Chinese Loanwords and Calques in the Hmu Newspaper

Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud

Joakim Enwall

Stockholm University

Introductory remarks

The purpose of this paper is to present a picture of the present status of written Hmu, using the newspaper *Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud* as an illustrative example. It also provides a brief historical introduction to Hmu writing in order to facilitate an understanding of the sociolinguistic setting. The author is convinced that the present conditions for Hmu writing are quite representative for many of the writing systems devised for the earlier illiterate/aliterate peoples in southwest China in the 1950s and propagated from the early 1980s onwards and thus provides some glimpses of the actual work being carried out by the language and writing authorities in the minority areas on the local level. For further details of writing in Hmu and other Miao languages in China, cf. Enwall 1994 and 1995.

Introduction

The Hmu language of the Miao language group, or, one might also argue, the Hmu dialect in the Miao language, is spoken by some 1.5 million people in the southeastern part of Guizhou province in southwest China – mainly in the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture. By the Chinese and in older Western sources this language was referred to as the Black Miao dialect, in

Chinese Hei Miao. Out of these 1.5 million people around 65% speak the northern vernacular, which has served as the basis for all writing systems devised for Hmu. The self-designations used by the speakers of Hmu are Hmu, Hme and Ghab Nes. The area in which Hmu is spoken is relatively homogenous linguistically, compared to other neighbouring areas. Apart from an increasing number of Chinese there are Dong, which constitute the second minority in the prefectural autonomy, some Buyi and also some speakers of a Hmong dialect, i.e. Western Miao. The speakers of Hmong refer to themselves as Ghao-Hmong and were earlier called Gedou/Keh Deo by Chinese and Westerners. Many of the people speaking this language speak Hmu as their second or third language, depending on whether they live near Hmu or Chinese speakers.

The Hmu area has for a long time been one of the richest Miao areas, with relatively prosperous farmers with rice and maize as their main crops. It has also been one of the most important strongholds against sinization in the Miao area. Several rebellions against the Chinese rule started in this area, particularly after the introduction of the reform to abolish local hereditary rule and transfer the power to Chinese Mandarins in the 1740s. After a bloody suppression of these rebellions many Miao fled to other areas. Almost all Hmong in the area fled to the neighbouring countries in the south, mainly Vietnam and later also to Thailand, Laos and Burma. Most Hmu stayed on, however, and the only Hmu living outside China have been reported by the Vietnamese scholar Nguyen Van Loi, who mentions a group comprising less than 1000 individuals in northern Vietnam (Nguyen Van Loi 1983:12-14). The Hmu is thus one of the most geographically concentrated Miao groups.

In the 19th century an increasing number of Chinese started to move to the area, mainly after the suppression of Zhang Xiumei's rebellion during the reign of the Tongzhi emperor. By the turn of the century Kaili – the capital of the prefecture – was basically a Chinese city, and Chinese townships grew up in many places around Kaili, often quite close to the Hmu villages. Those Hmu who wanted to advance in the Chinese society thus had an opportunity to put their children in Chinese schools.

Early Hmu Writing

In 1895 the China Inland Mission started missionary work among the Hmu. Soon missionaries were sent to the Hmu heartland, to Panghai village on the Qingshuijiang river. The missionaries preached through an interpreter, but soon they reduced the language to writing in Latin script. No samples have been preserved of this writing, which can be seen as a sign, though of doubtful scientific value, that this writing system was never used extensively, perhaps not even in printed form. A school was opened around the turn of the century and the attitude towards written Hmu was described by one of the missionaries, Samuel Clarke (1911):

When we opened a school at Panghai some years ago, and offered to teach the scholars to write their own language in the Roman script, the parents would not consent, but wished their children to learn to read and write Chinese. Their way of looking at the matter is not hard to understand. What writing they have to do must be done for them in Chinese. Any Miao who can read and write passably may easily make his living among his neighbours by doing their reading and writing for them. All proclamations and official notifications, all pleas and counter-pleas in law cases have to be written in Chinese.

