

Dao Ngan Tay: A B-language in Vietnam

Peter A. ROSS

Australian National University

1. Introduction

The dialect here called Tay [dai¹] is spoken by the people of Baan Haa, the largest village in Dao Ngan [ʔdao¹ ŋan¹] cooperative, Ha Quang district, Cao Bang province, Vietnam.¹ The population of Dao Ngan is between 2,300 and 2,500. Dialects of Tay are spoken by over 850,000 people throughout Vietnam (Hoang et al, 1984:19). While Theraphan (1994:1) finds the term *Thô* useful for these people from the point of view of her field work in southern China, in Vietnam it is considered derogatory and is no longer acceptable in the Tai context (Hoang et al, *ibid*).² In addition, my Ha Quang informants were adamant they had never heard of the term. They call themselves Tay or ɣən¹ dai¹ (Tay people) and if any further toponym is required use the name of their cooperative, eg. Tay Dao Ngan, Tay Soc Ha.³

Dao Ngan Tay (DN) is one of a type of Tai dialects for which Theraphan recently coined the name *B-languages* (1994:21-22): those whose reflexes show voiced stops for proposed Proto-Tai (PT) voiced stops. As Theraphan has noted, attention was first drawn to B-languages by Haudricourt in 1948 (1948a) and followed up in several other publications. Haudricourt drew largely on data from EFEO language surveys carried out in Vietnam from 1937, data whose reliability has been called into question (*ibid*, pp. 2-3). I have worked with ten EFEO surveys on Nung from this period and, while this type of data does require a cautious approach, it is not beyond usefulness.⁴ For Li, it was as if this B-language data did not exist: "Like *b-...[Proto-Tai *d-]...is regularly unvoiced in all modern

¹ A *cooperative* is a collection of villages organised into an administrative unit. Field work was carried out in Hanoi (Dec-Feb 1991) and Baan Haa (June 1993) and was sponsored in part by the National Thai Studies Centre and Faculty of Asian Studies, ANU. The Centre for Cooperation for Vietnamese Studies, Hanoi University helped make arrangements. Most of the data presented here was provided by Mr. Hoang Tieu (hwaan¹ tieu¹), age 42, but informants included a female speaker and 4 other male speakers whose ages ranged from 23 to over 70. The corpus is 440 words.

² It is in fact the official name for a language related to Muong (Hoang et al, 1984:35).

³ I cannot comment on Theraphan's use of *Tho* linguistically to designate a group of dialects with special tonal characteristics as my copy of her paper is missing a key page (p. 15 with Figure 2).

⁴ Ross (1991) discusses data quality issues for the EFEO Nung surveys.

languages (1977:104).” Perhaps Haudricourt alone persisted because he knew from experience that ‘impressionistic’ work ‘not carried out by linguists’ (cf. Chamberlain in Theraphan, 1994:3) can be surprisingly accurate.⁵

The aim of this paper is to add to the growing amount of available evidence which demonstrates that B-languages do exist. DN data comes from eastern Cao Bang province within 35 km of two locations for EFEO surveys cited by Haudricourt.⁶ A preliminary statement on the phonology of DN tones and initials is presented. This is followed by correspondences and examples for PT tones and initials (as per Li, 1977). Finally, I provide an interpretation of the data in the context of a theory of tonal development.

2. Phonology

2.1 Tones

DN has five tones on open syllables (those with final, vowel, semivowel and nasal):

1. level, slightly higher than mid: *naa1* ‘thick’, *khaa1* ‘leg’, *?dong1* ‘east’, *maa1* ‘dog’
2. falling, slightly lower than mid: *naa1* ‘rice field’, *daang1* ‘road’, *maa1* ‘to come’
3. high rise: *taang1* ‘window’, *mai1* ‘widow’, *naa1* ‘mother’s younger sister’
4. low fall and rise: *naa1* ‘face’, *khaa1* ‘to kill’, *mai1* ‘bamboo shoot’
5. low level: *dong1* ‘stomach’, *gaal* ‘to tell’, *maal* ‘horse’, *mail* ‘tree’

Glottalisation is a feature of low pitch in Tones 4 and 5 with corresponding vowel shortening in Tone 5. Ordering of tones is based on Vietnamese orthography.

Essentially, tones on closed syllables (stop final) occur which can be identified with Tones 3 and 4: *?byɔk1* ‘flower’, *laac1* ‘root’. Individual speakers argue variation with corresponding occurrences of Tones 1 and 5: *pet1* ‘duck’, *lep1* ‘fingernail’. Syllable nuclei in variation environments tend to be, though are not exclusively, phonetically short [C(C)VC]. With the exception of [a, aa] however, vowel length is phonemically non-contrastive in DN. This situation is similar to Red Tai (Gedney 1964:7).

