

## The Syllable Structural of The Yuan Language in Sikhio District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand

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### Abstract

There is the objective of this research: To study the syllable structural systems of the Yuan Dialects in Sikhio district, Nakhon Ratchasima province. Documentary Yuan dialect data are derived from key informants, books, documents and texts on the Yuan dialect of word analysis, dialect sound systems and related research works. Then, they are analyzed and summarized in descriptive languages. Results of the research as: there are three patterns: Monosyllabic pattern, Disyllabic pattern, and Polysyllabic pattern.

**Keywords:** Syllable, Yuan Dialect, Dialects, Sikhio District

### Introduction

Nakhon Ratchasima is a province with its own distinctive identity in terms of culture, traditions, and the “Korat language” which is different from other Isan dialects. At the same time, each district has unique cultural traditions because the locals come from different ancestral backgrounds. In particular, in the Sikhio District, the cultural practices are similar to those of the northern region. This can be observed from the syllable structural within the Wat Yai Sikhio temple, which has a pagoda resembling Myanmar architecture, as well as the Buddha image, which reflects Burmese art. Additionally, there is a traditional-style house preserved inside the temple, which has become an interesting tourist attraction in the Sikhio District.

The term “Yuan” or “Tai Yuan” comes from a legend originating from the word “Yun” or “Yonok” referring to a large group living in northern Thailand, particularly around the lower Mekong River basin, or the Chiang Saen area today. In 1804, after the Burmese occupation of Chiang Saen, King Phutthayotfa Chulalok sent military forces led by Luang

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Thep Hirak and Phra Ya Mong Rat to reclaim the city. Later, many people were relocated to Bangkok and settled in the Ratchaburi and Saraburi provinces. During this time, oxen were used as beasts of burden for transporting supplies during wartime, and the largest oxen group was near the “Lam Takong” river. This led to the settlement of the Yuan and Tai Yuan people in various villages, including the Sikhio District of Nakhon Ratchasima. Yuan, Tai Yuan, or Thai Yonok, migrated into the Sikhio District in two main ways: the first group moved from the north to the Sa Hae District in Saraburi, and later, the ruler of Saraburi wanted to establish a cattle farm in Nakhon Chanthuek, so he sent Tai Yuan families from Sa Hae to Sikhio. The second group migrated from Vientiane<sup>2</sup>.

The Yuan language, found predominantly in the Sikhio District of Nakhon Ratchasima, belongs to the Tai language family in the Central Mekong River group, specifically the Lanna or Yuan language, also known as Kam Muang. The challenge in analyzing the Sikhio Yuan dialect is that its phonological system must take into account the influence of the Korat dialect, which is also a member of the Southwestern Tai family but has developed differently<sup>3</sup>. The researcher therefore sought to study the persistence of the Yuan system, even with other languages, finding that the core phonological system, particularly the tonal system, retains the inflectional patterns and distinctive tones of its Yuan ancestors more robustly than the lexicon. This comparison with other Yuan dialects aids linguists in formulating hypotheses regarding the historical migration of the people and long-term linguistic inheritance.

## Content

The syllable structure of the Yuan language in Sikhio District must be analyzed according to the principles of Thai linguistics<sup>4</sup> Thus, syllables are categorized into three main types<sup>5</sup>:

- 1) Monosyllabic pattern
- 2) Disyllabic pattern
- 3) Polysyllabic pattern

<sup>2</sup> Sangwan Chotisookrat, *Yuan Thai - People of the City* (Bangkok: Sakae Printing, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Oratai Jurjanad, *Phonemic system of the Yuan dialect in Amphoe Sikhio, Changwat Nakhon Ratchasima*. (Thesis the Master of Arts, Department of Thai, Chulalongkorn University, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Ruengdej Pankhuenkhat, *Thai Linguistics* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2011) 103-107.

<sup>5</sup> Vichin Panupong, *Geographical Vocabulary in Nakhon Ratchasima Province: Pilot Project* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1983) 2-9.

