Pronominal Strategies in Tai Dam Poetic Discourse

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Abstract

A segment of a Tai Dam (Black Tai) poetic narrative, the tale of Khun Terng is examined from the standpoint of pronominal strategies employed. Southwestern Tai languages do not exhibit an exclusive category of pronouns to indicate addressee, adresser, or referent. Pronoun substitutes include the zero form, kinship terms, names, titles, and, especially in the written mode, epithets. Pronominals in older written texts are of comparative-historical interest, and discussion includes references to other languages within S.W. Tai as well as to Strecker's (1984) reconstruction of Proto-Tai pronouns.[1]

Introduction

The text under study here is an anonymous Tai Dam (Black Tai) narrative discourse written in a style known to students of Siamese literature as *râay* or *râay yaaw* ('long *râay*'). The *râay* form has been aptly described as "poetic prose." Line length typically varies between 7-11 syllables, with the rhyme of the final syllable of a line linked to one of the early syllables of the succeeding line. Alliteration and assonance are heavily employed to pack the poetic space of the text. In older texts, tonal rhymes based on Proto-Tai tone categories (A, B, C, D) can also be shown. The râay yaaw is a popular form used in the Jataka tradition of "Greater Laos."[2] It is an ancient poetic style shared by the Tai Dam with their Tai Lue and Lao neighbors. In fact, a longer, "Old Lao" version of the story being studied here was located by the author in the Thai National Library in 1985. The story, a founding myth, is important to the Tai Dam and the Lao for a number of reasons, not the least of which derives from the fact that both versions are

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masterpieces of imaginative literature that deserve to be translated for a wider audience.

In translating the text, one of the first challenges is coming to grips with who is who, who is talking, and who is being talked about—that, is pronominal strategies. Before going deeply into that matter, however, we shall discuss what is known of pronouns in contemporary Tai Dam speech, and the speech of other dialect areas in the near geographic region.

Contemporary Lao-Tai Dam Personal Pronouns[3]

In the Tai Dam-English, English-Tai Dam Vocabulary Book (Baccam Don et al. 1989), we find the following personal pronouns, noting (p.7) that "some of the lexical entries reflect the influence of Laotian upon the Tai Dam community they represent." The Lao-Tai Dam interviewed by the dictionary compilers had lived in Laos after fleeing the traditional homeland of the Tai Dam in the Son La region of Vietnam. Later we shall compare this array with the Tai Dam personal pronouns cited by Strecker (1984) in his reconstruction of Proto-Tai pronouns, citations which more likely reflect older Tai Dam usage in Vietnam. We shall also compare these two varieties of Tai Dam with Lao of Vientiane and Phu Thai of Nakhorn Phanom for the light they shed on the changes within the dispersed Tai Dam speech community.

Table I: Lao-Tai Dam Pronouns
(adapted from Baccam Don et al. 1989)

Person	Singular	
	Familiar	Polite
1st	ku1	khɔy3
2nd	mɯŋ4	caw3
3rd	man4 ('he, she,it')	
	pɯən5 ('he')	

Person			Plural	
	Familiar	Polite	Inclusive	Exclusive
1st			haw4	sum4-khɔy3
2nd	su1	pɯŋ4-caw3		
			Definite	Indef.
3rd			saw1	saw2('people')

In discussing the array of contemporary Lao-Tai Dam pronouns, we note that there is a division along lines of +/- familiarity in the first and second person, the "I/you" axis. In the first person plural, the division is between the inclusive vs. the exclusive "we." In the third person, the plural category marks a distinction between a definite and indefinite "they." (The form pɯən5 appears to me to be a Lao-ism and will be compared to Vientiane Lao and Phu Thai of Nakhorn Phanom later.) If one were to eliminate the familiar vs. polite category— and the extraneous Lao borrowing pɯən5 'he' (only)—the list of pronominals would be unique monosyllabic forms divided along the lines of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular and plural, not unlike the Aiton forms recorded by Diller below.

Proto-Tai and Older Tai Dam Compared with Ahom and Kam Muang

Strecker's (1984) reconstruction of Proto-Tai pronouns illuminates changes within Tai Dam itself (the Lao-Tai Dam vs. the older Vietnamese-Tai Dam speech communities) and changes from Proto-Tai to two other dialects in the northern reaches of Southwestern Tai.

