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REGIONAL VARIATION AND CHANGE OF TAI DAM SINGLE INITIALS

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Abstract

This paper presents a study on regional variation of Tai Dam initial single consonants in three locations, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Tai Dam or Black Tai language was selected as a case study because it is spoken by a significant ethnic group in the three ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. The research sites include locations which have never or for over a decade been studied so that a diachronic comparison can be examined. The framework used in this study is Variation Theory in which Tai Dam single initials are used as dependent variables, with the locations of Tai Dam speakers serving as independent variables. Based on the variation and change of the Tai Dam single initials, they are classified into three groups. The first group consists of thirteen single initials which remain intact. The second group includes five initials which internally change from Old Tai Dam and show no regional variation. The last group has nineteen single initials which change from Old Tai Dam and are varied according to locations in Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. The regional variation is caused basically by language contact which is an important external factor. Most Tai Dam people in the three countries are bilingual so the majority languages have definitely influenced.

Keywords

regional variation, language change, initial consonants, language contact, Tai Dam/Black Tai

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VARIACIÓN REGIONAL Y CAMBIO DE LAS INICIALES SIMPLES DEL TAI DAM

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un estudio sobre la variación regional de las consonantes iniciales simples del Tai Dam en tres lugares: Tailandia, Laos y Vietnam. El idioma Tai Dam o Black Tai ha sido seleccionado como un estudio de caso porque es hablado por un grupo étnico significativo en los tres países de la ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Los enclaves de la investigación incluyen lugares que nunca o durante más de una década se han estudiado para poder realizar una comparación diacrónica. El marco teórico utilizado en este estudio es la teoría de la variación en la cual las iniciales simples del Tai Dam se usan como variables dependientes, y las ubicaciones de los hablantes de Tai Dam sirven como variables independientes. Según la variación y el cambio de las iniciales individuales de Tai Dam, se clasifican en tres grupos. El primer grupo consiste en trece iniciales simples que permanecen intactas. El segundo grupo incluye cinco iniciales que cambian internamente del Old Tai Dam y no muestran variación regional. El último grupo tiene diecinueve iniciales simples que cambian de Old Tai Dam y varían según los lugares de Tailandia, Laos y Vietnam. La variación regional es causada básicamente por el contacto lingüístico, que es un factor externo importante. La mayoría de los hablantes del Tai Dam en los tres países son bilingües, por lo que las lenguas mayoritarias han influido definitivamente.

Palabras clave

variación regional, cambio lingüístico, consonantes iniciales, contacto lingüístico, Tai Dam/Black Tai

1. Introduction

This paper aims to study the initial single consonants of Tai Dam language which vary according to location, and to illustrate how language contact plays an important role in their regional variation. Tai Dam or Black Tai language, a language of the Southwestern branch of Tai-Kadai language group (Li 1960), is selected as a case study because it is spoken by a dominant ethnic group who live in three countries of Southeast Asia, namely, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Wherever this ethnic group lives, they are strongly united and establish their communities with distinguished ethnic identity. They are determined to preserve and strengthen their language and culture. Tai Dam people living in various locations are regularly in contact especially on special occasions such as the water splashing festival. In Thailand, Tai Dam associations of Thailand have been established in the western and northern regions of Thailand (Burusphat et al. 2011). At

present, transnational transportation and communications have made it easier for Tai Dam people in the three countries to visit each other. Even Tai Dam refugees in Europe and USA often come to visit their relatives in Southeast Asia. This intercommunication has strengthened the Tai Dam network, so much so that this ethnic group has become an important ethnic group of ASEAN community. The major purpose of this paper, therefore, is to compare the Tai Dam spoken in the homeland country of Vietnam, with that found in settled countries, notably Thailand and Laos so that the regional variation of this language and language contact with the majority living in these three countries may be revealed. The initial single consonants are focused on in this paper because their regional variation caused by internal and external factors are more evident than other phonological features.

