

THE TONES OF THE TAI DIALECT OF SONGKHLA

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In a most interesting article published in a recent number of this journal⁽¹⁾, Professor Mary Haas discusses the tones of four Tai dialects (Siamese, Nakhonsithammarat, Chiangmai and Roi-et) in terms of the dual system of tone categories and consonant classes commonly postulated for Proto-Tai. It happened that at the time the article came into my hands one of my post-graduate students in London, Miss Vichintana Chantavibulya, had just completed as part of her work for the London M.A. Degree a thesis on the phonetics and phonology of her own Southern Tai dialect⁽²⁾, which is that spoken in Songkhla (Singora), some hundred miles to the south of Nakhonsithammarat. Since the thesis concerned, like most theses submitted for University degrees, is likely to be difficult of access to many scholars interested in its field of study, it may be helpful to draw attention briefly here to such features of the tonal behaviour of Songkhla as appear relevant to Professor Haas' paper⁽³⁾.

As might be expected from its geographic situation, Songkhla bears a close resemblance to Nakhonsithammarat. There are seven tones in both dialects and the relation of the tones to the initial consonant classes is the same. There are, however, differences in the actual pitches and pitch contours used. Following the plan of the chart drawn up by Professor Haas to show the combinations of tone categories and consonant classes in Nakhonsithammarat and the resultant pitch contours, we set out below a similar chart for Songkhla:

(1) "The Tones of Four Tai Dialects" by Mary R. Haas, *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica*, Vol. XXIX, 1958.

(2) The title of the thesis is "The Phonology of the Syllable in Songkhla, a Southern Thai Dialect".

(3) A detailed phonetic description of the tones and of other features of the pronunciation of Songkhla is given in Miss Chantavibulya's thesis, cited above. In an earlier thesis (in Siamese) presented for the M.A. degree of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, in 1957, Miss Chantavibulya compares the pronunciation and vocabulary of Songkhla and Siamese (Thai). The title of this thesis is "A Comparison between the Bangkok dialect and Songkhla, a Southern dialect".

	A			B			C			D(S)			D(L)		
	1H	1M	2	1H	1M	2	1H	1M	2	1H	1M	2	1H	1M	2
High Rising	×			×						×					
Low rising		×			×						×				
Mid falling			×												
Low level						×									×
High falling							×						×		
Mid-level								×						×	
Low falling									×			×			

It will be seen that the “combinations across tone categories”⁽⁴⁾ observed by Professor Haas as effecting in Nakhonsithammarat the reduction of a theoretically possible nine-tone system for smooth syllables to a seven-tone system hold good also for Songkhla; that is to say, in Professor Haas’ words, “the actual tone of A-1H is the same as that of B-1H, and likewise for A-1M and B-1M”⁽⁴⁾ in both dialects, notwithstanding the fact that in Nakhonsithammarat A-1M and B-1M are pronounced with a high falling pitch as contrasted with a high rising pitch in Songkhla, while A-1H and B-1H are pronounced with a mid-gliding pitch in Nakhonsithammarat, but with a low rising pitch in Songkhla.

Songkhla is no exception to the general rule that “in all known Tai dialects, the actual tones developed in tone category D always coincide with certain actual tones developed in tone categories A, B and C”⁽⁵⁾, but the pattern for short vowels differs from that in Nakhonsithammarat. Whereas in Nakhonsithammarat D.S-1H “coincides” with C-1H and D.S-1M with B-2, in Songkhla D.S-1H coincides with A-1H and B-1H, and D.S-1M with A-1M and B-1M.

In conclusion, the examples of Nakhonsithammarat words cited by Professor Haas and described by her in terms of tone category, consonant class, and actual tone, are here set alongside their Songkhla equivalents:

(4) See Haas, *op. cit.*, p. 822.

(5) *op. cit.* p. 823.

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Tone category and consonant class	Example	Actual Tone		Gloss
		Nakhonsithammarat	Songkhla	
A-1H	maa	High falling	High rising	dog
A-1M	kin	Mid gliding	Low rising	to eat
A-2	maa	Mid falling	Mid falling	to come
B-1H	sii	High falling	High rising	four
B-1M	kaj	Mid gliding	Low rising	chicken
B-2	phoo	Rising	Low level	father
C-1H	haa	High	High falling	five
C-1M	kaaw	Mid	Mid level	nine
C-2	maa	Low	Low falling	horse
D.S-1H	sib	High	High rising	ten
D.S-1M	ced	Rising	Low rising	seven
D.S-2	nog	Low	Low falling	bird
D.L-1H	chiig	High	High falling	to tear
D.L-1M	peed	Mid	Mid level	eight
D.L-2	luug	Rising	Low level	child