

Paper title: Proto-Southwestern Tai: A New Reconstruction
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Proto-Southwestern Tai A New Reconstruction

Southwestern Tai (SWT) is the best studied among the three main branches of the Tai language family according to Li (1960)'s classification. Languages generally assigned to the SWT group includes a great number of varieties spoken in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, China, Myanmar, and India, such as Thai (or Siamese), Lao, Shan, Black Tai, White Tai and Lue, to cite a few. Because discrepancies among earlier proposals (Brown 1985, Jonsson 1991, Li 1977, and Sarawit 1973) are major obstacles both in subgrouping SWT varieties and in reconstructing PT, this paper makes use of data from 28 varieties, including Gedney ms. (n.d.), Umar 2003, Xing 2000 as well as the author's own fieldwork incorporating new data from lesser-known languages, to propose a revised PSWT reconstruction.

An initial argument disconfirms Luo's (1997, 2001)'s proposal that SWT be split into two sister branches; I then identify the phonological characteristics that distinguish SWT varieties. Next, I will review the earlier proposals and put forward a new reconstruction of PSWT which makes the following claims: 1) there was a distinct series of uvular consonants in PSWT, 2) there is no evidence for clusters **phr/ʎ*, **khl-*, and **mr-* at the PSWT level, 3) mid back unrounded vowel **ɣ* must be reconstructed for PSWT, and 4) vowel length was contrastive. Last, I will discuss important features of the proposed PSWT phonology that have implications for the reconstruction of Proto-Tai, including 1) redundancy of length contrast among non-high vowels, 2) gaps within the sub-system initial clusters, and 3) the defective nature of the vowel **ɣ*.

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