

The Angkuic languages: a preliminary survey

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Angkuic languages and ISO 639-3 codes

- **U:** ISO 639-3 U [uuu]. This is a geographically widespread dialect chain that includes P’uman, Avala, Ghu, Alva, Auva, etc. I will propose calling this dialect chain Northern Angkuic, since not all dialects are called U.
- **Hu:** duplicate ISO 639-3’s Hu [huo], Kon Keu [kkn]; Hu is also called *xɔn55 kɔt35* (Yan & Zhou 2012:152)
- **Man Met:** ISO 639-3 Man Met [mml]
- **Muak Sa-aak:** ISO 639-3 Mok [mqt]

Ethnologue also mistakenly lists Tai Loi [tlq], Kiorr [xko], and Samtao [stu] as Angkuic languages. No ISO codes exist for **Va** or **Angku**.

Background

- All Angkuic languages are tonal (cf. Svantesson 1988, 1991).
- Angkuic languages display a “Germanic-type” consonant shift, where Proto-Palaungic unvoiced, unaspirated stops change to aspirated stops in Angkuic languages.
- Angkuic languages preserve Proto-Palaungic *s- > s-, while Waic languages display Proto-Palaungic *s- > h-.
- In Northern Angkuic (U), Proto-Palaungic final nasals are reflected as final stops, such as *-ŋ > -k, *-m > -p.
- Muak Sa-aak (Hall 2010), Hu (Li 2006), and Manmet (Chen 2005) are the only Angkuic languages with more than 1,000 lexical items documented. U is documented by word lists of several hundred items. All others are very scantily documented.
- The only grammar of an Angkuic language is Chen’s (2005) sketch grammar of Manmet.

Names

Most Angkuic speakers are officially classified as ethnic Bulang in China. However, the Bulang (Blang) proper speak a Waic language, not an Angkuic language. Thus, in China, *Bulang* 布朗 can refer to speakers of both Angkuic and Waic languages, while *Wa* 佤 (another officially recognized ethnic group in China) also refers to speakers of Waic languages.

“Va”

Various groups refer to themselves as “Va”. The autonym Va / Wa is not exclusive to speakers of Waic languages.

1. *Eastern Angkuic* speakers in Mojiang County (vaʔ⁵¹)
2. *Northern Angkuic* (U) speakers in Lincang (“Va”), Shuangjiang (“Alva” /a³¹vaʔ¹³/), Lancang (“Auva” /ɔ⁵⁵vā²¹/), and Nanjian (“Avala” /a²¹ va²¹ la²¹/)
3. *Waic* speakers (“Wa”, “Va” /vaʔ/, “Ava” /ʔa vɤʔ/, “Avala” /xa³¹ va⁵³ lɔi⁵³/)

In Wendong Township 文东乡, Lancang County, Yunnan, Northern Angkuic speakers refer to themselves as **va²¹** (creaky voice) or alternatively as **ɔ⁵⁵va²¹** (“Auva”), while they refer to Waic speakers in neighboring villages of the same township as **va²¹** (lax voice). The Waic speakers refer to themselves as **va[?]** (lax voice), and unlike the Angkuic speakers, they speak a non-tonal language. The Northern Angkuic speakers (va²¹) are officially classified as Bulang 布朗 by the Chinese government, while the Waic speakers (va[?]) are officially classified as Wa 佤.

Neither two of these “Va” should be confused with the Eastern Angkuic va[?]⁵¹ spoken in Mojiang County.

