

Chapter 1

Introduction

Muak Sa-aak is an Austroasiatic language, belonging to the Angkuic subgroup of the Eastern branch of the Palaungic languages, a subgroup of Mon-Khmer. For the two other groups of Eastern Palaungic language groups, there is some published work on Waic languages, including Wa and Plang varieties (such as Diffloth 1980, Paulsen 1992, and Watkins 2002), and on Lametic languages (such as Narumol 1982 and Conner 1999). There is not, however, very much recent published work available on Angkuic languages. U and Hu have been studied by Svantesson (1988, 1991), who gives a listing of available wordlists (1988: 76). Some limited data is also available on Man Met (cited in Diffloth 1991) and on Mok (Wenk 1965, Diffloth 1982¹). Other Angkuic languages are known only from very old wordlists. These include Khas Kon Keu (Lefèvre-Pontalis 1892), Khas Kiorr (Lefèvre-Pontalis 1896), Pou Ma (d'Orléans 1898), A Mok, Angku, and Mong Lwe (Scott and Hardiman 1900), P'u-man (Davies 1909). It is not even clear whether all of these languages are still in existence today, or known by those names. This thesis seeks to provide a full phonological analysis of an Angkuic language.

Muak Sa-aak has been surrounded by Tai Lue, a Tai-Kadai language, for a long time, creating a rich inventory of borrowed words. In order to investigate whether Muak Sa-aak sounds and phonotactics remain typical for Eastern Palaungic languages, a brief comparison with Tai Lue phonology will be drawn. Since the unique impact of vowel length on tonogenesis in Angkuic languages is frequently mentioned in the recent literature regarding Angkuic languages, it seemed appropriate to investigate tonogenesis in Muak Sa-aak. Based on the phonological analysis, therefore, the process of tonogenesis in this Mon-Khmer language will also be presented.

Chapter 1 will investigate the linguistic and geographic affiliation of Muak Sa-aak and describe the research procedures. Chapter 2 gives account to previous

¹ According to Svantesson (1988: 76), Wenk's "Ya Ang Lawa" is the Mok presented by Diffloth (1982).

research relevant to Muak Sa-aak as an Eastern Palaungic language in general, tone and tonogenesis in Mon-Khmer languages, and Tai Lue phonology. Chapter 3 presents the results of the segmental phonological analysis and Chapter 4 presents Muak Sa-aak phonotactics. Tone will be discussed in Chapter 5, followed by effects of language contact in Chapter 6, and a summary of the research results in Chapter 7. The wordlist on which the phonological analysis is based and evidence of contrast are included as Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

1.1 Linguistic affiliation

Muak Sa-aak belongs to the Austroasiatic language family; it is a Palaungic language and is classified as Austroasiatic, Mon-Khmer, Northern Mon-Khmer, Palaungic, Eastern Palaungic, Angkuic (see Figure 1, below). According to Svantesson, the Angkuic languages are marked by having undergone a Germanic shift in the initial consonants (1991: 68). That is, the old voiced initial stops have become voiceless unaspirated stops, and the old voiceless initial stops have become aspirated voiceless stops. Therefore, when comparing cognate words with other Palaungic languages, one will find voiceless aspirated stops in the Angkuic languages corresponding to voiceless unaspirated stops in other Palaungic languages. According to Diffloth, the proto *h- and *s- initial consonants merged into one initial, h-, in Palaungic languages today, except for the Angkuic languages and Danaw. In Angkuic languages, the distinction between the proto *h- and *s- initials is maintained as (h)s- and h- (1977: 42).

Some features are shared by only some of the Angkuic languages. These are the development of tone, and the denasalization of some final nasals. The latter is seen in P'u-man and Pou Ma as well as in U (Svantesson 1988: 66). In U, word-final nasals following historically short vowels have undergone denasalization of the final nasal stop, resulting in the corresponding oral stop. In words with high vowels (i, u, and possibly ɨ), this has taken place without regard to length, which suggests that the length contrast was already lost in the high vowels at the time when the denasalization took place (Svantesson 1988: 79).

“Angkuic” is an interesting name for this group of languages, as it is not remotely similar to the name of any of the languages currently listed in the SIL Ethnologue as Angkuic. However, a previous edition, the 11th edition, listed “Angku,” with the language code of ANG, as a language of China, Myanmar, and Laos, possibly also found in Thailand, and classified it as Angkuic. It also suggested that the name might possibly include more than one language, including Kiorr, Kon Keu, and Pou

Ma. This language code later became the language code for the language Kon Keu in the 12th edition, which in the 15th edition was changed to the current code, KKN. It is not clear whether Angku and Kon Keu are the same language or whether one may be a variety of the other. The group called “Angku” is in fact originally known from old sources, and Scott and Hardiman refer to them in their *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States (Part I, Vol. 1)*. They give a wordlist of a group “known as Hka-la by Shans (they call themselves Āng-kú), Mōng-yawng district, Kēngtūng State” (Scott and Hardiman 1900: 720-722).

