SAEK REVISITED

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This article is intended to complement Professor Gedney's 1970 article on 'The Saek Language of Nakhon Phanom Province', in which he describes the phonological structure of Saek. In this paper I will discuss some word classes such as personal pronouns, sentence particles, question words and classifiers.

I. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Like other Thai dialects, Saek has different words to mean 'I', 'you' and the third person. Also like most Thai dialects spoken in the provinces of Thailand, Saek has a less elaborate system of personal pronouns than Standard Thai. This is certainly due to or related to the social structure of the community and the use of personal pronouns reflects this structure. In selecting the suitable personal pronoun in Saek, one has to consider "age" and "type of relation" of the speaker, the hearer, and the third person. Unlike Standard Thai, any personal pronoun in Saek can be used by both male and female speakers. Saek has the following personal pronouns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Person</th>
<th>Second Person</th>
<th>Third Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. hoy⁵</td>
<td>1. caw³</td>
<td>1. vua⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. phaan¹</td>
<td>2. ?ay³</td>
<td>2. raw⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. hiig⁵</td>
<td>3. ?ay³</td>
<td>3. man⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. kuu⁶</td>
<td>4. mig⁶</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ruu⁴</td>
<td>5. ?ay³</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I
[høy¹] 'I' indicates politeness. It is used when the speaker wants to show respect and politeness toward the hearer who, normally, is older or unacquainted.

[phaan¹] 'I' is used when the hearer is about the same age as the speaker.

[hiig⁵] 'I' is used among people of the same age to show intimacy.

[ruu⁴] 'I' has the same usage as [hiig⁵].

[kuu⁶] 'I' indicates intimacy. It is used when the speaker is older or about the same age as the hearer.

[caw²] 'you' indicates politeness. It is used when the hearer is older than the speaker or when the hearer is a stranger.

[?ay³] 'you' is used when the speaker and the hearer are about the same age. They can be friends or strangers.

[mio⁶] 'you' indicates intimacy. It is used when the hearer is younger or about the same age as the speaker.

[vua⁵] 'he, she' is used to refer to a respected or older third person.

[raw⁶] 'he, she' refers to third person in general.

[man⁶] 'he, she, it' refers to a younger third person.

[phaan¹], [hiig⁵] and [ruu⁴] may be used interchangeably. They have no difference in meaning.

Each Saek personal pronoun refers to only one person, that is, plurality is not expressed in this class of words. When there is a need to indicate plurality, either [muu²] 'group' or [phuak⁵] 'group' is added in front of each personal pronoun, for example, [muu² ruu⁵] 'we', [phuak⁵ ruu⁵] 'they'. Or the word [kin⁶] 'each other' follows the verb to indicate that there is more than person performing the action of the verb, for example, [man⁶ mok⁴ kin⁶] 'They beat each other'.

The first and the second person pronouns go in pairs as indicated by the numerical order in Table I above. That is, the selection of one form of 'I' determines the choice for the form of 'you'. It would sound peculiar if the expected partner of the pair were not used.

[raw⁶] which is used as a first and second person in many other dialects is used as a third person pronoun in this dialect. Is it possible that [raw] was once used as a first, second, and third person, which is like present usage of kinship terms and personal names?
II. NAMES, KIN TERMS, AND TITLES

Personal names and kinship terms can also be used as personal pronouns, but they have a wider usage. That is, they can be used either as a first person, a second person or a third person. Person names in Saek are not different from those in Standard Thai or other Thai dialects but what is conspicuous is that Saek person names are considered old-fashioned by the speakers of Standard Thai whose names are created daily based on Sanskrit. The following are kinship terms in Saek:

[yaa³] - thuat³]  patronal great-grandmother
[puu² - thuat³]
[ʔaayʰ - thuat³]
[oonʰ - thuat³]
[phoo⁵] father [mee⁵] mother
[ʔooq⁵] grandfather [taa⁵] maternal grandfather
[yaa⁴] maternal grandmother [ʔaayʰ] maternal grandmother
[puu²] paternal grandfather [ʔaayʰ] paternal grandfather
[luq'] mother's or father's older brother
[paa³] mother's or father's older sister
[ʔaaw³] father's younger brother
[ʔoo³] father's younger sister
[ʔawŋ¹] eldest son
[cli¹] eldest daughter
[phií⁵] older sibling
[nuaq⁵] younger sibling
[liq³] offspring
[laan²] grandchild
[leen¹] great-grandchild
[loot²] great-great-grandchild

