



Proto-Karen Worldview as Reflected in the Use of Noun Classifiers in Six Modern Karenic Languages, Sgaw, Pwo, Pa-O, Kayah, Kayan and Kayaw



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Background (1)



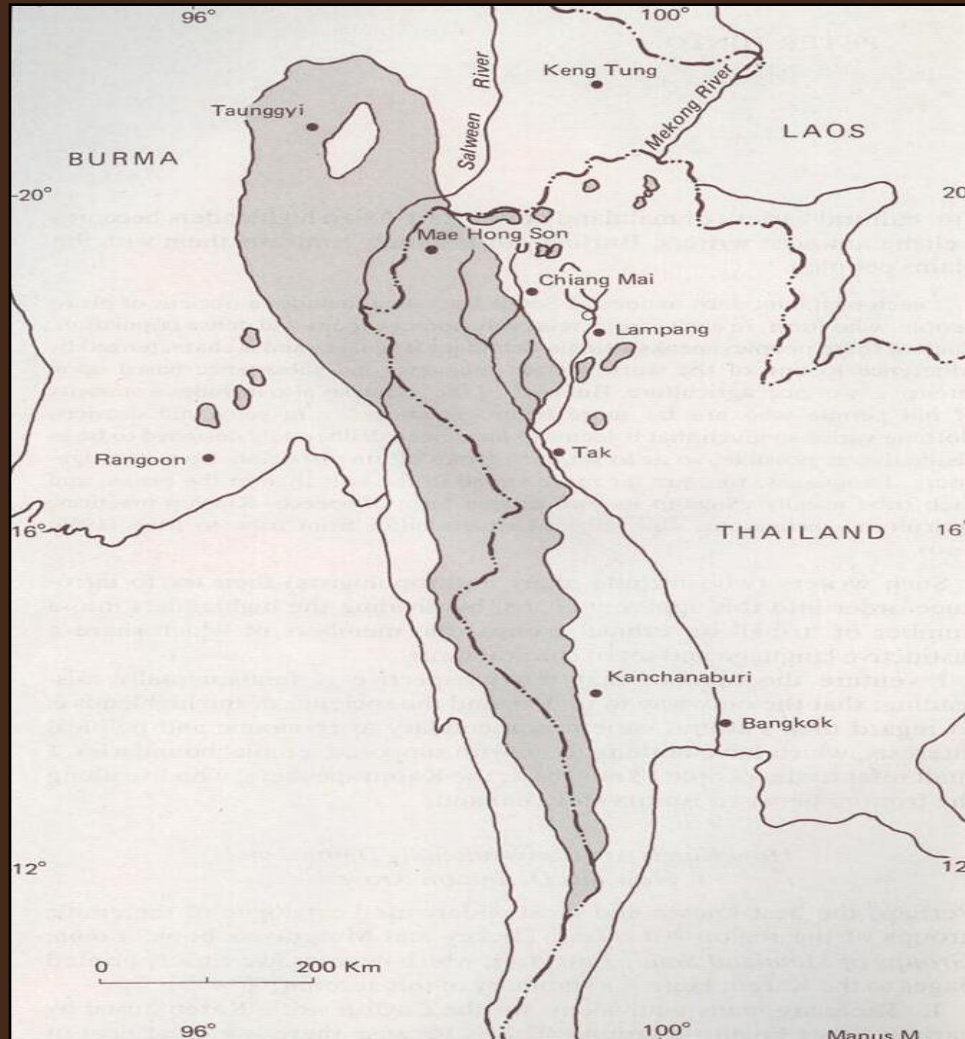
- Six groups of Karenic speaking people can be found in Thailand.
- Estimated number of population is about 500,000 (Sgaw Karen > 50%).
- They are scattered in 13 northern and western provinces: Chiangrai, Chiangmai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Maehongsorn, Tak, Kanchanaburi, Uthaithani, Suphanburi, Ratchaburi, Petchaburi and Prachuapkhirikhan.
- The Karen can also be found in big cities, e.g. Bangkok, as private college students, construction labourers, housekeepers, etc.



Background (2)



- Distribution of the Karen in Myanmar and Thailand





Background (3)



- Six groups of Karen speaking people in Thailand

Sgaw
(White Karen)



Kayah
(Red Karen)



Pwo
(Phlong, Phlou)



Kayan
(Long-necked Karen)



Pa-o
(Black Karen, Tongsu)



Kayaw
(Big-eared Karen)





Background (4)



- Earlier descriptive studies of Karen classifiers

Hsa Eh Ywar and Ken Manson. 2009. Classifiers in Kayan. Paper presented at 42nd ICSTLL, organized by Phayap University, Chiangmai, November 2-4, 2009.

