

The Nyo language spoken at Kut Kho Kan village (Loeng Nok Tha district, Yasothon province): A Language Documentation Research at Roi Et Rajabhat University

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(Received: July 31, 2018; Revised: September 1, 2018, Accepted October, 9 2018)

Abstract

The objective of this article is to document a Nyo variety spoken in Kut Kho Kan village (Khok Samran subdistrict, Loeng Nok Tha district, Yasothon province), which has not been previously mentioned in the linguistic literature about Nyo dialects in Northeast Thailand.

Among the Nyo speakers of Kut Kho Kan village who contributed to this research were two students of Roi Et Rajabhat University, still aware of the use of a distinct dialect in their native place. They helped the researcher reach Nyo speakers as well as speakers of other Tai dialects in a micro-linguistic area comprising districts belonging to three provinces (Mukdahan, Yasothon, and Amnat Charoen) of Northeast Thailand, where specific varieties of Tai languages (Southwestern branch) such as Phu Thai are also spoken. Further studies should thus include the documentation of those varieties, especially those of Phu Thai.

Nyo as well as Phu Thai are language names as well as ethnonyms which can be found not only in Thailand, but also in neighboring countries such as Laos and Vietnam.

Keywords: Language documentation, Nyo language, Phu Thai language, Tonal patterns, Micro-linguistic areas.

1. Introduction

As former teachers' colleges, Rajabhat Universities in Thailand can be described as universities for communities. If one considers Roi Et Rajabhat University in Northeast Thailand, most of the students come from district/subdistrict level secondary schools and can be described as from rural areas. Concepts such as local cultures, minority groups and dialects are relevant when dealing with local communities in Northeast Thailand.

Among the local languages spoken at home by Roi Et Rajabhat University students, one will find not only numerous varieties of the Lao language in Northeastern Thailand, or Isan dialects, and some varieties of Phu Thai dialects, but also, to a much lesser extent, dialects called Nyo, Bru, Kha, etc. Lao, Phu Thai, and Nyo are Tai dialects of the Southwestern branch (Chamberlain 1975, and 1984). Bru, also referred to as 'So', is an Austroasiatic dialect of the Katuic branch. As for the Kha dialects of Northeast Thailand,

they are distinct varieties of Lao, or in a few cases Phu Thai, spoken in villages where the village community is said to have stopped using an Austroasiatic language.

This article focuses on a language documentation research conducted with Nyo speakers of Kut Kho Kan village (Khok Samran subdistrict, Loeng Nok Tha district, Yasothon province).

2. Literature review

Some of the previously mentioned local languages, especially Phu Thai, have recently been the focus of quite a few scholars' and postgraduate students' research.

In this article, the language name and ethnonym / $\eta\text{ɔ}^{\text{C4}}$ / has been Romanized as 'Nyo', following most studies done in Thailand in which / $\eta\text{ɔ}^{\text{C4}}$ / is transcribed as $\eta\text{ɔ}$ in Thai and as 'Nyo' in English. 'Nyo' appears as 'Nyaw' in the website *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Simons & Fennig 2018: retrieved June 15, 2018, from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/nyw>), "alternate names" being "Jo, Nyo, Nyoh, Yo". 'Nyaw' is not ambiguous for English native speakers, but might be misunderstood as /niaw/ (or even / ηaw / or / ηiaw /) by readers familiar with the Royal Thai General System of Transcription proposed by the Royal Institute of Thailand.

If we follow a 1965 work by J. Marvin Brown, Nyo, which is identified as 'Yo' and said to be spoken in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom provinces, is defined as one of the "three quite distinct dialect groups" (Brown 1985: 90) of Lao language, the other two being "the Luang Prabang group" and "the Vientiane group".

All the studies referred to hereafter take into account the tone system of each variety that has been investigated and summarize it in a tone diagram with five columns and four rows, which has been devised to display "a maximum of possible tonal distinctions resulting from the various types of tonal splits that has been described" (Gedney 1972: 434). This method, known as the "tone-box method" (Phinnarat Akharawatthanakun 2004: 58), helps study and compare tonal systems in Tai dialects by determining historical tonal splits and mergers in each variety.

