Personal Pronouns in Palaung Dialects

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Abstract
This paper presents personal pronouns of the Palaung dialects, which belong to the Palaungic branch of Mon-Khmer in the Austroasiatic language family. Data were gathered from Palaung speakers in Thailand, Myanmar, and China: in Thailand from Noe-Lae village, Chiang Mai Province; in Myanmar from Nyaung Gone village, Kalaw city, and Ban Paw village, Kengtung; and in China from five varieties of the Palaung language spoken in villages in Luxi county and in Nan Sang Cun Shan Zhai village, Ruili township, both areas of which are in Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan. The personal pronouns of all of these dialects form a system divided by number—singular, dual, and plural—and by person—first, second, and third. A distinction between inclusive and exclusive forms occurs in dual and plural of the first person. This system conforms to the typical system of Mon-Khmer languages. Data collected in this study are also compared with the results presented in Janzen and Janzen’s 1972 study of Palaung pronouns. Based on personal pronouns, the relationship between the Palaung dialects in Thailand, Myanmar, and China is also discussed.

1. Introduction

Palaung belongs to the Palaungic branch of Mon-Khmer in the Austroasiatic language family (Diffloth 1974:480–484; Mitani 1977:193–212; Diffloth and Zide 2003:177–181). It is spoken by various Palaung groups living in Thailand, Myanmar, and China. In northern Thailand, most of the Palaung or Dara-ang live in the Fang, Chiang Dao, and Mae Ai districts of Chiang Mai Province. It is spoken by approximately 5,000 people (Deepadung 2009:7–29). In Myanmar, the Palaung who call themselves Ta-ang mostly live in mountainous areas in Namhsan and Namkham in northern Shan State, while those who call themselves Dara-ang live in and around Kengtung in eastern Shan State. Speakers of Palaung

1 This paper is part of the project entitled “A preliminary ethnolinguistic study of the Palaung people in Kengtung, Myanmar and in Yunnan, China.” The author would like to thank Thailand Research Fund and Mahidol University for the joint-support grant (BRG-5380001). I wish to thank Professor Yang Guangyuan, Miss Sha Xiao Rong, Yunnan Nationalities University, and speakers of Palaung in China and in Myanmar for their assistance and language data. My special thanks are due to Professor Somsonge Burusphat, Research Institute for Languages and Culture of Asia, Mahidol University for her very kind help and suggestions.

2 The term Palaung will be used in this paper to refer to both the people and their language. It will be used throughout the paper, except when other people’s works or groups’ autonyms reference it differently.
whose autonym is Da-ang are also found in Kalaw city\(^3\) in southern Shan State. According to Howard (2005:25), the estimated number of Palaung speakers in Myanmar is 600,000. In China, the Palaung people are officially called De’ang, pronounced Ta-ang by the Chinese. Based on the 2000 population census, there are 17,804 Palaung speakers scattered in and around Yunnan Province of southwestern China (Xiu Dingben 2008:5). They mostly live in the Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Luxi county, and Zhenkang county in the Lingcang Prefecture. Some are scattered throughout counties such as Lianghe, Longchuan, Wanding, and Baoshan, and in cities such as Ruili and Junnong.

Based on the author’s own study of Palaung speakers in Noe-Lae village, Chiang Mai, Thailand 2006–2008 and the author’s ongoing project on the Palaung in Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar and in the Dehong areas of Yunnan, China, a main objective of this paper is to present personal pronoun systems of the Palaung spoken in Thailand, Myanmar, and China.\(^4\)

There are numerous works on pronoun systems of Mon-Khmer languages, especially those spoken in Vietnam (Miller 1964; Watson 1964; Thompson 1965; Wallace 1966; Blood and Blood 1966; Manley 1972). Several studies conducted for MA theses at Mahidol and Silpakorn Universities on Mon-Khmer languages spoken in Thailand also touch upon the topic (see details in Srichampa and Bauer 1990:273–284). Milne (1921:17–28) describes pronouns of the Ta-ang Palaung spoken in Namhsan in Shan State, Myanmar, and Janzen and Janzen (1972:47–100) and Janzen (1976) describe the pronoun word class of the Palaung language spoken by the “Pale or the Southern Palaung people” (1972:83–84; 1976:662–663). Figure 1 shows Janzen and Janzen’s (1972:84) matrix for “the non-singular members of the pronoun word class form a system” in Pale.

\(^3\) See details in Buakaw’s Mahidol University dissertation (2012). My special thanks go to him for all his assistance in the project.