The development of Hmu writing before 1949

Around 1920 the Australian missionary Maurice H. Hutton introduced the National Phonetic Script, i.e. the so-called *bo-po-mo-fō*, to write Hmu, and between 1928 and 1934 the Gospels, a Catechism, a Hymn Book and finally the whole New Testament were published in Hmu. The number of Christians in the area was, however, quite limited, and can be estimated to altogether a few hundred people. Out of these it may be reasonable to assume that around 100 persons learnt the National Phonetic Script-based writing for Hmu. It is thus not so much for the impact on literacy that the early translations into Hmu may be of interest to us. It is rather the language of these translations. A problem is that these translated texts are the only Hmu texts of any length available to us before around 1950, and the texts from the early 1950s are of two strongly divergent kinds – folkloristic texts

which preserve an older poetic language, and political texts translated from Chinese. There are thus no samples of the ordinary spoken language. In evaluating the Bible translations we furthermore have to take into account that not only Hutton was influenced by Chinese, the language he had used for his missionary work during his first ten years in China, but also that those four or five Hmu Christians who took part in the translation work may have considered Chinese-like words and expressions to have a higher status than those purely Hmu.

The Hmu writing conference in 1956

Between 1955 and 1956 almost all varieties of Miao were recorded by field linguists, as this material should serve as the basis for the Miao writing system or systems to be devised in the autumn of 1956. At the Conference for Miao Writing held in Guiyang in November 1956 four orthographies were devised for the four chosen standard dialects – Ghao-Xong, Hmu, Hmong and A-Hmao. In 1958 the orthographies were revised in that they were adapted to the Chinese Pinyin System which had been passed by the People's Congress in the spring of 1958. That same year, however, the use of minority writing systems was stopped and was not resumed until the early 1980s.

The propagation of Hmu writing in the 1980s – ups and downs

The development of Hmu writing 1981–1987 has been analyzed by Sun Ruolan (1989:118-38), a Zhuang researcher, who presented a paper at the sixth conference of the Association for bilingual education of minorities. Sun described the three phases of the development as the rise (1981–3), the summit (1984–5) and the fall (1986–7).

In the spring of 1981 the authorities in Guizhou decided that teaching in Hmu should officially be taken up again, and in November the government of the Qiandongnan Autonomous Prefecture sent out a document about the resumption of the work on minority writing systems, and the prefectural Nationalities Affairs Commission shouldered the responsibility of carrying out the first experiments

with propagation of minority writing system on a trial basis. Hmu writing was soon widely propagated in the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture. Already during the first autumn there were literacy classes for peasants in six out of the ten Hmu counties in Qiandongnan, and in two places, Kaili and Majiang, Hmu writing started to be taught at school at a small scale. In March 1982 a group with representatives from the province, the prefecture and the various counties was set up, in order to evaluate the experiment. They found that the results were very satisfying, and in the autumn of 1982 a Nationalities Language and Writing Work Conference was convened by the Guizhou Nationalities Affairs Commission.

During 1983 the teaching of Hmu writing expanded, and in a document issued by the provincial Nationalities Affairs Commission and the Education Department on 16 August 1983, the usefulness of minority writing was acknowledged, and it was decided that minority writing should be taught at a larger scale. The main characteristics of this initial period was the training of teachers and an increasing number of students in the peasant classes. Students for the teachers' training class were elected from among the best students of the peasant classes.

In 1984–1985 the number of students was rather big, and here were peasant classes in all counties with a Hmu population in Qiandongnan.

Sun recognized five major reasons for the subsequent decline in 1986–1987:

- Lack of preparation from the relevant authorities
- The decrease of state and provincial funds for minority writing work
- Lack of teachers, and bad quality of their skills
- Opposition or a hesitant approach from some people
- Lack of textbooks and other reading matter

The authorities at both prefectural and provincial level had made insufficient preparations in theory, administration and planning of writing propagation, training and use of teachers, publishing of textbooks and other reading matter. Furthermore it was not at all clear what goals should be reached in bilingual education, although

it was stated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China that all nationalities had the right to use and develop their own language and writing. If a bilingual program was implemented, until what year should the education be only in the minority language, when should teaching in Chinese start, and what levels should be reached in the minority language and Chinese respectively.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons for the decline in Hmu writing activities was the decrease in funds for this kind of work.