Figure 1: William J. Gedney's tone diagram for Tai dialects (adapted from Gedney 1972 : 434)

		Proto-Tai Tones				
		A	B	C	D-short	D-long
Initials at time of tonal splits	1 Voiceless friction sounds					
	2 Voiceless unaspirated stops					
	3 Glottal					
	4 Voiced					
		Smooth Syllables			Checked Syllables	

A detailed classification of Nyo varieties has been proposed by Kanjana Koowatthanasiri (1981) for the areas she investigated in Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom provinces. Pinkanok Khamrueangsri (2002) has attempted a broader survey of Nyo varieties in Northeast Thailand.

Phinnarat Akharawatthanakun (2002), describing That Phanom district (Nakhon Phanom province) as an area of language mixture with Phu Thai, Lao, and Nyo, has proposed the following methodology to determine the linguistic characteristics of each language: “(...) the earlier available literature was examined to obtain what appear to be the prototypical distinctive merger and split patterns for the three languages” (Phinnarat Akharawatthanakun 2002: 32).

Even if the prototypical tonal pattern determined for Nyo by Phinnarat Akharawatthanakun (2002: 33) fits Nyo varieties in the investigated area, it might not be relevant for all Nyo varieties or dialects. In a classification of the Southwestern branch of the Tai dialects and languages proposed by James R. Chamberlain (1975: 49-58), Nyo refers to at least two distinct Tai dialects with quite different tonal patterns.

- For the first dialect, referred to as ‘Yo’ (Chamberlain 1975: 52), the author gives the example of the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon (Chamberlain 1984: 75, 78, and 82), as spoken by a speaker of Taw Ngoy, a village located at that time in Mueang Sakon Nakhon district. Although the name of that dialect is Romanized as ‘Yo’ by James R. Chamberlain (1975, and 1984), as it was in J. Marvin Brown’s 1965 work (1985), its pronunciation is /**ญอ**/ (Chamberlain 1984: 82).

- The second dialect is represented by the Nyo of Na Kaang (Chamberlain 1975: 55, and 1984: 72, 75-76), a village located in an area corresponding to the present-day Hinboun and Khounkham districts (Khammouane province), or the Nyo of Don Xat village (Khamkeuth district, Bolikhamxay province) in Central Laos. The name of that dialect, appearing as ‘Nyo’ (Chamberlain 1975) or ‘Nho’ (Chamberlain 1984), is also pronounced as /**ญอ**/ (Chamberlain 1984: 75). For that dialect, an example in Northeast Thailand is the Nyo of Tha Uthen district in Nakhon Phanom Province (Chamberlain 1984: 72, 75).

According to James R. Chamberlain, the language name and ethnonym Nyo is not limited to the Nyo dialects mentioned above: “this ethnonym or its non-nasalized, fricative, or affricated variants, is found to range from Thanh-Hoa through Nghê-An, Khammouan, Nakhon Phanom, and Sakon Nakhon” (Chamberlain 1984: 75). The website *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* mentions Nyo speakers in Sa Kaeo province (Eastern Thailand) and in an “isolated area on Cambodia border” (Simons & Fennig 2018: retrieved June 15, 2018, from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/nyw>). Thananan Trongdee (2014) has documented a dialect named Nyo or Lao Nyo by its speakers, which he actually analyzes as a Lao dialect, in the present-day Banteay Meanchey province of Cambodia, formerly a part of Battambang province.

The non-nasalized form /**jɔː**^{C4}/, appearing as ‘Do’ in Vietnamese, is the language name and ethnonym of the Tai Yo group in the Nghê An province of Vietnam. Michel Ferlus (2008: 304-309) has given a description of the Tai Yo dialect spoken in Quỳ Châu district (Nghê An province). Recordings of Tai Yo in Vietnam – related to Michel Ferlus’ research – are now available online (retrieved June 15, 2018, from <http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/pangloss/corpus/search.php?keywords=Tai+Yo>).

Tai Yo is also a Tai language of the Southwestern branch, but belongs to another group, the “P group” (Chamberlain 1975: 49). In the P dialects, the “devoicing sound shift” (Chamberlain 1991: 454), which affected Tai languages, “changed the voiced initial stops reconstructed for Proto-Tai */b, d, j, g/ to (...) /p, t, c, k/”. As for the two Nyo dialects of Northeast Thailand and Central Laos mentioned above, they belong to the “PH group”, which has “developed voiceless aspirated stops from (...) voiced stop initials” (Chamberlain 1984: 70). Accordingly, the website *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* treats Tai Yo as a distinct language (Simons & Fennig 2018: retrieved June 15, 2018, from <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/tyj>).

