

Phonology and Morphology In Tai-Phake

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Introduction

Most of the linguists believe that the Standard-Thai used nowadays in Thailand is a Tai dialect. The language of the Tai-Phake is also classified as a Tai dialect. So the study of the Tai-Phake dialect helps throw light on the Standard-Thai of Thailand.

Historical Background

Tai-Phake is a minority language spoken in ten villages-Nam-Phake, Tipam-Phake, Bor-Phake, Munglang, Ning-kam, Phaneng, Manmo, Nonglai, Long and Lungkung-in Assam, India. The Indian Census Report of 1971 gives 1,800 as the number of speakers of this language. The etymology of term Phake or Phakial is very interesting. It is a combination of two words : pha + ke; 'pha' means 'rock island' or 'king' or 'royal officer' and 'ke' means 'ancient' or 'old'. Thus it means 'ancestors of a very old dynasty' or 'dwellers of a very old rocky island', or 'descendants of old royal officers'.

Tai-Phake people are mainly agriculturists, and paddy is their chief crop. They have their own rice-fields and also vegetable gardens in their own plots. Their houses are mostly made of wood, some are high enough to keep the cattle under during the night. Most of them have their own cattle for cultivating their rice-fields and bulls for pulling bullock-carts. Apart from agriculture, some people engage in breeding pigs, poultry etc. for sale and for their own consumption. Most of them, however, are self-sufficient in food grains. Their food habits are almost the same as the other Assamese. They are non-vegetarians and rice is their main food.

Tai-Phake people are peace loving. They are the followers of Buddhism and are very religious. Each village has a monastery which is used for collective worship and looked after by a resident monk. Various socio-religious functions

are performed there. The monastery is centrally located in the village. Other communal institutions like schools etc. are located near the monastery.

Phonology

The inventory of phonemes of Tai-Phake consists of fifteen consonants, two semi-vowels, ten vowels and six tones. The following is the inventory of segmental phonemes :

Consonants of Tai-Phake

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
PLOSIVE						
Vl.unas	p		T	c	k	?
Vl.as	ph		TH		kh	
NASALS						
Vd.	m		N	n	ŋ	
FRICATIVES						
Vl.			s			h
LATERAL						
Vd.			L			
SEMI-VOWELS						
Vd.	w			y		

Minimal pairs

/ p, t, c, k, ? /

/ pá: /	“fish”
/ tá: /	“eye”
/ cá: /	“cover”
/ ká: /	“crow”
/ ?á: /	“aunt”

/ ph, th, kh /

/ phă: /	“wall”
/ thă: /	“shave off”
/ khă: /	“leg”

/ p, ph /

/ pí /	“year”
/ phí /	“fat”
/ pèk /	“bark”
/ phèk /	“taro”

/ t, th /

/ tày /	“below”
/ thày /	“here”
/ tá: /	“eye”
/ thá: /	“paint”

/ k, kh /

/ kăy /	“hen”
/ khăy /	“egg”
/ kă:y /	“last”
/ khá:y /	“buffalo”

/ m, n, ñ, ɳ /

/ má: /	“come”
/ ná: /	“paddy-field”
/ ñá: /	“come across”
/ ɳá: /	“sesame”

/ s, h /

/ sű /	“you (pl.)”
/ hŭ /	“ear”
/ sâ:y /	“left”
/ hâ:y /	“bad”

/ ?, h /

/ ?à:p /	“bathé”
/ hà:p /	“carry by shoulder pole”
/ ?áw /	“take”
/ háw /	“we”

/ n, l /

/ nam /	“black”
/ lam /	“classifier”
/ năŋ /	“hide”
/ lăŋ /	“back”

/ w, y /

/ wán /	“invite”
/ yá:n /	“hang down”

All Tai dialects of Thai in Thailand have / b /, / d / and / f /, but with the exception of Tai-Aiton, all the other four varieties of Tai in India (Tai-Phake, Tai-Khamti, Tai-Torung, Tai-Khamyang) do not have / b /, / d / and / f /.