Table II: Proto-Tai Pronouns Compared to Ahom, Kam Muang, and Tai Dam (adapted from Strecker 1984)

1st Per. sing:*kuuA/*kauA   1st Per. dual excl.:*raaA
     Ahom /kau/
     Kam Muang /kuu4/   Kam Muang /haa4/
     Tai Dam /**kuu1**/ (p. 26,33) **Tai Dam** /**haa4**/
                        1st Per. pl. excl.:*pruuA
                        Kam Muang /tuu1/
                        Tai Dam /**tuu1**/
                             -**fuu1** [sic]

1st Per. pl. incl.:*rauA
Ahom /rau/
Kam Muang /hau4/
Tai Dam /hau4/

2nd Per. sing:*mɯɯA/*mauɯ/   2nd Per. pl: *suu
Ahom /mau/   Ahom /ʃɯɯ/
Kam Muang /mɯŋ4/   Kam Muang /suu1/
Tai Dam /mɯŋ4/ (p.36)   **Tai Dam** /suu1/

3rd Per. sing:*minA/*mɯnA   3rd Per. pl.:*khrauA
Ahom /maan/   Ahom /khau1/
Kam Muang /man4/   Kam Muang /khau1/
Tai Dam /man4/ (p. 48)   T.D. /sau1, sau2/[4]

Aiton Pronouns

Diller (MS) lists a simple six member system for Aiton, a Tai language of Assam, that deserves comparison with Tai Dam. The differences are simply person and number. He mentions that "honorific forms, some in -caw2, are available." A guess would be that caw2 is an innovation that has crept into Aiton, just as it has into Lao Tai Dam speech. Strecker (1984) reports that the origin of caw2—as a pronoun—is unknown. Its appearance in Lao-Tai Dam and Aiton seems to indicate that it is a change that is being taken up readily in other Tai dialects in more northerly SW Tai.

Table III: Aiton (Assam) Pronouns
(adapted from Diller MS.)

Person	Singular	Plural
1st	kaw1	haw1
2nd	mauɯ1	su3
3rd	mɯn1	khaw3

Vientiane Lao Pronouns

Gething (1976) provides a very comprehensive list of Lao pronouns. To such dimensions such as familiar (intimate) vs. polite (formal), inclusive vs. exclusive, definite vs. indefinite (vague), singular vs. plural, he adds the social determinants of age, sex, status, and solidarity, information lacking from our Tai Dam data. His list of Lao pronouns is more extensive than the list of Tai Dam pronouns, where, clearly, sex of the speaker is less relevant, as is age, status, and solidarity—except for whatever can be inferred from the familiarity of the speakers. At

any rate, Lao has more pronouns per se than does Tai Dam. (Perhaps more might be discovered in Tai Dam if one were to investigate more closely the same sociolinguistic categories used by Gething.) By comparison with Tai Dam and Aiton, we can see, as Gething points out, that Lao has lost the category of distinct, monomorphemic plural pronouns. Lao places a plural noun marker /phùak/ in front of singular forms, as a general rule, seen below.

Table IV: Vientaine Lao Pronouns
(from Gething 1976)

A) 'I'
    (1) khɔ̂j
    (2) khanɔ̀ɔj
    (3) háw
    (4) kuu

B) 'we'
    (5) phùakkhɔ̂j (exclusive)
    (6) phùakkháw (inclusive)
    (7) phùakkhanɔ̀ɔj (ex.)
    (8) háw (ex. & inc.)
    (9) phùakkuu (ex.)

C) 'you' (singular)
    (10) càw
    (11) too
    (12) mɨ̂ŋ
    (13) thāan
    (14) ñáa (men only)

D) 'you' (plural)
    (15) phùakcàw
    (16) phùaktoo
    (17) phùakmɨ̂ŋ
    (18) phùakthāan
    (19) phùkñáa

E) 'he' or 'she'
    (20) láaw
    (21) phə̄n
    (22) mán
    (23) mɔ̂ɔ (men only)

F) 'they'
    (24) khacàw
    (25) phùakkhacàw
    (26) phùakláaw
    (27) phùakphə̄n
    (28) phùakmán
    (29) phùakmɔ̂ɔ (men only)

G) 'other'
    (30) khǎw
    (31) phùakkhǎw

Phu Thai (Nakhorn Phanom) Pronouns

Very close geographically to Vientiane Lao is the dialect of Phu Thai spoken in Nakhorn Phanom, Thailand. Wilaiwan Khanittanan (1975) recorded the Phu Thai pronouns as follows:

Table V: Phu Tai Pronouns
(adapted from Wilaiwan Khanittanan 1975)

1st per.: khaa5-nɔi2   2nd per.:tɕau5   to superiors, polite,
                                              infrequent
          khɔi5   tɕau5   to elders, polite
          hau3   too5   to same age, intimates,
                                              friends
          kuu1   mɯŋ3   older to younger,
                                              children, intimates

3rd per.: phən5   to show respect because of age or for being
                      an adult
           man3   to refer to a younger person or an intimate

    Khanittan (1973:70) makes the following claim about plural forms: "All personal pronouns in Siamese and other Lao dialects are singular....Plurality is not expressed in the Siamese pronouns. When there is need, a word which indicates plurality is added in front of the personal pronoun or after a verb of a sentence." (See Strecker 1984: 136 for a refutation of her claim.) She also notes that kinship terms are used in place of pronouns for the 2nd and 3rd person.

