

The Tai Element in Khmu?

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The Khmu? (K) language is spoken over a very large area stretching from northern Vietnam through northern Laos to Thailand. Probably all Khmu? groups have had long and close contact with speakers of Tai languages, with the result that a large number of Tai words have been absorbed into Khmu?. The most widespread and intimate contact has undoubtedly been with Lao (L), as the Lao have enjoyed political supremacy in the central Khmu? region for about 600 years. Although the hypothesis that the chief source of Tai borrowings has been Lao is difficult to substantiate on purely phonological grounds, and examples such as K ?*nian*, from L ?*dian*, 'month', where Khmu? agrees with Lao in having an alveolar initial as against the other Tai languages in contact with Khmu? such as Black, White and Red Tai with initial ?*b* (Gedney B.E. 2507:20), are difficult to find, there are other reasons for supposing that the Tai source in most cases has, in fact, been Lao. One pointer to this conclusion may be seen in the words of ultimate Pali or Sanskrit origin which are found in Khmu?; these do not occur in the Tai dialects mentioned above, which do not share in the Buddhist culture of Southeast Asia. Another indication of the deep influence of Lao is apparent in the way in which not only commonly used words such as *wat* 'temple' and *wiak* 'work' are adopted into Khmu?, but also the relatively less common generalized terms *wat waa* 'temples in general' and *wiak kaan* 'work in general' are treated as native Khmu? elements, as in *guut wat guut waa* 'going into temples' and *tæŋ wiak tæŋ kaan* 'doing work'.¹

The Khmu? area may be divided into two dialect zones, a northern and western one with five subdialects known as Yuan, Rɔɔk, Khwæen, Krɔɔŋ and Lii, centred apparently in Hua Khong province in Laos and adjacent areas of Thailand, and a southern and eastern zone where a single dialect, known as ?Uu to the northerners (probably from the name of the ?Uu River to the north of Luang Prabang) is spoken with little variation. The most noticeable difference between the two zones is that the southern dialect has a voiceless/voiced distinction in initial consonants, corresponding to a high/low register distinction in the northern dialects (Lindell et al. 1976:1). This paper deals with the southern dialect, on which work was done in Luang Prabang and Sayaboury provinces by the present writer in 1968.

The Lao penetration of Khmu? has probably been a continuous process during the past six or seven centuries, since the Tai people first invaded and conquered the region. Although in many cases it is impossible to determine the period a particular Lao item entered Khmu?, there are phonological clues in some classes of words that

¹Although the assumption is made here that the chief source of Tai loans is Lao, there are indications that some words from other Tai languages have also been adopted. Words of non-Lao origin so far found are: *sut* 'mosquito net' (from Delcros 1966:62), found in Chiangmai Tai (Purnell 1962) and White Tai (Minot 1949:17), *lam* 'tasty', Chiangmai; *nii* 'to iron', Chiangmai (L has *rii*).

indicate whether the borrowing was early (perhaps before the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, although this is pure speculation), or late, i.e. modern. This can be determined by comparing the Khmu? words both with the Lao written form, which is phonologically conservative and dates back at least several centuries, and with the spoken Lao of today, which has undergone several phonological changes in the meantime. Where Khmu? agrees with the modern Lao form as against the written form, as for instance if Khmu? has initial *kh-* corresponding to modern Lao *kh-* but written Lao *g-*, or Khmu? has initial *m-* like modern Lao *m-* but written Lao *hm-*, this is taken as a modern borrowing. Where Khmu? agrees with the written form, it is taken as an early loan. Given the socioeconomic position of the Khmu? in this area, the possibility that Khmu? represents some kind of learned pronunciation based on the script may be ruled out. The intention of this paper is to study the earlier layer of Lao loans in Khmu?.

