
Reviewed by Pranee Kullavanijaya*

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The voluminous anthology, *The Tai-Kadai Languages*, has taken some time to appear. However, it has proven worth waiting for. This single volume contains extensive as well as deep information about Tai-Kadai linguistics. For students of linguistics, it will strengthen foundation knowledge for an understanding of important and controversial issues concerning comparative Tai and a broad view of languages in the Tai-Kadai language family. Besides, it presents ongoing works on synchronic linguistics, especially in the area of syntax and semantics. For researchers of Tai-Kadai linguistics, several articles offer food for thought and for further studies.

Beginning with comparative linguistics, Luo’s article, “Sino-Tai and Tai-Kadai; another look” sets the stage for a discussion of a long-running controversy in comparative Tai, that is, the Sino-Tai genetic relationship. The paper not only gives an overview of the controversy but also presents interesting new evidence in support of the Sino-Tai relationship. Certainly, the evidence given invites further pro-con studies.

Other articles in the area of historical and comparative linguistics can be divided into 2 groups along the line of language family branches. The first group deals with languages in the southwestern Tai branch. This includes Edmondson’s article on the northern tier of southeast Tai languages, loosely known as ‘Shan’ dialects; Hartman’s paper on Lue; Ferlus’s on the Tai dialects of Nghe-An; and Morey’s on the Tai languages of Assam.

Ethnic names such as Shan or Lue may be useful to researchers of Tai in their field work. But when it comes to what exactly Shan or Lue, are, one finds that a clear cut answer cannot be given. For linguists, certain linguistic features or certain

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sound changes can be used as a distinguishing criterion. However, for the general public, ethnic names such as Lue or Shan can communicate better than the *b > p criterion. Edmondson studies the ‘Shan’ dialects in 44 locations. Using tonal development and certain vowel and consonant changes, he manages to classify the “Shan” dialects or, using his proposed terms, the northern tier of South-east Tais, into 3 subgroups: Tai Khamti, Southern Shan and Northern Shan. The subgrouping is not possible if one goes by the terms ‘Shan’ because people in this area call themselves “Tai”. Moreover, Edmondson has pointed out that Tai Sa and Tai Loi do not speak Tai although they call themselves Tai. It is not easy, therefore, to identify a speaker in absolute terms, either linguistically or ethnically. Hartmann portrays this same complication interestingly in his article on Lue languages. Lue, Khuen, Yuan, Lao and White Tai are mutually intelligible, but the speakers of these languages do not identify themselves as the same people. In this area, Hartmann points out, people move in and out of their communities regularly and this makes any absolute answer impossible.

Morey’s article on the Tai languages of Assam and Ferlus’s article on the Tai languages of Nghe-An give informative sketches of the sub-dialects in each group. The information serves as a solid background for anyone who wants to concentrate on these dialects which have been, up to now, rarely studied or available. What should be noted is Morey’s statement about Turung. Based on linguistic evidence and field work interviews, he points out that Turung speakers now speak a Tibeto-Burman dialect. If they once spoke a Tai language, it must have been a long time ago, since the Tai language that some Turungs still speak, is in fact the Tai language of other Tai groups.

The other groups of papers are on less studied Tai languages and distantly related languages to Tai: Kam, Sui, Hli and Kra languages. The paper on Bouyei by Snyder gives information, not only on the phonological system of a less studied Tai language, but also on the sub dialects of Bouyei.

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only phonology, word classes, syntactic constructions but also narratives and some
sociolinguistic issues. The description of sentence final particles is revealing and
will serve as a reference for anyone working on FP in Tai. Papers on Sui, Hli and
Kra languages, although not as relatively detailed, give sufficient information for
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that shares features with Sui, Mulao and Maonan. A list of synonyms and basic
vocabulary given in the paper may serve as preliminary data for a sociolinguistic
study of this language. The article on the Hlai language by Ostapirat is a short but
very informative paper. The author manages to describe how Hlai sub-dialects are
different and similar to each other, using the development of tones, vowels and
consonants as criteria. The last chapter of the volume is a paper on the Kra or Krada
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described. Tone development and consonant development are discussed. All articles
in distantly related languages to Thai and also some papers in the first group indicate
that, at present, when any Tai-Kadai dialect is described, not only phonological
information is given, but also grammatical information both at the word and
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research work, diachronically and synchronically, into the grammars of the Tai-
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another group of papers. These are papers on synchronic syntax and semantics.
Diller’s “Resources for Thai language Research” is indeed the gem of this part.
Considering that the paper is the work of one man, it is amazing how he is able to
cover linguistic works in Thai over a hundred years and to group them conveniently.
He outlines various aspects of works done on the Thai language: orthography,
phonetics and phonology, syntax and semantics, word structures and classes,
sociolinguistic issues, comparative and historical issues, contemporary issues such
as grammaticalization, aspects, serial verb constructions and typology. Not only does he manage to cover all these aspects with precision, but he also offers his own analysis which demonstrates his insight into Thai. The references given at the end of the paper are a gold mine for Thai researchers, especially students of Thai linguistics.

