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Although the sound and lexical changes among the members of the Tai language branch are fairly regular, the devil of classification lies in the details that separate one language from another. Li Fang Kuei's classic *A handbook of comparative Tai* (1977), proposed one taxonomic system with three terms — Northern Tai (NT) versus Central Tai (CT) versus South-western Tai (SWT). This tripartite theory has garnered the allegiance of most Tai specialists. In the tripartite theory one essential feature is a well-established linguistic division of Tai that lies in the geographic north and thus I will call this approach the *NT-Hypothesis*.

In the summer of 2000 I was able to study the Nung An of Jingxi County in Guangxi Province, China. There are about 26,000 speakers of this language located there. A preliminary comparison shows that the language spoken in Jingxi and that of Hà Quảng District, Cao Bằng are nearly identical.

A smaller group of scholars, including most prominently André Haudricourt, insisted on a two-term system, dividing the Tai parent language first into Dioi or ?Yai (corresponding approximately, but not exactly, to Northern Tai) versus Tai Proper. Resting on his work on the Tai languages of Vietnam, I suppose Haudricourt may have been reluctant to accept the term 'northern Tai', as he was aware of many 'northern Tai' features among the Nùng languages of Vietnam, far to the south of the usual line of division between NT and CT languages, (Haudricourt 1956, 1960). Further suspicion about geography as a criterion emerged from the discovery of another 'NT language' much further to the south in Laos called Saek (Haudricourt 1963). The 'non-northern focus' of ?Yai in Tai in Haudricourt's work is a position we can call the ?Yai-Hypothesis. While Haudricourt, to my knowledge, never framed the question so starkly, one can take two views, the NT-Hypothesis versus the ?Yai-Hypothesis, as in reality a discussion about the location of the original homeland of the Tai people and their migration thereafter. Crucial data bearing on the NT versus ?Yai Hypotheses is to be found mostly in Vietnam and this sort of data have often been meagre, recorded in Quốc Ngữ transcription, and, save for the EFEO survey of the 1930s, usually in the form of dictionaries of the language at one location. This paper will provide new data on several Tai languages all gathered in Cao Bằng Province in 1998.

There are still other problems about classfying Tai languages. Deciding whether a given Tai language is or is not a member of this or that branch is not a trivial question, as we have argued recently in writing about the Cao Lan language of northern Vietnam (see Gregerson &

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51

Edmondson 2000). We stated in that paper that Cao Lan might constitute a case of a tertium quid, a kind of a third thing neither NT/Dioi nor CT/Tai Proper, in regard to:¹

its *phonology* — Cao Lan demonstrates some phonological rules regarded as exclusively Northern Tai (NT) and others that have been regarded as Central Tai (CT) features,

its *vocabulary* — Cao Lan shares common Tai vocabulary, but it also has uniquely Central Tai as well as Northern Tai forms too.

In this paper I will investigate the classification of another language of northern Vietnam called Nùng An, because Nùng An was among those regarded by Haudricourt (1960) and Strecker (1985) as '... exhibit[ing] a mixture of ?Yai and Tay-Nung traits', (Strecker 1985: 481) and thus weakening the NT-Hypothesis. I will conclude that Nùng An is not a geographic anomaly at all, because it is not native to this area. Furthermore despite apparent similarities, Nùng An and Cao Lao are, in reality, unalike, because Nùng An appears to have imported its mixed contrasting colours from its progenitors in China. Thus, it did not evolve into a mixed language as a consequence of the migration process as perhaps happened in Cao Lan. Most importantly though, both of these are different from surrounding CT languages of Vietnam, such as Nùng Giang and Tày languages of Cao Bằng Province and NT languages of Vietnam, such as Giáy ?Yai).² Indeed, the evidence I have found suggests strong resemblance between Nùng An and Long'an, 108 km to the east in Guangxi Province, China, which I believe to have been the home of the Nùng An. Thus, Nùng An (and Cao Lan) data should be taken as support for 'migration' in the history of Tai and not for moving the NT/Dioi focus southward toward the Sino-Vietnam border. But, before we examine the linguistics and sociolinguistics of Nùng An, let us assemble a few pieces of information about Nùng An, the culture that speaks it, and the setting among other groups of the area.