The Khmu? morpheme may consist of either a single syllable, or a disyllable formed of a minor syllable with non-contrasting vocoid followed by a major syllable which has the same structural possibilities as a single syllable morpheme (cf. Henderson 1952 on the comparable Cambodian structure). The structure of minor syllables will not be described here, as they are scarcely to be found in words of Lao origin. The Khmu? initials of major syllables (and therefore of independent syllables) are as follows:

Simple:	p	ph	b	m	hm	ʔm	w	hw	ʔw	f	
	t	th	d	n	hn	ʔn	l	hl		r	hr
	c	ch	j	ñ	hñ		y	hy	ʔy	s	
	k	kh	g	ŋ	hŋ				ʔ	h	
Clusters:	kw	khw	gw								
	pl		bl								
	kl		gl								
	pr		br								
	tr		dr								
	cr		jr							sr	
	kr		gr								

Phonetic note: *w* everywhere is [β]; *r* everywhere is strongly rolled, and in clusters with voiceless consonants there is noticeable aspiration between the consonant and *r*; *f* is clearly marginal, occurring in this material were only *falar*(1)² ‘European person’ (from *Frank*), and *fəə* ‘soupe chinoise’, both from contemporary Lao (the latter apparently originally from Vietnamese *phở*).

The Lao initial consonant system is simpler than Khmu?. The writing system, however, reveals 13 initials that have merged in modern Lao. The following table shows the written system, with the modern pronunciation in brackets where merger has taken place.

²Since most of the Khmu? loan-words from Lao are identical in segmental phonemes with Lao, only the Lao tones (in a transcription of the written form) are indicated here. Where the Lao and Khmu? morphemes differ in segmental phonemes, the Lao form is quoted in full.

ʔb	p	ph	b (ph)	m	hm (m)	w	hw (w)	f	v (f)
ʔd	t	th	d (th)	n	hn (n)	l	hl (l)	r (h)	
	c			ñ	hñ (ñ)			s	z (s) ʔy
	k	kh	g (kh)	ŋ	hŋ (ŋ)	ʔ	h		
	kw	khw	gw (khw)						

The initial consonants provide the only clues to the date of borrowing (the vowels and final consonants of loan-words from Lao are usually identical with Lao). As stated above, however, there are certain classes of initials which give no indication of the time of borrowing: these are the initials which have remained the same from early Lao to the present, with the exception of the preglottalized ʔb and ʔd. Examples of these initials, with the Lao tone-mark added in brackets, are the following:

kop	‘frog’	khap	‘to sing’
kɛɛn	‘heartwood, core’ (1)	khaam	‘to cross over’ (2)
com	‘to sink’	thau	‘old’ (2)
cap	‘to grasp, catch’	tham	‘cave’ (2)
ɬɔɬn	‘to castrate’	phaa	‘to chop’ (2)
tau	‘tortoise’ (1)	phat	‘to rub’
paau	‘to inform’ (1)	hiip	‘box’
pua	‘to care for (an illness)’	hɔɔŋ	‘room’ (2)
ʔaan	‘saddle’	saai	‘thread’
ʔɛɛk	‘yoke’	sɛɛu	‘to embroider’ (1)
		phaai	‘cotton’, L <i>faai</i> (2)
		phaak	‘to entrust, L <i>faak</i>
ŋaa	‘ivory’		
ŋuaŋ	‘elephant’s trunk’		
naai	‘master’		
nun	‘kapok’ (1)		
muaŋ	‘mango’ (1)		
muŋ	‘mosquito net’ (2)		
ñaan	‘gum benjamin’		
ñɔɔm	‘to dye’ (2)		
liai	‘saw, to saw’ (1)		
lau	‘to say, tell’ (1)		
wat	‘temple’		
ween	‘bad luck’		

As pointed out in Li 1977:173, L ñ- has two Proto-Tai sources, *ñ- and *y-. The two examples of this Lao initial, however, are certainly from ñ-, compare Malay *kemenyan* (Siamese *kamyaan*) ‘gum benjamin’ and Vietnamese *nhuôm* ‘to dye’.

