

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO LAHU SHI BALAN

2.0 Language classification

Linguistically, Lahu Shi Balan is considered to be an uninflected, primarily monosyllabic, tonal language; a member of the Tibeto-Burman subfamily of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. More specially, it is one of the Lahu languages in the Central Loloish branch. Figure 1 illustrates the position of Lahu Shi Balan in its language family tree.

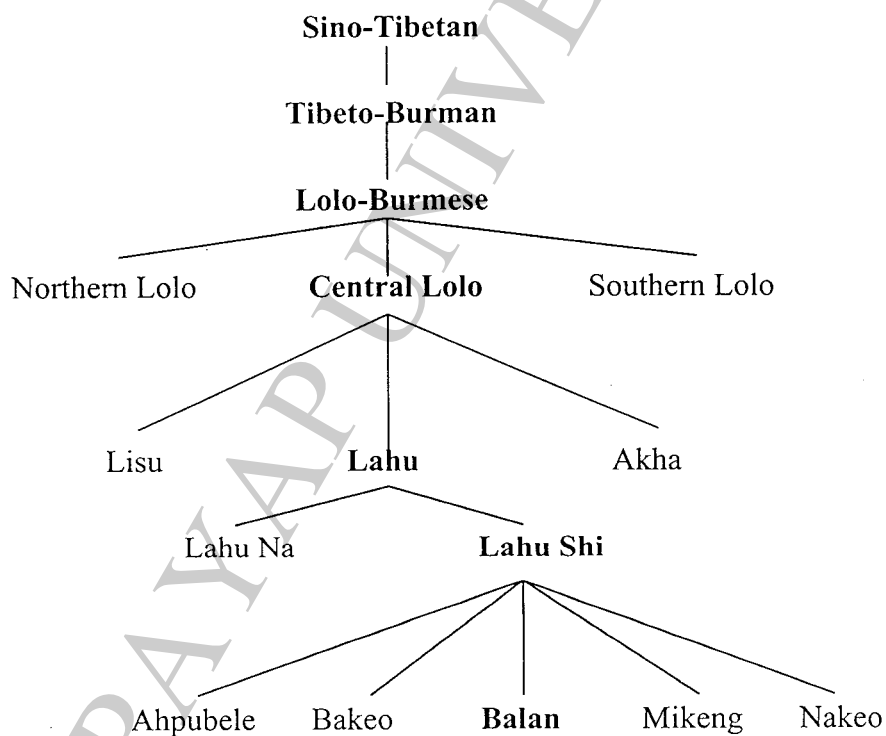


Figure 1. Language Family Tree of Lahu Shi Balan

2.1 Linguistic overview

A linguistic overview of the Lahu Shi Balan language is provided in this section for the readers to get a general idea of Lahu Shi phonology and grammar.

2.1.1 Lahu Shi phonology

This section provides an overview of Lahu Shi phonology and its orthographic presentation; the transcription system which is used in this thesis. The Lahu Shi phonology and orthography presented in this section are taken from the work of Cooper (1997; 2002) and Cooper and Cooper (1996).

2.1.1.1 Lahu Shi vowels

There are eight phonemic vowels in the Lahu Shi language, all of which appear in the single vowel syllable type. There are few examples of vowel sequences, which are most often found at morpheme boundaries where the following morpheme is a bound morpheme. These eight phonemic vowels are represented in IPA (left column) with their orthographic transcription (right column), as shown in Table 1.

	Front				Back	
	Unrounded		Unrounded		Rounded	
	Phonemic Sound	Orthographic symbol	Phonemic Sound	Orthographic symbol	Phonemic Sound	Orthographic symbol
Close	i	i			u	u
Mid	ɛ	e			o	o
Open	æ	eh	ʌ	uh	ɔ	aw
			ɑ	a		

Table 1. Lahu Shi vowels

2.1.1.2 Lahu Shi consonants

There are twenty-two phonemic consonants in the Lahu Shi language, all of which appear in syllable and word initial position. No naturally occurring consonant clusters are found in the language. These twenty-two phonemic consonants are represented in IPA (left column) with their orthographic transcription (right column), as shown in Table 2.