Limpichati, Chirapasr. 1991. Worldviews of the six hilltribes in Thailand as reflected in noun classifiers for households items. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

Ratanakul, Suriya. 2004. Numeral classifiers in Sgaw Karen. In *Selected Topic I: Karen*, pp. 107-120. Bangkok: Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University.

Yingsawadi, Piyawalee. 1990. Worldviews of the six hilltribes in Thailand as reflected in classifiers for animate nouns. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of Linguistics, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.



Objectives



- To analyse basic noun classifiers in the six Karenic languages spoken in Thailand using the componential analysis method
- To compare the results of the above analyses and to interpret the cognitive system of noun classification and the worldview of the Karen
- To reconstruct the forms and meanings of basic noun classifiers in Proto-Karen
- To evaluate the earlier results of Karenic language classification based on the lexicostatistic method and phonological development



Hypotheses



- Karen speakers primarily classify nouns into “human beings” and non-human beings”.
- Non-human beings, i.e. “animals” (except mammals with four legs) and “things” belong to the same category in Karen perception.
- The use of noun classifiers can be traced back to Proto-Karen times and it can reflect Proto-Karen worldview.
- A conceptual or cognitive system of noun classification can be additional evidence for language classification.



Research Sites



- Kayan (May, 2009)
- Huay Suea Thaw, Maehongson: Kayaw (November, 2009)
Kayah (November, 2009)
- Huay Khan, Maehongson: Pa-O (November, 2009)
- Huay Khom, Chiangrai: Sgaw (September, 2009)
- Suan Phueng, Ratchaburi: Pwo (July, 2009)



Scope



- “Basic noun classifiers” used in this paper are “noun classifiers commonly known and widely used in everyday conversation among the Karen”. Those referring to “collective units” are not included.
- Two types of semantic features used are:
 - (1) BINARY FEATURES: [\pm human], [\pm mammal], [\pm animate], [\pm big];
 - (2) DESCRIPTIVE FEATURES: [+long], [+flat], [+round]
- Based on the above definition, only 7 basic noun classifiers were analysed.



Data Collecting Method



- Three steps of data collecting
 - (1) General interview
 - (2) In-depth interview after preparing working hypotheses
 - (3) Final interview with a devised thematic word list.



Classifier for Human Beings



- [+human]



Kayan: pra³³; **Kayaw:** ra³³; **Kayah:** phre¹¹;

Sgaw: ya³³; **Pwo:** ya³¹; **Pa-O:** phra³³





Non-Human Beings



- [-human], [\pm animate]





Mammals with Four Legs



- [-human], [+animate], [+mammal]



Kayan: dəi⁵³; **Kayaw:** də⁵⁵; **Kayah:** do³³;

Sgaw: di³³; **Pwo:** di³¹; **Pa-O:** ba⁵⁵



Animals and Things (1)



- [-human], [-mammal], [\pm animate], [+long]



Kayan: bo⁵³; **Kayaw:** bo⁵⁵; **Kayah:** bo³³;

Sgaw: bo³³; **Pwo:** bō³¹; **Pa-O:** ba⁵⁵/li⁵³



Animals and Things (2)



- [-human], [-mammal], [\pm animate], [+flat]



Kayan: ba¹¹; **Kayaw:** ba¹¹; **Kayah:** be¹¹;

Sgaw: be³¹; **Pwo:** bai⁵⁵; **Pa-O:** ba⁵⁵



Animals and Things (3)



- [-human], [-mammal], [\pm animate], [+round]



Kayan: ma⁵³; **Kayaw:** ma⁵⁵

Kayah: me³³

Sgaw: - ; **Pwo:** - ; **Pa-O:** -



Animals and Things (4)



- [-human], [-mammal], [\pm animate], [+round], [-big]