1 Introduction

The Nùng An constitute a subgroup of the Nùng nationality, one of the larger of Vietnam's 54 officially recognised minority ethnicities. The Nùng An population is concentrated in Cao Bằng Province at a location 37 km from Cao Bằng City in Quảng Hòa District at Phúc Sen Village and neighbouring Communes such as Đoàn Khôn, Quốc Phong, and Quốc Dân, where the population is 99 per cent Nùng An. Beth Nicolson (pers. comm.) reports that Nùng An speakers also live in Quảng Hòa District at Chí Thảo and Tự Do as well as in Hà Quảng District at Nội Thôn Commune and in Ba Bê District at Cao Ché Commune, see map. In this region the Nùng An have a population of about 10,000. It is unknown how many Nùng An speakers there are altogether.³ The Nùng An are a distinctive and geographically concentrated group with their own native dress, customs, practices, and

Thun for comments on this paper.
It is to be noted though that Nùng Giang does show some surprising NT features lacking in Tày Bảo Lặc

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and Tay Trùng Khảnh of Cao Bằng Province.

³ The Nùng had a total population of 696,300 according to the 1989 census.

language, which is not mutually intelligible with other kinds of Nùng. According to our informant's wife, who is studying the ethnic literature of the Nùng An as a part of a doctoral degree at Hanoi University, the Nùng An tell that they immigrated from Long'an in Guangxi Province some 8–10 generations ago and settled this territory. Today they continue their traditions of wet paddy agriculture using water buffaloes, planting trees to produce charcoal, shamanist medicine men, and using modified Chinese characters, similar to the Chữ Nôm of the Vietnamese.

2 Features of the Nùng An language

The following is intended to provide a preliminary treatment of the initials and tones of Nùng An. Like all Tai languages Nùng An has syllables with initials, rhymes (open syllables probably have vowels that are long as well as CVC and CVVC syllable shapes, which terminate in codas /-p -t -k -m -n -ŋ -i -u/), and a system of six tones. We will not provide details of the rhymes of Nùng An until we have gathered more data.

Initials in Nùng An:

p	pəi ^l	'year'	pət ⁷	'duck'
ph	phu ³	'cloud'	phən ¹	'rain'
²b	2bəət9	'blind'	?baw ¹	'leaf'
m	mal	'dog'	miŋ ²	'name'
f	fei²	'fire'	fəən ²	'firewood'
v	ven ²	'day'	vaai ²	'buffalo'
t	ta ⁶	'river'	tɔ ¹	'wasp'
th	thal	'eye'	theu ¹	'louse, head'
?d	?da ¹	'cloth sling for baby'	?duuut ⁹	'hot'
n	nəək ⁸	'outside'	ກວກ ²	'worm'
ł	łaaŋ ¹	'high'	fom ³	'sour'
1	laau ²	'fat'	ləət ⁸	'blood'
r	raan ²	'house'	rat ²	'mushroom'
S	suuu ²	'ox'	saam ²	'indigo'
tç	tçuŋ ³ tçaau ¹	'spider'	tçai ¹	'plow'
n.	nw ³	'grass'	n.oŋ²	'mosquito'
j	jaai ²	'mother's mother'	jiiu ⁶	'eagle'
k	kuut ⁹	'fern'	phak ⁷ kaat ⁹	'mustard green'
kh	kheen ¹	'arm'	khim ¹	'needle'
ŋ	ரய ²	'snake'	ກູອກ ²	'silver'
h	ha ²	'cogongrass'	hən ²	'person'
?	?aap ⁹	'to bathe'	200i ³	'sugarcane'
kw	kwa ^l	'pumpkin'	kwaaŋ ¹	'sambar deer'

Tones of Nùng An. Nùng An has six tones on CV syllables and two tones each on $CVVC_1$ and CVC_1 syllables (where $C_1 = /-p - t - k/$).⁴

⁴ It will be convenient to transcribe Nùng An *Tone Values* in terms of Y.R. Chao's 'Scale-of-Five system' in which two or more numbers from 1–5 are intended to portray points on a pitch scale with 5 the highest