The last six kinship terms may take the suffix [baawʰ] 'male' or [saawʰ] 'female' to indicate gender; for example, [liq³-baawʰ] 'son' and [laan²-saawʰ] 'granddaughter'. They can also take the suffix [khwoo⁴] 'male-in-law' and [khwea⁴] 'female-in-law' to indicate relationship by marriage; for example, [liq³-khwoo⁴] 'son-in-law', and [laan²-khwea⁴] 'wife of a grandson'. Saek has different titles for old people, young people, and children. [thaw³] which means 'old' is used in front of old people's names to show politeness or respect; for example, [thaw³-maa⁴] 'Mr Maa' or [thaw³-si¹] 'Mrs See'. [threem³] is used in front of younger people's names. Like [thaw³], [threem³] may be used either before a male or a female name. Boys and girls get different titles: [ʔawŋ³] is used preceding a boy's name and [naaŋʰ] before a
girl's name. What is noticeable here is that Saek children have separate titles but as they grow up they share the same titles.

III. SENTENCE PARTICLES

Marvin Brown describes sentence particles, the label often applied to short words which are added at the end of sentences, functioning in a way comparable to English intonation. Those particles never occur alone to convey meaning. They may be used to indicate an urge, a command, or to form questions.

There are two question particles in Saek, [haa^3] and [he?^"-boo^2]. These two words turn statements into questions when added at the end of the sentence.

These two words can be used interchangeably, for example:

[mee^3 yuu^2 raan^h he?^"-boo^2]  
mother to be home question particle  
Is mother home?

[mee^3 yuu^2 raan^h haa^3]  
mother to be home question particle  
Is mother home?

[mak^h he?^"-boo^2]  
to like question particle  
Do you like it?

[mak^h haa^3]  
to like question particle  
Do you like it?

[yuu^h nam^h phan^3 haa^3]  
to swim to be able question particle  
Do you swim?

[si^2-hit^2 he?^"-boo^2]  
will do question particle  
Are you going to do it?

The following are some other final particles in Saek.

[na^6-khay^h] is added at the end of a positive command to make it sound stronger and show the urge of the speaker.

[riik^5 raao^h raao^h na^6-khay^h]  
to call loud loud particle  
Call him loudly!
[takʰ nam⁶ thramᵉ² - thramᵉ² na⁶-khayʰ]
to dip water soft soft particle
Dip up the water softly!

[?aw¹ din¹-som³ pay¹ kuan⁶ nam⁶ na⁶-khayʰ]
to take alum go stir water particle
Stir some alum in the water!

[?iil³] is also added at the end of a positive command. Though it shows the urge of the speaker, it is different from [na⁶-khayʰ] in that it adds a sympathetic feeling of the speaker towards the listener. Thus, it is mostly used when the speaker is older or superior to the listener. The word is pronounced [?iil³] by younger speakers.

[thuu¹ raanʰ ?iil³]
to clean house particle
Clean the floor!

[kin¹ ?iil³]
to eat particle
Eat it!

[diʔʰ] is used in negative sentences to soften them. To native speakers, a negative sentence without this particle sounds harsh and almost impolite.

[boo² pay¹ diʔʰ]
not to go particle
I am not going.

[boo² kin¹ diʔʰ]
not to eat particle
No, I won't eat it.

[vawʰ boo² nakʰ diʔʰ]
light not heavy particle
No, it is light; it is not heavy.

[?iitʰ] is used at the end of a statement to show that whatever the speaker is doing is not important or does not take any particular energy.

[pay¹ tham² sakʰ ?iitʰ]
to go to visit just particle
I am going to visit him (a little).

[yakʰ phia³ ?iitʰ]
to wash blouse particle
I am washing (a little).
[net² ลำะฯ-นำย⁴ ]
  to do things to eat with rice particle
  I am cooking (a little).

Other question words such as 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why', and 'how' are used in the same manner as other Thai dialects.

[thaaS⁶] 'what'
[het² (ʔan⁶) thaaS⁶ yuu²]
  to do what in the process
  What are you doing?

[naa² รีฉ⁵ (ʔan⁶)-thaaS⁶]
  movie story what
  What is the title of the movie?

[miι⁵ วลำ⁵ (ʔan⁶)-thaaS⁶]
  to have business what
  What can I do for you?

[nee⁴] 'where, which', 'who'
[aw² ทูอา⁴ นี⁴]
  to take noun classifier which
  Which one do you want?

[maa⁶ ธรรมดา นี⁴]
  to come from where
  Where do you come from?

[hun⁴ นี² ถ้า⁴]
  man which come
  Who came? Which person came?

[dee¹] 'who'
[mən³ ซี¹ hun⁴ ซู³ ʔaa⁶]
  who come to see grandma
  Who came to see grandma?

[taa⁶ TRAAY² nam⁴ dee¹]
  grandpa speak with who
  With whom is grandpa speaking?