\(^4\) No implication of historical comparative study is intended. Those who are interested in the subject are referred to Shorto, H. L.: A Mon-Khmer Comparative Dictionary (2006) and to Sidwell’s online Proto-Palaungic reconstruction: http://www.sealang.net/monkhmer.
They then state that phonological units become grammatically relevant as syntagmatic features on word level. That is, the consonants mark person, and the vowels mark numbers as follows:

- **y-** marks 1. person exclusive,
- **ʔ-** marks 1. person inclusive,
- **b-** marks 2. person,
- **ɡ-** marks 3. person,
- **-ai** marks dual number,
- **-e** marks plural number.

As a result, a secondary objective of this paper is to see whether the pronoun system, with more data from various Palaung varieties, especially those spoken in Yunnan, China, yields the same result as Janzen and Janzen. With this in mind, I will first address the sources of the data and then touch upon the topic of language family and Palaung dialect classification. Finally, I will discuss the personal pronouns of the eight Palaung dialects.

### 2. The Data

Mitani in his preliminary comparison of Palaung dialects (1977:193) mentions that “But this is just one dialect of Palaung, that of Namhsan, the capital of the former state of Tawngpeng, and other dialects, which are apparently many and diverse, are mostly only poorly known.” Additionally, Pinnow (1965:3) quoting W. Schmidt (1901:575f) explains that “The pronoun in general, and the personal pronoun in particular, is indeed ordinarily a part of speech of prime importance when the question of the relationship between two languages is to be decided…” To confirm what is noted in these statements, the personal pronoun data for this study were gathered from Palaung speakers living in:
(i) Noe-Lae, Mon-Pin sub-district, in Fang district, Chiang Mai, Thailand;
(ii) Nyaung Gone village of Kalaw city\(^5\) and Ban Paw village of Kengtung, Myanmar;
(iii) De‘ang people in China, based on the author’s data collection,\(^6\) which consists of five dialects as follows:

1) Liang dialect of Chu Dong Gua village, San Tai Shan Xiang, Mangshi district, Luxi county. (The speakers of Liang call themselves Ta-ang.);\(^7\)
2) Pu-le dialect of Meng Dan village, San Tai Shan Xiang, Mangshi district, Luxi county. (The speakers of Pu-le call themselves Ka-ang.);
3) Rumai dialect of Nan Sang Cun Shan Zhai village, Ruili township. (The speakers of Rumai call themselves Ru-mai.);
4) Raokot dialect of Cha Ye Qing village, Mangshi district, Luxi county. (The speakers of Raokot call themselves La-ang.);
5) Raojin dialect of Xiang Cai Tang village (Huapa), Mangshi district, Luxi county. (The speakers of Raojin call themselves Na-ang.).

In all, the data for this study are sourced from eight groups of Palaung speakers. In addition, the basis of the study is a Mahidol University 1,000 item SEA wordlist (first revision 1990, second revision 2011) and a preliminary grammar questionnaire from Mahidol University (first revision 2011).

3. Language Family and Palaung Classification

Palaung, as mentioned above, consists of a group of dialects. It belongs to Mon-Khmer sub-family of the Austroasiatic language family. Diffloth and Zide (2003) divide the Palaungic branch, formerly known as Palaung-Wa, into two sub-branches: the western sub-branch consists of three language groups—Lametic, Auguic, and Waic; the eastern sub-branch includes Danau, the Riang dialects, and a group of Palaung dialects.\(^8\) Figure 2 below shows how Palaung relates to the rest of the Austroasiatic language family.

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5 I wish to express my appreciation to Supakit Buakaw for his permission to use his data.
6 Research conducted May 2010–May 2012.
8 For the details and state of the art classification of the Palaungic sub-branch, see Sidwell (2009:127–133).
And from five dialects of Palaung—Ta-ang dialect called Pu-le\(^9\) spoken in Yunnan (Yan and Zhou 1995); Rumai dialect called Ru-mai spoken in Yunnan (Yan and Zhou 1995); Na-ang dialect spoken in Yunnan (Yan and Zhou 1995); Da-ang or Pale dialect of Kalaw, southern Shan State, Myanmar (Janzen 1991); and Dara-ang dialect of Noe-Lae Chiang Mai, Thailand (Rattanapitak 2009:77–122),—Ostapirat (2009:63–76) proposed a tentative sub-grouping of these dialects, based on selected phonological changes as shown in Figure 3.