From an outsider's perspective, one will assume that local languages of Northeast Thailand such as Nyo, Phu Thai, and even Bru are now better documented, and, as a matter of fact, the areas where their varieties are spoken are identified (Suwilai Premisrat et al. 2004: 40, 50, 73). However, when one takes the area of Kut Kho Kan village in Loeng Nok Tha district (Yasothon province), as well as a broader area comprising neighboring districts such as Mueang Mukdahan, Nikhom Kham Soi, Don Tan (Mukdahan province), and Chanuman district (Amnat Charoen province), the Nyo, Phu Thai, and Kha varieties spoken there remain poorly documented, if not documented at all.

3. Eliciting data

The idea of collecting data for the Nyo spoken at Kut Kho Kan came from a casual encounter in November 2014 with the relatives of Phontraithep Hongsaen, an English Education student at Roi Et Rajabhat University. As I asked where they were from, that student's great-aunt and her husband gave a short account of their village, Kut Kho Kan, and of the Nyo dialect spoken there. I had earlier heard about a Nyo village located in the same area, Hin Siw, from another student of the university, Ramphaiwan Phansawat, a Science Education student. In March 2013, I had collected data for the Phu Thai spoken in the neighboring subdistrict of Bungkha, but not yet for Nyo.

As the Nyo spoken in either Kut Kho Kan or Hin Siw is not mentioned in the literature, I visited Kut Kho Kan in June 2015. I recorded, with a Sony voice recorder, lexical items, sentences, and various explanations given by Phontraithep Hongsaen's great-aunt, Luan, who is in her early sixties. Although Phontraithep Hongsaen is aware of the use of Nyo in her village, she does not speak that dialect and can only repeat a few words and short utterances when her great-aunt speaks slowly.

I came to know later, in October 2015, that Lalida Utama, a student of Social Science Education, speaks the Nyo of Kut Kho Kan village, and I interviewed her at the university. In February 2016, I had the opportunity to visit Kut Kho Kan village again. I spent a day interviewing Nyo villagers, among whom Lalida Utama's maternal grandmother, Lon Bunnet, who was then in her early seventies, and grandfather, Soi Bunnet (1940-2018).

One of the main objectives of those interviews was to get representative lexical items for the various cells of the tone diagram devised by William J. Gedney (1972), as the authors mentioned above did

for the varieties which they investigated. For each cell of the tone diagram, a minimum of five monosyllabic words, pronounced in citation style at least two times, were elicited. To gather such data, the interviews focused on various semantic fields, such as body parts, colors, kinship, but also gathering food, cooking processes as well as weather, nature, basic astronomy.

4. Data processing

The MP3 files related to the interviews were transferred on a computer and opened in Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2014) in order to obtain the spectrum and the F0 contour for each monosyllabic word analyzed. The Praat program provides on request the “pitch listing”, that means the F0 values, of every selected portion. The F0 contours of given monosyllabic words can be rising, falling, level, or can exhibit two or more of those characteristics successively. The tone analysis takes into account the curves of the F0 contours analyzed as well as their relevant F0 values.

On the basis of the average F0 values calculated for each cell of the tone diagram, tones’ phonetic characteristics could be apprehended, and a tentative tone system with its coalescence and split pattern was determined for each speaker. Average F0 values could then be estimated for the tones which were identified. When the tone systems of all the Nyo speakers interviewed in Kut Kho Kan were finalized, it turned out that they shared the same coalescence and split pattern, which will be considered in this article as the distinctive coalescence and split pattern of the Nyo dialect of Kut Kho Kan.

The tone diagram of the speech of Nari, a female villager of Kut Kho Kan in her early fifties, is given below to summarize the coalescence and split pattern as well as the tones’ phonetic characteristics of the Nyo dialect spoken in Kut Kho Kan. Yuen Ren Chao’s five-point pitch scale was applied to the tones’ average F0 values, ranging from 152 Hz in the tone of the DL4 cell (rising from 152 Hz to 213 Hz) to 272 Hz in the tone of the B4 cell (rising from 183 Hz to 272 Hz). Following James R. Chamberlain (1975, and 1984) and Phinnarat Akharawatthanakun (2004), the layout of the columns was changed to A, B, C, DL (D-long), DS (D-short).