Previous studies of Tai Dam phonological variation and change were mostly conducted in Thailand (Buranasing 1988; Liamprawat & Wattanaprasert 1996; Saeng-ngam 2006; Thavorn 2013; Yooyen 2013; Burusphat 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Most studies explore both social and regional variation. Age is used as an independent variable that conditions linguistic variation. This study expands the studied areas outside Thailand to cover Laos and Vietnam. In Thailand, the Tai Dam spoken in Suratthani province in the southern region of Thailand is studied as there is no previous study of the Tai Dam language at this location. The Tai Dam spoken in Loei province in northeast Thailand is also selected for this study because it was studied thirty-seven years ago (Ananthrawan 1978) and needs to be rechecked to determine phonological change. In Laos, the research site of this study is Luangnamtha province. The villages under study are different from those researched by L-Thongkum (2002b). In Vietnam, the studied areas are Dien Bien Phu, Son La, and Lo where previous studies were conducted over a decade ago (Gedney 1964; Fippinger & Fippinger 1974; and L-Thongkum 2002b) so it is worthwhile to make a diachronic comparison.

The following sections present general information on Tai Dam people, methodology, Old Tai Dam (OTD) single initials, Modern Tai Dam (MTD) single initials,

regional variation and change of Tai Dam single initials. A conclusion and discussion make up the final parts of the paper.¹

2. Tai Dam people

Tai Dam people are addressed by various names such as Tai Dam (Black Tai), Song, Lao Song, Thai Song, and Thai Song Dam. The original homeland of Tai Dam people was in Muang Thaeng, Sipsong Chao Tai (the twelve local administrative units) bordering Laos at Pongsali, Luang Prabang, and Huaphan provinces (Pitiphat 2002). This place used to be under the control of the Luang Prabang government (M. Sribusara 1987) but now it is Muang Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam. It is notable as an important battlefield against the French in 1953 (Sayphan 2011).

Later on a number of Tai Dam people migrated to Thailand and Laos because of war and in search of somewhere new to settle. The first forced migration to Thailand as prisoners of war was during the reign of King Taksin (1767-1782) and later migration occurred during the reigns of Rama I, Rama II, and Rama III (Baker & Phongpaichit 2005). This group of Tai Dam people was settled in Phetchaburi province in western Thailand and some of this group moved on to other provinces thereafter. In 1880, during the reign of Rama V, another group of Tai Dam people voluntarily migrated to Loei province (Paisoon 2010). Tai Dam people also migrated to northern Laos during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

3. Methodology

The framework used for the study of regional variation is Variation Theory which holds that linguistic forms have variants that are alternatively used but their meanings remain constant. Linguistic variation is conditioned by social factors such as region,

¹ List of abbreviations: Tai Dam (TD); Old Tai Dam Stage 1 (OTD 1); Old Tai Dam Stage 2 (OTD 2); Modern Tai Dam (MTD) Tai Dam Thai (TDT); Tai Dam Lao (TDL); Tai Dam Vietnam (TDV).

social class, educational background, or style (Snyder 1995). The linguistic variable used in this study is Tai Dam single initials as dependent variables, and the locations of Tai Dam speakers serve as independent variables. A diachronic comparison of Tai Dam single initials follows the works of Li (1977) and L-Thongkum (2002a) who reconstructed 1,827 Old Tai Dam words in two stages—Old Tai Dam 1 (OTD 1) and Old Tai Dam 2 (OTD 2) –as well as L-Thongkum (2002b) who reconstructed Old Tai Dam phonology.

The primary research tool consisted of a wordlist which was prepared by selecting seventy-six words from *Old Tai Dam (Black Tai) Lexicon* (L-Thongkum 2002a) based on the regional variation of single initials. A criterion for informant selection was age. Informants had to be over forty-five years old so as to be more fluent in their ethnic language than the younger generations and less influenced by official languages. Twenty-six informants were selected at two locations in Thailand. In Laos and Vietnam, thirteen informants were chosen in each country. Though this study focuses on regional variation, two additional young informants at each location were also included for a diachronic comparison. The total number of informants was sixty.