As Khmu? has not undergone the phonological changes that have fashioned modern Lao, the following items, where Khmu? agrees with written Lao, are definitely borrowings from an early period:

gem	‘salty’
guu	‘pair’ (1)
gaap	‘to hold in the mouth’

ʝɔɔi	‘to help’, L <i>zɔɔi</i> (1), S(iamese) <i>juai</i> (1)
ʝiim	‘to taste’, L <i>ziim</i> , S <i>jim</i>
jaŋ	‘to weigh’, L <i>zaŋ</i> (1), S <i>jaŋ</i> (1)
juu	‘lover’, L <i>zuu</i> (2), S <i>juu</i> (2)
daa	‘to paint’
dæək	‘to measure’
dæən	‘to replace’
bæɛ	‘raft’
ban	‘to roll up’
ɾɔɔt	‘to arrive’
ræɛŋ	‘strength’
ræɛt	‘rhinoceros’
baau	‘quickly’, L <i>vaau</i> (2)
biim	‘comb of a loom’, L <i>viim</i> (from Delcros 1966)
hñia	‘bait’ (2)
hñaaɸ	‘rough, leathery’
hni	‘debt’ (2)
hnɔɔ	‘rhinoceros horn’ (1)
hmiaŋ	‘fermented tea’ (2)
hmɔɔŋ	‘sad’
hmuak	‘hat’
hlɔɔ	‘to smelt’ (1)
hliik	‘to avoid’
hloŋ	‘to forget’
hwaan	‘space between’ (1)

Among the words with preglottalization, the preglottalized stops of Lao are found as preglottalized nasals in Khmuʔ. Judging from the shape of the Lao letters for these initials, which are based on Indic *t*- and *p*-, these initials have been stops in Lao since the adoption of the script. A few words such as K *daap* ‘sword’, L *ʔdaap* and *bat* ‘a time’, L *ʔbat*, were found; these are presumed to be recent borrowings.

ʔnoŋ	‘virgin forest’, L <i>ʔdoŋ</i>
ʔnian	‘month’, L <i>ʔdian</i>
ʔnook	‘rotten’, L <i>ʔdook</i>
ʔmet	‘fish-hook’, L <i>ʔbet</i>
ʔmɔɔ	‘mine’, L <i>ʔbɔɔ</i> (1)
ʔmɔɔn	‘place’, L <i>ʔbɔɔn</i> (1)
ʔyaa	‘medicine’
ʔyiim	‘to borrow’
ʔyaan	‘sort, kind’ (1)

So far, the Khmuʔ evidence has merely confirmed the validity of the written Lao distinctions, which preceded the phonological changes which have shaped modern Lao. However, Khmuʔ also provides evidence for the existence of initial clusters of stop-plus-continuant in early Lao. As these are only sporadically marked in the Lao

script (they have disappeared entirely from modern spoken Lao), S(iamese) evidence may be brought in to confirm the Khmu? forms.

kliip	‘kip, unit of money’, L <i>kiiip</i> , S <i>kliip</i> ‘petal’
klep	‘fish-scale’, L <i>ket</i> , S <i>klet</i> . (Li 1977:223 notes that there is an alternation in this word between final <i>-t</i> and final <i>-p</i> in Central Tai. Perhaps this item belongs with the non-Lao forms mentioned in footnote 1.)
grua	‘family’, L <i>gua</i> , S <i>grua</i>
graan	‘lazy’, L <i>gaan</i> (2), S <i>graan</i> (2)
plɔɔk	‘ring’, L <i>pɔɔk</i> , S <i>plɔɔk</i>
pliin	‘to turn inside out’, L <i>piin</i> (2), S <i>pliin</i> (2)
pliin	‘leech of ricefields’, L <i>piin</i> , S <i>plin</i>
plɔɔi	‘to release’, L <i>pɔɔi</i> (1), S <i>plɔɔi</i> (1)
braan	‘lucky in hunting’, L <i>baan</i> , S <i>braan</i>
brɔɔm	‘together’, L <i>bɔɔm</i> (2), S <i>brɔɔm</i> (2)
brɛɛ	‘cloth’, L <i>bɛɛ</i> , S <i>brɛɛ</i> ‘silk cloth’
bra?	‘monk’, L <i>ba?</i> , S <i>bra?</i>
bluu	‘betel leaf’, L <i>buu</i> , S <i>bluu</i>

Some of the above items are also found to have doublets with reflexes of modern Lao: for instance, besides *braan* is to be found *phaan* ‘hunter’ and besides *bra?* is to be found *pha?* (same meaning), both of which show the relatively recent development in Lao of voiced stops to voiceless aspirated stops, as well as the loss of the second element in clusters.

