

The Biao languages of NW Guangdong, China

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Introduction

- ▶ Autonym: **koŋ⁵³pju³³** (in Dagang Town)
- ▶ Spoken just NW of Guangzhou in:
 - **Huaiji County**, Guangdong (majority)
 - Fengkai County, Guangdong (2 townships)
 - Hezhou, Guangxi (a few villages)
- ▶ Speakers: **150,000** (Yang Biwan 2011)
- ▶ **Vigorous** language use, spoken by all ages
- ▶ Officially all ethnic **Han**
- ▶ Easily accessible **lowland locations**
- ▶ Yet, many varieties are **undescribed** (except Shidong)

People

- ▶ Ethnically self-identify as simply another Han Chinese group
- ▶ No ethnic minority clothing or visible customs
- ▶ Only their language is non-Han Chinese (which they generally do not realize), which has many Yue Chinese loanwords as well.

Why Biao?

- ▶ **Least documented internal variety** among major Kra-Dai (KD) subgroups
 - Tai, Ong Be, Kra, [core] Kam-Sui, Lakkja, and Biao
- ▶ Located closest to KD homeland: Pearl River Delta region
- ▶ Unique forms within KD that may be crucial for PKD reconstruction and subgrouping (e.g., tshan1 'rain')

KD riverine dispersal: up the Pearl River watershed



Internal diversity of Biao

3 mutually unintelligible languages:

- ▶ **1. Shidong Biao** 诗洞 (55,000)
 - *Liandu* 莲都 (1,300)
 - *He'erkou* 河儿口 (1,750)
 - *Shatian* 沙田 (20)
- ▶ **2. Yonggu Biao** 永固 (40,000)
- ▶ **3. Northwestern Biao** (65,000)
 - *Dagang* 大岗 (30,000)
 - *Qiaotou* 桥头 (10,000)
 - *Liangcun* 梁村 (18,000)
 - *Chang'an* 长安 (7,000)

Previous work

- ▶ **Shidong Biao**: documented in Liang Min (2002)
 - Grammar, texts, and 1,500-word list

New data (previously no extensive documentation)

I collected new data from 2 more closely languages in May 2013.

- ▶ **1. Yonggu Biao**: Between Shidong and NW Biao areas. Several words documented in Liang Min (2002).
- ▶ **2. NW Biao**: I have personally observed Biao speakers from Dagang and Chang'an talking to each other without problems. Several words documented in the *Fengkai County Gazetteer* (1998).

Datapoints

1. **Shidong** Township 诗洞镇, Huaiji County (Liang Min 2002)
2. **Yonggu** Township 永固镇, Huaiji County, Guangdong Province (field notes 2013)
3. Zhailing Village 寨岭村, **Dagang** Township 大岗镇, Huaiji County, Guangdong Province (field notes 2013)
4. Baoshan Village 保山村, **Chang'an** Township 长安镇, Fengkai County, Guangdong Province (field notes 2013)

Some initial correspondences

- NW Biao is in many ways most conservative; only one to preserve:
 - *s-
 - *k-
 - etc.

Proto-Biao	Shidong	Yonggu	NW	Examples
*s-	θ	θ	s	three, star
*tɕ-	θ	θ	tɕ	hair, back
*k-	ts/_i	tɕ/_u	k/_i	l

Importance of documenting Biao internal diversity:
Forms with different etymologies

(Italics in table: Yue Chinese loanwords)

Gloss	Shidong	Yonggu	Dagang	Chang'an
liver	<i>kɔŋ3</i>	ɲien53	<i>kuŋ53</i>	ɲin423
tongue	<i>tshu1</i>	ɲen33 phyə55	li53	<i>tɕə53 tɕit35</i>
to kill	thɔŋ1	<i>sat55</i>	khə33	thɛuŋ55
meat	nɔn4, ɲa:u4	tɕiə33	<i>ɲok53</i>	mou33 tɕiə53
head louse	jɔ2	jau53	<i>tou33 sat55</i>	kou33 tɕo55

- ▶ ‘**liver**’: Yonggu *ɲien53*, Chang’an *ɲin423* < PHM **h.ɲeŋX* ‘intestines’ (rather unexpected!)
- ▶ ‘**tongue**’: Yonggu *phyə55* related to Kam-Sui **ma2* ?; but Dagang *li53* < Tai **li:n C*
- ▶ ‘**to kill**’: Dagang *khə33* < Tai **qa: C* / Kam-Sui #*va3*; Shidong *thɔŋ1*, Chang’an *thɛuŋ55* are innovations
- ▶ ‘**meat**’: Shidong *nɔn4* < Kam-Sui **na:n4*; Yonggu *tɕiə33*, Chang’an *mou33 tɕiə53* are innovations