	Bilabial		Labio-dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
Plosive Aspirated	p ^h	ph			t ^h	th			k ^h	kh		
Plosive Voiceless	p	p			t	t			k	k		
Plosive Voiced	b	b			d	d			g	g		
Fricative Voiceless			f	f	s	s					h	h
Fricative Voiced			v	v					ɣ	gh		
Affricate Aspirated					tʃ ^h	ch						
Affricate Voiceless					tʃ	c						
Affricate Voiced					dʒ	j						
Nasal	m	m			n	n			ŋ	ng		
Approximant							j	y				
Lateral Approximant					l	l						

Table 2. Lahu Shi consonants

2.1.1.3 Lahu Shi tones

There are seven phonemic tones in the Lahu Shi language, symbolized in the writing system by Roman characters in the syllable final position.

Phonemic tones	Orthographic Symbols
1 low	r
3 mid	no symbol
5 high	d
ʔ3 mid-stopped	q
ʔ5-6 high-stopped	z
2-4 mid-rising	x
4-2 mid-falling	g

Table 3. Lahu Shi tones

Below are some examples of Lahu Shi words. The first column contains the Lahu Shi words written in Roman script. The second column has the IPA transcription of each example, while the last column provides an English gloss. These examples are taken from Cooper (2002).

Example	Example in IPA	Gloss
<i>ghaz</i>	ɣaʔ ⁵⁻⁶	'chicken'
<i>ca</i>	tʃa ³	'eat'
<i>awr</i>	o ¹	'rice'
<i>vid</i>	vi ⁵	'dry'
<i>lag</i>	lɑ ⁴⁻²	'tea'

Table 4. Examples of Lahu Shi words

2.1.2 Lahu Shi grammar

Lahu Shi is a language which lacks inflection. This type of language is referred to as 'isolating', that is a language in which word forms do not change and in which grammatical functions are shown by single words, or combinations of single words, by the use of independent particles, and by word order, rather than by affixes. Most Lahu Shi words are monosyllabic or bisyllabic.

For counting, Lahu Shi uses a system of classifiers in which a classifier follows the noun and the numeral (noun + numeral + classifier). There are separate classifiers for human beings, for animals, for inanimate objects, and so on (Chaikuna 2003: 32).

Lahu Shi is a subject-object-verb (SOV) language. However, sometimes OSV occurs so as to emphasize or bring the object of a clause into focus (Chaikuna 2003: 56ff).

Genitive relationships are expressed either by apposition with the possessor juxtaposed with the noun, or by use of a linking particle (*ve*). Lahu Shi also has serial verb construction, i.e., a string of verbs occurring in sequence, which is common in languages which have little or no morphology (Chaikuna 2003: 24-27).

Lahu Shi has a set of modal and aspectual particles that come at the end of a sentence. Aspect markers analyzed in this thesis are *vehor*, *peor*, *peg vehor*, *tod*, and *chehd*. *Peg*, *chehd*, and *tod* can function as main verbs. They mean ‘finish’, ‘stay’, and ‘walk’, respectively. It has no tense (i.e., it has no grammatical device for expressing location in time). Time reference is shown by a temporal phrase or clause.

2.2 The Lahu Shi people³

Lahu Shi is spoken in a number of countries including China, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and the United States. In Thailand, approximately 20,000 Lahu Shi people live in at least 50 villages in five provinces: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak, Mae Hong Son, and Lampang (estimated in 1998). Thai people refer to them as Yellow ‘Musseh’, which comes from Burmese via Shan, and means ‘hunter’.

Lahu Shi people have been migrating from Yunnan Province in China to Myanmar and Laos for many generations. However, they have migrated from Myanmar to Thailand just for the past forty years.

³ The information about Lahu Shi people is mainly taken from Cooper (1997, 2002).

The Traditional Lahu Shi houses are built on stilts, using bamboo as the main material for most of the construction. Their village is surrounded by hills and forests, from which most of the needs of the community come. One important economic activity of Lahu Shi people is the swidden cultivation of rice (i.e., slash-and-burn techniques for farming in the hills).

Lahu Shi has its own orthography based on linguistic studies (Bradley 1979, Cooper & Cooper 1996, Cooper 1999) and two orthographies for Lahu Na. The Lahu Shi orthography uses a Roman letter based system.

Lahu Shi people, particularly adults, normally speak multiple languages, for example Standard Thai, Northern Thai, Lahu Na, Lao, Burmese and English, for wider communication.