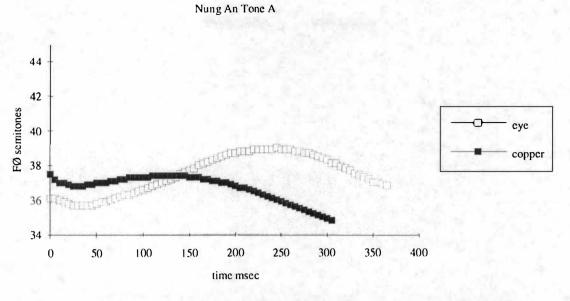


Figure 1: Nùng An Tone A illustrated with tha²¹³¹ 'eye' and toon²²¹ 'copper'

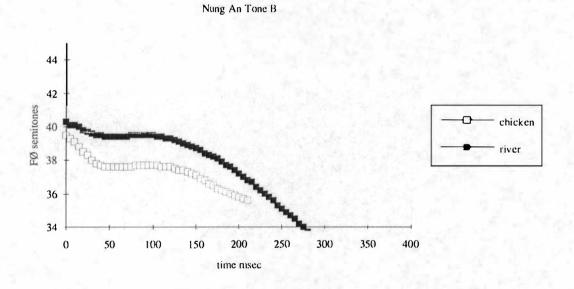


Figure 2: Nùng An Tone B illustrated with $k e i^{21}$ 'chicken' and $t a^{31}$ 'river'

value and 1 the lowest. Thus, 35 will mean a mid-to-high rising tone. At other times I will use *Tone Categories*, which remain rather constant across members of the family even if the Tone Values change. There are thought to have been five original tones called *A*, *B*, *C*, *DL*, and *DS*. These four tones split, according to whether the initial consonant was voiced or voiceless into more tones. I will employ here the Chinese system, where Tone A became in daughter languages Tone 1 and Tone 2; Tone B became Tone 5 and Tone 6; Tone C became Tone 3 and Tone 4; Tone DL became Tone 9 and Tone 10; and Tone DS became Tone 7 and Tone 8. For more on this issue, see Edmondson and Solnit (1997), introduction.

The B tones in Nùng An are quite close in pitch trajectory. They are kept distinct not only by pitch but also by voice quality. The tone category 5 is accompanied by tight throat voice at the end of the syllable. Minimal pairs illustrating this difference are shown above, kei^{21} 'chicken' versus ta^{31} 'river', see Figure 2.

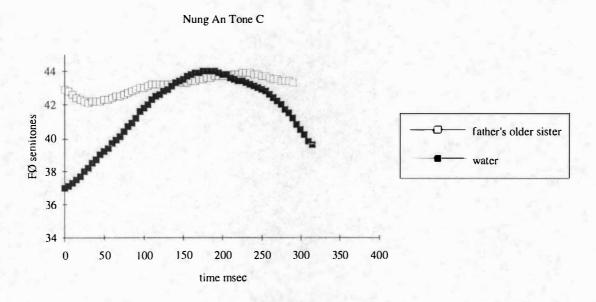


Figure 3: Nùng An Tone C illustrated with pa45 'aunt' and nem253 'water'

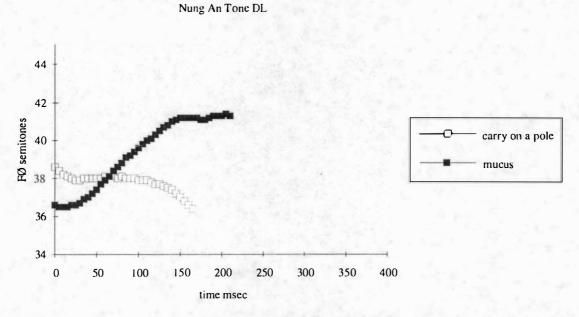


Figure 4: Nùng An Tone DL illustrated with $thaap^{33}$ 'to carry on the ends of a pole' and $muuk^{24}$ 'mucus'

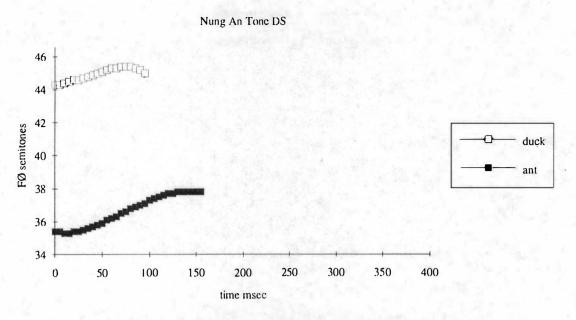


Figure 5: Nùng An Tone DS illustrated with $p = t^{4.5}$ 'duck' and $m = t^{2.3}$ 'ant'