Vowels of Tai-Phake

The lexical items collected yield the following inventory of Tai-Phake vowel phoneme:

	Front		Central		Back	
	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long
Close	i		ɯ		u	
Close-maid	e				o	
Open-mid	ɛ		ə		ɔ	
Oper			a	a:		

Minimal pairs

/ i, ɯ, u /

/ kín /	“eat”
/ kɯn /	“each other”
/ kún /	“uproot”

/ e, ə, o /

/ khě /	“fishing net”
/ -khě /	“eggplant”
/ khǒ /	“bridge”

/ ε , a, ɔ /		
	/ khěn /	“arm”
	/ khǎn /	“expensive”
	/ khǒn /	“metaphorically”
/ u, ə /		
	/ mu /	“handé”
	/ mə /	“you”(sg.)
/ o, ɔ /		
	/ sǒn /	“garden”
	/ sǒn /	“teach”
/ a, a: /		
	/ kát /	“cold”
	/ ká:t /	“market”
/ u, o /		
	/ súp /	“wear”
	/ sóp /	“mouth”
/ i, e /		
	/ mít /	“knife”
	/ mét /	“seed”
/ e, ε /		
	/ pét /	“duck”
	/ pé:t /	“eight”

Note :

For most Tai-Phake vowels, there is no length distinction, and these are considered short.

Tai-Phake the short vowels have slightly lengthened allophones in final position. Thus, the /i/ in /pí/ “year” is longer than the /i/ in /mák-phít/ “chilli”

The only vowel length contrast in medial position in Tai-Phake is the one between /a/ and /a:/. For example,

/ kát /	“cold”
/ ká:t /	“market”
/ wán /	“day”
/ wá:n /	“invite”

Occurrences

- 1) No word begins with a vowel in TP.
- 2) All vowels occur only in the medial and final position or open syllables.
- 3) All short vowels can occur in the open syllable in TP, and never occur in the final position.
- 4) No long vowels occur in TP except /a:/.
- 5) Tai-Phake does not have any diphthongs.

Word Structure

Tai-Phake words may be monosyllabic, disyllabic, or polysyllabic.

Monosyllabic words

The structure of the monosyllabic words in Tai-Phake is as follows:

ccvT TP

/ tá: /	“eye”	/ mâ: /	“horse”
/ ká: /	“crow”	/ khă: /	“leg”
/ má: /	“come”	/ nă: /	“face”
/ ná: /	“paddy-field”		

cvcT TP

/ kín /	“eat”	/ nɯŋ /	“one”
/ nom /	“smell”	/ lăŋ /	“back”
/ nɛŋ /	“red”	/ haŋ /	“net”
/ pét /	“eight”	/ kòn /	“bottom”

ccvvT TP

/ tlá: /	“law”	/ klá: /	“foriegn”
/ pyá: /	“show”		

ccvcT TP

/ myét /	“holly”	/ myék /	“imagine”
/ phyék /	“spoil”		

ccvvcT TP

/ kyă:m /	“try”	/ khyá:k /	“once time”
/ pya:n /	“translate”	/ kya:n /	“quickly”

In monosyllabic words with the structures ccvvT, ccvcT and ccvvcT in Tai-Phake, /y/ is always the second member of the cluster.

Disyllabic words

The structure of disyllabic words in Tai-Phake is the following :
 (The mark · shows the syllabic boundary)

cvT · cvvT

TP

- / tu · la: / “constipation”
- / sa · lā: / “teacher”
- / tɛ · na: / “embankment”

cvvcT · cvT

TP

- / sā:ŋ · phó? / “papaya”

cvcT · cvvT

TP

- / pi · hǔ / “ear”
- / lák · ká: / “crow”
- / mók · mù / “butterfly”

cvT · cvcT

TP

- / la · piŋ / “leeché”
- / ci · pík / “alms-bowl”

cvvcT · cvcT

TP

- / phâ:p · kan / “fighting”
- / ma:ŋ · lék / “nail”

cvvT · cvvcT

TP

- / ca: · tā:ŋ / “table”
- / ta: · lā:ŋ / “court”

cvT · cvvcT

TP

- / sa: · lá:p / “cockroach”

cvcT · cvcT

TP

- / hôk · lă:y / “ladder”
- / sǎŋ · kɛn / “new year”

cvvcT · cvvcT

TP

- / pa:ŋ · tā:y / “rabbit”

cvvT · cvT

TP

- / na: · li / “o’clock”
- / ka: · le / “visit”

cvt · cvt	TP	
	/ p᷑ · l᷑ /	“union”
	/ pí · ló /	“sister in law”
	/ si · mi /	“candle”
	/ mí · mi /	“cat”
	/ sa · k᷑ /	“lamp”
cvct · ccvvt	TP	
	/ t᷑m · tlá: /	“worship”
	/ phúk · klá: /	“carpet”

It should be noted that the disyllabic words are rare in Tai-Phake andin no Disyllabic word begins with a cluster.