⁵ Before the northern dialects became well known through Li’s work, Haudricourt once expressed his disappointment at the transcription in Esquirol and Williate’s (1908) *Dioi* dictionary. “[L]e dioi est mal noté: le timbre et la quantité des voyelles ne sont pas précisés, l’aspiration des occlusives n’est pas notée...” (1948b:197). Loss of aspiration on differing vowel reflexes are now known as key distinguishing features for northern dialects as opposed to non-northern dialects.

⁶ Nguyễn Bình (30km SSW from Hà Quảng) and Bảo Lạc (35km WNW from Hà Quảng) (1960:163).

2.2 *Initials*

DN Tay has as *initial consonants*:

Preglottalized/glottal stops. ʔb ʔd ʔy ʔ as in ʔbaa ʔ 'crazy', ʔdam ʔ 'black', ʔyu ʔ 'to be at', ʔan ʔ classif. for things.

Breathy voiced stops. (Phonetically these range from simple voiced stops, to a voiced stop with a breathy prosody extending over the following vowel or diphthong, to a fricative with the same. Velars are most subject to fricativisation followed by bilabials. The same variations are found with these stops in clusters.) b d g as in bi ʔ 'lard', daa ʔ 'river', gun ʔ 'night'.

Voiceless unaspirated stops. p t c k as in pi ʔ 'year', tam ʔ 'low', cai ʔ 'elder brother', kin ʔ 'to eat'.

Voiceless aspirated stops. ph th kh ch as in phet ʔ 'chilli', thaang ʔ 'tail', hat ʔ chi ʔ ɔi ʔ 'to sneeze', khaa ʔ 'leg'. ch has only one occurrence.

Nasals. m n ɲ ŋ as in maa ʔ 'dog', nu ʔ 'rat', naa ʔ 'grass', ŋu ʔ 'snake'.

Voiced Fricatives. v z ʒ as in vuc ʔ 'mat', zaan ʔ 'elephant', ʒuan ʔ 'house'.

Voiceless Fricatives. f s ʃ h as in fan ʔ 'half', səu ʔ, 'near', ʃip ʔ 'ten', haat ʔ 'to sing'. f has only one occurrence.

Sonorants. l, w as in liŋ ʔ 'monkey', wan ʔ 'day'.

Initial clusters in DN Tay occur with a velar consonant with w: kw khw ŋw as in kwua ʔ 'animal', khwiu ʔ 'to whistle', ŋwaa ʔ 'yesterday'. Initial clusters also occur with a bilabial consonant and y: ʔby by py phy my as in ʔbyək ʔ 'flower', byəu ʔ 'evening meal', pya ʔ 'fish', phyaa ʔ 'mountain', myaak ʔ 'slippery'. There are also occurrences of a velar consonant with y: kyet ʔ 'to hate' and a palatal consonant with w: swaa ʔ 'right side'.

3. Proto-Tai Correspondences⁷

3.1 Tones

The following tone correspondences can be established:

A1 1	B1 ↓	C1 1	D1L 1	D1S 1
A2 ↓	B2 1	C2 J	D2L ↓	D2S ↓

- A1 *thin* 'rock', *ɕaɪ* 'tiger', *nɪ* 'rat', *kin* 'to eat', *pil* 'year', *kuɪ* 'salt'
- B1 *kai* 'chicken', *taang* 'window', *ɕi* 'four', *ke* 'old', *tam* 'short'
- C1/B2 *ɕaa* 'grass', *khau* 'to enter', *ʔbaan* 'village', *bɔ* 'father', *naŋ* 'to sit'
- A2 *wan* 'day', *zaai* 'sand', *ɲu* 'snake', *nom* 'milk', *liŋ* 'monkey'
- C2 *vaal* 'sky', *nam* 'water', *zaaŋ* 'elephant', *lin* 'tongue', *dɔŋ* 'stomach'
- D1L/S *mɔk* 'fog', *ʔbyɔk* 'flower', *puak* 'bark', *khop* 'to bite', *tap* 'liver'
- D2L/S *laak* 'to drag', *lak* 'to steal', *nɔk* 'outside', *nok* 'bird'

Proto Tai tones B2 and C1 have merged. Subject to verification, tones D1L and D1S have merged, as have D2L and D2S.