Forms shared only with Lakkja, but not other KD

Gloss	Biao	Lakkja	P–Kam–Sui	P–Tai
leg	puk7	puk7	*kwa1, *ti:n1	*p.qa: A
road	ti6 tsɔŋ1	tsa:ŋ1	#khwən1	* ^h rwɛn A
neck	lak8 ɲen1	kan3 ʔɛn1	*ɣo1	*ɣo: A
house	lək10	lie:k8	*hra:n1	*rɛ:n A
stone	ta1 pɔŋ2	fa:ŋ1	*pra1	*tri:l A
to cry	ta1 phɔ1	piē1	*ʔne3	*t.haj C
heavy	tshak7	tsak7	#zan1	* ^h nak D

P-Kam-Sui: starred forms from Thurgood (1988), forms with pound signs are my own preliminary quasi-reconstructions.

P-Tai: from Pittayaporn (2009)

Forms cognate with Tai

- ▶ ‘**to eat**’: Yonggu kun33 < PT *kɯŋ A
 - ▶ ‘**blood**’: Dagang lyt11 < PT *lɯət D
 - ▶ ‘**salt**’: Dagang luə53 < PT *klwɯə A
 - ▶ ‘**tongue**’: Dagang li53 < PT *li:n C
- Dagang has been in contact with Tai? Or are these retentions?

Forms cognate with Kam-Sui

While others apparently have Kam-Sui cognates.

- ▶ ‘**hand**’: Yonggu ɲam33 ʔiə53 < PKS *k-mja1; but also in Kra
- ▶ ‘**nose**’: kaŋ2 ɲaŋ3 < PKS *ʔnaŋ1
- ▶ ‘**snake**’: tshy1 < PKS *dzu:i2
- ▶ ‘**painful**’: kət9 < PKS #kit7
- ▶ ‘**sky**’: man1 < PKS *ɬun1
- ▶ ‘**needle**’: tsham1 < PKS #tshəm1
- ▶ ‘**fish**’: ma:i6 < PKS *mprai3

Forms unique to Biao

But, many more words are NOT shared with Lakkja and other KD. Forms are Shidong unless otherwise indicated.

- ▶ ‘**head**’: Shidong ha6 lo5, Yonggu lo33 mu33
- ▶ ‘**eye**’: Shidong θo1 θiaŋ3,
Yonggu jam33 tsɔ55
- ▶ ‘**to sleep**’: han5
- ▶ ‘**to buy**’: ɔ1
- ▶ ‘**near**’: Shidong a5, Dagang ɲe33

Unique Biao reflexes

Forms common in other KD branches but with different reflexes in Biao

- ▶ ‘**to steal**’: Shidong θak8; Tai *C̣.lak D; KS *hljak7
- ▶ ‘**dog**’: Shidong mu3; Tai *^hma.; KS *k-hma1
- ▶ ‘**leaf**’: Shidong mai5; Tai *ɬaɯ A; KS *pwa5
- ▶ ‘**rain**’: Shidong tshan1; Tai *C̣.wun A; KS *xwin1; Kra *jəl A
- ▶ ‘**moon**’: Shidong phyn1; Tai *ɬlɯən A; KS *nüa:n1' or #mla:n1
- ▶ ‘**day**’: Dagang maŋ53; Tai *ɲwan A; KS *hɲwan1

Classification

Possibilities

- ▶ 1. Biao **forms a subgroup with Lakkja**, with Biao-Lakkja constituting an outer subgroup of greater Kam-Sui. (cf. Khasic and Palaungic)
 - The Lakkja and Kam (Dong) claim that their ancestors had migrated from further to the east in Guangdong.
- ▶ 2. Biao is an **independent primary branch** of KD (like Tai and Kra) that has borrowed from earlier forms of Lakkja and Kam-Sui (before they had migrated westward from the Pearl River Delta).

What next?

- ▶ Proto-Biao reconstruction needed
- ▶ New reconstruction of Proto-Kam-Sui
- ▶ Lengthy word lists needed for Yonggu Biao and NW Biao
- ▶ Computational analysis of KD branches using MrBayes, SplitsTree, etc.

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