Notes on Laha final -l

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1. Laha is among the few Tai-Kadai languages which possess a seemingly exotic final, -l, in addition to the normal set of stop and nasal endings. It has been tempting to believe that this -l will give us another clue for linking Tai-Kadai with Austronesian. As a matter of fact there are examples which may support this expectation, e.g. Laha jil[6]/zil[6]: Malay **kecil** 'young/small', Laha ŋal[3]: Malay **beŋal** 'deaf'. Certain forms such as the following, however, remind us that there may be more than one possible AN final corresponding to Laha -l:

'fat/oil'		'rain'	
Laha	mal[1]	Laha	jal[2]
Formosan:		*Formosan:*	
Ami	simár	Paiwan	qúd'al
Bunun	símal	Bunun	hóďan
Saaroa	ʔimarə	Saaroa	usałə
*PMP	himaR	*PMP	quzan

We will discuss this more, in connection with other Tai-Kadai languages, in section 3.

2. AN is certainly not the only Southeast Asian language family which has liquid finals. Both Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic possess such finals as well, and either could possibly be sources of Laha -l. For instance, we may also find good matches for 'fat/oil' spread throughout TB subgroups: (Himalayish) Tibetan **mar** Cuona Monpa *mar*[35], (Nungish) Dulung **mɑ̌ɹ**[55]**kɯ**[55], (Kamarupan) Damu **mar-kɯ**, (Qiangic) Gyarung **kə ne mer**, etc.

Also, such Laha forms as those for 'mouth' and 'flower' seem to be most closely related to Tibeto-Burman:

'mouth'[1]		'flower'	
Laha	mul[1]	Laha	bal[2]
Maring	mur	Meche	bibar
Tangkhul	khə-mor	Bodo	bibár?
Khoibu	mur	Garo	bibal
Limbu	mur-a	Kokborok	bo-bar
Haka Lai	hmur[2]	Dimasa (blossom)	bar-
Tibetan (gills)	mur	Tibetan (blossom)	'bar-ba

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[1] Note Malay **kemur/kumur** 'revolving in the mouth', reconstructed by Dempwolff as PMP ***kəmuɣ/*kumuɣ**.

It should be noted here, however, that evidence of TB liquid finals has been found mostly in western branches. Lolo-Burmese speakers, which we assume to be the ones who have most likely come in contact with Laha, have not retained such finals well. For example, Naxi (Lijiang) ma³¹, Yi (Dafang) mi³³ 'fat/oil'[2]; Bisu **man-pɔ̀ŋ**, Hani (Dazhai) me³¹ bɔ³¹, Lisu (Nujiang) mɯ³¹lɯ³⁵, Yi (Dafang) mi¹³pu²¹ < Proto-Loloish *(C)me² 'mouth'; Burmese pàn, Zaiwa pan²¹, Lisu (Northern) ba³⁵ba⁴⁴, Naxi (Lijiang) bɑ³¹ (but note Nusu vɑɹ⁵³ɑɹ³¹) 'flower'. Thus, if the forms came through contact, we may have to assume that the Lolo-Burmese people in question must still have kept the liquid final(s) or that the contact had antedated Proto-Lolo-Burmese.[3]

Another etymon, 'fly (v.)', is worth noting here. There seem to be at least two possible TB affiliations for this word, *pur/pir and *byer. The former is probably related to Laha and Kam-Sui, the latter with Tai:

'fly (v.)₁'[4]		'fly (v.)₂'	
Laha	po'l⁴	Saek	bɯl A1
Kam	pən C1	Siamese	bin A1
WT	'phur-ba	Bokar	bjar
Zeku	mphər	Abor-Miri	ber
Lhasa	phir	Bahing	byer
Gurung	pihri ba	Gurung	birꞙ-la
Rumdali	perꞙ ma	Rumdali	bɛrɔ̃
Limbu	pE:r-	Limbu	bɛrsi
Thakali	pyurꞙ-wa	Damu	biar ra
Kulung	perte	Dulong	bĕɹ⁵³
Jingpho	pjɛn³³	Trung	biel

This word, however, seems to be a Pan-SEA etymon[5], also widespread in Austroasiatic languages. The AA forms seem to belong to 'fly₁'.