In his article on U, Svantesson includes Pou Ma and P’u-man, described in older sources, among the Angkuic languages (1988: 66). In addition to these, the Angkuic languages include Hu, U, Man Met, and Samtao (SIL Ethnologue 2009). The position of Muak Sa-aak and the known Angkuic language varieties in relation to other Palaungic languages is shown in Figure 1 below.

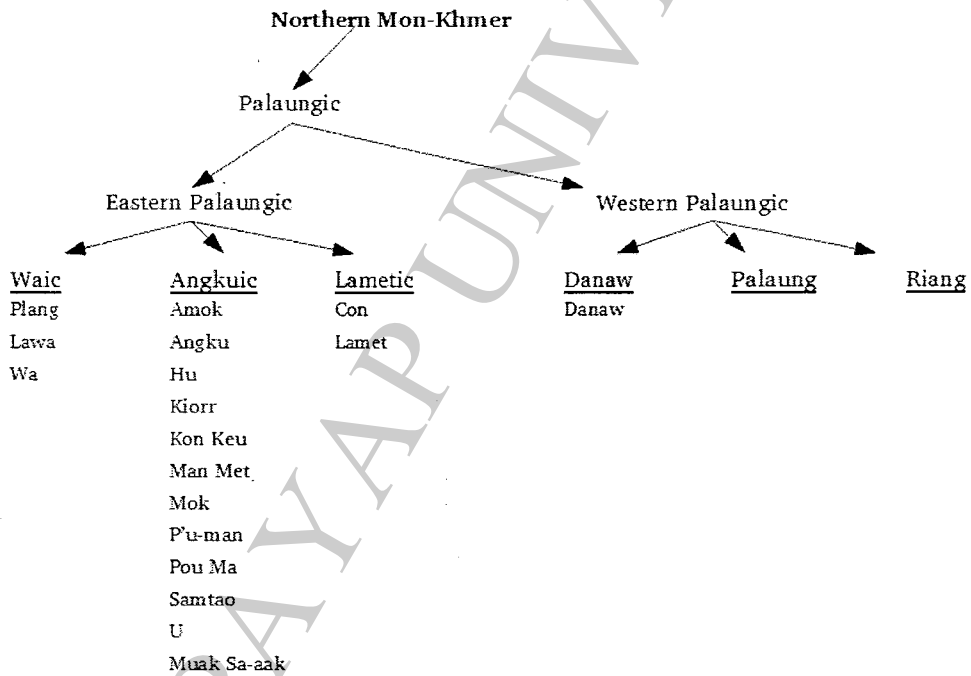


Figure 1. Language family tree for Muak Sa-aak (adapted from SIL Ethnologue 2009)

Outside of Angkuic, in the other Eastern Palaungic languages, there is more published work available on Waic languages, including Wa and Plang varieties (such as Diffloth 1980 Paulsen 1992, and Watkins 2002), and on Lametic languages (such as Narumol 1982 and Conver 1999), which also have some characteristics in common with Muak Sa-aak.

1.2 Muak Sa-aak glossonyms

Muak Sa-aak /mùak sʔàak/ means “mountain slope.” According to speakers, Muak is an old autonym; however, it does not seem to be one generally known by outsiders today. Both Muak and Sa-aak have similar meanings; the second word was added only recently. Many of the younger people may not even know the term “Muak Sa-aak;” they refer to their language by using the Tai word “Kam”, “language”, followed by the name of their village, i.e. “Kam Wan Fai.” Muak Sa-aak displays wide variation even from one village to the next.

The Muak Sa-aak are currently listed in the SIL Ethnologue (16th Edition) under two names. The first is “Mok” (in Thailand), for which they are listed as an alternate name. This listing, however, is still uncertain. The second is the name “Tai Loi,” for which they are listed as a dialect (“Saneung Muak;” *saneun* means “language”) (SIL Ethnologue 2009). According to speakers, the Muak Sa-aak are typically called Tai Loi or Tai Doi by outsiders, “Loi” or “Doi” being the Shan and Tai Lue words for mountain. According to Lebar, Hickey and Musgrave, the Shan sometimes call the Palaung “Kunloi,” or “mountaineer” (1964: 121) and the Buddhist Wa have been called “Tai Loi” and “Hkun Loi” (1964: 129). Scott also speaks of Tai Loi as being a generic term of reference to hill groups which have become Buddhist, but also principally meaning Buddhist Wa, also called Wa Küt (J. George Scott and J. P. Hardiman 1900: 517).