3.2 Initials and DN Tay Cognates

PT initials and DN Tay cognates are as follows.

Labials. *p- *pet* 'duck', *pil* 'year', *paak* 'mouth', *pik* 'wing' *pet* 'eight'; *ph- *phaa* 'to split', *phu* 'husband', *phieu* 'bamboo', *phit* 'wrong'; *b- *bɔ* 'father', *bi* 'lard', *bɛ* 'boat', *bi* 'elder sibling'; *ʔb- *ʔbaan* 'village', *ʔbaa* 'crazy', *ʔbɔu* 'leaf', *ʔbao* 'young man'; *m- *mia* 'wife', *mum* 'beard', *mɔn* 'round'; *mw- *mail* 'tree', *muŋ* 'hand'; *hm- *mɔk* 'fog', *maa* 'dog', *men* 'porcupine', *mɔ* 'cooking pot'; *f- *phaa* 'cloud', *phɔn* 'rain', *phaɪ* 'cotton', *phan* *gun* 'to dream'; *v- *vaal* 'sky', *vuc* 'mat', *vun* 'firewood', *vɔi* 'fire'; *w- *waal* 'cubit', *waan* 'free, nothing to do'; *hw- *wai* 'rattan', *wil* 'comb', *waan* 'sweet'.

⁷ DN is undoubtedly a southern (non-Northern) dialect. Beyond this, there is no satisfactory classificatory system for Tai. *p-, *tr- > th-, the classic phonological feature for Li's Central dialect group, evident here, has been shown by Haudricourt (1960) and Strecker (1985) to be an areal feature. Special variations in initial and special vocabulary items do exist, but their appearance is never as consistent as Li would have us believe (Ross 1991) In particular, out of 47 words annotated by Li (1977) as "Not in the Central Tai dialects", my field notes record 22 as present in DN.

Labial Clusters. *pl- *pya1* 'fish', *puak1* 'bark'; *pr- *then1* 'wasp', *thaak1 khəu1* 'to dry rice in the sun', *theŋ1* 'cucumber'; *phl/r- *phyaa1* 'mountain', *phyom1* 'hair', *phyaaak1* 'forehead', *phī1* 'spirit'; *bl- *mīau1* 'betel'; *br- *byaan1* 'to lie', *bia1* 'orphan'; *ʔbl/r- *ʔbyək1* 'flower'; *ml/r *mɛŋ1* 'insect', *myaaak1*, 'slippery', *myeɹ1* 'lightning flash'; *vr- *byəu1* 'evening meal', *byuk1* 'tomorrow', *byaa1* 'knife'; *vl- *dəu1* 'ashes'.

Dentals. *t- *taaŋ1* 'window', *tam1* 'low', *tap1* 'liver'; *th- *thəŋ1* *dī1* 'to arrive', *thua1 ʔdīn1* 'peanut'; *d- *daaŋ1* 'road', *dəŋ1* 'stomach', *daa1* 'river'; *ʔd- *ʔdaɪ1* 'to get', *ʔdai1* 'good', *ʔdaŋ1* 'nose'; *n- *naa1* 'rice field', *naŋ1* 'to sit', *nom1* 'milk'; *hn- *naa1* 'thick', *naa1* 'face', *nu1* 'rat', *naam1* 'thorn'.

Dental Clusters. *tl- *təŋ1* 'banana leaf', *tem1* 'full', *tun1* 'to get up'; *tr- *thaa1* 'eye', *thai1* 'to die'; *thl- *thəi1* 'to plough'; *thr- *thaaŋ1* 'tail', *thin1* 'rock', *thua1* 'head'; *dl- *leŋ1* 'morning meal', *laak1* 'to drag', *lak1* 'to steal'; *dr- *laak1* 'root', *lua1* 'boat'; *ʔdl/r- *ʔduk1* 'bone', *ʔdeŋ1* 'red', *ʔdam1* 'black'; *nl/r- *nam1* 'water', *nok1* 'bird', *nək1* 'outside'.

Liquids. *l- *liŋ1* 'monkey', *luk1* 'child', *lin1* 'tongue', *luam1* 'blood'; *hl- *lek1* 'iron', *ləu1* 'wine', *luaŋ1* 'yellow'; *r- *zuan1* 'house', *zəŋ1* 'nest', *zɛŋ1* 'strong'; *hr- *zaa1* 'cholera', *hau1* 'to bark'.

