# Case-marked pronouns in the Taoih language

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Taoih is a Mon-Khmer language spoken in Vietnam and Laos. There are about 15,000-16,000 Taoih people living in Vietnam (some sources give 20,000). They call themselves Ta-ôih, in some places pronounced as Ta-uôih or Ta-uôt. According to old sources, the name Taoih was used by people who lived in the western part of Thưathien Province. The language of this group of Taoih people was investigated by the joint Russian-Vietnamese linguistic expedition in 1984.

The majority of this group of Taoih people live in Laos and call themselves Ta-ôih. Among the Taoih living in Vietnam the largest ethnic group is the Pa-koh ('in the mountains'). This group lives in the mountain region about 1500-1600 m. above sea level. In Laos the Taoih people live on the Taoih Plateau in Saravan Province. In Vietnam there lives another group called Ba-hi or Pa-hi which according to its traditions and origin should be included in the Taoih ethnic group, but some of the Bahi are mingled with the Bru-Vankieu people. So in Vietnam there are three groups of Taoih people. The Taoih language is close to the Bru-Vankieu and Katu languages, belonging to the Katuic branch of Mon-Khmer.

The materials on Taoih and other languages gathered by the expedition and by other linguists show the processes in the evolution of these languages, where each language stands in one or another stage of the evolutionary process. Among these processes the main ones are: changes in the typology of language, changes in the morphological paradigms, shortening of syllables, monosyllabization (Solntsev 1979), the transfer of traits from old morphological elements to new morphological elements or to syntactic elements, the shifting of prefixes to infixes or suffixes,[1] and changes in syntax, especially in word order.

Taoih may be counted as a language in the oldest stage of evolution that is characteristic of the South and Southeast Asian languages. Actually, it demonstrates all the changes mentioned above. Taoih retains blocks of old morphological elements, but they are not productive.

There are case paradigms in the system of personal pronouns (the nouns do not possess such a paradigm). There are also verb clitics *i-* and *u-* which resemble those in Written Mongolian. Some of the cases are also used with demonstratives

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[1] Cf. The analogous process in Sino-Tibetan (Nishida 1994).

and interrogative pronouns. The nouns probably also possessed these case forms previously, but now they rely wholly on the pronouns taken in one or another case form to express relations with other words in a sentence. Some of the case forms can be used only with kinship terms. So the pronouns in Taoih display two functions: a direct function as a special part of speech, and an indirect function as a means of expressing grammatical relations between words or grammatical meanings of other pronouns and nouns (Solntseva 1991). The case forms of Taoih are given in Table 1.

*Table 1.* Taoih pronouns

|          | 1sg.             | 1pl.        | 2sg.                                      | 2pl.  | 3sg.              | 3pl.                                          |
|----------|------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Initial  | a-ku ~ a-kə̌u̯    | mu-hę ~ hę  | a-me ~ a-mai̯                              | i-pę  | ʔǫ ~ a-dǫ         | a-pę                                          |
| Genitive | əŋ-ku ~ əŋ-kə̌u̯  | əŋ-hę       | əŋ-me ~ əŋ-ma ~ əm-mai̯ ~ əm-me            |       | əŋ-ʔǫ ~ əŋ-dǫ     | əŋʔǫ a-pę ~ əŋdo a-pę ~ əŋ-ŋai̯                |
| Dative   | a-ku ~ a-kə̌u̯    | a-hę        | am-me ~ am-mai̯                            |       | a-ʔǫ ~ a-do.      | a-ʔǫ a-pę ~ a-ŋai̯                             |
| Locative |                  | i-hę        | i-me ~ i-mai̯                              |       | i-dǫ              | i-ŋai̯                                         |

The pronouns in these forms were evidently used in ancient times and all are used in modern Taoih. In Taoih, unlike Chinese, the system of pronouns as a whole was not changed, at least as seen from the materials gathered by the expedition. There are three specific traits of the pronoun case marking which I would like to mention.

First, most of the Taoih pronouns are common to the Katuic languages. They are also found in Kadai and Austronesian, and in many other Austroasiatic languages.

Katu - 1sg. *ku*, 1pl. *hę*, 2sg. *mai̯*, 2pl. *pę*, 3sg. *dǫ*
Vankieu - 1sg. *kuʔ*, 1pl. *heʔ*, 2sg. *mai̯*
Arem - 1sg. *kuʔ*, 3sg. *mɔi̯*
Pupeo - 1sg. *kau̯¹*, 2sg. *mi³*
Chru - 1sg. *kəu̯*, 1pl. *buol kɔu̯*

I should note here that of the two 3sg. Taoih pronouns *dǫ* is similar to the 3sg. pronoun found elsewhere in Katuic. The other one is *ʔǫ* which is similar to the 3rd person pronoun *o* used in Old Oguz, Old Khirgis and Uigur texts. This may be a coincidence, but *ʔǫ* in Taoih functions very much like *o* in those old texts and in Written Mongolian. And we should keep in mind that the pronoun *dǫ* used

in Taoih and other Katuic languages means 'this'; it is a demonstrative pronoun used as a personal pronoun, as in Mongolian, where the proper 3sg. pronoun is not used any more.

Second, *a-* which is the marker of the initial case, is used rather rarely and not with every pronoun. I call *a-* a marker of the initial case and not a marker of the nominative case because the pronouns with *a-* can be used either as subjects or objects. But what is important about case forms is that they are used systematically in Taoih grammar; for instance, a pronoun in the initial case form may not be used as an attribute or in a locative function. The opposition of the cases is rather strict. Of course, since the whole system is dying, the use of case markers may not always be obligatory, but when they are used, they strictly follow the grammatical rules. So we cannot say that it is non-systemic (as LaPolla 1994 puts it).

I think there are in reality two types of pure non-systemic marking. One type is connected with the formation of new systems, when the markers as yet are not wholly grammaticalized, hence they are used non-obligatorily or non-systematically. The second type we see when one marker is used instead of another, when there is syncretism (a fusion of two or more forms). In Taoih there are many less-used constructions where the subject of the sentence has the genitive case form; such constructions exist in Taoih alongside the more frequently used constructions where the subject has the intial case form. The use of pronouns as subject in the genitive case always correlates with verb predicates of special meanings (existential, inactive), which might be the result of the split-ergativity nature of Taoih in its previous states of evolution.

Third, in looking at the initial case forms and the dative case forms one can see that these forms are built using materially the same elements as case markers. This certainly is not a syncretical use of cases. We can draw such a conclusion having evidence from other languages where the markers of dative are similar. For instance, we find in Ruc a prefix $pa^l$- marking dative. From this we can make a supposition that previously Taoih also used a prefix with the same initial which was lost later.

A further interesting trait of the pronoun case forms is the use of the 3sg. genitive and dative forms to help form the 3pl. genitive and dative forms. (See Table 1.)

## REFERENCES

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