Figure 2: the tone diagram of Nari, a female Nyo speaker of Kut Kho Kan

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	214	233	233	233	13
2	214	233	15	233	13
3	214	233	15	233	13
4	231	25	15	13	11

A more precise tone inventory will distinguish four or five tones in the smooth syllables and three tones in the checked syllables.

The smooth syllables have a mid falling, then low rising tone (214) in the A1, A2, A3 cells, a low rising, then mid falling tone (231) in the A4 cell, a low rising, then mid level tone (233) in the B1, B2, B3

cells, and the C1 cell, and low rising tones in the B4 cell, and in the C2, C3, C4 cells (respectively a 25 tone, and a 15 tone).

As for the checked syllables, they have a low rising, then mid level tone (233) in the DL1, DL2, DL3 cells, a low rising tone (13) in the DL4 cell, and the DS1, DS2, DS3 cells, and a low level tone (11) in the DS4 cell.

5. Discussion

Coming back to the classification of the Southwestern Tai languages proposed by James R. Chamberlain, the tone diagram for the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon (Chamberlain 1975: 52, and 1984: 78), identified as ‘Yo’, relates that dialect and its varieties to one subgroup of the PH group, the “Lao-Southern Thai subgroup” (Chamberlain 1975: 51-52), which exhibits the following characteristics: “PH – *BCD 1-23-4”.

As for the tone diagram of the Nyo spoken in Nam Kaang (Chamberlain 1975: 55), it relates that variety, as well other varieties or dialects such as the Nyo of Tha Uthen, to another subgroup of the PH languages, the “Neua-Phuan” (Chamberlain 1975: 51) subgroup, for which we have: “PH – *BCD 123-4” (Chamberlain 1975: 54).

When considering James R. Chamberlain’s criteria for those two subgroups of the PH group, one will ascribe the Nyo spoken at Kut Kho Kan to the first subgroup, the “Lao-Southern Thai subgroup”. In that subgroup, Lao dialects share the following characteristics: “(...) the patterns which appear most in the Lao dialects are B1234, C1=DL123, C234=DL4 and B≠DL. As for the patterns C1=DL123/C234=DL4, they are the main ones that distinguish Lao from the other Tai languages” (Phinnarat Akharawatthanakun 2004: 61).

With a tone split 123-4 in the B column, the Nyo of Kut Kho Kan is not exactly a Lao dialect. However, its tone diagram shows a tone coalescence C1=DL123 (with a 233 tone in all those cells) and a quasi-coalescence C234≈DL4 (with rising tones in both C234 and DL4, respectively a 15 tone, and a 13 tone). The Nyo of Kut Kho Kan can thus be considered as related to Lao dialects. When its B column is taken into account, the coalescence C1=DL123 turns out to be a broader coalescence B123=C1=DL123 (with the 233 tone all along), and the quasi-coalescence C234≈DL4 becomes a quasi-coalescence B4≈C234≈DL4 (the 25 tone in B4 being also a rising tone).

With that split and coalescence pattern in the B, C, and DL columns, the tone pattern of the Nyo spoken at Kut Kho Kan appears to be closely related to the tone pattern we have for the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon (Chamberlain 1984: 78), also discussed and interpreted by Thananan Trongdee (2014: 73-74, 77-78). Furthermore, Thananan Trongdee (2015-2016: 52) notes that “the tone boxes of Yo, Yooy and Kalööng are identical”, and he holds the view that “the share innovation of the tone boxes in Yo, Yooy, Kalööng and Nakhon Phanom is the merger of B123=CL=DL123”.

Figure 3: the interpretation of the tones in James R. Chamberlain' tone diagram for the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon as spoken in Taw Ngoy (Chamberlain 1984: 78) by Thananan Trongdee (adapted from Thananan Trongdee 2014: 74, and 2015-2016: 52)

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	24	31	31	31	35
2	24	31	42	31	35
3	24	31	42	31	35
4	45	42	42	42	33

Although the Nyo of Kut Kho Kan and the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon (among the previously mentioned dialects) have similar tone patterns, it is important to stress that the former and the latter have quite different tone shapes.