4. Old Tai Dam single initials

L-Thongkum (2002b) reconstructed the Old Tai Dam phonological system and Tai Dam lexicon. The data were collected from Son La, Lai Châu, Yên Bái, Lào Cai in northern Vietnam, Hua Khua village in Luangnamtha province, northern Laos, and Khaoyoi District of Phetchaburi province in western Thailand. It was found that Tai Dam people in northern Laos and western Thailand are conservative in regard to their language and culture as they take pride in their ethnic identity and the history of their homeland empire. L-Thongkum (2002b) classified Tai Dam language into two groups, eastern Tai Dam in Vietnam and western Tai Dam in Laos and Thailand. She reconstructed thirty-nine single initials as follows:

*p-	*t-	*c-	*k-	*ʔ-
*b-	*d-	*j-	*g-	
*ph-	*th-		*kh-	
*ʔb-	*ʔd-			
*m-	*n-	*ɲ-	*ŋ-	
*hm-	*hn-	*hɲ-	*hŋ-	
		*ʔɲ -	*ʔŋ -	
*f-	*s-		*x-	*h-
*v-	*z-		*ɣ-	*ɦ-
*w-	*l-	*j-		
*hw-	*hl-			
	*ʔl-	*ʔj-		

Table 1. Old Tai Dam single initials

L-Thongkum (2002b) found that a number of Old Tai Dam initial single consonants have changed in Modern Tai Dam. The voiced plosives /*b-, *d-, *j-, *g-/ have become unaspirated voiceless plosives /p-, t-, c-, k-/. The voiceless sonorants /*hm-, *hn-, *hɲ-, *hŋ-, *hw-, *hl-/ are reflected by voiced sonorants /m-, n-, ɲ-, ŋ-, w-, l-/. The preglottalized sonorants /*ʔɲ-, *ʔŋ-, *ʔl-, *ʔj/ are represented by voiced sonorants or glottal stop /ɲ-/ʔ-, ŋ-/ʔ-, l-/ʔ-, j/. The voiceless fricative /*x/ has changed to /s/. Voiced fricatives /*v-, *z-, *ɦ-/ have become voiceless fricatives /f-, s-, h-/ and /*ɣ-/ has changed to /kh-/.

5. Modern Tai Dam single initials

Modern Tai Dam single initials consist of 19-21 consonants depending on locations as follows.

p-	t-	c-	k-	ʔ-
b-	d-/l-			
ph-	th-	ch-	kh-/x-	
m-	n-	ɲ-	ŋ-	
f-	s-			h-
v-/w-	l-	y-/z-		

Table 2. Modern Tai Dam single initials

In the work of Gedney (1964), the Tai Dam language spoken in Son La, Vietnam does not have /ph-/ and the initial consonant /kh-/ is present whereas in the work of Fippinger & Fippinger (1974), /kh-/ is reflected by /x-/. In both works, /d-/ and /b-/ vary with [l-] and [v-] respectively according to region. Gedney (1964) notes that the changes of d- > l- and b- > v- are in progress and /y-/ is in free variation with [z-].

The Tai Dam language in Thailand does not have [x-, v-, z-]. These sounds are represented as [kh-, w-, y-] in Modern Tai Dam Thai.

Panka (1979) found that the phoneme /w-/ is sometimes pronounced as [v-] in the word, [viaʔ] 'work' by some informants. The sound [d-], freely varied with [l-], is analyzed as an allophone of the phoneme /l-/ (Ananthrawan 1978; Panka 1979; Wattanaprasert & Liamprawat 1988; Maneewong 1987; Unakornsawat 1993; Suesorsit 1992). On the other hand, Daecha (1986) and Jirananthanaporn et al. (2003) treat both /d-/ and /l-/ as phonemes and /d-/ has two allophones, [d-] and [l-] which are in free variation. Jirananthanaporn et al. (2003) add /ch-/, a borrowed sound from Standard Thai, to the Tai Dam phoneme inventory.