The above words, although not confirmed regularly in Lao, are confirmed in Siamese, and provide additional evidence that Khmu? can be used as a source for reconstructing clusters in early Lao. However, there are certain items in Khmu? which are not revealed in the written systems of either Lao or Siamese. These are of particular interest as they provide evidence for clusters and other features that must antedate the adoption of the Lao and Siamese scripts, which apparently date from the 13th Century A.D.

Clusters found in Khmu?, but without trace of such clusters in the corresponding items in the Lao or Siamese written forms, all have a medial *-r-* and, in the case of plosives, an aspirated stop. There are three clear cases of such clusters.

kraŋ	‘to confine’, L, S <i>khaŋ</i>
kɔɔ	‘to ask for’, L, S <i>khɔɔ</i>
kɔɔŋ	‘the Mekong river’, L <i>khɔɔŋ</i> , S <i>khoonŋ</i>

For the first two items above, Li 1977 reconstructs clusters, *khl-* (p. 227) and *kh-* (p. 229) respectively, on other evidence. The last item shows the same variation between mid-low and mid-high vowels in Lao and Siamese as is found in Lao *khɛɛ* (2), S *ɔɔrakhee* (2) ‘crocodile’. *Kɔɔŋ* is a proper noun, as in *ʔom kɔɔŋ* ‘Mekong river’; there is also a somewhat similar common noun *hroŋ* ‘stream’

prəŋ 'bee, honey', L *phəŋ* (2), S *phīŋ* (2)
 praam 'shelter for festivals', L *phaam*, not in S

srəŋ 'to send', L, S *soŋ* (1)
 srɔɔi 'necklace', L *sɔɔi* (2), S *srɔɔi* (2), pronounced *sɔɔi*

The last item is written with *-r-* in Siamese, but this is discounted by Li (p. 158) as an imitation of spellings found in loans from Cambodian, and he reconstructs simple *s-* initial for both items. If this word is to be connected with L, S *rɔɔi* (2) 'hundred', it would appear that this cluster is to be attributed to Proto-Siamese-Lao at least.

hrok 'six' L, S *hok*
 hrot 'to sprinkle (water)' L *hot*, S *rot*
 hrəŋ 'long (time)', L *həŋ*, not in S

On the basis of other evidence, Li (p. 233) reconstructs *xr-* as the initial for the first item. The irregular correspondence in Lao and Siamese for the second item suggests also that *hr-* should be posited for Proto-Siamese-Lao.

Although McFarland 1944 has a few words with initial clusters *khr-* and *phr-*, these are purely marginal, and one may conclude that these initials were not part of original Siamese vocabulary at the time of the adoption of writing. There is no trace of *hr-* in Lao or Siamese, which had presumably merged with *h-* at that time, and *sr-* occurs only in Siamese, where it is not at present pronounced. With all these initials, there is good reason to assume that the Khmu? evidence is to be trusted, just as it was confirmed with those clusters that are still to be found in Siamese. There remains one puzzle, in the word *grɔɔk* 'enclosure, stable, jail' L, S *grɔɔk*. The initial cluster *gr-* is retained in Siamese, but there is no trace of this cluster in this item in the writing systems.

