

## Chapter I



### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

Kui, Bruu and So are languages in the Katuic branch of the Mon-Khmer family of languages. Mon-Khmer languages are spoken throughout most of Southeast Asia, and the speakers of these languages are descendants of what are considered to be the indigenous populations of Southeast Asia.

The Katuic languages, consisting of Bru, Kattang, Katu, Kuy, Makong, Ngeq, Nkriang, Ong, Pacoh, Sli, So, Sui, Ta-oy (after Smith 1981:194-195) and possibly others, have been established as one of the 12 branches of the Mon-Khmer family of languages which, along with the Munda languages of India, comprise the Austroasiatic stock.

The Katuic languages are spoken throughout a relatively broad area extending from central Vietnam (Quang Tri, Quang Nam and Thua Thien Provinces) westward, covering most of middle (as far north as Kham Muon Province) and southern Laos, into parts of northeastern Thailand and north central Cambodia.

The particular languages that I have chosen for this comparative study: Kui, Bruu and So are spoken in several provinces of northeastern Thailand. Since dictionaries of all three languages had been compiled, ample data was readily available.

These languages have been classified under Katuic sub-branches of various designations: So-Souei, So-Bruu, Souei-Kuy, North Katuic, West Katuic, etc. mostly based on lexical evidence. (See Thomas and

Headley 1970; Ferlus 1974a, 1974b; Headley 1976a, 1976b; Diffloth 1982; Smith 1981.)

It may be that both more lexical and more phonological evidence can and should be used to propose different or further subdivisions within the Katuic branch.

One is struck again and again by statements by several Mon-Khmer scholars that the real "needs" in Mon-Khmer comparative-historical studies are systematic reconstructions at the "lower" levels, i.e. of various closely related, often overlooked, "minor" languages down in the root sections of all those impressive-looking family trees. It seems that most often such needs refer to phonological comparison to support findings of lexical comparisons, as noted by Smith (1981:203):

The lexicostatistic classification of languages is perforce tentative, but helpful for lack of a more definite means to relate languages. More phonological work is urged to refine these language relationships more definitely. (See also Thomas and Headley 1970:411.)

Historical reconstructions of Mon-Khmer languages firmly based on reliable descriptive data and beginning with groups of more closely related languages have been accomplished within the past two decades (e.g. Blood 1966; Thomas and Smith, M. 1967; Thomas, D. M. 1967; Smith 1972; Diffloth 1982, 1984). Comparative studies have soundly established the genetic relationships of many of the languages, but theoretical questions have been raised concerning the factors involved in linguistic change and the methods used to evaluate them. Sometimes conflicting results in regards to subgroupings are obtained from phonological and lexical comparisons, with questions raised concerning the precision and reliability of phonological comparisons (Gregerson, Smith and Thomas 1976; Hamp 1976; Headley 1976a, 1976b; Huffman 1976; Thomas 1980; for general discussion see Bradley 1979a, 1979b).

Hoping to keep myself neutral as regards the usefulness of phonological versus lexical evidence in genetic subgrouping, I proposed to undertake this study as a contribution to these needs in Mon-Khmer comparative-historical linguistics.

## 1.2 Purposes

1.2.1 To present phonological descriptions of Kui, Bruu and So, of the Katuic branch of Mon-Khmer.

1.2.2 To compare the phonological systems of the three languages, in particular phonological inventories and the distribution of phonological units.

1.2.3 To determine the genetic relationships of Kui, Bruu and So based on shared and non-shared features of their phonological systems and on shared and independent phonological developments.

1.2.4 To compare the results and conclusions of 1.2.3 to those of other linguists mainly based on lexicostatistics and to discuss the classification of these three languages in Katuic sub-branches.

## 1.3 Hypotheses

1.3.1 The comparison of the phonological systems of Kui, Bruu and So and the analysis of sound correspondences between them is one line of evidence for determining the genetic relationships between these three languages.

1.3.2 The results and conclusions concerning genetic relationships which are based on comparative phonological evidence may agree with those which based on lexicostatistical evidence.

## 1.4 Scope

This study will focus on the phonological systems of the Kui language spoken at Ban Sang-kae, Tambon Ban Tael, Sikhoraphum District, Surin Province (sometimes referred to as Kui Ban Tael), the Bruu lan-

guage spoken at Ban Woen Buek, Tambon Khongchiam, Ubon Ratchathani Province (Bruu Woen Buek), and the So language spoken at Ban Photi Phaisan, Tambon Photi Phaisan, Kusuman District, Sakon Nakhon Province (So Photi Phaisan). Data will be mainly from the dictionaries on these three languages (Prasert Sriwises 1978; Theraphan L. Thongkum and See Puengpa 1980; Gainey and Klang Chaonam 1981).