6. Regional variation and change of Tai Dam single initials

As mentioned in section 4, L-Thongkum (2002b) reconstructed thirty-nine single initials, including /*ʔn-, *ʔŋ-, *ʔl-/, because there are a number of words having these consonants. However, in L-Thongkum (2002a), she reconstructed /*ʔn-, *ʔŋ-, *ʔl-/ as /*ʔ-/. In this study, the reconstruction of /*ʔ-/ will be used so that the OTD single initials are reduced to thirty-six phonemes.

The single initials are classified into 3 groups as follows:

- (1) Thirteen OTD 1 initials which remain intact in all MTD dialects as in Table 3.

OTD 1						All MTD dialects				
Stops										
	*th-				>		th-			
*p-	*t-	*c-	*k-	*ʔ-	>	p-	t-	c-	k-	ʔ-
Fricatives										
*f-	*s-			*h-	>	f-	s-			h-
Sonorants										
*m-	*n-			*ŋ-	>	m-	n-			ŋ-
*w-						w-				

Table 3. Intact OTD 1 initials

(2) Five OTD 1 initials which changed in all MTD dialects and are not regionally varied as in Table 4.

OTD 1	OTD 2		TDT	TDL	TDV	TD sample word ²	Gloss
Fricatives							
*v-	*f-	>	f-	f-	f-	fa: ⁶	‘sky’
*z-	*s-	>	s-	s-	s-	sa:j ²	‘sand’
*ɣ-	*kh-	>	kh-	kh-	kh-	khwaɯj ¹	‘used to’
Sonorants							
*hm-	*m-	>	m-	m-	m-	mau ³	‘new’
*hn-	*n-	>	n-	n-	n-	naŋ ¹	‘skin’

Table 4. Changed OTD single initials without regional variation³

(3) Nineteen OTD 1 single initials which changed in all MTD dialects and are varied according to location, that is, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam as in Table 5.

² Tai Dam sample words are used in Thailand. The phonetic features of tones are 1-lower-mid rising; 2-mid rising falling; 3-mid high rising; 4-higher-mid level; 5-lower-mid falling; 6-higher-mid falling (Burusphat 2012).

³ Tai Dam Thai refers to Tai Dam dialects spoken in various locations in Thailand, namely, Suratthani province and Loei provinces which were the research sites for this study, as well as other locations studied in previous researches. Tai Dam Lao refers to the Tai Dam dialect spoken in Luangnamtha province, Laos where the data were collected for this study in 2016 as well as the Nam Tha Tai Dam dialect in the work of L-Thongkum (2002a). Tai Dam Vietnam refers to Tai Dam dialects spoken in Dien Bien Phu and Son La where the data were collected for this study in 2016 and Son La Tai Dam in the works of Gedney (1964) and Fippinger and Fippinger (1974). The Proto-Tai initials *gl-/*gr- (Li 1977) changed to *j- in OTD1 and *c- in OTD2 (L-Thongkum 2002a).

OTD 1	OTD 2		TDT	TDL	TDV	TD sample words	Gloss
Stops							
*ph-	*ph-	>	ph-~f-	f-~ ph-	f-~ ph-	phom ¹	'hair'
*kh-	*kh-	>	kh-	kh-	kh- ~ x-	khon ¹	'body hair'
*ʔb-	*ʔb-	>	b- ~ d-	b-	b- ~ v-	bwan ¹	'moon'
*ʔdl/r-	*ʔd-	>	d- ~ l- ~ n-	d- ~ l-	d- ~ l-	da:w ¹	'star'
*b-	*p-	>	p- ~ ph-	p- ~ ph-	p- ~ ph-	pi: ⁴	'elder sibling'
*d-	*t-	>	t- ~ th-	t- ~ th-	t- ~ th-	ta:ŋ ²	'way'
*j-	*c-	>	c- ~ ch- ~ s-	c- ~ s-	c-~ch-~s-	ca:ŋ ⁶	'elephant'
*gl/r-> j-	*c-	>	c- ~ kh-	c- ~ k-	c- ~ k- ~ h- ~ s-	ca:n ²	'crawl'
*g-	*k-	>	k- ~ kh-	k- ~ kh-	k-	kem ²	'salty'
Fricatives							
*x-	*s-	>	s- ~ kh-	s-	s-	saj ³	'egg'
*h-	*h-	>	h- ~ l-	h-	h-	hu: ²	'hole'
Sonorants							
*ɲ-	*ɲ-	>	ɲ- ~ j-	ɲ-	ɲ-	ɲuŋ ²	'mosquito'
*l-	*l-	>	l-	l-~ d-	l- ~ d-	liŋ ²	'monkey'
*j-	*j-	>	j- ~ ɲ-	j- ~ h-~z-	z- ~ ɲ-	ja: ⁴	'father's mother'
*ʔj-	*j-	>	j- ~ z-	j- ~ z-	z- ~ j- ~ ɲ-	ja: ²	'mother's mother'
*hw-	*w-	>	w- ~ v-	v-	v- ~ b-	va:n ¹	'sweet'
*hɲ-	*ɲ-	>	ɲ-~ j-	ɲ-	ɲ-~j-~ z-	ɲaa ⁵	'grass'
*hŋ->*h-	*h-	>	h-~ŋ-	h-	h-	ŋɔn ¹	'cockscorn'
*hl-	*l-	>	l-~ d-	l-	l-~ d-	lɛw ¹	'liquid'

