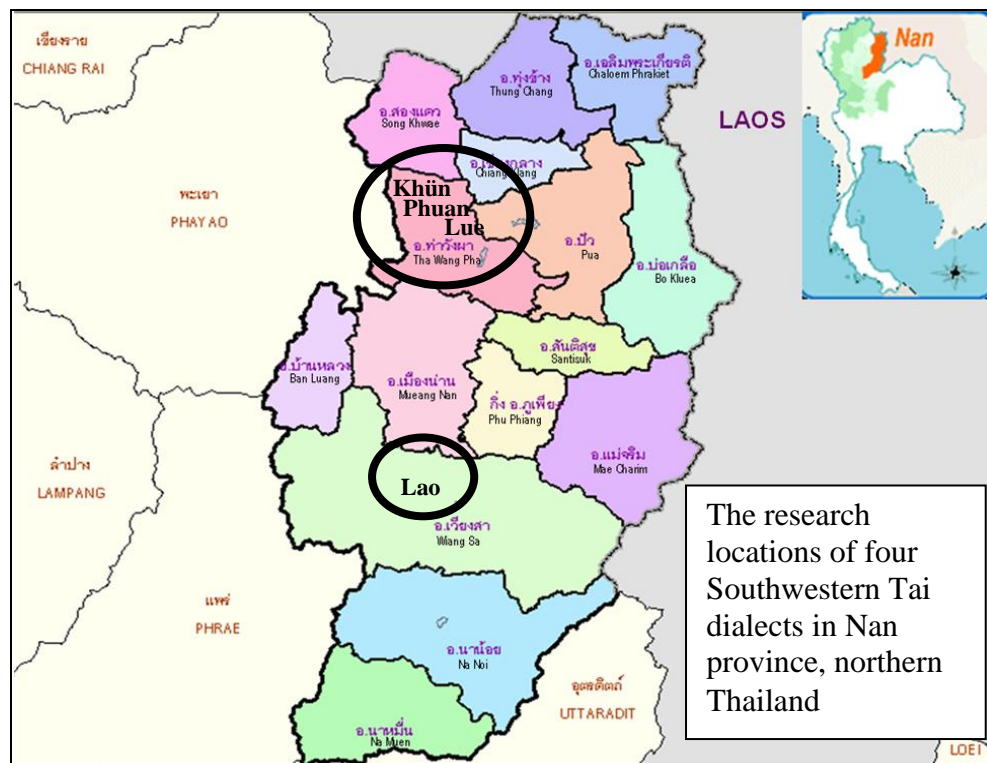


Patterns of Lexical Variation in Four Southwestern Tai Dialects

This paper aims to present the patterns of lexical variation commonly found in four Southwestern Tai dialects: Lue, Khün, Phuan, and Lao, spoken in Nan province, a language mixture area in northern Thailand. The 800-word list is used for collecting the data from language resource persons in three different age-groups: older (60 up), middle (35-50), and younger (15-25). There are total of 60 speakers (5 in each age-group X 3 age-groups X 4 Tai dialects). Besides the age-group, the domains of language use are also investigated. The lexical data in the four Tai dialects in this study are compared to the available earlier studies in order to establish the patterns of variation. Percentage statistics is employed for data analysis.

The findings show that the lexical variation in these four Southwestern Tai dialects is induced by both internal factors (i.e. linguistic simplification) and external factors (i.e. language contact). The internal factors include processes of vowel shortening (e.g. $CV^T.CVC^T \rightarrow CV^T.CVC^T$), vowel weakening (e.g. $Ca^T.CVC^T \rightarrow Cə.CVC^T$), tonal simplification (e.g. in Lao: High-Falling-Rising \rightarrow High-Rising, or in Phuan: Low-Rising \rightarrow Low-Falling), simplification of consonant clusters (e.g. $CCV^T \rightarrow CV^T$), and syllable reduction (e.g. $CV-CVC^T \rightarrow CVC^T$ or ${}_1CVC^T.{}_2CVC^T \rightarrow {}_2CVC^T$). Different patterns of contact-induced lexical variation are also found in the four Southwestern Tai dialects and they are related to the following processes: phonological variation (i.e. consonant/vowel/tone variation), lexical mixture, lexical borrowing, lexical innovation, and semantic shift. A number of lexical items in each of the four dialects have been rarely used which would lead to the prediction that lexical loss will likely happen in the near future.

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The location of each Southwestern Tai dialect:

- Lue: Nong Bua Village, Pa Kha Sub-District, Tha Wang Pha District, Nan Province
- Khün: Nong Muang Village, Pa Kha Sub-District, Tha Wang Pha District, Nan Province
- Phuan: Fay Mun Village, Pa Kha Sub-District, Tha Wang Pha District, Nan Province
- Lao: Nam Pua Village, Nam Pua Sub-District, Wiang Sa District, Nan Province