Polysyllabic words

In Tai-Phake polysyllabic words are rare. The seven such words collected are

cvT · cvvT · cvT		
	/ ka · la: · c᷑ /	“bittern”
cvT · cvT · cvcT		
	/ na · hu · kây /	“sometime”
cvvT · cvT · cvvcT		
	/ ya: · ca · kâ:k /	“grasshopper”
cvcT · cvT · cvT		
	/ sâp · pa · t᷑ /	“door”
	/ kham · ca · p᷑ /	“pine tree”
cvcT · cvT · cvvT		
	/ maŋ · kha · la: /	“goodness”
cvvcT · cvT · cvvT		
	/ ma:n · ca · kâ: /	“guava”

Consonant clusters of Tai-Phake

The following ten consonant clusters are possible:

/ pl /		
	/ pl᷑ /	“marigold”
	/ t᷑ŋ-plɛ /	“water-melon”
	/ plɛt-tlá: /	“lawyer”

/ phl /

/ phlá? / “Lord Buddha”

/ phlă: / “birth”

/ kl /

/ klí / “big”

/ klá: / “new”

/ klə / “how”

/ khl /

/ khlă: / “how many or much”

/ khlu / “finish”

/ tl /

/ tlá: / “law”

/ tɔm-tlá: / “worship”

/ hō:-tlá: / “praying”

/ py /

/ pya: / “show”

/ pya:n / “translate”

/ pyék / “translate”

/ phy /

/ phyék / “spid”

/ ky /

/ kyă:m / “try”

/ kya:m / “cruel”

/ kya: / “be fond of”

/ my /

/ myét / “holy”

/ myék / “imagine”

Note :

- 1) It is interesting to note that all the consonant clusters occur word-initially.
- 2) With the exception of /m/, all first members are plosives.
- 3) All second members are either the lateral or the semi-vowel /y/.

Table I

TP		Initially
p		✓
ph		✓
k	+ l	✓
kh		✓
t		✓
p		✓
ph	+ y	✓
k		✓
m		✓

Tones

There are six tones low tone, high tone, mid tone, rising tone, falling tone and mid rising tone in Tai-Phake.

For example :

- i) Low tone \ / kà: / “dance”
- ii) High tone / / ná: / “paddy-field”
- iii) Mid tone unmarked / ma: / “shoulder”
- iv) Rising tone v / mǔ / “pig”
- v) Falling tone ^ / mî:n / “mirror”
- vi) Mid rising tone ~ / tây / “climb”

Minimal pairs

The following minimal pairs show that the six tones are phonemic:

/ ma: /	“shoulder”	/ ka: /	“go”
/ mā: /	“soak”	/ kā: /	“trade”
/ mà: /	“mad”	/ kâ: /	“dance”
/ mâ: /	“horse”	/ kâ: /	“rice sprout”
/ má: /	“come”	/ ká: /	“crow”
/ mă: /	“dog”	/ kă: /	“exclamation”

Low vs High

/ sùt /	“smoke”
/ sút /	“mosquito net”

Low vs Mid

/ kà: /	“dance”
/ ka: /	“go”

Low vs Rising

/ nà: /	“face”
/ nă: /	“thick”

Low vs Falling

/ mà:n /	“village”
/ mâ:n /	“mirror”

Low vs Mid rising

/ làw /	“alcohol”
/ lāw /	“classifier”

High vs Mid

/ ná: /	“paddy-field”
/ na: /	“squirrel”

High vs rising

/ má: /	“come”
/ mă: /	“dog”

High vs Falling

/ kíw /	“I”
/ kâw /	“nine”

High vs Mid rising

/ kín /	“eat”
/ kīn /	“promise”

Mid vs Rising

/ mu /	“work”
/ mǔ /	“pig”

Mid vs Falling

/ ma: /	“shoulder”
/ mâ: /	“horse”

Mid vs Mid rising

/ tay /	“Tai-people”
/ tāy /	“climb”

Rising vs Falling

/ mǎ: /	“dog”
/ mā: /	“horse”

Rising vs Mid rising

/ mǎ: /	“dog”
/ mā: /	“soak”

Falling vs Mid rising

/ kāw /	“nine”
/ kāw /	“old”

Morphology

There are no gender, number and person markers in Tai-Phake. Nor are the nouns or pronouns inflected for case. There are prepositions in Tai-Phake but these prepositions do not affect the form of the nouns or the pronouns. The prepositions are the following.

TP

/ ca: mǎ: /	“for dog”
/ lòy mǎ: /	“with dog”
/ lúksě mǎ: /	“from dog”
/ ně mǎ: /	“on dog”
/ tày mǎ: /	“under dog”
/ khǒŋ mǎ: /	“of dog”
/ hǎŋ mǎ: /	“to dog”
/ ?ēm mǎ: /	“near dog”
/ waw mǎ: thā:ŋ mimí /	“between dog and cat”
/ khàŋ nà: mǎ: /	“before or in front of dog”
/ khàŋ lǎŋ mǎ: /	“after / behind dog”
/ tì mǎ: /	“towards dog”
/ nə mǎ: /	“in dog”

Tai-Phake does not have any variants.