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\(^9\) From the author’s own study, “Ta-ang” is an autonym of a group of Palaung (De’ang) people in Yunnan, who belong to the “Liang” group, while the “Pu-le” group of Palaung (De’ang) people call themselves “Ka-ang”.

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According to Ostapirat (2009), the primary split of the three main Palaung dialects is between the Ta-ang and Rumai-Darang groups, and the secondary split is between Rumai and the Darang groups.

4. Personal Pronouns in Palaung Dialects

From the data, the personal pronoun system of the eight Palaung groups conforms to the regular system of Mon-Khmer languages. It forms a system divided by person—first, second, and third person, and by number—singular, dual, and plural. The first person dual and plural forms consist of inclusive and exclusive pronouns. And upon examining the pronoun members of all the eight groups, especially those of plural and dual forms, we can see that what Janzen and Janzen (1972:84) describe above still holds true, that is “…phonological units become grammatically relevant as syntagmatic features on word level.” However after having proposed phonological components of verb-aspect words and of the pronoun word class, Janzen (1976:661) states, “…but a complete separation of grammar words on the basis of phonological system is not possible.”

In this section, personal pronouns of the eight Palaung dialects, based on number—the singular, dual, and plural categories—will each be respectively discussed. In the following tables, columns 1–5 are dialects spoken in southwestern China—Liang (Li), Pu-le (Pu), Rumai (Ru), Raokot (Ra) and Raojin (Ro); column 6 is Da-ang (Da) spoken at Nyaung Gone village in Kalaw city, southern Shan State, Myanmar; column 7 is Dara-ang (Dr (BP)) spoken at Ban Paw village in Kengtung, southern Shan State, Myanmar; and column 8 is Dara-ang (Dr (NL)) spoken at Noe-Lae village in Chiang Mai Province, northern Thailand, making a total of eight representations.

4.1 Singular category

Table 1 shows singular number personal pronouns of the eight Palaung dialects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>you (sg.)</td>
<td>maj</td>
<td>maj</td>
<td>maj</td>
<td>maj</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the first person singular number, in Table 1 above, Liang and Pu-le share the common form /ʔo/, while Rumai and Raokot have the same form /ʔau/ and Raojin, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP) and Dara-ang (NL) have /ʔou/—the single vowel being diphthongized. In this case, the development of diphthongized vowels in a basic word, such as the verb “to fear,” provides evidence for this line of change o>a, o>ou. In Liang this /ʔo/ ‘to fear’ becomes Pu-le /ʣo/, Rumai /jau/, Raokot /ʣau/, Raojin, Da-ang /jou/, Dara-ang (BP) /jou/, and Dara-ang (NL) /jou/. More examples are shown in (1). All the words in (1) have the same line of diphthongized vowels as those in the first person singular pronouns. However, there are exceptions: the word for “shirt” in Rumai and Raokot is /kabjok/, which needs more investigation.

(1) Gloss Li Pu Ru Ra Ro Da Dr (BP) Dr (NL)
‘fear’ jo ʣo jau ʣau jou jou jou jou
‘lie’ kalau ʧəlau kalou kalou kalou kalou
‘shirt’ saɗo kado kabjok kabjok --- satou sitou satou

For the second person, Raojin, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL) share the same form /me/. The /me/ becomes diphthongized /maj/ in Liang and /məj/ in Pu-le, and diphthongized /maj/ in Rumai and Raokot. An example of this vowel change in the second person can be seen in the word for “sun” which in Liang is pronounced /səŋaj/, Pu-le /ŋəj/, Rumai /sanaj/, Raokot /kəŋaj/, and Raojin, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL) /saŋɛ/-ɛ>æj, ɛ>əj, ɛ>aj. Again, a diphthongized vowel occurs, as shown in (2).

(2) Gloss Li Pu Ru Ra Ro Da Dr (BP) Dr (NL)
‘sun’ səŋaj ŋəj saŋaj khaŋaj saŋɛ saŋɛ saŋɛ saŋɛ
‘louse’ saŋ --- saiʔ masaj məɛ masɛ masɛ masɛ masɛ
‘hand’ daj daj taj daj də də də də də
‘full’ phaj --- phaj phaj phə phə phə phə phə

Third person singular personal pronouns have a particular characteristic in that the Liang and Pu-le seem to use almost the same forms, /di/ in Liang and /ti/ in Pu-le, whereas
Rumai, Raokot, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL) have /ʔan/ and Raojin has /ʔən/. The /ʔən/ form developing into the /ʔan/ form is explainable, but the /di, ti/ forms are less so. In fact, according to Pinnow (1965:31–32), both the /di, ti/ forms and the /ʔan, ?ən/ forms may both possibly originate independently from demonstratives.