Praj (Khmuic)	phar	Kui (Katuic)	paar
Mu'o'ng (Vietic)	păl	Jeh (Bahnaric)	păl
Nyahkur (Monic)	phaɹ	Proto-Waic	*pɤr

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2   Lolo-Burmese languages use other roots in this area, including *tsil for the noun (WB **chi**, 'fat, oil', **khraŋ-chi** 'marrow') and *tsow for the stative verb 'be fat' (WB **chu**, N. Lisu **tshɯ³³**, Lahu **chu**, etc.)

3   Another choice would be to stipulate that some of those western TB people used to be *further east, bordering on Kadai-speaking areas.*

4   Note various related Old/Middle Chinese forms pɪwər/pjwɐi A, pɪwən/pɪuən A, and pɪwən/pɪuən C. The last one has departing tone corresponding well with Lakkja **phon** B1. Still another TB root for 'fly' with labial initial is *byam.

5   Related forms have not been well attested in AN. But note some of the following Formosan forms: Paiwan (Makazayazaya) **mipərpɔ́r**, Saaroa **miapiɬiɬi**.

In connection with Austroasiatic, we may further mention words like the following:

	Laha		AA
'arrow'	lal³	*Mường*	lăl
'grandchild'	klal³	*Mường*	klal 'boy/child'
'bamboo shoot'	pul³	*Mường*	pŭl
'buy'	col³	*Kui*	toor
'shallow'⁶	dol³	PW	*dɒl/r;
		NyK	kədạal
'tasty'	mạl²	NyK	mạl

Also worth noticing is Laha lŏl¹ 'tongue'⁷ Sach (Vietic) lal (Vietnamese lưỡi < PMK*-s, cf. Thavung laš etc.). The similarity between the forms for 'tongue' could be accidental, but note the parallel in Saek tɛl⁶ 'mushroom' Bulang (Palaungic) tɯḷ¹, Proto-Waic *tes.

3.   The other two Tai-Kadai languages known to have final -l are a Baisha dialect of Hlai (Wang and Qian 1951) and Saek. Since these languages represent separate branches of Tai-Kadai, it would be interesting to see what connection their -l finals could have with each other.

3.1.   Baisha -l usually corresponds to -ɯ in other Hlai dialects . It appears, however, only after Proto-Hlai *-ă-. For instance, Baisha fəɯ¹ Baoding vəɯ¹ 'navel', but Baisha pla:l³ Baoding plaɯ³ 'near'. It is thus possible to consider this -l as a conditioned reflex of final *-ɯ, which may be phonetically assumed to be a velar approximant -ɣ or a velarized -ɫ.

Laha usually has zero final corresponding to Baisha -l⁸; this Laha development resembles Jiamao (a Hlai language).⁹

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6   Siamese has tɯnɯn C1. The root is not very widespread within Tai (no reconstructed form in Li's Proto-Tai). Waic forms point to a voiced initial, but cf. also Kui nthùur. The connection among these forms is uncertain (note that both Kui and Nyahkur normally distinguish final -r and -l).

7   Proto-Tai shows initial *l-: Siamese lin, Saek li:n C2. But Hlai forms seem to point to *tl-, Savina's Hiai tlíen, Baisha ḷi:ŋ⁵⁵, Heitu diən³. The PMP reconstruction is *dilah, with somewhat irregular reflexes in daughter languages: Tagalog dilah, Malay lidah, Hova lela'. Some Formosan languages from old sources show interesting trisyllabic forms: Favorlang tatsira, Siraya dadila(h), which may explain some peculiarities. The connection among the forms is uncertain.

8   Note that all these forms have tone *3 in Hlai, a fact which may turn out to be significant later.

9   For instance, Jiamao la¹ 'near' and tha¹ 'short'.

	Baisha	Baoding	Laha	Tai (Lungming)
'near'	pla:l³	plaɯ³	kla¹	kjaɯ C1
'light (≠heavy)'	kha:l³	khaɯ³	kha⁶	-10
'short (≠tall)'	t'a:l³	thaɯ³	ta⁶	taɯ C1 'below'11
'grandma'	tʃa:l³	tsaɯ³	ja⁴	jaa B2

However, there are also Laha forms like **mal²** 'new' and **pal³** 'wilderness' which have similar Tai rhyme reflexes of the above type (cf. Lungming **maɯ B1** and **paa B1** respectively).[12] We may temporarily assume ***-ɬ** > Laha -l after -a-, but ***-ɬ** > Laha -ɯ after -ǎ- (and then -ǎ- > -a following -ɯ > -Ø). The development seems to mirror that of Baisha, where -ɬ > -l after -ǎ- (with then the lengthening of the preceding vowel). As we have just seen, however, the short/long (-ǎ-/-a-) distinction does not always match with that of Tai (cf. 'grandma' and 'new').