    On an informal level male and female prefixes can be used in combination with names:

    Male: bak2 + name   Female: ʔii1 +name
    On a formal, polite level we find the following:
    Male: thaaw5   Female: naaŋ 3 (single or married)

    In comparing the Lao-Tai Dam personal pronouns listed at the outset to the older Tai Dam and Lao of Vientiane and Phu Thai of Nakhorn Phanom—both "Lao" dialects—we can come to the following conclusions.
    1. Lao-Tai Dam has added:
      a. the dimension of "politeness" by adopting the Lao forms khɔy3 (1st person singular) and caw3 (2nd person singular).
      b. the separate morpheme pɯŋ4 to indicate "plurality" in the 2nd person plural form pɯŋ4 caw3.
      c. the separate morpheme sum4 to designate the "exclusive we" in the form sum4 khɔy3.

[In the Tai Dam dialect of Ban Chieng district (Chiangrai) recorded by Strecker (1984:157) we find the form sum4 fuu1 'we' (exclusive) used with intimates. Strecker states that the form sum4 is a plural marker, one dimension of its use in Lao-Tai Dam sum4 khɔy3, the other dimension being the exclusive.]

    d. the form pɯən5 from Lao and reassigned the meaning from 'he' or 'she' to 'he'. That is, a gender distinction—one exclusively male—is now being made.

    2. Lao-Tai Dam has lost:

    a. the 1st person dual exclusive (haa4 in Strecker's Tai Dam and Kam Muang).

    b. the 1st person plural exclusive (tuu1 in Strecker's Tai Dam and Kam Muang) and replaced it with the Lao-like sum4 khɔy3.

Old Titles as Modern Honorifics

Khanittanan (1977) mentions that thaaw5 and naaŋ3 are used in combination with male and female names respectively as a sign of formality or politeness, an honorific not unlike Siamese khun5 + formal name. In his study of "Ahom and the Study of Early Tai Society," Terwiel (1983:45-46), in his list of "terms indicating rank, title or class from early Siamese sources" defines, among other titles the following:

    khun   ruler of a fortified town and its surrounding villages, together called a mu'ang.[5]

    thāaw "lord", often used where phrayā would also apply.

    nāaŋ "lady"; it seems that originally the term indicated a lady of high rank, but that with the passage of time the term was used to include women of a less exalted class.

In both Siamese and Phu Thai, as well as other SW Tai languages, these three older titles have been clearly downgraded to honorific status, but they are preserved in Tai Dam literature.

Pronominal Strategies in Tai Dam Poetic Discourse

We shall now turn our attention to pronominal strategies employed in the Tai Dam poetic narrative, the tale of Khun Terng. The text of the narrative is 743 lines of what in Siamese is called râay, a sample of which appears in the appendix of this paper.

In discussing pronominal strategies found in the text, it is first necessary to give a general introduction to some of the actors in the narrative. The hero is Khun Terng, or Prince

Terng. He has a wife, variously referred to as naaŋ2, or 'Lady'. Saddened by the death of his father and the fact that he is childless and without an heir—as is so often the case in South and Southeast Asian heroic narratives—(witness a similar opening theme in the Ramayana) Prince Terng wanders off into the jungle and meets up with—unbeknownst to him, at first—a Naga princess, named caw3 ʔaet2-khay6, who conceives a child by him. In the story, Khun Terng's parents are mentioned, as are the founders or creators of the first city. Male retainers or servants also play a role in finding the vanished Khun Terng.