Table 5. Changed OTD initials with regional variation

The regional variation and change of Tai Dam single initials will be discussed according to the consonant groups as follows:

1. Plosives

*ph- > ph-~f-

The OTD initial */*ph-/* is reflected by */ph~f-/*. Most MTD dialects reflect */ph-/*. L-Thongkum (2002a) expounds that */*ph-/* is represented by */f-/* before */i/* in all Tai Dam dialects. This statement agrees with what Thavorn (2013) found in the Tai Dam dialect spoken in Loei province, but only one word, [fiŋ¹] ‘to expose to fire or sunlight’ was present. TDV speakers use */f-/* because of language contact with Vietnamese in which */ph-/* is absent (Burusphat 2013). TDL speakers also use */f-/* as their ancestors migrated from Vietnam to Laos after */*ph/* changed to */f-/*. At present, */ph-/* is used both by TDV and TDL speakers because they have had contact with Lao people.

**kh-* > *kh~x-*

*/*kh-/* is represented by */kh~x-/*. The reflex */kh-/* is prevalent in all Tai Dam dialects. Gedney (1964) mentions that the Proto-Tai */*kh-/* merged with */*x-/* and became */kh-/*. In TDV, Fippinger & Fippinger (1974) found the reflex */x-/*, but it is absent in this study and other studies. Therefore, there might be a further shift from */kh-/* to */x-/*.

**ɓb-* > *b~d~v-*

The OTD */*ɓb-/* is reflected by */b~d~v-/*. The reflex */b-/* is found in all Tai Dam dialects. TDT also borrows */d-/* from Standard Thai. L-Thongkum (2002a) found two reflexes, */b-/* and */v-/*, the latter used in Lo, Than, Nam Ma villages. The initial */v-/* is absent in this study. All informants use */b-/*.

**ɓd-* > *d~l~n-*

The OTD */*ɓd-/* has three reflexes, */d~l~n-/*. In all Tai Dam dialects, */d-/* freely varies with */l-/*. Old informants in Thailand affirm that old Tai Dam does not have the initial */d-/* but rather */l-/* so */d-/* must have been borrowed from Thai (Burusphat 2013). As mentioned previously, most studies on TDT treat [d-] as an allophone of */l-/*. TDL and

TDV also use /l-/. As for the reflex /n-/, it is used by old Tai Dam speakers in Suphanburi and Phetchaburi provinces only in one word, [nom¹] ‘to smell’ (Burusphat 2013b).