Kayan: phləu¹¹; **Kayaw:** phlə¹¹; **Kayah:** plə¹¹

Sgaw: phlə^{31~}; **Pwo:** phlõu⁵⁵

Pa-O: phlon⁵⁵



Cognate Sets of Basic Noun Classifiers

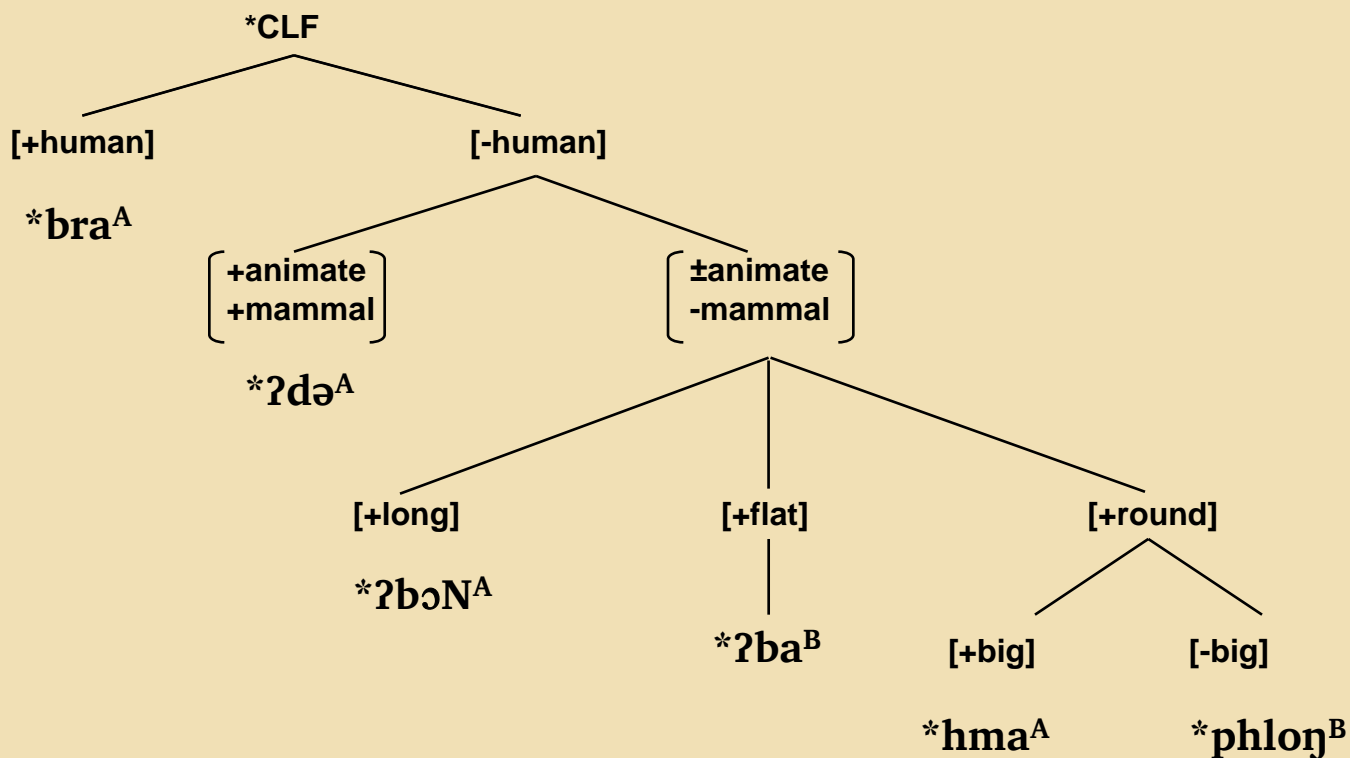
Kayan	Kayaw	Kayah	Sgaw	Pwo	Pa-O
pra ³³	ra ³³	phre ¹¹	ɣa ³³	ɣa ^{31''}	phra ³³
dəi ⁵³	də ⁵⁵	do ³³	di ³³	di ^{31''}	—
bo ⁵³	bo ⁵⁵	bo ³³	bo ³³	bõ ^{31''}	—
ba ¹¹	ba ¹¹	be ¹¹	be ^{31~}	bi ⁵⁵	bai ⁵⁵
phləu ¹¹	phlə ¹¹	phlo ¹¹	phlə ^{31~}	phlõu ⁵⁵	phloŋ ⁵⁵
ma ⁵³	ma ⁵⁵	me ³³	—	—	—



Research Findings (1)



- Proto-Karen Cognitive System of Noun Classification
- Reconstructed forms of basic noun classifiers



(tentative reconstruction)



Research Findings (2)



- Conceptual system as revealed by the use of basic noun classifiers shows how the Karen construe their world of experience.
- Karen speakers primarily make a distinction between [+human] and [-human].
- The [-human] category can be [+animate] or [±animate]
- [+animate] must be [+mammal] / [+4-legged].
- [±animate] must be [-mammal].
- [±animate] can be [+long], [+flat] or [+round].
- [+round] can be [+big] or [-big] (only in Kayan, Kayaw and Kayah)