There are also voice quality features in Nùng An. Tone 3 and Tone 4 end in glottal constriction that chokes off the voicing abruptly. This feature is not normally found in NT languages, but it is a prominent feature of CT languages. In addition to the constriction in Tone 3 and 4, Tone 5 shows a kind of slower change from modal to tight throat voice at the end of the syllable. This feature can be seen in Figure 6 below which is an inversely filtered airflow plot, for details on the recording and filtering of this sort of data (see Edmondson & Li 1994).

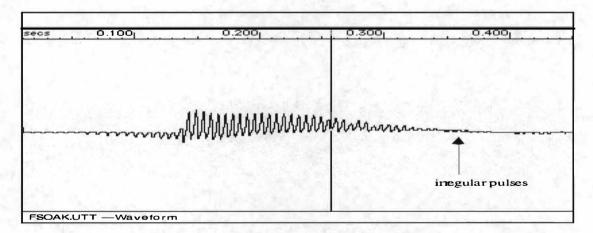


Figure 6: Inversely filtered airflow plot of the syllable ma^{21} 'to soak (rice)'

In Figure 6 particular attention should be paid to the irregular height (amplitude) and nonuniformity of distance (frequency) between glottal pulses at the end of the syllable.

3 Aspiration in Nùng An

With this preliminary look at some of the sound features of Nùng An, let us now turn to the comparative situation of Nùng An. Note first the sources of Nùng An initials. Some of the aspirated stops of the Tai parent language have merged in Nùng An with the plain stops, i.e. $/*p-*ph-/\rightarrow p$; $/*t-*th-/\rightarrow t-$; and $/*k-*kh-/\rightarrow k-$. Thus, Nùng An has:

Gloss	Nùng An	Giáy (NT)	Nùng Giang (CT)
'bamboo'	mei ⁴ pei ⁵		pheu ⁵
'pond'	tem ²	tan ²	tem ²
'male animal'	tvk ⁸	tek ⁸	tek ⁸
'chopsticks'	tul ⁶	tul ⁶	thəu ⁵
'to kill'	ka ³	ka ³	kha ³
'to ride'	ke ⁶	kuui ⁶	khwe ⁵
'son-in-law'	kwi ¹	kuui ¹	khi ¹
'maternal uncle'	kæu ³	아랫동안 같이 다	kjæu ³
'body hair'	phən ¹	pun ¹	khon ¹
'head hair'	phom ¹	pjim ¹	phjam ¹
'taro'	phuik ⁹		phik ⁹
'vegetable'	phak ⁷	pjik ⁷	phjak ⁷
'leg'	kha ^l	ka ¹	kha ^l
'needle'	khim ¹		khjam ¹
'eggplant'	khw ¹	kuu ²	khi ¹

This rule is, of course, the well-known rule of the loss of aspiration in NT that Li (1977:12) noted. As the data above demonstrate, Giáy and Nùng Giang show typical features of NT and CT, respectively, whereas Nùng An is rather ambiguous, having about one-half NT and one-half CT features. As the data below show, the deaspiration processes bled NT of its aspirated stops. Later rules from CT sources appear to have 'fed' or repopulating the aspirated stop categories from original /*f-/ developing into ph-, whereas /*f-/ in Giáy often become v-.

'cloud'	phui ⁴	vш ³	fa ⁴
'cotton'	pha:i ⁵	va:i ⁵	pha:i ³
'rain'	phən ¹	pun ¹	phən ¹
'hand palm'	pha ⁵	va ⁵ fuŋ²	pha ⁵ moŋ ²
'turtle, soft shell'	phul ¹		pha ¹
'dam'	pha:i ^l		pha:i ¹
'dream'	pha ¹ nən ²	pan ¹ hum ²	pho ¹ n_in ²
'to sharpen'	pən ¹		

Another source of aspiration came from original clusters involving the /*-r-/, such as *tr- or *thr-, which also developed into th-. See the list below.