'Grandchild' is a good form which shows Laha -l corresponding to Baisha -l and to -n in most other languages. We may temporarily label this type of correspondence ***-l**. The validity of certain examples here remains tentative.

	Baisha	Baoding	Laha	Others
'grandchild'	la:l¹	-	klal³	laan² (Saek)
'return'	pa:l¹	pəɯ²	po˙l¹ 'turn'	pen⁵⁵ (Gelao)
'rise'	va:l²	ʔwaɯ²	o˙l³ 'turn up'	-

3.2.   Saek -l appears in almost a hundred forms and may follow any vowel.   Laha often has -l corresponding to Saek -l, but also has -l corresponding to Saek -n in certain forms.   Where Baisha forms can be found, they normally show -ŋ (<-n) for these words:

	Laha	Saek	Baisha	Tai (Siamese)
*-L				
'snore'13,14	kal³	tlɛl¹	fa:ŋ¹	kron A1
'husked rice'	ʃal⁵	saal²	-	saan A1
'shake'	ʃạl⁴	sɛl⁶	-	san B1
'fat/oil'15	mạl¹	mal	-	man A2
toad	*jạl³*	*ɣạl⁴*	*(ka:l²)*	*khan- A2 (Lao)*
'shallow'	do˙l³	-	t'ɯŋ¹	tɯɯn C1

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10 Cf. NyK (Nam Lau dialect) **hyɐal**, (Taling Chan dialect) **khɔyɐal**.
11 Cf. NyK (Nam Lau dialect) **çɐl**, (Taling Chan dialect) **çɛr** 'short/low'. Siamese (and most Southwestern Tai) also have **san** C1 'short'. The connection among the forms is uncertain.
12 Many Hlai dialects, including Baisha, have another form for 'new': **no³**. But note Heitu **ma:n¹** and Baoding **pa:n¹**.
13 Note the following TB forms: Thakali **kɔhr-kɔr**, Thulung **khor-**, Khaling **khor-**, Dimasa **goro**, Chamling **ghura**, Pattani **gor-gor-si**.
14 For Saek, Gedney also lists other variants: **tlen¹** and **trel¹**.
15 The Saek form is from Haudricourt (1963). Gedney (1993) has **man⁴**.

*-N	*Laha*	*Saek*	*Baisha*	*Tai (Siamese)*
'tongue'	loɗl^1	li:n^6	ɬi:ŋ^3	lin C2
'rain'	jaɗl^2	vɯn^2	foŋ^1	fon A1
'swallow'[16]	doɗl^3	tlɯɯn^1	-	klɯɯn A1

The last examples in both sets ('shallow' and 'swallow') are tentative, since either the Saek or Baisha form is lacking. For instance, if Baisha had -l for 'swallow', the word should be included together with forms like 'grandchild'.

3.3. We may summarize the tentative correspondence sets relating Baisha, Laha, and Saek -l as follows:

*-ɬ	*Laha*	*Baisha*	*Saek*	*Tai*
/*-ă-	-Ø	-l	-ɯ (>ɣ)	-ɯ
/*-a-	-l	(-Ø)	-Ø	-Ø
*-l	-l	-l	-n	-n
*-L	-l	-n	-l	-n
*-N	-l	-n	-n	-n

3.4 It may be possible to speculate about the phonetic values of -L and -N. For -l, the plausible related forms in languages outside Kadai normally point to final -r: 'fly (v.)' Saek **bɯl**^{1} (TB) Bahing **byer**; 'crow (v.)' Saek **hal**^{2}, (AA) Kui **kaar**, Ngeq **takar**; 'dust' Saek **mul**^{4} (AN) Iban **amor**[17]; 'sow/scatter' Saek **vaal**^{6}, (AN) Malay **sebar**, Ngaju-Dayak **sawar**, (TB) Chepang **war-sa**, etc. Thus, we may set up ***-r** or retroflex ***-ḷ**. This will remain tentative and its tenure will depend on many factors including the validity of other sets such as ***-l** and ***-ɬ**, and the possible influence of early preceding vowels.[18]