This economic cut-down seems to be one of the major reasons for the drastic decline after the high-tide in 1984-5, and it is noticeable in all provinces where Miao writing activities have been carried out. Sun Ruolan further wrote that during the years 1984-7, the Guangxi Nationalities Language Commission had a budget of 5,000,000 yuan for propagating Zhuang writing, whereas the Nationalities Writing Office of the Guizhou Nationalities Affairs Commission had only 200,000 yuan, which should be enough for all the minority languages, and also cover the salaries for the workers and staff members. According to Sun Ruolan the total amount spent each year on the propagation of minority languages in Guizhou, i.e. including funds from prefecture and county level, lied between 300,000 and 700,000 yuan.

The lack of pedagogical skills among the newly trained teachers has often been pointed out as a reason for the failure to go on using Hmu writing after the students have grasped the basics. The teachers cannot read fluently themselves but only recognize the initials and finals and slowly put them together to syllables.

The development of Hmu writing was furthermore hampered by the educational system, as it was (and is) not included in the exams, and the achievements in Hmu writing were indicated only for reference. This factor should not be underestimated, as it is often difficult for the students to make the entrance exams for middle school, although this is a compulsory part of the educational system. Hence, Hmu writing is regarded only as a tool for learning Chinese, for writing down the pronunciation and meaning of Chinese words, and not as a means of communication on its own right.

During the first period, 1981-2, the teachers in the various counties produced their own textbooks and reading matter, which resulted in divergent standards. In May 1984 the provincial Nationalities Affairs Commission arranged a training class for editorial work, and afterwards the Nationalities Language Office of the

provincial Nationalities Affairs Commission employed some people to prepare textbooks and other reading matter. However, during the first years there was only the peasants' literacy primer to read, and this resulted in a disenchantment with Hmu writing, as people saw no practical use of the skill they had acquired. To improve the situation, some counties, as well as the prefecture, published some additional reading matter, but the only wide-spread publication was the *Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud*, the 'Hmu and Dong Newspaper', published by the Qiandongnan Nationalities Affairs Commission.

Periodicals in Miao

Already in 1956 the Second Work Team had pointed out that the publication of periodicals in Miao was one of the prerequisites for a successful propagation of Miao writing, but apparently no periodical in Miao was published during the first two years of propagation of Miao writing, i.e. 1957–1958. Later Miao writing activities stopped altogether and were not resumed until the early 1980s. In November 1984 the Nationalities Affairs Commission of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture started publishing a Hmu and Dong periodical. The first issue was called *Liul Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud*, but from the second issue onwards (Feb. 1985) it was renamed *Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud*. Each issue contained four pages, with slightly more texts in Hmu than in Dong. The tenth and last issue was published in November 1989. Thus the average was just two issues per year.

The language of the Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud

The language of the *Baod Leix Hmub Leix Gud* can still, as in the texts from the early 1950s, be divided into two basic categories – folklore and political/administrative texts, but occasionally we also find letters from the readers which come much closer to the spoken language. In the folklore texts there are almost no Chinese loanwords, and if found, only old ones. It can easily be seen if a loanword is old or new as the set of correspondences between the original Chinese tone

category and the Hmu tone category is different for modern loanwords and for loans made before the 20th century.

The orthographic principles of Hmu writing are basically the same as for the Pinyin scheme for Chinese with the following additions:

- v- voiced velar fricative
- dl- unvoiced lateral
- hl- aspirated unvoiced lateral
- gh- uvular stop
- kh- aspirated uvular stop
- hm- unvoiced bilabial nasal
- hn- unvoiced dental nasal
- hs- aspirated dental fricative
- hv- aspirated velar fricative

Furthermore every syllable ends in a grapheme marking the tone. The tone markers represent the following tones on a five tone scale:

- b 33
- x 55
- d 35
- l 22
- t 44
- s 13
- k 53
- f 31

Sample text

(Fangb Linf 1985: 1)

Chinese loanwords in bold.