4 Sonorants and sonorant clusters in Nùng An in comparative perspective

Strecker, supporting the claims of Haudricourt, points to the behaviour of old clustered elements *dl/r, *l, *r, *hr, *hw, *thr and finds that in NT languages there is a tendency for vocabulary to merge into *l*- or *n*- in NT languages, whereas CT tends to have separate reflexes for *r, *l, *w and proto-clusters involving *-r-, *-l-, or *-w-. In this case we will again use data from a NT language, Giáy of Lao Cai Province, Vietnam, and a CT language, Nùng Giang for comparison.

Gloss *1-	Nùng An	Giáy	Nùng Giang
'wind'	lem²	ðum ²	lem²
'fingernail'	lip ⁸ mu ²	zit ⁸ fuŋ ²	lap ⁸ mon ²
'blood'	ləət ⁸	lwat ⁸	luut ⁸
'pangolin'	tçit ⁹ rən ⁶	lin ⁶	lin ⁶
*kl/r-			
'head'	rau ⁴	tçau ⁴	
'far'	tçei ¹	tçai ¹	kjwei ^l
'banana'	ko ³	tçoi ³	kui ³
*X1-			
'road'	ran ¹	ðan ¹	ALT A MONT
'rice pestle'	rum ¹	-	<u>-</u>
'six'	rok ⁷	ðok ⁷	khjok ⁷
'ear'	rw ¹	ðш ¹	kh je u ¹
*dl/r-			
'day after tomorrow'	ven² ruı²	ðш²	ven² ləi²
'to steal'	sv k ⁸	ðek ⁸	lek ⁸
'to wash dishes'	luŋ4	lar ⁴	
*г-			
'house'	ra:n ²	ða:n ²	hru:n ²
'rice husk'	ram ²	ðam ²	hrum ²
'dry field'	rei ⁶	ði ⁶	hrei ⁵
'shout, to'	rəən ⁶		hro:ŋ ⁶
*hr-			
'bark'	heu ⁵	ðau ⁵	heu ⁵
'mushroom'	rat ⁷	ðat ⁷	
*hw-			
'comb'	roi ¹	ðoi ¹	vei ¹
*nl/r-			
'water'	nem ⁴	ðem4	nem ⁴
'bird'	nok ⁸	ð>k ⁸	nok ⁸
'outside'	nɔ:k ¹⁰	ðɔ:k ¹⁰	nook ¹⁰

*thr-			
'carry on a pole'	thaap9	ðaap ⁹	thaap9
'tail'	thuŋ ¹	ðuŋ ¹	thaŋ ¹
'stone'	thən ¹	ðin ¹	thən ¹
'loom'	thok ⁷		thok7
'louse'	thau ¹	ðau ^l	thau ¹
'cook, to'	thoŋ ¹	ðuŋ ¹	
'carry hanging'	thiu ³	ðiu ³	thiu ³
'hailstone'	thet ⁷	thap ⁷	

Summarising the comparison above:

Giáy	*1-, *k1/r-, *xr-, *d1/r-, *r-, *hr-, *hw-, *n1/r-, *thr- $\rightarrow \delta$ -	
Nùng An	*kl/r-, *xr-, *r-, *hr-, *hw-	\rightarrow h-, r-, tc-, k-
	*]-	\rightarrow 1-
	* <i>nl/r</i> -	\rightarrow <i>n</i> -
	*thr-	\rightarrow th-
Nùng Giang	*1-, *d1/r-	\rightarrow 1-,
	*kl/r-	$\rightarrow k(1)$ -
	*xr-	\rightarrow khj-
	* <i>r</i> -	\rightarrow hr-
	*hr-	\rightarrow h-
	* <i>hw</i> -	\rightarrow v-
	*thr-	\rightarrow th-

we can see that Nùng An occupies a position much closer to Giáy and is more apt to merge proto-initials than Nùng Giang, which preserves nearly all the contrasts in the parent language.

5 Tone differences, other phonological and lexical differences

Another pattern of NT vis-à-vis CT is that a number of common items are found in the lower tone set, whereas CT and SWT have these in the high set. On this litmus Nùng An sides with the North.