[nee⁴] may be compounded with [pan²] to mean 'how much'.
[gaw³ ข้า⁶-ลู⁴ นี⁴ พาน²-นี⁴]
  rice kilo one how much
  How much is rice a kilogram?
[phlak⁴ nii² kwaay¹ pan²-nea⁴]
vegetable this to sell how much
How much is this vegetable?

IV. NOUN CLASSIFIERS

Noun classifiers in Saek fall into two main categories: human beings and objects. The distinction between these two categories is very clear. That is, classifiers used for human beings are never used for objects and vice versa. Animals, trees, and fruits do not have special classifiers. These nouns are partly repeated to serve as their own classifiers. For example:

[thua⁴-paw⁶ saam² thua⁴]
crab three classifier
'Three crabs'

[thua⁴-maaw⁴ cat⁴ thua⁴]
cat seven classifier
'Seven cats'

[thua⁴-lian¹ sip¹ thua⁴]
eel ten classifier
'Ten eels'

[maak²-mian¹ soun² maak²]
mango two classifier
'Two mangoes'

[maak²-kian³ saam² maak²]
orange three classifier
'Three oranges'

[khoo⁴-lam⁶-ñay⁶ soun² khoo⁴]
lam-yai tree two classifier
'Two lam-yai trees'

[khoo-maak²-mian¹ saam² khoo⁴]
mango tree three classifier
'Three mango trees'

For the human category, Saek has two classifiers: [hun⁴] and [ʔoŋ⁶]. The former is used with ordinary people and the latter is used with monks. For example:

[nian⁵ soun² hun⁴]
young sibling two classifier
'Two younger siblings'

[phiil⁵ saam² hun⁴]
older sibling three classifier
'Three older siblings'

[phraʔ⁵ soun² ʔoŋ¹]
monk two classifier
'Two monks'

Unlike the surrounding Lao dialects which are rich in noun classifiers for objects, Saek has only one classifier for this category [ʔan¹]. All objects regardless of shape, size, or function share the same
classifier. However, a part of some nouns, as an alternative to [ʔan¹], may be repeated to serve as their own classifiers. For example:

![Kon³ - klaaw³ scoo² an¹] 'Two drinking glasses'

drinking glass two classifier

![Moo² rök⁴ an¹] 'Six pots'

pot six classifier

![Pak⁴-tuu⁶-bon² scoo² an¹] 'Two windows'

window two classifier

![Lam⁵-kim¹ scoo² lam⁵] 'Two needles'

needle two classifier

![Lam⁵-rua¹ scoo² lam⁵] 'Two boats'

boat two classifier

![Phiin¹-phia³ scoo² phiin¹] 'Two blouses'

blouse two classifier

![Saay¹-scoo² si² saay¹] 'Four necklaces'

necklace four classifier

The underlined classifiers may be used interchangeably with [ʔan¹].

The first syllable of compound nouns above, e.g. needle, boat, may be dropped. Thus one can say either [lam⁵-kim¹] or [kim¹] for 'needle', [lam⁵-rua¹] or [rua¹] for 'boat', [phiin¹-phia³] or [phia³] for 'blouse' and [saay¹-scoo²] or [scoo²] for 'necklace'. The five compound nouns above might at first seem strange to speakers of other Thai dialects but the process of dropping the first syllable is certainly not foreign. In Standard Thai this process also occurs, for example, the words for 'onion' and 'garlic' are [hūa-hōm] or [hōm] and [hūa-kra-thiam] or [kra-thiam] respectively. The classifier of these two nouns is, of course, [hūa]. In many Lao dialects, the word for umbrella is [khan-hom] or [hom], and the classifier for this noun is [khan]. If a speaker of Standard Thai sits down to think of this type of word, a long list can be produced.

From the evidence above, I would like to propose that noun classifiers are not new features in the Thai language. Rather they have been in the languages for a long time but with a different word order. They used to be in front of nouns and some still are. Currently, this order has been reversed. Classifiers are used after nouns and numbers. [ʔan], the most common classifier in the Thai languages, must have been a relative pronoun which meant 'who', 'which', or 'that'.
V. THE STABILITY OF SAEK

Saek speakers have been decreasing in number and this process will probably go on until the Saek language disappears. This is because younger Saek people have more or less stopped using it. They have started to speak local Lao dialects which are spoken by the majority in their province. In addition to this, there are two other main reasons. One is that the Saek people have tended to move away from their villages in order to work. In doing this, they have to discard their own language for whatever dialect prevails in their new surrounding. Intermarriage is the second factor in the disappearance of the Saek language. When one parent does not speak Saek, it follows almost naturally that children will not speak it either. Saek may indeed die out in another thirty to fifty years as Professor Gedney has predicted.