One will also observe that, whereas the split separating B123, C1, and DL123 from respectively B4, C234, and DL4 corresponds in the Nyo of Kut Kho Kan to a clear distinction between a low rising, then mid level tone (233) and rising tones (respectively a 25 tone, a 15 tone, and a 13 tone), the 31 tone in B123, C1, DL123 and the 42 tone in B4, C234, DL4 in the Nyo of Sakon Nakhon might be perceived as less sharply distinguished.

6. Other linguistic features

Other features of the Nyo spoken in Kut Kho Kan include the use of typical lexical items, such as /ɲin^{A4}/ 'pleasant to hear', /kap^{DS2} phen^{A4}/ 'full moon', etc.

The speech of most speakers of Kut Kho Kan has the distinctive rhyme /aɰ/, a false diphthong in which the vowel nucleus /a/ is followed by the velar approximant /ɰ/. For example, they say /phaɰ^{A1}/ 'who', /saɰ^{A1}/ 'where', /caɰ^{A2}/ 'heart', /taɰ^{A2}/ 'gizzard', /baɰ^{A3}/ 'leaf', /daɰ^{A3}/ 'which', /ɲaɰ^{B1}/ 'to be big', /maɰ^{B1}/ 'to be new', /saɰ^{B1}/ 'to put, to wear', /kaɰ^{C2}/ 'to be near', among other examples. Those words are respectively pronounced, in the Lao varieties spoken in the Northeast Thailand, as /phaj^{A1}/, /saj^{A1}/, /caj^{A2}/, /taj^{A2}/, /baj^{A3}/, /daj^{A3}/, /ɲaj^{B1}/, /maj^{B1}/, /saj^{B1}/, /kaj^{C2}/, etc. When those words have cognates in Phu Thai, /aɰ/ is replaced by the back unrounded vowel /ɤ:/, as in /cɤ:^{A2}/, /tɤ:^{A2}/, /bɤ:^{A3}/, /ɲɤ:^{B1}/, /mɤ:^{B1}/, /sɤ:^{B1}/, etc.

In the speech of young speakers from Kut Kho Kan, the rhyme /aɰ/ is found to be pronounced as /aj/, when they use Nyo with relatives and fellow villagers. They are aware that older speakers pronounce something else. Lalida Utama can actually produce the rhyme /aɰ/ correctly when repeating it in words pronounced by other speakers. As for Phontraithep Hongsaen, she cannot repeat /aɰ/: she pronounces /aj/ instead, and, if her great-aunt insists on making her pronounce /aɰ/ correctly, she produces /ɤ:/.

Thananan Trongdee (2014 and 2015-2016) has given the various origins of the rhyme /aɰ/ in Proto-Tai and mentioned the dialects of Northeast Thailand and Laos in which /aɰ/ can still be found. In

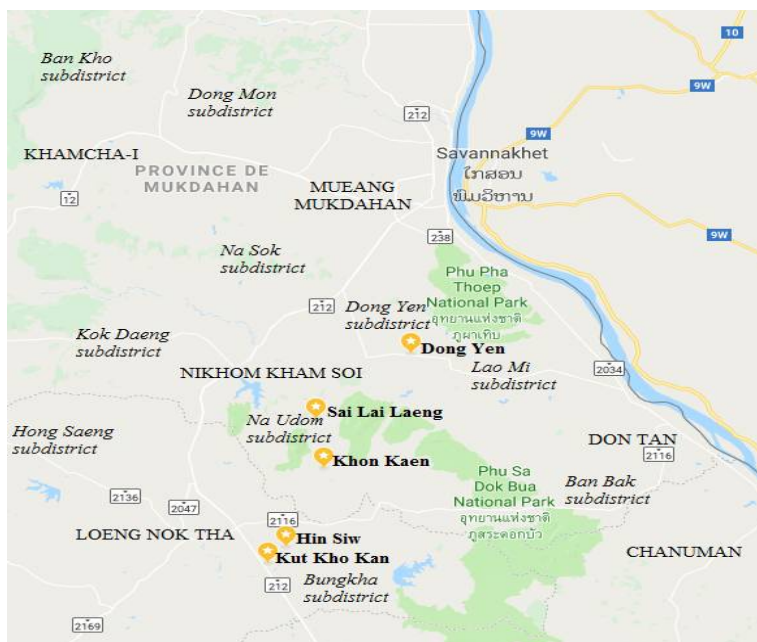
“cognate words which have the vowels developed from proto **əi*, **eĩ* and **oi*”, the segments **əi*, **eĩ* and **oi* “became [ə:] in Tha Uthen and Tha Khonyang Nyo but became [aj] in Yo, Lao Nyo, Vientiane Lao and became [aɯ] in Luang Prabang Lao” (Thananan Trongdee 2014: 75). He also mentions Yooy and Kaloeng, two dialects of Sakon Nakhon province, as having the rhyme /aɯ/ (Thananan Trongdee 2015-2016: 52).

