

**Anthony V.N. Diller et al. (2008), *The Tai-Kadai Languages*, London: Routledge.**

**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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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.

Zhuang cannot be called a less studied Tai language anymore. However the two papers on Zhuang provide a Zhuang perspective that is not usually studied. Luo’s “Zhuang” gives the most complete description of Zhuang grammar in English and will certainly be a Zhuang grammar reference for anyone who does not read

Chinese and who is looking for a deeper grammatical aspect of Zhuang to study. The other paper is by Holm on old Zhuang scripts. This is interesting and can be a useful source of information especially towards a study of Chinese borrowings into Zhuang.

Tongin Yang and Jerold A. Edmondson present various aspects of Kam, not 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 further studies. Chadong, a newly discovered Kam-Sui language, illustrates a dialect 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 Kradai language in which sub dialects of each of the seven languages in this group are 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 sentence level. It can thus be expected that, in the near future, there will be deeper research work, diachronically and synchronically, into the grammars of the Tai-Kadai languages.

Apart from comparative-historical linguistic papers, the anthology presents 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, *kaan* “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, khuîn, loŋ, khâw, ʔɔ̀ɔ̀k/ are studied to see how they develop into grammaticalized units. Metaphor is obviously at work when a thinking verb such as /khit/ “to think” co-occurs with a directional verb such as /ʔɔ̀ɔ̀k/ ‘out’. At this stage, the grammaticalization process is certainly in progress. The third paper on grammaticalization by Pranee Kullavanijaya is on /thîi/ a polyfunctional word in Thai. This study shows how the word was grammaticalized into nine functions during the four periods of Thai history. /thîi/ 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 nominalizer function.

Somsong Burusphat presents a historical paper that is not about grammaticalization but about a controversial word in Thai, /kɔ̀ɔ̀/, a narrative marker. Somsong 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. Somsong 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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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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