The value of -N is trickier and examples are few. For 'rain', the AN forms were illustrated at the beginning of this paper and are extended below. The forms show -n in MP but -l and similar sounds in most Formosan languages, a distinction which has led to the reconstructed sound labelled as ***-N** in the Austronesian field. This same Austronesian ***-N**, when appearing initially or medially in forms which I consider cognate with Tai-Kadai, is best assumed to

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[16] The younger generation of Saek speakers have variants **trɯɯn** and **trɯɯl**. The latter form is noted as a hypercorrection by Gedney. (The younger generation's speech normally lacks -l).

[17] But note (AA) Pacoh **amul**, Ngeq **muul** 'dirty', which point to final ***-l**. These languages normally kept the contrast between -l and -r.

[18] For instance, the Nyahkur form for 'light (≠heavy)' **khəyɡal** points to final ***-l** in that language and may suggest the early merger of TK ***-l** and ***-ɬ** after a certain vowel, say, -ă-. We must be cautious, however, with arguments like this, since the forms are being compared across (presumably) separate language families and their connection may be doubtful. In addition, it is not absolutely certain, especially for those who believe in the Austric hypothesis, that AA never had more than two kinds of liquid-like endings.

be a TK retroflex nasal *ɳ-, normally reflected as n- in the Southern branch of Tai but as r- or similar sounds in Northern (Zhuang-Yay).

	'water'	'rain'[19]
Southern Tai		
Siamese	nam C2	fon A1'
Lungchow	nam C2	phən A1
Northern Tai (Zhuang-Yay)		
Wuming	ram C2	fun A1
Yay	ram C2	hun A1
Saek	nam C2	vɯn A1'
Laha	(ung⁶)	jəl²
Formosan		
Saaroa	saɬumu	usaɬə
Paiwan	zálum	qúd'al
Thao	θá:ðum	qú:θað
Saisiyat	ralum	ʔä-ʔöral
Bunun	ɗanom	hóɗan
PMP	*danum	*quzan
PAN	*DaNum	*quZaN

On this basis, we may assume *-ɳ, which became -n in most languages but -l in Laha. For 'swallow (v.)', AN has a possibly related form: Malay **telan**, Ngaju-Dayak **telen** < PMP *tələn. The final might just as well go back to *-N but the related Formosan forms have not been attested. There is room for argument against our assumption, however. For instance, the word for 'moon' also has PAN *-N, but its reflexes in all Tai-Kadai related forms, including Laha's, simply point to TK final *-n: PAN *bulaN > PMP *bulan; (Formosan) Saaroa **bulaɬə**, Thao **fú:ral**, Bunun **ɓoan**; TK, Siamese **dɯan A1**, Saek **blian A1**, Laha **ɗan²**. There is a possible way out of this difficulty by explaining variant reflexes of Laha as conditioned by preceding vowels (cf. the case of *-ɬ discussed in 3.1). In any case, the assumption remains highly tentative.

4. Laha -l may turn out to be a more complex story than expected. First, we may be dealing with a mixture of real cognates and loans, and the dividing line between the two has not been always clear. Second, it seems probable that there is more than one source of this Laha -l, in terms of both language source and original endings. But this small study of Laha -l reminds us of one thing: the area between Northern Vietnam and Southern China may have been a linguistic crossroads where the once easternmost TB, northernmost AA and perhaps southwesternmost TK intersected.

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19 *While Laha* **jəl²** *simply resulted from the loss of the first syllable of the original form, Tai* **fon** *A1 or the like, with a fricative labial initial, arose from clusterizing the first syllable with the weakened initial of the second into* qwj- (qwjan < quZaN). *Such Kam-Sui forms as Then* **xwen A2**, *Mulam* **kwən** *A1 will help readers to see better the connection among the forms.*

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Austroasiatic	PMP	Proto-Malayo-Polynesian
AN	Austronesian	PW	Proto-Waic
MP	Malayo-Polynesian	SEA	Southeast Asia
NyK	Nyahkur (Monic)	TB	Tibeto-Burman
	(Tha-Pong dialect)	TK	Tai-Kadai
PAN	Proto-Austronesian	WT	Written Tibetan
PMK	Proto-Mon-Khmer		

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