In summary, based on the singular personal pronouns of the eight dialects of Palaung, with respect to those in China, Liang and Pu-le seem to be close for first and third persons while Rumai and Raokot are close for all three persons. As for China’s Raojin, Myanmar’s Da-ang of Kalaw city and Dara-ang (BP) of Kengtung, southern Shan State, and Thailand’s Dara-ang (NL) in Chiang Mai Province, they all share almost exactly the same pronoun forms for all three persons. However, whereas Rumai and Raokot share diphthongized vowels in second person forms with Liang and Pu-le, they share diphthongized first person forms with Raojin, Da-ang, and Dara-ang (BP and NL). In addition, Rumai and Raokot also share the third person /ʔan/ with Da-ang, and Dara-ang (BP and NL). This /ʔan/ is /ʔən/ in Raojin. That is to say, on the basis of the first singular personal pronoun forms, Rumai and Raokot seem to have some close relationship with Raojin, Da-ang, and Dara-ang (BP and NL).

4.2 Dual category

The dual number personal pronouns of the eight Palaung groups conform to one another very nicely, as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Dual number personal pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>you (dual)</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>they (dual)</td>
<td>kaj</td>
<td>kaj</td>
<td>kaj</td>
<td>kaj</td>
<td>gaj</td>
<td>gaj</td>
<td>gaj</td>
<td>gaj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dual pronoun of the first person found in all varieties of Palaung in this study is /ʔaj/ as seen in Table 3. However, there is some slight difference in the initial consonants in the exclusive varieties, that is, for Liang, Pu-le, and Raokot the first dual exclusive is /ʔaj/, whereas it is /ʔaj/ in Rumai, Raojin, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL)—the /ʔaj/ is in variation with /j/. As for the second person dual number, apart from Rumai which has /ʔaj/ with a voiceless bilabial stop initial, all possess the form with voiced bilabial stop initials.

10See details about the /ʔən, ?ən/ forms in Mitani (1972).
Finally, Liang, Pu-le, Rumai, and Raokot share the form /kaj/ for the third person dual number, whereas Raojin, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL) share the form /ɡaj/. This again shows the voiceless and voiced initial stop distinction, which is very common in Palaung. Shorto (1963:60) stated that “the possession of dual pronouns is a special characteristic of Northern Mon-Khmer.” The unity of all the forms in Table 2 confirms this statement. In particular, all the dialects show almost the same forms of dual personal pronouns, so there is no evidence for any particularly close or distant relationship among the eight dialects. Examples of this uniformity can be observed in basic words as shown in (3).

\[
\begin{array}{llllllll}
\text{Gloss} & \text{Li} & \text{Pu} & \text{Ru} & \text{Ra} & \text{Ro} & \text{Da} & \text{Dr (BP)} & \text{Dr (NL)} \\
\text{`wash'} & \text{baj} & \text{baj} & \text{paj} & \text{baj} & \text{baj} & \text{baj} & \text{baj} & \text{baj} \\
\text{`rain'} & \text{klaj} & \text{ɡlaj} & \text{klaj} & \text{ɡlaj} & \text{ɡlaj} & \text{ɡlaj} & \text{ɡlaj} & \text{ɡlaj} \\
\text{`man'} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} & \text{ʔimaj} \\
\text{`new'} & \text{kamaj} & \text{kamaj} & \text{tamaj} & \text{lamaj} & \text{kamaj} & \text{kamaj} & \text{kamaj} & \text{kamaj} \\
\end{array}
\]

4.3 Plural category

Table 3 summarizes plural number pronominal forms.

**Table 3.** Plural number personal pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st we (pl. excl.)</td>
<td>dze</td>
<td>dze</td>
<td>je</td>
<td>dzi</td>
<td>ji</td>
<td>je</td>
<td>je</td>
<td>je</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd you (pl.)</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>baj</td>
<td>pe</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd they (pl.)</td>
<td>kaj</td>
<td>kaj</td>
<td>ke</td>
<td>ke</td>
<td>γe</td>
<td>γe</td>
<td>γe</td>
<td>γe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3, plural pronominal forms in the eight dialects can roughly be divided into two sets, with the exception of the first exclusive forms, the first set having a single vowel and the second set having a diphthongized vowel. The former consists of Rumai,
Raokot, Raojin, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL); the latter consists of Liang and Pu-le. For the first person plural inclusive forms, there are some slight variations, namely: /ʔe/ in Raokot, Raojin, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL) is lowered to /ʔɛ/ in Rumai—the /e/ ~ /ɛ/—and the /ʔe/ is diphthongized to /ʔɔj/ in Liang and to /ʔəj/ in Pu-le.14