In Northeast Thailand, varieties having the rhyme /aɯ/ can be considered as exceptions. Apart from the Nyo of Kut Kho Kan, the researcher could hear the rhyme /aɯ/ in the Nyo spoken in Dong Yen village (Dong Yen subdistrict, Mueang Mukdahan district, Mukdahan province) and the Yooy of Akat Amnuay village (Akat Amnuay subdistrict, Akat Amnuay district, Sakon Nakhon province). The situations in Dong Yen and Akat Amnuay are quite similar: the rhyme /aɯ/ can be heard in the speech of older speakers living in the village which has been chosen to be the administrative center of the area, but, when it comes to either Nyo varieties spoken in neighboring villages in Dong Yen subdistrict or Yooy varieties spoken in other parts of Akat Amnuay district, the rhyme /aɯ/ is absent.

7. The Nyo, the Phu Thai, and the Kha

When considering accounts by Nyo villagers in Kut Kho Kan, one will note that they relate themselves not only to the Nyo of Hin Siw village in the same area, but also to the Nyo living in more distant villages which belong to two districts of Mukdahan province, Mueang Mukdahan and Nikhom Kham Soi. Those villages, Dong Yen (Dong Yen subdistrict, Mueang Mukdahan district), Sai Lai Laeng and Khon Kaen (Na Udom subdistrict, Nikhom Kham Soi district), are located in subdistricts contiguous to Don Tan district.

Map 1: Nyo villages mentioned by the Nyo speakers of Kut Kho Kan in Mukdahan and Yasothon provinces (adapted from map data ©2018 Google)



The researcher could interview extensively only one speaker of the variety spoken in Dong Yen village, Aroonsawat Deedongpun, a male speaker in his late thirties, whose speech still has the final rhyme /au/. His tone system, which shows the same coalescence and split pattern as the tone systems obtained from Kut Kho Kan, has a real coalescence $B4=C234=DL4$ (rising tone with fall on end), as against the quasi-coalescence $B4\approx C234\approx DL4$ of Kut Kho Kan. The main difference between the tones in the speech of Aroonsawat Deedongpun and the tones of the Kut Kho Kan variety lies in their respective shapes: for example, to the mid falling, then low rising tone (214) tone of the A1, A2, A3 cells corresponds, in the same cells, a distinctive tone which is high falling, then rising to mid (413). More data are required to ascertain the tone system of Dong Yen village, all the more so because the tone diagram proposed for Dong Yen by Pinkanok Khamrueangsri (2002: 127 and 137) exhibits a tone split 123-4 in the C column, and the tones she describes have different shapes.

In addition, the Nyo of Kut Kho Kan mention the Phu Thai and the Kha living in Loeng Nok Tha district (Yasothon province), Don Tan district (Mukdahan province), and Chanuman district (Amnat Charoen province) as their “*phi-nong*” (‘elder and younger siblings’). The Phu Thai of Na Kok and Nong Khaen in Bungkha subdistrict, which is the subdistrict next to Khok Samran subdistrict in Loeng Nok Tha district, describe in their own words the relationship between the three groups: while they are themselves the “*Phu Thai Boran*” (‘old Phu Thai’), they consider the Nyo and the Kha as other Phu Thai, calling them respectively “*Phu Thai Nyo*” and “*Phu Thai Kha*”.