Research Findings (3)



- NP structure = N NUM CLF, e.g. **di³³ khi³³ phlə^{31~}**
'two drums' (Sgaw)
- 3-6 basic noun classifiers were found in the six modern Karenic languages studied.
- “Shape” is more important than “size” in the Karen worldview (less clear in Pa-O).
- Based on the use of noun classifiers, the six Karenic languages investigated can be classified into 3 groups: (1) Kayan, Kayaw, Kayah; (2) Sgaw, Pwo; and (3) Pa-O.



Research Findings (4)



- *hma^A [+round, +big] has been lost in Sgaw, Pwo and Pa-O.
- The Christian Sgaw use di³³ [-human, +animate, +mammal] for classifying ‘back baskets’, ‘spirits, ghosts’, and ‘Buddha statues’, which is innovated by religious preaching.
- The Pa-O seem to have a different conceptual system of noun classification, for example, the classifier ba⁵⁵ [+flat] is used for most animals, except for snails and tortoises, when phloŋ⁵⁵ [+round] is used instead.



Research Findings (5)



- Tai or Shan words have been borrowed into Pa-O and used as classifiers, e.g. law³³ ‘clf. for flutes’, li⁵³ ‘clf. for long objects’, phi³³ ‘clf. for mats, blankets’, phon⁵⁵ ‘flock, herd’, etc.
- The above finding suggests that the Pa-O may have been in contact with Tai speaking peoples for a long time, long enough to have their cognitive system changed.



Research Findings (6)



- 6 basic noun classifiers can be tentatively reconstructed, i.e. *bra^A, *ʔdə^A, *ʔbɔN^A, *ʔba^B, *hma^A and *phloŋ^B
- Kayan, Kayaw and Kayah have retained all of them, while Sgaw and Pwo have kept only five: *bra^A, *ʔdə^A, *ʔbɔN^A, *ʔba^B, *phloŋ^B.
- The distinction between [+big] and [-big] for [+flat] and [+round] shapes has been lost in Sgaw, Pwo and Pa-O.
- Pa-O has kept only 3: *bra^A, *ʔba^B and *phloŋ^B, resulting from the loss of *ʔdə^A, *ʔbɔN^A and *hma^A.



Conclusions



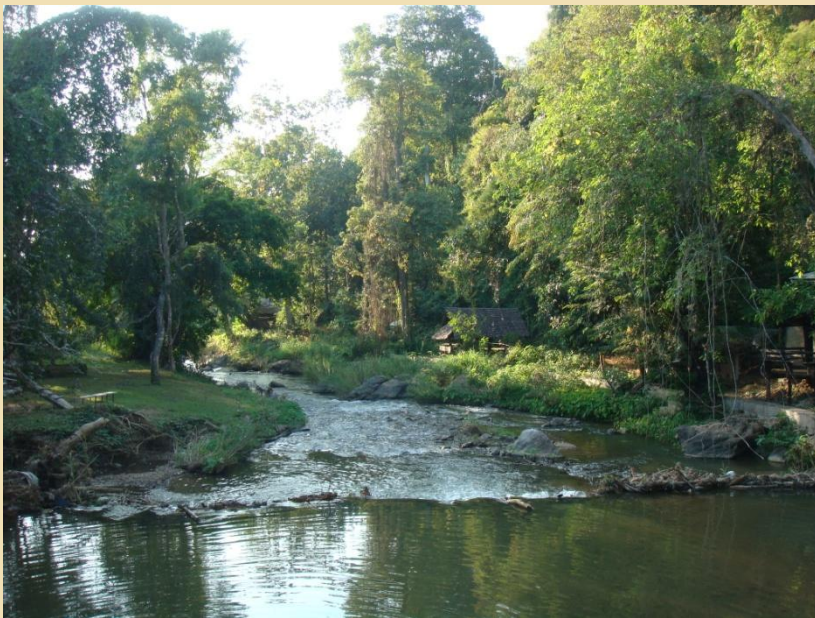
- A cognitive or conceptual system of noun classification can be used as additional evidence for language classification.
- The different conceptual system of noun classification suggests that the Pa-O separated from the other Karenic speaking groups quite earlier in time depth.
- This finding seems to confirm the results of the Karenic language classification based on lexical and phonological development proposed by, e.g. Shintani (2002).



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THANK YOU