*b-	>	p- ~ ph-
*d-	>	t- ~ th-
*j-	>	c- ~ ch- ~ s-
*gl-/*gr- > *j-	>	c- ~ kh- ~ k-
*g-	>	k- ~ kh-

As mentioned in section 4, the voiced plosives /*b-, *d-, *j-, *g-/ have become unaspirated voiceless plosives /p-, t-, c-, k-/ in all Tai Dam dialects. TDT and TDL also borrowed /ph-, th-, ch-/s-/ from Thai and Lao. It should be noted that the reflex /k-/ of *gl-/*gr- > *j- was originally /kh-/ which was borrowed from Thai or Lao. The borrowed /kh-/ was then adjusted as /k-/ to fit the unaspirated plosive group, which is a typical feature of Tai Dam. The phonological adaptation is summarized as follows:

*gl-/*gr-	>	*j-	>	kh-	>	k-
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Burusphat (2013b) calls this phonological adaptation a hypercorrection. The TDV is also influenced by the Lao language. Some Lao sounds such as /ph-, th-, s-/ are also borrowed.

2. Fricatives

*x-	>	s-~kh-
*h-	>	h-~l-

The OTD velar and glottal fricatives /*x-/ and /*h-/ have changed to /s-/ and /h-/ respectively in all Tai Dam dialects. TDT also has the Thai borrowed sounds *x-> kh- and *h->l- which is a simplified form of /r-/.

3. Sonorants

*ɲ- > ɲ- ~ j-

/ɲ-/ remains intact in all Tai Dam dialects. However, some Tai Dam speakers in Thailand also use the Thai sound /j-/.

*l- > l- ~ d-

The initial /ɲ-/ has two reflexes, /l-/ and /d-/. Most Tai Dam informants use /l-/. Some TDL and TDV speakers use /d-/ in some words such as [liŋ²] ~ [diŋ²] ‘monkey’.

*j- > j- ~ ɲ- ~ h- ~ z-

*ʔj- > j- ~ z-

The OTD initials /ɲ-/ and /ɲʔ-/ merge into /z-/ in TDV. Only two informants – 36 and 40 years old – use /z-/ and /ɲ-/ in different words. In all Tai Dam dialects in Thailand, except for Tai Dam dialect in Loei province, /ɲ-/ and /ɲʔ-/ merge into /j-/. In Loei TDT, /ɲ-/ changes to the Lao initial /ɲ-/ because the majority of people in Loei province speak the Lao or Isan language (Thavorn, 2013). L-Thongkum (2002a) found that /ɲʔj-/ is represented by /z-/, particularly in the word *ʔjaaŋC1> *zaaŋ³¹ ‘grill’ in TDT spoken in Phetchaburi province, as well as TDL in Luangnamtha province. In TDL, /ɲ-/ and /ɲʔj-/ also merge into /j-/ having four variants, [j- ~ ɲ- ~ h- ~ z-]. L-Thongkum (2002a) found the variant [h-] in the word /het³³/, a Lao loanword, whereas TDT speakers in Petchaburi province use /ʔet³³/.

*hw- > w- ~ v- ~ b-

The OTD initial /hw-/ has three reflexes, /w-, v-, b-/. The reflex /w-/ is present in most TDT dialects (Burusphat 2013). The reflex /v-/ is found in TDT in Petchaburi province and TDL in Luangnamtha (L-Thongkum 2002a). Most TDV speakers use /b-/ and

few use /v-/ and /w-/. TDL speakers in this study use both /v-/ and /b-/ approximately the same.

*hŋ- > ɲ~j~z-

Most TDT speakers in all dialects use the reflex /ɲ-/ of /*hŋ-/. Only some speakers use the Thai sound /j-/. Some TDV speakers follow the change of *j-, *ʔj- > z- and use /z-/ instead of /ɲ-/.

*hŋ- > *h- > h~ŋ-

Most Tai Dam speakers in all locations use the reflex /h-/ of *hŋ->*h-. Some TDT speakers also use the Thai sound /ŋ-/.

*hl- > l~d-

TDT speakers use only the reflex /l-/ of /*hl-/. Most TDL and TDV speakers use /l-/ whereas few use both /l-/ and /d-/ in different words.

7. Conclusion and discussion

This paper aimed to study the regional variation of Tai Dam single initials in three countries in the ASEAN region, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Based on the variation and change of the Tai Dam single initials, they are classified into three groups as follows:

(1) The thirteen single initials which remain intact include *th->th-, *p->p-, *t->t-, *c->c-, *k->k-, *ʔ->ʔ-, *f->f-, *s->s- *h->h-, *m->m-, *n->n-, *ŋ->ŋ-, *w->w-.