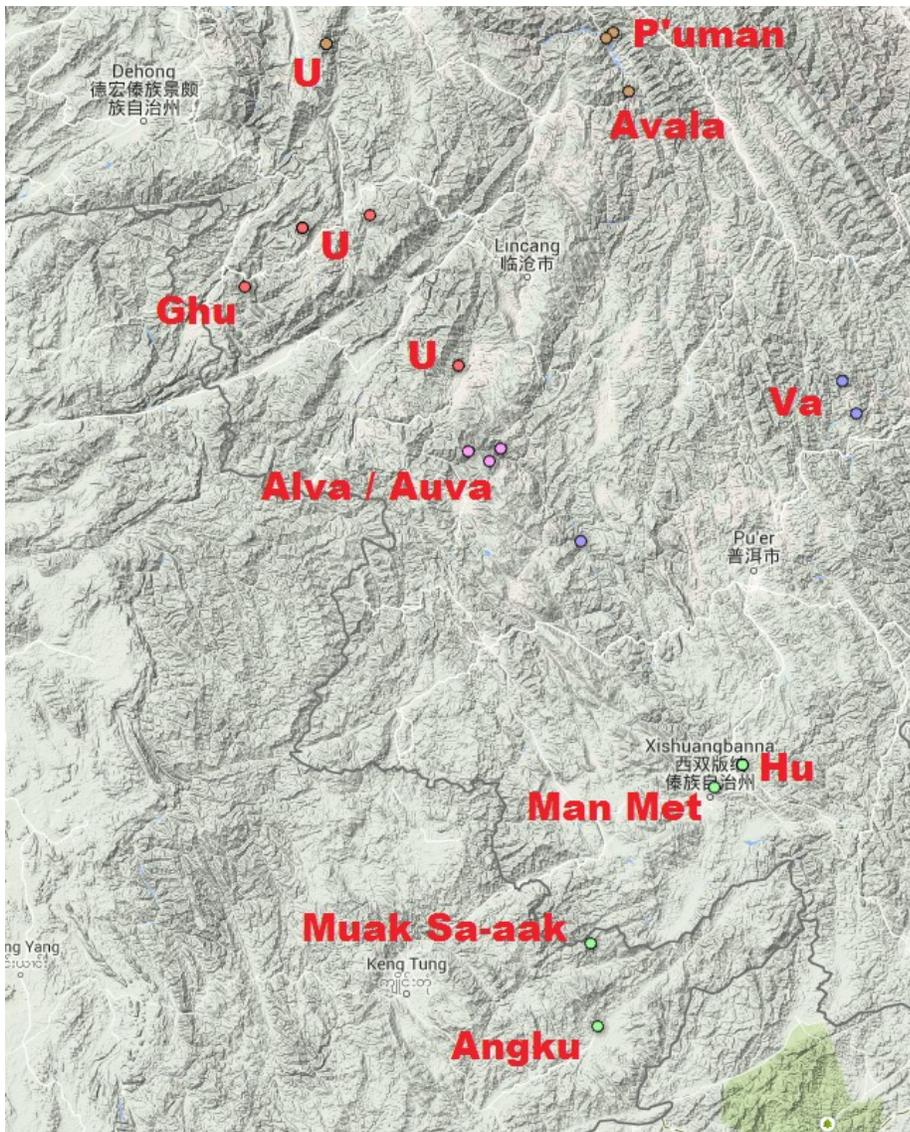


Figure 1: Map of Angkuic languages

New documentation of two Angkuic lects

1. Va (va?⁵¹) of Mojiang County, Yunnan

On April 10-11, 2014, I collected about 270 words from Northern Va and about 100 words from Southern Va. Both are spoken in several scattered villages in Jingxing Township 景星乡, Mojiang County, Yunnan, China. Southern Va is spoken only by middle-age and elderly people, but not by children. It is more conservative and retains many sequisyllabic prefixes, particularly /s-/, which are not retained in Northern Va. Northern Va, which is also vigorously spoken by children, may have about 2,000 speakers, and for Southern Va, perhaps just under 1,000. The Va of Mojiang County are geographically isolated from other Austroasiatic-speaking groups, as no other Austroasiatic languages are spoken within perhaps a 100-km radius.

My Northern Va informant, surnamed Li 李, is a 27-year-old male shopkeeper who is fluent in Putonghua (standard Mandarin), Southwestern Mandarin, and Va. He has worked in Kunming for a few years before. According to Li, the ancestors of the Va were also called “Mang 莽” in the past, and had migrated from the Dali area, which is located much further to the northwest. My Southern Va informant is 42-year-old Wang Lijuan 王丽娟. Data collection on Southern Va was performed under time constraints, since it was done during a bus break by the side of a road while I was on my way to the Mojiang county seat.