The following lists of references to characters or use of personal pronouns covers only the first 108 lines of the text. The list is not meant to be complete, because it does not cover the entire poem. First indications are that pronominal strategies in this particular narrative poem, which deals with an elite strata of society who have both royal and sacerdotal characteristics and who project status, power, and emotional relationships, are largely rendered through the use of titles, epithets, and kinship terms, with only rare instances of simple personal pronouns. Of the older Tai Dam personal pronouns outlined in the earlier sections of this paper, only the 1st person plural haw4 and the 3rd person plural saw4 appear. As a sociolinguistic tactic, this is not a surprise. In speaking of the 3rd person plural 'they' or 'them', no direct speaker communication takes place, in which case status need not be acknowledged. In a somewhat different manner, references to 'we', the second person plural, cannot call for recognition of status differences because of joint activity. The singular of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person pronouns, because they deal with individuals rather than two or more persons, demands an elaborate use of titles and epithets in order to give legitimacy and varying degrees of power and glory to the heroes and his circle. In the "I-Thou" dyad, elaborate epithets are displayed, particularly when it comes to expressing emotional states such as love or deference.

Of all the titles or honorifics listed, the term taaw6, which historically meant something like 'lord', appears in nearly all elaborate reference to Khun Terng, and it is the last item in an expression.[6] It appears again in references to his father.

The most often used term for the two important women in the narrative, the wife and "mistress" of Khun Terng, is naang4 'lady'. When the Naga princess appears to speak in the 1st person, the forms ʔuan1 and hiam4 are used, neither of which are regular 1st person pronouns in Tai Dam.

The zero pronoun appears when an action is uninterrupted by another actor or change of setting. For example, when Khun Terng wanders off, a series of clauses follow one after another describing his movement and activities in the jungle.

[In the following list, a computer-compatible transcription system is used.]

References to Khun Terng:

khun1 terng4	(lines 7, 60, 67, 69, 80)
khun1	(lines 10, 14, 41, 102, 107)
thi1-li1(di1)-khaan4-taaw6	(lines 25, 370)
vaa1(baa1) taaw6	(line 31)
caw3 vaa1(baa1)taaw6	(line 32)
vaa1(baa1) taaw6 khaan4	(lines 34, 52)
vaa1(baa1) tay4	(line 57)
vaa1(baa1) tay4 taaw6	(line 84)
taaw6	(lines 36, 48, 103)
fua1	(line 43, 63)
khun1 terng4 taaw6	(line 55)
naw3 fua2 taaw6	(line 76)

Forms used by the Naga princess to address Khun Terng:

taaw6 fua1 ming5 khun1 terng	(line 87)
caw3 kaen2 tay4 fua1 ming	(line 94)

References to his parents:

fua1 mia1 taaw6	(line 6)

References to his father:

....while he is still alive:

pou5 king4	(line 10)
pou5	(line 70)

....after he is dead:

faa6 taaw6 tun6	(line 11)
taan5 fu3 kong2 taaw6	(line 70)

References to his wife:

kaew3 bou?2(bouk2)-may6 naw3 ming4 tiam-faeng1	
	(line 9)
naw3 num2 taaw6	(line 41)
naang4	(lines 57, 59, 61, 63, 75)
naang4 meuang4	(line 37)

References to the Naga princess:

fi1 tham3 nyay+2	(line 29)
caw3 ?aet khay6	(lines 30, 85, 104)
?uan1 naang4	
koung1 thi1-li1(di1) kaew3	(line 97)

References to male retainers or servants:

baaw2	(line 43)

References to founders of Chiang Baan:
    thi1-li1(di1) tay1   (line 4)
Child or son:
    general reference:
        kaew3 ?oun2 nouy6   (line 16)
        lu?5(luk5) caay4   (line 18)
    child in Naga princess's womb:
        nouy6   (line 86)
Personal Pronouns:
    1st person singular, Naga princess speaking:
        ?uan1   (line 90. See ?uan1 naang4 above)
        hiam4[7]   (lines 93, 94)
    1st person plural:
        haw4 'we'   (line 95)
    3rd person plural:
        saw4 cu5 kon5 'all of them'(line 66)
        saw4 'they'   (lines 77, 83)

Conclusion

The first part of this paper set out to examine personal pronouns in several Tai dialect areas (and periods), especially older Vietnamese-Tai Dam and more recent Lao-Tai Dam, along with Lao of Vientiane and Phu Thai of Nakhorn Phanom and to compare them to Proto-Tai personal pronouns as reconstructed by Strecker (1984). Comparisons of the four dialects with Proto-Tai were carried out as a means of identifying and understanding pronouns, pronoun substitutes and pronominal strategies in an old Tai Dam poetic narrative, *Khaam Khun Terng*, examined in the second half of the paper.

Only two older (Vietnamese) Tai Dam personal pronouns mapped on to the text of the poetic narrative: the 1st person plural /haw4/ and the 3rd person /saw4/. These, in turn, find parallels in the northern S.W. Tai dialects such as Northern Thai (Kam Muang) and Ahom, showing an earlier line of geographical and historical continuity. The more recent Lao-Tai Dam speech maintains these same two forms, but only as inclusives; an exclusive category for the 1st and 3rd person plural has been added. Not surprisingly, innovation and language change are at work.