Derivative Marker

In Tai-Phake, we could not find a single derivative marker; of course we are eliminating loan-words from Pali that follow the Pali derivative marker rules. Tai-Phake does not have any word-formation rules.

Some linguists describe / -m- /, / -an- /, / -anm- / and / -amr- / as infixes (cf. Warotamasikkhadit, Udom. 1970. Introduction to Linguistics). We have not included them here for three reasons. One, they do not change the word-class; two, they do not change the meaning. Three, the forms without the infixes are not really discontinuous morphemes. The second reason is stronger than the other two in not treating them as infixes.

Comparison

Tai-Phake has only comparative degree and the word / khɛn / marks the comparison :

/ chaw khɛn pí hǎŋ khomsǎn /
 Chao -er fat to Khomsan
 Chao is fatter than Khomsan.

/ chaw khɛn pí hǎŋ lúk?ɔn nây khǎw hà: khon /
 Chao -er fat to boy those Pl.m. Five Cla.
 “Chao is the fatter to those five boys”
 “Chao is the fattest of all those five boys”.

Time indicators

The present time

Verbs are not inflected for tenses in Tai-Phake. The present time is optionally indicated by auxiliary verbs / ?ū / in Tai-Phake.

/ chaw lâ:ŋ mò khǎw (?ū) /
 Chao wash pot Pl.m. aux
 Chao washes / is washing pots.

One can add either / cわŋnây / “now” or / kuwan / “everyday” in Tai-Phake.

The past time

The past time is marked by the auxiliary / ka: /, / yâw / or / ka:yâw /. We found their frequency in a descending order in our data. These auxiliaries are optional if a past time indicating adverbial is present.

/ chaw lâ:ŋ mò khǎw ka: / yâw / ka:yâw /
 Chao wash pot Pl.m. aux
 Chao washed / was washing pots.

/ chaw lâ:ŋ mɔ khăw maŋa: /

Chao wash pot Pl.m. yesterday

Chao washed / was washing pots yesterday.

One can use both the auxiliary and the adverbial / ka:yâw / which has a variant / yâwka: /.

The future time

Tai-Phake has the auxiliary / tà? / for marking future time. This auxiliary does not however occur at the end of the sentence like markers of the past time. It occurs before the verb.

/ chaw tà? lâ:ŋ mɔ khăw /

Chao aux. wash pot Pl.m.

Chao will wash / will be washing pots.

The auxiliary is obligatory even when future time indicating adverbials such as / mûphûk / “tomorrow” are present.

In short we get the following :

Table II

TP	Present v.... (aux) adv	Past v.... (aux) adv	Future aux + v
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Conclusion

Tai-Phake is a stunted language and there is no growth as it is not used in all fields of life as a living language. Tai-Phake people have to use Assamese outside the village and borrow Assamese words in their Tai-Phake speech. All new artefacts and new concepts have Assamese names because of Tai-Phake is not used in reading and writing. The chances of its growth and spread are very slight.

APPENDIX

LIST OF IMPORTANT SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATION USED

1. List of symbols

/ /	=	Phonemic Transcription
()	=	Optional
→	=	Rewritten as
-	=	All compound words
< >	=	Meaning components
:	=	Length (when used after a vowel)
~	=	Mid rising tone
\	=	Low tone
/	=	High tone
^	=	Falling tone
V	=	Rising tone
+	=	Presence of the component
-	=	Absence of the component
=	=	Equal
✓	=	Occurrence
x	=	Non - occurrence

Note : Mid tone is unmarked.

2. Abbreviations

Adj.	=	Adjective
Adv.	=	Adverb
aux.	=	Auxiliary
as.	=	Aspirated
c	=	Consonant
cc	=	Consonant cluster
Cla.	=	Classifier
con.	=	Continuous marker
ex.	=	Exclamation
Dem.	=	Demonstrative
N.	=	Noun
NP	=	Noun phrase
Num.	=	Numeral
Pl.m.	=	Plural marker
Part.	=	Particle
Past.	=	Past marker
Pre.	=	Present marker
T	=	Tone
TP	=	Tai-Phake
unas.	=	Unaspirated.
v	=	Vowel or verb
Vd.	=	Voiced
Vi.	=	Voiceless
vs.	=	versus
vv	=	Long Vowel

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