(2) The five single initials which internally change from OTD 1 and show no regional variation are: *v->f-, *z->s-, *ɣ->kh-, *hm->m-, *hn->n-.

(3) The nineteen single initials which change from OTD 1 and are varied according to location in Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam are listed in table 6. The regional variation is caused by both internal and external factors.

OTD 1	OTD 2		Internal factors	External factors				
				Language contact			Others	
			Variants					
Plosives				Thai	Lao	Vietnam		
*ph-	*ph-	>	ph-	ph-	ph-	f-		
*kh-	*kh-	>	kh-			x-		
*ʔb-	*ʔb-	>	b-	d-		v-		
*ʔdl/r-	*ʔd-	>	d~l~n-	d-	d-			
*b-	*p-	>	p-	ph-	ph-			
*d-	*t-	>	t-	th-	th-			
*j-	*c--	>	c-	ch-	ch~s-			
*gl/r->j-	*c-	>	c-	kh-	s-		k-	h-
*g-	*k-	>	k-	kh-				
Fricatives								
*x-	*s-	>	s-	kh-				
*h-	*h-	>	h-	l-				
Sonorants								
*ɲ-	*ɲ-	>	ɲ-	j-				
*l-	*l-	>	l-					d-
*j-	*j-	>	j-		ɲ~h-	z-		
ʔj-	*j-	>	j-		ɲ-	z-		
*hw-	*w-	>	w-			v-		b-
*hɲ-	*ɲ-	>	ɲ-	j-		z-		
*hɳ-	*h-	>	h-	ɳ-				
*hl-	*l-	>	l-					d-

Table 6. Regional variation of Tai Dam single initials caused by internal and external factors

The most important factor that triggers regional variation of single initials is language contact. A typical feature of Tai Dam language in all locations is the change of the voiced plosives /*b-, *d-, *j-, *g-/ to unaspirated voiceless plosives /p-, t-, c-, k-/. In Thailand, young generation speakers have adopted the aspirated voiceless plosives /ph-, th-, ch-, kh-/ from Thai. There is a tendency that /p-, t-, c-, k-/ might be replaced by /ph-, th-, ch-, kh-/. In Laos, the aspirated voiceless plosives /ph-, th-, kh-/ are also pronounced by some young speakers since, in the Lao language, the voiced plosives are also

reflected by aspirated voiceless plosives. The borrowed initial *j-> c- has also been replaced by the Lao initial /s-/. In Vietnam, recent contact with Lao people has resulted in some TDV speakers borrowing aspirated voiceless plosives from Lao.

In addition to the aspirated voiceless plosives, TDT have also replaced some other initials with Thai initials as exemplified below.

OTD > MTD	TD words	Thai words	Gloss
*x->s-	saj ³	khaj ³	'egg'
*ɲ->ɲ-	ɲuŋ ²	juŋ ²	'mosquito'
*h->h-	hu: ²	lu: ² (ru: ²)	'hole'
*hɲ->ɲ-	ɲaw ³	jaw ³	'big'
*hŋ->h-	hɔŋ ¹	ŋɔŋ ¹	'cockscorb'

Table 7. Replacement of Tai Dam initials with Thai initials in TDT

TDL is also influenced by the majority language. Some TDL speakers in Luangnamtha have replaced *j- > c- with /ɲ-/ in the same way as TDT in Loei province, and some use *j- > h- which is borrowed from the Lao word /het³³/ (L-Thongkum, 2002a). In modern Lao language, the Proto-initials /*j-/ and /*ʔj-/ do not merge (Li, 1977) whereas in MTD and Thai, they merge into /j-/ as follows:

Lao	MTD and Thai
*j- > ɲ-	*j- > j-
*ʔj- > j-	*ʔj- > j-

The Lao initial *j-> ɲ-, which is borrowed by TDL and TDT in Loei province, might cause a merger of *j->j-> ɲ- and *ɲ-> ɲ- instead of the original merger of *j->j- and *ʔj- > j- as seen below.