Sibilants. *s- *ɣua1* 'tiger', *ɣi1* 'four', *ɣip1* 'ten'; *z- *zɔ1* 'to buy', *zay1* 'sand', *zak1* 'to wash'; *ç- *cak1* 'to know', *ce1* 'seven', *cep1* 'to hurt'; *çh- *yik1* 'to tear'; *j- *zɔu1* 'correct', *zaaŋ1* 'elephant', *zai1* 'man'; *ñ- *ɣi1* *ɣip1* 'twenty', *ɣuŋ1* 'mosquito', *niəu1* 'urine'; *hñ- *ɣaa1* 'grass', *ɣiŋ1* 'woman'; *ʔj- *ʔyu1* 'to be at', *ʔyaaak1* 'hungry', *ʔyen1* 'cold'. As yet there are no examples for *j-.

Velars. *k- *kai1* 'chicken', *kop1* 'frog', *ke1* 'old', *kin1* 'to eat'; *kh- *khaa1* 'leg', *khaa1* 'to kill', *khon1* 'feather'; *g- *gɔu1* 'swollen', *gem1* 'salty', *gen1* 'musical instrument made of reeds'; *ŋ- *ŋu1* 'snake', *ŋau1* 'shadow', *ŋai1* 'morning meal'; *hŋ- *hai1* 'moon', *huak1* 'gills', *nuak1* 'deaf'; *x- *khau1* 'to enter', *khop1* 'to bite', *khieu1* 'tooth', *khim1* 'excrement'; *g- *gun1* 'night', *gam1* 'night', *gom1* 'sharp'.

Velar Clusters. *kl- *kua1* 'salt', *kwəi1* 'far', *kwom1* 'banana'; *kr- *səu1* 'near', *kep1* 'rice husk'; *khl- *khəu1* 'fever'; *khr- *sə1* 'to ask', *sai1* 'egg', *saan1* 'toy top'; *gl- *zaan1* 'to crawl'; *gr- *zok1* 'mortar', *zaan1* 'lazy'; *ŋl/r- *ŋaa1* 'sesame'; *xr- *sok1* 'six', *su1* 'ear', *khua1* 'to laugh'.

Labio-Velars. *kw- *kwaan1* 'wide', *kwet1* 'to sweep'; *khw- *ɣwaa1* 'right side'; *gw- *gwə1* 'lame'; *ŋw- *ŋwaa1* 'yesterday', *wan1* 'day', *wam1* 'dumb'; *xw- *khwaa1* 'trousers'; *ɣw- *wai1* 'buffalo', *wan1* 'smoke'.

Laryngeals. *ʔ- *ʔon1* 'soft', *ʔom1* 'sugar cane', *ʔai1* 'to cough'; *h- *haa1* 'five', *həi1* 'shell', *hu1* 'to give'.

4. Tonal Development

Reflexes of proposed PT voiced simple initials and clusters are all voiced in DN. Reflexes also show voiceless/voiced opposition of PT Series 1 and Series 2 (Li 1977) counterparts in all of the PT obstruents. In contrast, reflexes of PT Series 1 and Series 2 sonorants show no opposition. However, *hr- and *hŋ- show a mixture of voiced and voiceless reflexes.

My interpretation of this data (as opposed to Theraphan 1994, with her data) is that DN began a process of tone-splitting but that the process is incomplete. In DN, Series 1 and 2 initials went through a process of attaining low and high tone as corresponding secondary features. The ensuing merger of Series 1 and 2 sonorants meant that for words with these initials, tone alone became the distinguishing feature. For Series 1 and 2 obstruents both initial and tonal opposition was maintained and it is generally not clear which of these, if either, is salient. However, at some point after tone as a secondary feature was attained, PT tones B2 and C1 merged. In this environment, theoretically, we have a unique situation whereby PT Series 1 and 2 initial reflex opposition alone, and not tone, is consistently the distinguishing feature across the whole spectrum of obstruents.

5. Conclusion

Apart from Dao Ngan Tay, two other Tai dialects, the only others I examined in Ha Quang district, are also B-languages: a Tay dialect in Sóc Ha cooperative and a Nung Giang [zaaŋ¹] dialect in Lung Nam cooperative. This brings us to a total of ten B-languages known for Tai⁸. At some time in the future, it will be appropriate to compare the data of all of these languages. What also remains to be done is to determine more exactly the nature of the reflexes which characterise B-languages, the saliency of tones or initial features as distinguishing features in particular environments, and whether or not tone splitting is still active in these dialects.

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⁸ Haudricourt, 3; Zhang (in Theraphan 1994), 1; Theraphan, 3 and myself, 3.

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The Australian National University
Canberra Act 0200
Australia