The study of the Yuan syllable structure in Sikhio requires understanding the different types of words in the Thai language, using symbols to represent the different sound units in the syllables as follows:

C = Initial consonant phoneme

V = Short vowel phoneme

VV = Long vowel or diphthong

N = Final consonant phonemes, Nasal consonant sounds /m n ɳ/  
or a semivowel /w y/

S = Final consonant phonemes, stop consonant sounds /p t k ?/

<sup>T</sup> = Tone

<sup>1</sup> = Mid tone phoneme

<sup>2</sup> = Low tone phoneme

<sup>3</sup> = Falling tone phoneme

<sup>4</sup> = High tone phoneme

<sup>5</sup> = Rising tone phoneme

## 1. Monosyllabic pattern

Monosyllabic structures in the Yuan language in Sikhio are divided into four types:

Type 1. C(C)V<sup>T1,2,4</sup>

Type 2. C(C)VV<sup>T1-4</sup>

Type 3. CV(V)N<sup>T1-5</sup>

Type 4. CV(V)S<sup>T2,3,4</sup>

These four structures can further be categorized according to their tonal patterns.

### Type 1 C(C)V<sup>T1,2,4</sup>

This type of syllable structure consists of three to four phonemes: (1) an initial consonant phoneme, (2) a short vowel phoneme, and (3) a tone phoneme - either mid, low, falling, or high tone. This syllable structure typically appears only in the first syllable of true disyllabic words, and does not normally occur in monosyllabic words. In terms of tone realization, this type of syllable is usually unstressed, and thus generally carries a mid - tone. However, if the syllable receives slight stress, the tone may be low or falling, depending on the class of the initial consonant in the written form. That is, if the initial consonant belongs to the high or mid-class, the tone is typically either low or mid; whereas if it belongs to the lower class, the tone is usually mid or falling.

This syllable structure can be categorized into two types based on tone as follows:

- 1) C(C)V<sup>T1,2,4</sup> เช่น  
 /ta<sup>4</sup> p<sup>h</sup>aan<sup>1</sup>/ [ตะพาน] “Bridge”  
 /ma<sup>2</sup> la<sup>2</sup>/ [มะละ] “Bitter gourd”
- 2) C(C)V<sup>T4</sup> เช่น  
 /ka<sup>4</sup> tuu<sup>3</sup>/ [กะตุ้ง] “Month”

### Type 2 C(C)V<sup>T1-4</sup>

This structure is called an open syllable, consisting of at least 3 phonemes and at most 4 phonemes: (1) a single initial consonant phoneme, (2) a long vowel or diphthong phoneme, which forms the nucleus of the syllable, and (3) a tone phoneme<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>. This structure can be classified into 4 types as follows:

- 1) C(C)V<sup>T1-4</sup> เช่น  
 /may<sup>4</sup> p<sup>h</sup>uu<sup>2</sup>/ [ไม้ผู] “Broom”
- 2) C(C)V<sup>T2</sup> เช่น  
 /nii<sup>2</sup> ໄວt<sup>4</sup>/ [นี หลีอด] “Low, Short”  
 /bo<sup>2</sup> nεε<sup>2</sup>/ [บໍ່ແນ່ງ] “Cherimoya”
- 3) C(C)V<sup>T3</sup> เช่น  
 /maa<sup>3</sup>/ [ມາ] “Bench”  
 /ta<sup>4</sup> k<sup>h</sup>ee<sup>3</sup>/ [ตะເຂົ້າ] “Crocodile”
- 4) C(C)V<sup>T4</sup> เช่น  
 /la<sup>2</sup> k<sup>h</sup>ω<sup>4</sup>/ [ລະ ຂົວ] “And then”

### Type 3 CV(V)N<sup>T1-5</sup>

This type of structure is called a live syllable (kham pen). It consists of four phonemes, with a maximum of five, as follows: (1) an initial consonant phoneme, (2) a simple vowel or diphthong phoneme, (3) a final consonant phoneme that is either a nasal consonant (/m/, /n/, /ŋ/) or a semivowel (/w/, /y/), and (4) a tone phoneme<sup>1-5</sup>. This syllable structure can be further classified into two subtypes as follows:

- 1) CVN<sup>T1-5</sup> เช่น  
 /kin<sup>5</sup>/ [กິນ] “Eat”  
 /haŋ<sup>1</sup>/ [ຫັ້ງ] “Nest”