The terms for mountain, “Doi” or “Loi”, seem to refer to Buddhist peoples speaking other Palaungic languages in the area, not necessarily only Muak Sa-aak. The Muak Sa-aak do, however, use these terms to refer to themselves.

1.3 Geographic location

The Palaungic languages are located mainly in Southern China and in Myanmar, as well as in Thailand and also in Laos. Among these, the known Angkuic languages are located primarily in China, although some have been documented previously in Myanmar (Samtao), Thailand (Mok) and in Laos (Kiorr) (SIL Ethnologue 2009). The areas where they live are places that have been, for the most part, difficult for outside researchers to access in recent years.

The Muak Sa-aak people live primarily in the eastern part of Shan state of Myanmar, in Mong Yawng Township (see Figure 2). Some of their villages are located near Mong Yawng, and some are near the Chinese border, in what is called Special Region #4. At least two villages are located across the border in China. There are

1.4 Sociolinguistic background

This subsection will discuss the surrounding languages and the language use typical for the Muak Sa-aak in Myanmar.

1.4.1 Contact languages

There are at least three major languages from different language families spoken in the area where the Muak Sa-aak live: Burmese, Chinese, and Tai Lue. The national language of Myanmar, where the majority of the Muak Sa-aak are located, is Burmese, a Tibeto-Burman language. However, although it is used as the language of education in the government schools, many people in that part of Myanmar do not speak it. Like other adults in their community, none of the speakers interviewed for this phonology could speak Burmese since none of them had any formal education. However, some Muak Sa-aak children in Wan Fai and other Muak Sa-aak villages are in school now and exposed to Burmese.

A second contact language used in the areas where the Muak Sa-aak live is Chinese. Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan language and also belongs to a different language family from Muak Sa-aak. In Shan state of Myanmar, especially near the Chinese border, there are obvious signs of Chinese influence, and the speakers from Wan Fai village report that their children watch Chinese television and that Chinese traders come through their village.

The most influential contact language is Tai Lue, from the Tai-Kadai family. It is the language most commonly spoken by the Muak Sa-aak as a second language, and Muak Sa-aak shows a considerable amount of influence from Tai Lue, especially in terms of lexical borrowing. The languages have been in contact for a long time in that area, and there is evidence that in recent generations at least, there has been intentional borrowing: in reference to borrowing from Tai Lue, one speaker in his fifties said that his parents had told him that if they did not borrow words from Tai Lue, “it’s like if we eat food with no salt in it” (Personal communication Speaker A: July 2008).

1.4.2 Language attitude and use

All four of the speakers interviewed (see Table 1 in Section 1.5.2) said the children learned Muak Sa-aak first, and that the parents used Muak Sa-aak with their children in their homes. Their children might sometimes use Tai Lue, Chinese, or Burmese (if they are in school) at home. While the speakers see benefits for their children

learning these other languages, they appreciate it when their children speak their own language. One speaker also expressed the fear that the use of these other languages endangers their own language. The speakers available for this study were interested in being able to write their language, and the primary reason they gave was the fear that it would be lost.

Although Shan and Tai Lue are separate Tai-Kadai languages, the Muak Sa-aak do not seem to draw an ethnic or linguistic distinction between them. They have one ethnic group name for both groups, and in survey questions they tended to refer to both languages as a group. However, the speakers on whom this phonological analysis was based speak only Tai Lue as a second language, and not Shan.

During elicitation with Speaker A and Speaker B, there were two Muak Sa-aak women who were frequently around, if they were not occupied with caring for their children or with preparing food. With certain domains of vocabulary, particularly those pertaining to cooking, childcare, and terms for jewelry, the men were sometimes slow to think of the correct vocabulary, but these women would prompt them. This partial loss of Muak Sa-aak vocabulary for the males, who may be more in touch with the outside world than their wives, could be a result of the exposure to surrounding Tai Lue; however, it could also reflect a lack of Tai Lue vocabulary for these items.

The exposure to the national language in school could create further pressure on the Muak Sa-aak language. Together with the Chinese television programs, this might cause a shift in borrowing patterns, as the children growing up now use more Burmese and Chinese and less Tai Lue than their parents.

1.5 Methodology

This section lays out the research methodology. It begins with the data collection procedures, followed by a description of the language informants available for this study, and methods of data processing.