The identification of the two Tai Dam pronouns establishes the fact that the text of *Khwaam Khun Terng* preserves the older form of Tai Dam. A list of pronoun substitutes used in the text reveals the usual predilection of Tai languages to use kin terms, titles, and elaborate epithets, all reflective of social categories

and manifestations of power and affection, the classical intersecting axes of formality and familiarity, the exotic and the plain, the high and the low.

Notes

[1] A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society on May 14-16, 1992 at Arizona State University. It is a revision of an earlier (unpublished) version read at the 23rd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, The University of Texas—Arlington, October 5-7, 1990.

[2] The term "Greater Laos" is used by Frank E. Reynolds (MS) to refer to an area extending from "Yunnan in the north, through Laos and northeastern Thailand, to the borders of Cambodia in the south."

[3] The term Lao-Tai Dam is used in this paper to refer to a speech community of Tai Dam who had moved from Son La, Vietnam to Laos soon after the fall of Dienbienphu and then once more to Iowa via the refugee camps of Thailand starting from 1976. Vietnamese-Tai Dam refers to an older Tai Dam spoken in Vietnam several generations ago.

[4] Strecker (1984:113) explains the tonal variants of /sau1, sau2/ as a difference in meaning: /sau1/ means 'they', definite plural, referring to human beings; /sau2/, the irregular form, is an indefinite pronoun.

[5] The complete Siamese citation is khun5 (ขุน), not to be confused with khun1 (คุณ). The latter is a Pali-Sanskrit borrowing: Guna 'good quality; virtue; merit'. Siamese thaaw4 (ท้าว) 'lord' is cognate with Tai Dam thaaw6.

[6] In the concordance to the text of *Lilit Phra Lo* /lilit phráʔ lɔɔ/, composed in the early Authaya period, the frequency of Siamese thaaw4 (Tai Dam taaw6) is very high also, and higher than khun5 (T.D. khun1). See Hartmann et al. (1989).

[7] Cognate with Siamese riam1 เรียม, ระเรียม 'pron. I; me; we; older brother; commonly used in poetry or songs as a personal pronoun, considered to be derived from the Cambodian language'. From McFarland's *Thai-English Dictionary*. (Professor Gedney first pointed this out to me.)

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Appendix: Text of Khun Terng
(sample: lines 1-13)

The following lines of the poetic narrative are intended to illustrate the rhyme scheme of the râay form. The bolded items show external linking rhyme.

Of interest is the fact that most of the rhymes fall into Proto-Tai tone categories. That is, modern Tai Dam tones 1 and 4 =*A; 2 and 5 = * B; 3 and 6 = *C, an underlying phenomenon first pointed out by Gedney (1978).

1. kwam4   khun1   terng4
   story   prince   Terng
   Free translation: *(Title) The Story of Prince Terng*

2. hery4   bat2-ni6   maa4   cang2   nae1-kaay2
   Oh!   now   come   then   relate
   thouy3   caat5   can6   paang1   koun2
   story   life   time, layer   period   before
   ciang-4-baan1
   Chiang Baan

F. T.   Oh! Now let us tell the story of life before Chiang Baan was founded.

3. (2) naw4 laa1(daa1) kheua3 toun1 peun6 pen1 tiang2 leu4-**kay4**

4. thi1-li1(di4)-**tay4** saang3 ciang-baan1 laay1(daay1) **khuap2**

5. (3) bun1-**cuap2** lay3(day3) ʔoun2-nouy6 taen4 ceua6 seup2 **saay1**

6. fua1-mia4 taaw6 com4 **laay1(daay1)**

7. (4)lian1 cang2 tat2-ceu5 hay+3 ʔoun2-nouy6 hia?5(hiak5) vaa4 khun1   **terng4**

8. (5) **herng1** pi1 liang6 laay1(daay1) ciang1 khaw3 khuap2

9. lian1 cang2 keut5-ʔaaw2 kaew3 bou?2(bouk2)-may naw3 ming5 tiam1-**faeng1**

10. (6) khun1 kou6 **khaeng1** meuang4 loum1(doum1) pou5 king4 laay1(daay1) **khaw3**

11. herng1 khuap2 **khaw3** pi1 (7) faa6-taaw6-tun5 khaa4 **kaay4**

12. vaang4 meuang4 **vay6** khun1 terng4 pen1 **lu?5(luk5)**

13. tian3 (?) **cu2**-can6 khaw4-kan3 hong2-haa1