2) CVN<sup>T1-5</sup> เช่น

/tɔɔŋ <sup>4</sup> /	[ตื้อง]	“Stomach”
/fɔɔŋ <sup>4</sup> /	[ฟื้อง]	“Hurry”

Type 4 CV(V)S<sup>T 2,3,4</sup>

This type of syllable structure is called a dead syllable (kham tai). It typically consists of four phonemes, but may contain as few as two or three phonemes, as follows: (1) a single initial consonant phoneme, (2) a simple vowel or diphthong phoneme, (3) a final consonant phoneme that is a voiceless stop consonant (/p/, /t/, /k/, or glottal stop /ʔ/), and (4) a tone phoneme - specifically Tone<sup>2,3,4</sup>. This syllable structure can be further categorized into two subtypes, as follows:

1) CVS<sup>T2,3,4</sup> เช่น

/bak <sup>2</sup> kuut <sup>4</sup> /	[บักกูด]	“Kaffir lime”
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2) CVVS<sup>T2,3,4</sup> เช่น

/huup <sup>3</sup> /	[ูป]	“Image”
/kæəp <sup>2</sup> /	[เกิบ]	“Flip-flops”

## 2. Disyllabic pattern

Disyllabic structures in the Yuan language can be classified into two types: 1) Disyllable and 2) Mono + Mono Syllables.

### Type 1 Disyllable

The Disyllable in the Yuan language of Sikhio District, Nakhon Ratchasima, has two different types of syllables as follows: The first syllable follows the same pattern as Type 1 monosyllabic structure CV<sup>T2-4</sup>. It contains a short vowel and no final consonant, and the syllable is unstressed, meaning it carries no stress in pronunciation. The second syllable, which receives greater stress than the first, consists of: a single initial consonant phoneme, a short vowel /a/, and a mid-tone phoneme. The second syllable follows a syllable structure that corresponds to one of the monosyllabic patterns, as shown in the following structures.

#### First syllable      Second syllable

CV <sup>T2-4</sup>	+ CV <sup>T1-5</sup>
	+ CV(V)N <sup>T1-5</sup>
	+ CV(V)S <sup>T2-4</sup>

The structure of these two-syllable words can be classified into two types, which are

**First syllable      Second syllable**

1) CV <sup>T2-4</sup>	+	CVV <sup>T1-5</sup>	เช่น
/ka <sup>4</sup> taa <sup>3</sup> /	[กะต้า]		“Basket”
/ka <sup>4</sup> p <sup>h</sup> aw <sup>1</sup> /	[กะเพา]		“Thai Basil”
2) CV <sup>T2-4</sup>	+	CV(V)N <sup>T1-5</sup>	เช่น
/ta <sup>4</sup> wan <sup>1</sup> /	[ตะวัน]		“Sun”
/p <sup>h</sup> aa <sup>3</sup> k <sup>h</sup> on <sup>5</sup> /	[ผ้าขน]		“Handkerchief”

**Type 2 Mono + Mono Syllables**

The Mono + Mono Syllables in the Yuan language of Sikhio district follow the same pattern as two monosyllabic structures arranged or combined (Mono + Mono). Each syllable will follow the structure of one of the monosyllabic patterns, which may or may not have meaning. The structure depends on how the monosyllabic patterns are combined to form one of the following two types of compound disyllabic words.

1) CV <sup>T1-5</sup>	+	CV(V)N <sup>T1-5</sup>	เช่น
/k <sup>h</sup> ii <sup>3</sup> poom <sup>2</sup> /	[ขี้ป้อม]		“Tadpole”
/ta <sup>4</sup> kim <sup>3</sup> /	[ตะกิม]		“Gecko”
2) CV <sup>T1-5</sup>	+	CV(V)S <sup>T2,3,4</sup>	เช่น
/ta <sup>4</sup> k <sup>h</sup> ep <sup>3</sup> /	[ตะเข็ป]		“Centipede”
/bo <sup>2</sup> fak <sup>3</sup> /	[บ่ฟัก]		“Pumpkin”

**3. Polysyllabic pattern**

The polysyllabic structure in the Yuan dialect of Sikhio District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, refers to the syllable structure of compound words consisting of three syllables or more. It can therefore be that various combinations or sequences of monosyllabic (Mono) and disyllabic (Dis) syllable structures result in a wide variety of polysyllabic patterns. In this section, the polysyllabic syllable structures will be analyzed as follows:

