

ON SIAMESE JAAI

Fang Kuei Li

There are four terms for grandparents in the Tai languages, for example, Siamese *puu* B1 'paternal grandfather', *jaa* B2 'paternal grandmother', *taa* A1 'maternal grandfather', and *jaai* A2 'maternal grandmother'.¹ On the whole the four words are retained in most of the Tai dialects, although some words may show shifts of meaning. Siamese *jaai* A2 is phonologically an anomaly from the point of view of comparative Tai.

If we compare forms from other Tai dialects of the Southwestern branch to which Siamese belongs, we find that Lao has *mɛɛ* B2 *naai* A2 'man's mother-in-law', which is comparable to Siamese *mɛɛ* B2 *jaai* A2 with the same meaning.² The semantic development from maternal grandmother to man's mother-in-law is quite common among the Tai languages, and apparently is derived from the practice of calling one's mother-in-law from the standpoint of one's children. A similar development is Lao *phɔɔ* B2 *puu* B1 'woman's father-in-law', from *puu* B1 'paternal grandfather', and *mɛɛ* B2 *naa* B2 'woman's mother-in-law', from *naa* B2 'paternal grandmother'.

All other Tai dialects of the Southwestern branch agree with the Lao form *naui* A2, namely, Black Tai *naai* A2 'maternal grandmother', White Tai *mɛ* B2 *nai* A2 'man's mother-in-law', Shan *nai* A2 'grandmother, a respectful appellation for any aged female', Lü *nai* A2 'wife's mother', etc. phonologically Siamese initial *j-* does not correspond normally to *n-* of the other Southwestern dialects, and it is unlikely that we can reconstruct a special proto-initial for this word

alone. If we examine forms from dialects of the other branches, there are other irregularities.

Among the Central dialects, Lungchow has mee B2 *taai* A1 'woman's mother, man's mother-in-law', *naaŋ* A2 *taai* A1 'maternal grandmother', Nung *me* B2 *taai* A1 'grandmother', Tay *taai* A1 'wife's mother', Tho *taai* B1 'maternal grandmother', and T'ienpao *taai* A1 'maternal grandmother'. All the Central dialects, as far as we know, have a dental stop initial.

The Northern dialects agree with Central dialects in having a dental stop initial, for example, Wuming *tai* A1 'man's mother-in-law, maternal grandmother', Po-ai *taai* B1 'man's mother-in-law', maternal grandmother', *jaa* B2 *taai* B1 'maternal grandmother', T'ienchow *taai* B1 'maternal grandmother, wife's mother', Hsilin *taai* B1 'ibid', Lingyun *taai* 'ibid.', etc. However the Northern dialects tend to have tone B1, rarely A1 for this word. In the survey of Pu-yi dialects, the Northern Tai dialects in Kweichow, only one among forty dialects shows tone A1 (p. 245), while the Central dialects normally have tone A1, rarely B1.

Thus this word shows a correspondence of Siamese *j-* to the other Southwestern dialects *n-*, and to the Central and the Northern dialects *t-*. It would evidently be an ad hoc reconstruction to dream up a Proto-Tai initial on the basis of one word, without support from parallel phenomena. We might also consider only the majority, since the Northern and the Central dialects agree, and reconstruct a Proto-Tai **t* for this word, leaving the Siamese and the Southwestern forms as aberrant developments. While the temptation of trying to accomodate the majority of cases is strong in the writing of phonological rules, we might miss some important insight into the development of this word.

The Siamese form *jaai* A2, since it is found only in one of the Southwestern dialects, must be considered an innovation on the part of Siamese. It is apparently a case of contamination of words of paired semantic contents. Namely, the

initial consonant of the word for maternal grandmother is replaced by the initial of the word for paternal grandmother. It originates perhaps from such common or similar expressions as *puu* B1 *jaa* B2 *taa* A1 *jaai* A2 'ancestors, paternal and maternal grandparents', cf. also Lao *phoo* B2 *mee* B2 *puu* B1 *naa* B2 *taa* A1 *naai* A2 'ancestors, parents and grandparents'.

The Central and the Northern dialect forms come from another source of contamination with words of paired semantic contents, namely replacing the initial consonant of the word for maternal grandmother with the initial of the word for maternal grandfather. It originates perhaps from such expressions as Po-ai *taa* A1 *taai* B1 'maternal grandparents, wife's parents'. For such contaminations of words of similar semantic contents in the Indo-European languages, one may compare Germanic *f-* in the word for four, a contamination with the word for five, and Latin *qu-* in *quinque* 'five', a contamination with *quattuor* 'four'.

If this hypothesis is correct, we may assume that the Proto-Tai word for maternal grandmother has an initial **n-* as preserved in a number of the South-western dialects. The initial *t-* in the majority of dialects is not original. The Proto-Tai **naai* A2, then, may be compared with the Chinese word 孀 Ancient Chinese **nei* (also pronounced **nai*²), which is given as a word for mother (Kwang-ya) or as a word for mother in the Ch'u dialect (Kwang-yün 楚人呼母). One version of Ch'ieh-yun gives it as the word for mother in the I dialect (夷人呼母)³. The common modern Chinese kinship term *nainai* 'grandmother', a reduplicated form frequent in kinship terms, may be related to this.

NOTES

1. A1, A2, B1, B2, etc. after the cited forms denote the tone classes, cf. F.K. Li, Consonant clusters in Tai. *Language* 30 (1954) 368-79.
2. For the classification of Tai dialects, see F.K. Li, a tentative classification of Tai dialects. *Culture in History*, ed. by S. Diamond. (1960) 951-9.
The languages cited in this article are taken from the following sources, except my own unpublished field notes.
Lao : E. Guignard, *Dictionnaire francais-laotien*. 1912.
Black Tai : E. Diguët, *Etude de la langue tai*. 1895.
White Tai : G. Minot, *Dictionnaire tay blanc-francais*. BEFEO 40. 1940.
Shan : J.N. Cushing, *A Shan-English dictionary*. 1914.
Nung : F.M. Savina, *Dictionnaire etymologique francais-nung-chinois*. 1924.
Tay : F.M. Savina, *Dictionnaire tay-annamite-francais*. 1910.
Tho : E. Diguët *Etude de la langue tho*. 1910.
Lungchow : F.K. Li, *The Tai dialect of Lungchow*. 1940.
Dioi : J. Esquirol and G. Williatte, *Essai de dictionnaire dioi-francais*. 1908.
Wuming : F.K. Li, *The Tai dialect of Wuming*. 1956.
Pu-yi : Pu-i-yü tiao-ch'a pao-kao 布依語調查報告 1959.
3. Cf. Shih-yün hui-pien, p. 132 十韻集編 1937.