Zangx	Xongx	Xeed	Minf	Weix	Huid	ed	Leix
Leishan		county	nationality	commission		use	writing
Hmub	hxad	jangx	hniut	1984	bangf	gongb	zof
Hmu	write	<i>perf.</i>	year		<i>conn.</i>	work	
zongx	jeef	hsat	denx,	laix	laix	seix	hot
summary		before		everyone		<i>part.</i>	say
vut.	Weid	gid	gheix	xid	nend?	Yenb	weid
good	for	purpose	which		<i>modal</i>	Because	
ib	lol	dios	kof	dad	Leix	Hmub	bangf
one	<i>part.</i>	be	increase		writing	Hmu	<i>conn.</i>
zend	zid	yenx	xangx,	jab	qangf	Zaid	Hmub
political		influence		strengthen		people	Hmu
bangf	zid	zenb	xenb	haib	zid	xend	xenb ;
<i>conn.</i>		self-respect		and		self-confidence	
Ob	lol	dios	cuf	jend	Leix	Hmub	bangf
second	<i>part.</i>	be	promote		writing	Hmu	<i>conn.</i>
tuib	xenf	gongb	zof,	tif	gaob	Zaid	Hmub
propagation		work		raise		people	Hmu

bangf <i>conn.</i>	kob science	xof	wenf culture	huad	suix level	pinf ;	Bib three
lol <i>part.</i>	dios be	cuf promote	jend	minf nationality	cuf	dongx unite	hvb heart
jus without	gid, way	sail all	ves strength	ait make	vut good	sid four	huad , modernizations
mais <i>causative</i>	bib we	bangf <i>conn.</i>	zux motherland	gof	vel more	ait and	vel more
vut good	dax. become						

Translation

Before the Nationalities Affairs Commission of Leishan County wrote the work summary for the year 1984 in Hmu writing everyone said it was good. For what purpose? Firstly, because it increases the political influence of Hmu writing and strengthens the self-respect and self-confidence of the Hmu people; secondly because it promotes the propagation work for Hmu writing and raises the level of science and culture of the Hmu people; thirdly because it promotes nationality solidarity [so that] all forces [are used to] implement the Four Modernizations and to make our Mother-land become better and better.

Chinese influence on Hmu

The Chinese influence on Hmu can be found in almost all spheres of the language, in the phonological system, with new finals used for Chinese loanwords only, in the lexicon, with a fair number of Chinese loanwords already in early texts and a predominance of Chinese loanwords in modern political texts, and finally, in the syntax, where the Chinese habit of linking nouns without associative particles as well as most types of complex sentence structures, including the very conjunctions used in Chinese.

New finals

- ie
- io (<-iao)
- ui (-uei)
- uai
- ua
- en/-ien (<-ian)
- un/-uen
- uang

Loanwords

- senx 'province' < C. *sheng*
- zeb 'prefecture' < C. *zhou*
- zend fux 'government' < C. *zhengfu*
- linx daod 'leader' < C. *lingdao*
- gongb zof 'work' < C. *gongzuo*
- zux rend 'director' < C. *zhuren*

The nature of the Chinese influence on Hmu

The heavy Chinese influence on Hmu is, nevertheless, restricted to the written language, and in the every-day spoken language on topics other than politics and Chinese-style administration and society, the number of loanwords, and also the Chinese influence on syntax is much more limited.

Unlike so many other minority language areas in the world, there is at present no question whatsoever of a threatening language death in the Hmu area. There is still a relatively large number of monolinguals in Hmu, especially women and children, and the knowledge of Chinese among the rest of the Hmu is more often than not limited to the spoken language.

Concluding remarks

The large Chinese influence on Hmu newspaper texts can probably not be viewed as a situation of ordinary heavy borrowing from one language into another, but rather as the result of a lack of insight on part of those responsible for writing these texts in Hmu. They simply failed to realize that the readers of a Hmu newspaper mainly are, or should probably be, people who cannot get direct access to Chinese language media.

Similar problems have been encountered for the newspapers in Ghao-Xong (eastern Miao) and Hmong (western Miao) and also here, particularly in the Ghao-Xong case, the number of loanwords and borrowed Chinese syntactic structures must have rendered the language utterly incomprehensible to those monolingual in Ghao-Xong or with only market Chinese.

It would, however, be a bit simplistic to claim that the discontinuation of most Miao periodicals in 1989 or 1990 was the result of too much Chinese influence on the language. Other important factors have been the lack of economic incentives for learning and retaining knowledge of Miao writing coupled with a desire among a large part of the best educated young Miao in the poor inland provinces where they live to move to the more prosperous areas along the coast in search for better

living conditions. The intellectual elite, which could have played an important role in the propagation and development of written Hmu thus leaves the area, and the remaining people, most of them without more than the most basic education become even more marginalized in the otherwise expansive Chinese society.

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