1.5.1 Data collection

The research involved the collecting of a 1,700 item wordlist (see Appendix 2), originally designed for use in Africa (Snider and Roberts 2006), modified by Hopple (2008) for use in Southeast Asia, and translated into Burmese. The speakers were interviewed as well for sociolinguistic background information, using a questionnaire already in use by Hopple for sociolinguistic survey in Palaungic

languages. This questionnaire is included as Appendix 1. Since the Muak Sa-aak only speak Muak Sa-aak and Tai Lue, the major regional language, a translator was involved who speaks Burmese as a first language, but also speaks English and Tai Lue. The list of words were transcribed and an audio recording made. The transcription was checked as much as possible with the speakers.

1.5.2 Language informants

The wordlist was fully or partially recorded from three male Muak Sa-aak mother tongue speakers in their early forties to mid fifties. They spent most of their lives in the same village, called Wan Fai. This is essential to the study because Muak Sa-aak displays wide variation even from one village to the next. The speakers came down to an accessible location for the specific purpose of language elicitation and recording. They all were farmers, without formal education, and with Tai Lue as a second language.

All four of the speakers can speak Tai Lue, and three can also read and write it to some extent. These three men are also familiar with the Shan script, as the Shan Bible is being used in their village church, but they cannot speak Shan. These three speakers may be unusual for the Muak Sa-aak of their generation, judging by the value they appear to place on education. Like most others of their age, they never attended school, nor were they ever monks, which is one of the ways in which older speakers of Tai Lue may have learned to read and write. While many of the children in their village are still not in school, these men put an effort into sending at least some of their children to school, even though it has meant sending them away from home.

All four men are exposed to Shan in the local Christian church where Speaker A and Speaker C were deacons. This means they were not ordained ministers, but carried church responsibilities. According to these speakers, the Bible is read in Shan, but they speak in Muak Sa-aak. Table 1 summarizes background information on the four speakers.

Table 1. Background of speakers

	Age	Occupation(s)	Second language(s)	Reading abilities ²	Education
Speaker A	50	Farmer; deacon in the church	Tai Lue	Tai Lue, Shan	None
Speaker B	55	Farmer; soldier; church elder	Tai Lue	Tai Lue, Shan	None
Speaker C	42	Farmer; deacon in the church	Tai Lue	Shan, Tai Lue	None
Speaker D	53	Farmer; soldier	Tai Lue (best), Chinese, Akha	None	None

The wordlist was recorded over three field trips. The full wordlist was recorded for Speaker A. Only the first 1,375 words were recorded for Speaker B due to illness at the time of the third field trip which prevented him from recording the remainder of the list. Speaker A therefore recruited another speaker for the third trip to come in place of Speaker B, Speaker C³ who was recorded for the remaining 325 words. For additional confirmation, a recording by Hopple of 242 words out of the list used in this study, recorded by her in November 2007, was included. The informant was 53-year old male Speaker D, who grew up in the same village.

1.5.3 Data analysis

An audio recording was made using a Sony minidisc recorder model MZ-R700. The recordings were analyzed with the aid of Speech Analyzer 3.0.1⁴. The words were entered into FieldWorks Language Explorer 3.0⁵. Words borrowed from Tai Lue or other languages, as much as possible, have been identified and labeled as borrowed words. The data was analyzed phonologically with the aid of Phonology Assistant 3.0.1⁶. The phonology is based primarily on Speaker A, from whom the entire

² Tai Lue and Shan use two different non-Roman scripts. The ability to decipher the scripts does not imply being able to speak or understand the language.

³ Speaker C grew up in Wan Fai village and moved to Nawng Pok village, founded about 20 years ago by people from Wan Fai, with an estimated population of about 115 (Hopple 2007, unpublished). It has only Muak Sa-aak speakers according to the speaker. The two villages farm the same fields, conduct their celebrations together and still consider their speech to be the same.

⁴ SIL International, 2007

⁵ SIL International, 2009

⁶ SIL International, 2008

wordlist was recorded, and the data from the three other speakers was used for confirmation.

1.6 Limitations of the study

Muak Sa-aak is endangered by the high rate of borrowing and by pressure from the surrounding languages. The Muak Sa-aak community may benefit from the phonological analysis in this study as it provides a reliable basis for a possible orthography, and literature development for an endangered language may very well hinder it from disappearing. It is not possible within the framework of this study, though, to investigate the sociolinguistic and educational implications required for the creation of an orthography. Although sociolinguistic data have been gathered, a sociolinguistic analysis would exceed the scope of this study.

It is difficult for the author as an outsider to access the areas where the Muak Sa-aak people live. Therefore it was necessary to conduct the research with speakers who are available outside of their home area. Because of the considerable variation in speech between villages, the data have been elicited from speakers from only one village. Since Muak Sa-aak appears to vary considerably from one village to the next, it is not clear how applicable the results are to the varieties spoken in other villages.