Gloss	Nùng An	Giáy	Nùng Giang
'excrement'	khi ⁴	?e ⁴	kh jei ³
'rice'	heu4	hau4	kheu ³
'bowl'	tui ⁴	tui ⁴	thui ³
'bean'	tu ⁶		thu ⁵
'bitter'	ham ²	ham ²	kham ¹
'eggplant'	khw ¹	kw²	khi ¹
'son-in-law'	kwi ²	kuui ²	khi ¹

There are also some differences of tone or segmental elements that seem to be restricted to individual words. First consider the items in which Nùng An resembles the NT languages.

Gloss	Nùng An	Giáy	Nùng Giang
'ladder'	lai ¹	lai ¹	?dai ¹
'this'	nəi ³	ni ⁴	
'a fly'	neŋ ²	nɛŋ²	miŋ ²
'sleep, to'	nə:n²	nin ²	nu:n ²
'meat'	no ⁶	no ⁶	ni ⁴

Finally there are many items (see Zhang & Wei 1997) in which NT languages and CT languages have a lexical difference. Consider the items below, which show similarity between columns 1 and column 3, that is Nùng An and Nùng Giang, and differ from column 2, Giáy.

'cloth'	pha:i ⁵	paŋ²	pha:i ³
'moon'	ha:i ¹	?dwan ¹	ha:i ¹

This table shows cognate items between column 1 and column 2, that is Nùng An and Giáy, and are different from the items in column 3, Nùng Giang, a CT language.

'sun'	thuŋ ¹ ŋon ²	tçan ³³ wan ²	tha ¹ wen ²
'clothing'	pəu ¹	pu ⁶	<i>Өш</i> ³
'sky'	2bən1	2bun1	fa ⁴
'horn'	kək ⁷	kok ⁷	kok ⁷
'yesterday'	luun ²	luı:n ²	va ²
'tiger'	kok9	kuk ⁹	łwa ¹
'flower'	va ²	?dok ⁹ va ²	2bjok ⁷
'evil spirit'	maŋ ^l		phi ¹
'yellow'	hɛŋ³	he:n ³	lurn ¹
'wing'	fəət ¹⁰	fuuut ¹⁰	pek ⁷
'head'	rau ¹	tçeu ¹	thu ¹ khjæi ¹
'slippery'	laau ²	laau ²	laau ²
'rice mortar'	rum ¹		kjok ⁸
'wide'	kwaaŋ ⁵		kwaaŋ ³
'right'	kwa ²		ła ¹
'bean'	tu ⁶		thu ⁵

6 Conclusion

The phonological and lexical features of Nùng examined above show that most lexical items found in Nùng An are typical of NT and that the phonological rules are NT as well, except for two, (1) the $*f \rightarrow ph$ - rule and (2) the $*thr \rightarrow th$ - rule. However, Nùng An seems not to have borrowed these two phonological rules from the neighbouring Tai languages of Vietnam, such as Nùng Giang, but instead to have brought them from Long'an in Guangxi, which has exactly these two phonological rules as well, as the data below show (Long'an data taken from Zhuangyu Yinxi 1959):

Gloss	Nùng An	Long'an ⁵
(Examples of $*f \rightarrow ph$ -) 'cloud' 'rain'	phur ⁴ phən ¹	phur ⁴ phաn ¹
(Examples of $*thr \rightarrow th$ -) 'stone'	thin ¹	thin
'carry on end of pole' 'to die'	thaap ⁹ thai ¹	thaap ⁹ thai ¹

Thus, Nùng An and Long'an appear to have the same mix of NT and CT lexical and phonological features. The simplest account of this similarity accords with the report of the people themselves; they brought these NT features with them when they immigrated from further north in an area located on the border between NT and CT areas. The explanation for the NT features is to be found in the immigrant status of a NT people to a CT-speaking area in Cao Bang Province and it should not be considered support for the ?Yai-Hypothesis.

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⁵ The Long'an data available to me is rather limited, but it is already apparent that there are also some important differences between the Nùng An data I collected and the vernacular of Genju Siqu Village, Long'an County, as the velar series are rather different and the Genju Siqu Village vernacular appears to have more Chinese loan words (see Zhuangyu Yinxi 1959:317–323).

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