### 1.5 Methodology and Procedures

1.5.1 Review the literature and data on Kui, Bruu and So, on the Katuic branch and on Mon-Khmer comparative-historical studies.

1.5.2 Compile and collate phonological and lexical data. Review the analyses and descriptions of Kui, Bruu and So phonological systems. Make detailed comparisons of their syllable structures and their consonant, vowel and register systems for similarities and differences.

1.5.3 Collate cognate sets and determine and analyze sound correspondences and patterns.

1.5.4 Draw tentative conclusions on the relationships of Kui, Bruu and So based on phonological evidence.

1.5.5 Summarize and make final conclusions. Compare them to those based on lexicostatistical evidence. Discuss implications of conclusions and other results of the study. Consider areas for further study and write up the material.

### 1.6 Related Research and Documents

The following documents and related research were used in this study for data sources and preparatory reading:

1.6.1 Prasert Sriwises (1978) is a tri-lingual dictionary of Kui, English and Thai containing about 3,000 entries, a more than adequate data base for phonological comparison purposes. It also con-

tains a brief phonological description of the language, information on Kui dialects and the geographical and historical settings of the Kui.

1.6.2 Theraphan L. Thongkum and See Puengpa (1980) is a trilingual dictionary of Bruu, English and Thai with approximately 3,000 entries. It too has a phonological sketch of the language, and some historical and geographical information on the Bruu.

1.6.3 Theraphan L. Thongkum (1980) provides a detailed description of Bruu syllables, the register system, the consonant and vowel systems and charts showing the distribution of vowels and final consonants. Phonetic details are given for consonants and vowels as well as their frequencies of occurrence.

1.6.4 Gainey and Klang Chaonam (1981) is an unpublished dictionary of So and English containing about 3,000 entries along with an unpublished phonological sketch of So.

1.6.5 Thomas, D. M. (1967) is a phonological reconstruction of Proto East Katuic based on data from manuscript dictionaries of 3 Katuic languages spoken in Vietnam: Katu, Pacoh and Brou (Bru). This study is concerned primarily with the main syllable consonants and vowels and proposed that within East Katuic a family tree can best be constructed on the basis of the stop series of consonants particularly. This family tree is the same as that found by lexicostatistics; in it Brou and Pacoh are established as sister languages within the sub-family of Brou-Pacoh.

1.6.6 Diffloth (1982) is another historical study of Katuic languages. Using data from recently published dictionaries of 7 languages, it outlines a reconstruction of Proto Katuic based mainly on long vowels and diphthongs and shows that devoicing of initial conso-

nants, registers and vowel qualities are not as interdependent as previously thought. It further supports a division of Katuic into East and West, with the So-Bruu and Souei-Kuy sub-groups comprising West Katuic.

1.6.7 Johnston (1976) is a very detailed phonetic and phonological description of a Kuy dialect spoken in eastern Surin Province. Comparing the phonological inventory of Kuy to Thai, the writer proposes the use and adaptation of the Thai writing system for transcribing Kuy.

1.6.8 Phailin Yantreesingh (1980) is a study of the phonology of the Kuay language spoken in western Thailand and a phonological comparison of Kuay to the Kui of Prasert Sriwises (1978). The two dialects are found to be closely related; the author also compares the results with some lexicostatistic figures.

1.6.9 Ekawit Chinowat (1983) is a study and comparison of the morphological processes of Kui, Bruu and So which concludes that Bruu and So are more closely related genetically than either is to Kui, lending support to Smith's placement of Kui in West Katuic and Bruu and So in the separate subdivision of North Katuic based on lexicostatistical figures (Smith 1981).

1.6.10 Several other indirectly related studies were also consulted: Miller, J. D. (1967); Miller, J. D. and Miller, C. (1976); Phillips, Miller and Miller (1976); Ferlus (1979); Huffman (1980); Taveeporn Suwannaraj (1980).

## 1.7 Contribution of this Research

1.7.1 Presents descriptions of the phonological systems of Kui, Bruu and So and analysis of their similarities and differences.

1.7.2 Provides more phonological evidence from closely relat-

ed languages needed to determine and explain the complex sound changes that have taken place in many Mon-Khmer languages, especially regarding vowel and register systems.

1.7.3 Represents another effort to determine genetic relationships between Mon-Khmer languages by utilizing phonological evidence and comparing the results and conclusions to those reached by lexicostatistics.