For the first plural exclusive forms, all of the dialects have a single vowel. The forms are /je/ in Rumai, Da-ang, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL), /ʥe/ in Liang and Pu-le, and /e/ is raised to /i/, yielding /ʥi/ in Raokot and /ji/ in Raojin. In Liang and Pu-le, the vowel of the first plural exclusive forms still remains a single vowel, whereas those of the first plural inclusive and the second and third forms become diphthongized vowels. This may be due to the initial palatal consonant /ʥ-/.

For the second and third plural pronouns, some slight variations of a single vowel set and a diphthongized set are also observed. The single vowel /e/ in Raokot /be/, Raojin /ɓe/, Da-ang /ɓe/, Dara-ang (BP), and Dara-ang (NL) /be/ becomes /ɛ/ in Rumai /pɛ/ for the second plural forms. For the third plural pronouns, the single vowel /e/ in Raokot /ke/, Raojin /γe/, Da-ang /γe/, Dara-ang (BP) /γe/, and Dara-ang (NL) /γe/ is lowered to /ɛ/ in Rumai /kɛ/.

In Liang, the /e/ is diphthongized to /ɓɔj/ for the second plural and to /kɔj/ for the third plural members. In Pu-le, it is diphthongized to /ɓaj/ for the second and to /kaj/ for the third plural members. Again, the evidence of the plural number personal pronouns seems to enable one to say that Rumai and Raokot varieties may be more closely related to Raojin, Da-ang, and Dara-ang (BP and NL) than to Liang and Pu-le.

Nevertheless, while the vowel /e/ or /ɛ/ of the plural pronoun forms in Rumai, Raokot, Raojin, Da-ang, and Dara-ang (BP and NL) is diphthongized in Liang and Pu-le, other words such as ‘fruit’ which is /ɓli/ in Raojin, Da-ang, and Dara-ang (BP and NL) are a single vowel /ɓli/ in Liang and /ɓli/ in Pu-le. However, it is diphthongized /plɔj/ in Rumai and /ɓlɔj/ in Raokot. Shown in (4) are more examples of words that do not follow the same line of development as those in the plural pronoun forms. Mitani (1977:201), who investigated phonological correspondences of the four Palaung dialects, particularly in the case of the front vowel /ɛ/ or /e/ in Ta-ang, which was diphthongized in other dialects, but the /e/ or /ɛ/ was still kept in several words, states that “I tentatively interpret the irregularity in these cases as being due to the special character of these words, the first four being pronouns and…” In other words, the pronoun system, being a sub-system within any language, sometimes has its own course of development.

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14 See /e/ ~ /ɛ/ and gliding developments in Ostapirat (2009:65)
5. Discussion

Based on the personal pronoun forms, especially the singular and plural number categories, 1) Liang and Pu-le form their own subgroup separate from Rumai and Raokot. 2) Rumai and Raokot are closely connected. Interestingly, speakers of both dialects posit that Raokot is a sub-dialect of Rumai. 3) Raojin in China share virtually the same personal pronoun forms as Da-ang in Kalaw city, Myanmar, Dara-ang of Ban Paw village in Kengtung, Myanmar, and Dara-ang of Noe-Lae village in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. The oral historical accounts agree in broad terms with this relationship. That is, about 50 years ago, groups of Palaung migrated from the same areas in Shan State with some of them settling in Ban Paw, Kengtung, and others moving further southward to the Myanmar-Thai border and later to Noe-Lae village in Fang district Chiang Mai, Thailand. 4) The Dara-ang of Ban Paw and those of Noe-Lae are the same dialect. Referring to Scott and Hardiman (1900:707–709) and Ostapirat (2009:64–76), this group of Palaung—Raojin, Darang, Da-ang, Dara-ang—is assigned the name “Darang.” Furthermore, 5) Rumai and Raokot in China seem to be more closely related to Raojin, Da-ang, and the Darang group of dialects than they were in previous studies; there are three main groups of Palaung: Liang, Rumai, and the Darang groups in the southern part of Shan State. This supports the finding in Ostapirat (2009). Further study, based on a larger sample and not just one sub-system of personal pronouns, including Palaung dialects spoken in the northern part of the Shan State, Myanmar, will definitely complete the picture.
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