OTD	MTD	Lao
*ɲ- >	ɲ-	
*j- >	j- >	ɲ-
*ʔj- >	j-	

In Vietnam, some single initials have been replaced by Vietnamese initials as compared with TDT and TDL as follows:

OTD		TDT	TDL	TDV
*ph-	>	ph-	f-	f-
*j-	>	j-/ɲ-	ɲ-	z-

Because Tai Dam speakers in all three countries are bilinguals, the Tai Dam language is influenced by the majority languages. TDV speakers have replaced /ph-/ with the Vietnamese initial /f-/ since the Vietnamese language does not have the initial /ph-/. This replacement probably took place after the Tai Dam people now resident in western Thailand, originally migrated there because Tai Dam speakers at this location still use /ph-/. The migration of Tai Dam people from Vietnam to Laos took place after the replacement of /ph-/ by /f-/ since /f-/ is prevalent in Laos.

In addition to /f-/, TDV speakers have also borrowed the initial /z-/ from Vietnamese. In Vietnamese, the voiced palatal fricative has two forms– /z-/ as used in central Vietnam, and /j-/ as in southern Vietnam (Wikipedia, n.d., Accessed: 17th August, 2016). Therefore, TDV speakers who live in northwest Vietnam pronounce /z-/, a reflex of /*j-/ and /*ʔj-/, as in the following sample words.

OTD		TDV	Sample words	Gloss
*j-	>	z-	zaa ⁴	‘father’s mother’
*ʔj-	>	z-	zaa ²	‘medicine’

It is evident that language contact plays an important role on regional variation of Tai Dam language in the three countries. Some minor external factors influencing regional variation are also found in this study. A hypercorrection is an external factor by which some Tai Dam speakers adjust certain initials to fit the phonological system of Tai Dam. For example, some young speakers pronounce the words /caan²/ ‘moan’ and /caan²/ ‘crawl’ as /kaan²/ and /kaan²/ respectively because they have borrowed the initial /kh-/ from Thai and adjusted it as /k-/ to fit the phonological system of Tai Dam

which is classified as an unaspirated voiceless initial group (P-group) (Chamberlain 1975). The process of adjustment is as follows:⁴

Proto-Tai	OTD1	OTD2	MTD			
*graŋA>	*jaŋA>	*caŋA2>	caŋ ² >	khaŋ ² >	kaŋ ²	'moan'
*glaŋA>	*jaanA>	*caanA2>	caan ² >	khaan ² >	kaan ²	'crawl'

Another external factor is the merger of OTD initials which results in confusion for some Tai Dam speakers as seen in the following example.

OTD		MTD	Sample words	Gloss
*ʔd-	> d- >	l-	di: ¹ ~ li: ¹	'good'
*l-	>	l-	lin ⁶ ~ din ⁶	'tongue'
*hl-	>	l-	lɛw ¹ ~ dɛw ¹	'fluid'

The OTD initial /*ʔd-/ is reflexed by /d-/ which later on changes to /l-/. The initial /l-/ is presently used in free variation with the original reflex /d-/ at various locations. The OTD initials /*l-/ and /*hl-/ which are represented by /l-/ then merge with *ʔd->d->l-. Consequently, some Tai Dam speakers confusingly use /d-/ as a variant of *l-, *hl- > l- as in the sample words above.

The result of this study reveals a comparison of Tai Dam single initials spoken in the homeland of Tai Dam people, Vietnam and in newly settled countries, Thailand and Laos. The regional variation is caused by both internal and external factors. It is hoped that this study can be beneficial to some organizations such as language planning organizations and ethnic language preservation organizations. At academic institutions where linguistic courses are taught, it can be applied in such courses as dialectology, and comparative and historical linguistics. The study further promotes the maintenance of Tai Dam identity as well as helps to unite Tai Dam people living in the three countries in the context of a changing and varying ASEAN society.

⁴ See details of the Proto-Tai tones A, B, C, D in Gedney (1972).

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