In addition to the overview of syntax and semantics by Diller, there are several papers dealing with syntactic and semantic aspects in Thai. These articles contribute significantly to linguistics in this area and will serve as a reference source and framework for young researchers in the field. In his paper, “Verb and multi-verb constructions in Lao”, Enfield points out that in Lao a string of verbs in a sentence is highly structured because there is no word form change, or, in other words, no morphological surface marker of the relationships in the string. The highly structured sequence needs an analysis of the syntactic and semantic relationships of the verbs and other related components in a sentence. Enfield begins with basic verb constructions and then goes on to multi-verb constructions, or, in a more common terms, serial verb constructions. In dealing with verb constructions, he emphasizes ellipsis features of the verbs, semantic classification of the verbs (Aspectual features of verbs) and argument movements. By these 3 features, he can successfully describe valency of verbs, sentence ambiguity, and alternative constructions. The article illustrates unique characteristics of Thai and Lao (probably of other Tai languages) and is highly recommended for students interested in verb phrase constructions, and grammatical categories such as aspect. What may make this article hard to follow is a number of special terms such as vector events and disposal constructions. Also, a lack of sentence examples for the verbs discussed may lose the reader, for instance, kaak “to be hoisted” is given as an example of verb in a resultant state transitive construction where agent is unexpressed and not contextually retrievable. Here, the reader may not be able to provide a sentence that helps to better understand this verb category. Despite these small complaints, the article is packed with valuable insights into Tai languages.

Grammaticalization has been an issue seriously studied in Thai. In this volume there are three papers dealing with grammaticalization. In his paper “Bipolar distribution of a word and grammaticalization in Thai”: a discourse
perspective”, Iwasaki calls for the actual use of the language in a discourse as the data for grammaticalization. As he says, a language change is evident in language use. The verb /hây/ “to give” is grammaticalized to a preposition, functioning as a benefactive marker as a result of a clause boundary loss. Through a move of this preposition to the mid layer of a clause, /hây/ becomes a sentence modal with malefactive function. As can be seen, grammaticalization can be accounted for from a discourse perspective which can yield an interesting view of grammaticalization in Thai. However, in my opinion, some mechanisms, for example, amalgamation, probably need more explanation to see how they really work.

Another paper in connection with grammaticalization is “Directional verbs as success markers in Thai: another grammaticalization path” by Kingkarn Thepkanjana and Satoshi Uehara. Six directional verbs, /pay, maa, khūn, lōŋ, khâw, ñ/ are studied to see how they develop into grammaticalized units. Metaphor is obviously at work when a thinking verb such as /khît/ “to think” co-occurs with a directional verb such as /ñ/ ‘out’. At this stage, the grammaticalization process is certainly in progress. The third paper on grammaticalization by Pranee Kullavanijaya is on /thī/ a polyfunctional word in Thai. This study shows how the word was grammaticalized into nine functions during the four periods of Thai history. /thī/ functioning as a noun occurs in all four periods, but the other six functions appeared only from the Ratanakosin period. The data studied show a different pathway of a grammaticalized noun, that is, the complementary marker and relative marker come before a nominanalyzer function.

Somsonge Burusphat presents a historical paper that is not about grammaticalization but about a controversial word in Thai, /k5/, a narrative marker. Somsonge proposes that this narrative marker was a Khmer borrowed word, although she quotes Wiyada’s work (1981) stating that the word was not found in Khmer inscriptions being studied then. Somsonge then gives an explanation of why in the Ramkamhaeng inscription is currently spelled. Also, she suggests that in the Ramkamhaeng inscription was probably pronounced with short vowel and low tone. The word adopted a falling tone in the mid-Ratanakosin period. A long vowel developed later. I would like to give a different opinion which is entirely a speculation. The tone marker in the Ramkamgaeng inscription may mark the word
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As Somsonge shows that k5ɔ is an areal feature, Amara Prasitrathasint proposes that a four-word-elaborate expression in Yunnan Tai Lue, is a Pan-Tai cultural trait. This seems to be confirmed nicely in Hudak’s paper entitled “Tai-Aesthetics”

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It took a long time for me to read all the papers in this significant volume and it occurs to me how much time the editors had to spend urging the writing of the papers, collecting the manuscripts and preparing all the material for publishing. I am certain that everyone in the field of Tai-Kadai linguistics will appreciate their efforts and hope that there will be a brave team to produce a new volume in Tai-Kadai linguistics in the near future. My only complaint about this volume is the use of small letters that slow down the reading for an elderly person.

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