The same ethnonyms and language names, Nyo, Phu Thai, and Kha, are found in other areas of Mukdahan province. One of those areas is given here as an example: it comprises the two contiguous subdistricts of Dong Mon (Mueang Mukdahan district) and Ban Kho (Khamcha-i district). Nyo speakers in Kut Kho Kan know that the Nyo of Khamcha-i district call themselves Nyo, but they are either “different Nyo” or “not real Nyo”! The Kha, or Kha Loeng, of Lao Mi and Ban Bak subdistricts (Don Tan district) will in the same way differentiate themselves from the Kha living in Dong Mon subdistrict.

When it comes to Phu Thai, the variety spoken in Dong Mon subdistrict has the same tone pattern as the varieties spoken in various places of Khamcha-i district, in Na Sok subdistrict (Mueang Mukdahan district), and in Kok Daeng subdistrict (Nikhom Kham Soi district), but the tone patterns of the varieties spoken in Loeng Nok Tha, Don Tan, and Chanuman districts are quite different and obviously belong to a distinct dialect.

Figure 4: the tone diagram of a female Phu Thai speaker of Don Sawan (Dong Mon subdistrict, Mueang Mukdahan district)

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	224	331	44	331	35
2	224	331	44	331	35
3	224	331	44	331	35
4	331	334	334	331	44

Figure 5: the tone diagram of a female Phu Thai speaker of Nong Khaen (Bungkha subdistrict, Loeng Nok Tha district)

	A	B	C	DL	DS
1	445	33	451	33	43
2	232	33	451	33	43
3	232	33	451	33	43
4	232	31	41	31	31

When taking into account the accounts mentioned above as well as the particular linguistic situation of Phu Thai, one can propose to draw a linguistic/ethnolinguistic isogloss isolating the Phu Thai varieties of Loeng Nok Tha, Don Tan, and Chanuman districts from those spoken in all the districts of Mukdahan province except Don Tan.

Starting from the Southwestern part of Mukdahan province, that isogloss has to be drawn first along the border of Nikhom Kham Soi district (Mukdahan) with Loeng Nok Tha district (Yasothon), where it separates the Phu Thai of Kok Daeng subdistrict (in Nikhom Kham Soi) from the Phu Thai of Hong Saeng subdistrict (in Loeng Nok Tha). Leaving aside Don Tan, that isogloss turns Northwards to cross the Eastern part of Nikhom Kham Soi and then enters Mueang Mukdahan district, separating the area located between Kok Daeng and Na Sok from the area between Na Udom and Dong Yen.

The Nyo of Dong Yen, Sai Lai Laeng and Khon Kaen villages precisely live on the borderline between the two distinct sets of Phu Thai varieties!

8. Conclusion

This article while focusing on a variety of Nyo spoken in Kut Kho Kan village has mentioned the presence of different dialects with the same language name in the Northeast region of Thailand as well as in neighboring countries of Mainland Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). When it comes to Phu Thai, we get a similar picture: not only are Phu Thai dialects spoken both in Northeast Thailand and in Central Laos, but speakers of Southwestern Tai languages in Vietnam such as Tai Yo or Tai Daeng are also found to refer to themselves as Phu Tai (/tāj^{A4}/ in P dialects being the regular cognate of the form /thāj^{A4}/ used in PH dialects).

If one would conceive a “language ecology” (Smalley 1994) for the countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, its structure would not be different from the “hierarchy of relationships among most of the categories of languages which make up the linguistic diversity of Thailand” (Smalley 1994: 69): there would be definitely more than just one level with a “world/international language” (English) and another one with national languages (Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer, etc.). Every country in ASEAN has numerous ethnic groups in its population, and that aspect is worth taking into account when considering the economic integration of the various regions as well as the implementation of education at the level of local communities.

When it comes to Roi Et Rajabhat University and similar universities for communities not only in Thailand but also in other ASEAN countries, language and culture awareness can be viewed in terms of cultural heritage and student-centered education. One can think of data banks meant for language documentation and various disciplines investigating communities’ indigenous knowledges. In the spheres of education and language teaching, linguistic autobiographies by students would definitely help them formulate and solve specific problems that people of their communities may have encountered at various levels in the system of education.

About the author

Jean Pacquement has taught foreign languages and done linguistic research in India, Laos and Thailand. In his teaching, he takes into account students’ linguistic backgrounds, in which he includes oral languages spoken at home, and focuses on target languages’ phonetic and prosodic features.

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