There is one further initial suggested by the Khmu? material, which may be attributed to Proto-Lao, and presumably to Proto-Siamese-Lao. As mentioned above, Proto-Tai **ñ-* is not distinguished from **y-* in either Lao or Siamese, being uniformly *ñ-* in Lao and *y-* in Siamese. The Khmu? material, however, suggests that these two Proto-Tai initials may, in fact, have been distinguished in the Tai source of the Khmu? loan-words, which is here taken to be early Lao. The expected reflexes in Khmu? of L *ʔy-* and *ñ-*, that is, K *ʔy-* and *ñ-* respectively, have already been exemplified. There remain, however, four Khmu? words which have non-glottalized *y-* where Lao has *ñ-*:

yaak 'difficult', L *ñaak*
 yok 'to lift', L *ñok*
 yuan 'northern Thai', L *ñuan* and S *ñuan* (pronounced *yuan*) 'Vietnamese'
 yɔɔi 'small scales for weighing', L *ñɔɔi*, not in S but found in Shan. *yɔɔi*
 (Cushing 1914:549)

The first of these has been reconstructed by Li (p. 179) as Proto-Tai *y-, on other evidence. On the basis of the Khmu? evidence, these items may all be taken to reflect Proto-Lao (and probably Proto-Siamese-Lao) *y- as against *ñ-.

With the Khmu? evidence it is now possible to add to the inventory of written Lao initial consonants the following clusters, which are confirmed by written Siamese, and which may be assumed for early Lao:

kl- gr- pl- br- bl-

In addition, the following initials may be inferred for a very early period, as they are not marked in either Lao or Siamese script (*sr-* being a partial exception in Siamese):

khr- phr- sr hr- y-

These ten initials are here assumed to be ascribed to Proto-Siamese-Lao. On Khmu? evidence alone, it would be possible to dispense with the aspiration marker in *khr-* and *phr-*, but this would leave unexplained correspondences such as L *kaap* ~ *khaap*, S *kraap* 'to prostrate oneself' and L *paap* ~ *phaap*, S *praap* 'to reprimand'.

If the above hypothesis is correct, the borrowing of Lao words into Khmu? must have begun at a very early period.³ Although the evidence for this is confined phonologically to certain classes of initial consonants, it is obvious that items with other initials must also have been borrowed at an early period. A few of these may be captured if they form part of a series which also contains items with evidence of early borrowing; it may be safely assumed that the borrowing of the series took place at the same period. Examples of such series are the numbers from one to ten:

nɨŋ (1), sɔŋ, saam, sii (1), haa (2), hrok, cet, pɛet, kau (2), sip (but not *saau* 'twenty', L *zaau*, not in S);

the cycle of ten (for days and years):

kaap, rap, rwaai, mɔŋ, plək (L *pək*), kat, kot, ruaŋ (2), tau (1), kaa (1);

and the cycle of twelve (for years):

cəə (L *cai* [2]), plau (L *pau* [2]), ñii, hmau (2), sii, səə (L *sai*), sŋaa (2), mot, san, rau (2), set, gəə (L *gai* [2]).

³Borrowing has, of course, been continuous, and some forms reveal the order of changes in Lao: K *kraat* 'to harrow' L *gaat* S *graat*, and K *grɨaŋ*, *kriɨaŋ* and *kndriɨaŋ* 'clothing' (from Delcros 1966: 43, on the infix see Ferlus 1977) both suggest that Lao first devoiced the older voiced stop, then lost *-r-*.

Throughout this paper the assumption has been made that the Lao-Khmu? correspondences are the result of one-way borrowing, from Lao into Khmu?. There are, in fact, a few words which are plausibly the result of Lao borrowing from Khmu?: two of these are *wɔɔm* (1) 'brimless hat' and *K khuj* 'papaya', *L huj* (1), neither of which are found in Siamese. There are also words where the major syllable appears to be Tai, but which have prefixed elements not to be found in Tai. Such are *hnaa* 'wet ricefield', *L naa*; *kruak* 'tadpole', *L ruak*; *krneep* 'pincer', *L hneep*; *sgEEP* 'narrow', *L gEEP*; *krlaaj* 'to wash', *L laaj* (2). The analysis of these items must await more documentation of both Tai and Mon-Khmer languages of this area.

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