My Northern Va informant claimed that Southern Va is very difficult for him to understand, but my Southern Va informant reported that she understands Northern Va perfectly well. Also, speakers are aware that Va numerals (except 1-3) are from Tai. However, most of their neighbors are Kaduo (*kha31 tu31*) speakers, a Southern Loloish group; the Tai are a minority in the region.

Northern Va is spoken in about 8 villages in Taihe Administrative Village 太和村, Jingxing Township 景星乡, Mojiang County, Yunnan, China by about 600 ethnic Bulang households or just over 2,000 families. All generations, including children, speak the language fluently.

- Wamo 挖墨
- Xinzhai 新寨 (Upper 上 and Lower 下 hamlets)
- Jiuzhai 旧寨
- Dazhai 大寨 (Upper 上 and Lower 下 hamlets)
- Xiaozhai 小寨 (Upper 上 and Lower 下 hamlets)

Southern Va is spoken in the following villages of Zhenglong Administrative Village 正龙村, Jingxing Township 景星乡, Mojiang County, Yunnan, China. The children do not speak Va.

- Pingtian 平田
- Banglao 蚌老 (culture and language best preserved)
- Miena 乜那

- Binggu 丙故
- Yin'gou 阴沟
- Yakou 丫口 (culture and language least preserved)

Even their autonym is “Va,” their language is fully Angkuic, and does not have any Waic influence or substrate.

2. Avala of Yun County, Yunnan

Avala (*a21 va21 la21*) is a previously undocumented Angkuic lect that I had recorded on April 30, 2014 in Bangliu 邦六, Manghuai Township 芒怀乡, Yun County 云县, Yunnan, China. Avala is practically extinct, and there is only one elderly man in the entire village cluster who remembers any words from the language – 83-year-old Chen Zhifang 陈织芳. Chen is hard of hearing and has lost most of his teeth; hence elicitation was difficult, resulting in inconsistent speech as well. Fortunately, of the 30 or so words I managed to elicit from him, he also remembered the autonym. Chen claims he does not remember any more words in Avala other than the ones that I have elicited from him.

Locals in Manghuai Township reported more ethnic Bulang residing in Niuquan 牛圈, Maolan Township 茂兰镇, Yun County, but it is unknown whether they speak Avala (Bulang) or not.

Avala is most similar to Luce’s P’uman and to Bulang of Nanjian County as recorded in Chinese characters by the *Nanjian County Gazetteer* (1994). Due to the small number of vocabulary items elicited, Avala was not included in my computational phylogenetic analysis of Angkuic languages. Some speakers of Waic languages much further to the southwest along the Burma-China border also refer to themselves as Avala (Zhou & Yan 2004).

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Avala</i>	<i>Comments</i>
autonym	a ²¹ va ²¹ la ²¹	compare va²⁵¹ of Mojiang
exonym	p ^h u ²¹ man ³³ , p ^h u ²¹ man ³⁵	used by Han Chinese as well
call (of crow)	k ^h a ³³	
cat	ku ³³ lu ³⁵ pɣ ²¹	etymology unclear
corn	tso ³³ ji ²¹ , tso ³³ zi ²¹	
crow	a ³³ ve ³³	
dog	tɕaŋ ⁵³ so ²¹	AA / Angkuic form
drink, to	na ²¹	same as 'to eat'
drunk, inebriated	poŋ ³³ ŋai ³³	
ear	na ²¹ so ²¹	Hu and Manmet form
eat, to	na ²¹ , k ^h a ²¹	U form