**The polysyllabic structure**

The polysyllabic structure in the Yuan dialect of Sikhio District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province is formed through combinations of different monosyllable types. These include combinations of disyllabic and monosyllabic structures, resulting in three types, as follows:

Type 1 Mono+Mono+Mono

Type 2 Dis+Mono+Mono

Type 3 Mono+Dis+Mono

Please observe the examples of polysyllabic structures in all three types as follows:

**Type 1 Mono + Mono + Mono เช่น**

/ pii<sup>3</sup>lua<sup>1</sup>kin<sup>5</sup>k<sup>h</sup>aw<sup>2</sup> / [ปีลัวกินเข้า] “The sister-in-law is eating rice.”

/ paa<sup>5</sup>pay<sup>1</sup>?εεw<sup>2</sup> / [ป้าไปแอ่ວ] “Take [someone] to travel.”

**Type 2 Dis + Mono + Mono เช่น**

/ ?a<sup>2</sup>ya<sup>4</sup>yan<sup>5</sup> / [อะยะหยัง] “What are you doing?”

/ bɔ<sup>2</sup>k<sup>h</sup>aam<sup>5</sup>waan<sup>5</sup> / [บขามหวาน] “Sweet tamarind”

**Type 3 Mono + Dis + Mono เช่น**

/ k<sup>h</sup>on<sup>1</sup>?a<sup>2</sup>yan<sup>5</sup> / [คนอะหยัง] “What kind of person?”

/ ?ot<sup>2</sup>day<sup>3</sup>hua<sup>5</sup>bɔ<sup>2</sup>day<sup>3</sup> / [อดได้หัวบ๊ด] “Can't hold back the laughter.”

## Conclusion

The Yuan dialect spoken in Sikhio District has been studied and analyzed, with vocabulary organized according to linguistic structures. The findings are as follows: Monosyllabic pattern, Disyllabic pattern, and Polysyllabic pattern. The Yuan dialect in Sikhio also demonstrates a distinctive lexical and phonological system, particularly in terms of tonal features, which consist of five tonal phonemes: mid, low, falling, high, and rising have 5 tone sounds (Tone<sup>T1-5</sup>) differences Yuan dialect spoken in Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Mae Hong Son have 6 tone sounds<sup>6</sup>. These features result in phonological and structural differences when compared to other regional dialects.

The study of the Yuan language reveals significant dialectal variation, broadly divided into central dialects (Lanna) and migrated dialects (Extra-Lanna). The main differences lie in the tonal system and consonant phonemes. For instance, isolated migrated dialects, such as those found among the Yuan in Sikhiu, Nakhon Ratchasima or the Yuan in Ratchaburi<sup>7</sup>, often preserve archaic tonal systems more successfully than their lexicon. The tonal system of most Kham Mueang (Yuan) dialects generally consists of five to six phonemic tones, but

<sup>6</sup> Ekaphon Kanthong. *Tonal Variation in Chiang Mai Thai by Age Group*. (Thesis the Master of Arts, Department of Thai, Chulalongkorn University, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Oratai Jurjanad, *Phonemic system of the Yuan dialect in Amphoe Sikhiu, Changwat Nakhon Ratchasima*. (Thesis the Master of Arts, Department of Thai, Chulalongkorn University, 1969).

their phonetic realization (the pitch contour or rise/fall) varies regionally across areas like Chiang Mai, Lampang, or Nan. Regarding consonants, the Yuan language typically does not differentiate between the /r/ and /l/ phonemes (usually pronounced as /l/) and exhibits reduced use of consonant clusters. Furthermore, influence from neighboring languages is evident: Extra-Lanna dialects may adjust their phonological systems to align with nearby local languages (such as Central Thai, Khorat Thai, or Isan). This variation provides crucial evidence for studying linguistic inheritance and human migration patterns.

### Recommendations

This research focuses on a regional dialect spoken in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, which differs from other Thai regional dialects. Those interested in dialectal studies may use this as a model for collecting structural systems or for conducting comparative analysis with other regional varieties of Thai. It is hoped that this study can serve as a foundation for further development and more comprehensive research in the future.

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