

SOME WORDS FOR THAI DIALECTOLOGY

Fang Kuei Li
University of Hawaii

By Thai dialectology I mean the study of dialects in Thailand, not including the Northern Tai dialects, spoken chiefly in China, and the Central Tai dialects, spoken in North Vietnam and China (Li 1960). A detailed survey of all Tai dialects would not be feasible now, but a survey of dialects in Thailand can be made in a reasonably short time. A very good start of Thai dialectology has been made by J. Marvin Brown (1962), but it is chiefly concerned with dialectal phonology. The short sketch of tones in Thailand by Mary R. Hass (1958) and dialect studies made by S. Egerod (1961) are also chiefly phonological. The study of Songkhla dialect by Vichintana Chantavibulaya (1956) is an excellent description of a single dialect in comparison with Standard Thai. I would like to suggest certain lexical items as worthy of being used as test words in a dialect survey in Thailand. This is a slightly different approach from the studies mentioned above, although it is traditional in dialect surveys in Europe.

The words suggested here are very few, and, no doubt, can be considerably increased. These words are chosen from my comparative study of Tai languages, including the Southwestern, Northern and Central Tai groups. Many words would not particularly be suitable for the Thailand dialects, which all belong to the Southwestern group. For instance the word *phii* (พี่) 'elder sibling' has tone B2 in the Southwestern and Central dialects, but tone C2 in the Northern dialects. An interesting isoglossal line can be drawn for this word between the Southwestern and Central dialects on one hand and the Northern dialects on the other.

Similarly the word *taa* 'eye' is uniformly *taa* in all Southwestern dialects, but appears as *haa*, *thaa*, etc. in the Central dialects, and as *taa*, *ra*, *praa*, etc. in the Northern dialects. A survey of the distribution of the various forms of this word in the various dialects would show very interesting isoglossal lines according to the dialect groups or subgroups. However, they are not proper test words for the dialects in Thailand, which all belong to the Southwestern group, except *Saek* which is a Northern Tai dialect (Gedney 1970).

One of the words I would like to suggest is *thaj* C2 (ทั้ง) 'all' which is the form used in Standard Thai. However, all Northern Tai dialects, as far as I know, such as *Po-ai*, *Dioi*, etc. show tone A2, and similarly the Central dialects, such as *Lungchow*, *Nung*, *Tho*, etc. Even among the Southwestern dialects, the dialects of *Chieng Mai*, *Chieng Rai* in Northern Thailand (Purnell 1963), and *Lao* (Guignard 1912) show tone A2. It would be interesting to find out the exact distribution of tone A2 and C2 for this word in Thailand. Since the tone C2 for this word is attested only in Standard Thai, while the

rest of the Tai languages show A2, we may speculate that tone C2 is a new development in Standard Thai (Li 1970), but as Standard Thai is influential, it may have the tendency of replacing tone A2 with tone C2. It is also reasonable to expect that tone A2 and C2 may coexist in some dialects. It is interesting to note that the oldest inscription in Thailand also write the word without tone mark (ทจจ), indicating tone A2. An exact geographical information about this word would help us to formulate a theory about the origin of tone C2 in Standard Thai.

Another word that I would like to suggest is the word *jaai* A2 (ຍາຍ) 'maternal grandmother.' Lao has *mɛɛ* B2 *naai* A2 'man's mother-in-law', cf. Thai *mɛɛ* B2 *jaai* A2 'idem'; White Tai has also *mɛ* B2 *nai* A2 'man's mother-in-law'; Shan has *nai* A2 'grandmother'; Lü *nai* A2 'wife's mother' etc. Apparently many Southwestern dialects have the form *naai*. The Standard Thai, form is aberrant, and I suspect that the consonant *j-* is due to contamination with the word *jaa* B2 'paternal grandmother' (Li 1971). Whatever theory may be suggested for the Standard Thai form, it would be interesting to know the distribution of *jaai* and *naai* in Thailand. We may suspect that dialect doublets may also exist and the form *jaai*, being standard, tends to replace *naai* in some dialects. As a matter of fact, the word *naai* A2 'mistress, lady' in Standard Thai is probably a doublet, specialized in certain usage and not related to the homonym *naai* A2 'master, mister.'

The word *kii* B1 'several, how many' has tone B1 in Standard Thai, but Lü has *ki* C1 and Lao has both *kii* C1 and B1. Among the Central Tai dialects, Lungchow, Tay, and Tho have *kii* C1, and among the Northern Tai dialects, Po-ai has *kii* C1 and *čii* C1 (palatalized), Dioi *ki* C1, and Wuming *koi* C1. It would be interesting to find out the distribution of tone B1 and C1 for this word in Thailand. This word may be suspected to be related to (or a loan of) the Chinese word *chi* (3rd tone), which normally corresponds to Thai tone C1.

Another word which may be suggested for the survey is the word *som* C1 *?oo* A1 'pomelo'. The name of this fruit occurs in a number of Tai languages. White Tai and Black Tai, among the Southwestern dialects, have *puk* D2S, Lungchow, among the Central Tai dialects, has *puk* D2S, and Wuming and Dioi, among the Northern dialects, have also *puk* D2S. It would be interesting to find out how far south the form *puk* extends. Apparently the Standard Thai word *som-?oo* replaced the *puk* form, or some other form may be employed for this fruit in other dialects. Perhaps a host of words of this type, namely fruit names, plant names, etc. may be selected as test words for a dialect survey.

I suggest these words mentioned above, because they are found at least in some of the Southwestern languages and therefore presumably may be found somewhere in Thailand. But it is chiefly because I believe competent scholars in Thailand can do this much better than I can. The selection of words of this type, which have significance in the study of word distribution, dialect subgrouping, and in the

explanation of unusual irregularities, must involve some preliminary knowledge of Comparative Tai.

REFERENCES

- Brown, Marvin. 1965. From Ancient Thai to Modern Dialects. Bangkok.
- Egerod, Søren. 1961. "Studies in Thai Dialectology" Acta Orientalia 26.
- Gedney, William. 1970. "The Saek Language of Nakhon Phanom Province" Journal of the Siam Society 57.1.
- Guignard, Theodore. 1912. Dictionnaire Laotien -Francais.
- Li, F. K. 1960. "A Tentative Classification of Tai Dialects" Culture in History : Essays in Honor of Paul Radin. Edited by S. Diamond.
- _____. 1966. "The Relationship between Tones and Initials in Tai" Studies in Comparative Austroasiatic Linguistics. Edited by Norman Zide.
- _____. 1970. "Some Tonal Irregularities in the Tai Languages" Studies in General and Oriental Linguistics. Edited by Roman Jakobson and Shigeo Kawamoto.
- _____. 1971. "On Siamese jaai" Bull. of the Inst. of Hist. and Philology, Academic Sinica 42.3.