eye	ɣ ⁵³ ku ³³ lu ³³	etymology unclear
face	ŋai ³³	Hu and Va form
foot	sɣ ²¹ , ɲa ³³ so ²¹ , ɲa ²¹ sai ³³	informant does not remember exact form?
fire	ŋau ²¹ , kan ⁵³ ŋau ²¹	U and Manmet form
meat	nui ²¹	
nose	na ²¹ khe ³³	< Loloish?
pig	a ³³ ve ²¹	< Loloish?; not AA *lik
rat	p ^h i ²¹ sɿ ³³	
rice, cooked	k ^h ai ³³	U and Va form
run, to	u ⁵⁵ la ³³	cf. Manmet u⁵³lu³⁵
snake	se ³³ ve ²¹ tsɿ ²¹	perhaps first syll. < AA
sticky rice	no ³⁵	
stone	a ³³ mu ³³ , a ³³ mu ²¹	AA
tea	su ²¹ saj ³³ (p ^h jɔ ²¹)	
wash, to	sa ²¹	
water	tɕi ⁵³ nã ²¹ (ko ²¹ tɕi ⁵³ te ²¹)	looks like a phrase?
wine, liquor	pja ³³	
smoke, to	su ³³ sa ³³	

3. Mok

There appears to be 3 types of Mok.

1. Mok of Lampang, Thailand, which is extinct or nearly extinct. Mentioned in the Ethnologue as ISO 639-3 [mqt].
2. Mok of Shan State, a newly discovered variety that still needs documentation (Ellie Hall, p.c.)
3. Muak Sa-aak of Shan State (Hall 2010)

Computational phylogenetics

- 22 languages (17 Angkuic varieties, 3 from the author's own field notes; Danau and 4 others to root the tree)
- 178 lexical items
- Neighbor-joining (NJ) algorithm using SplitsTree 4

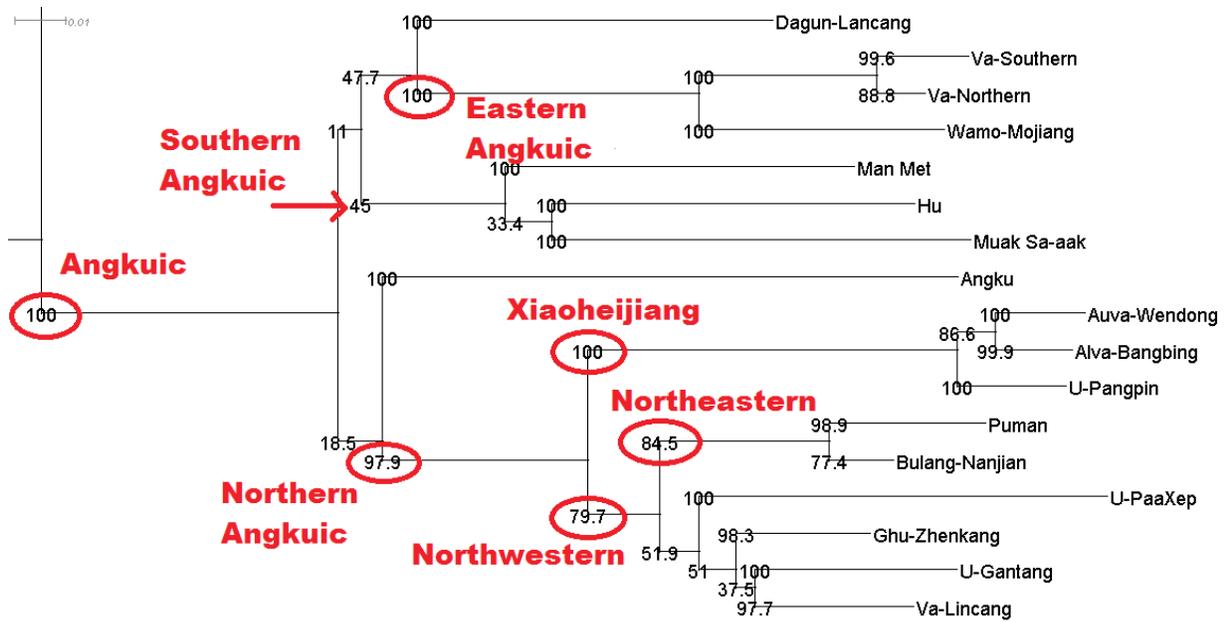


Figure 2. Phylogram of Angkuic languages

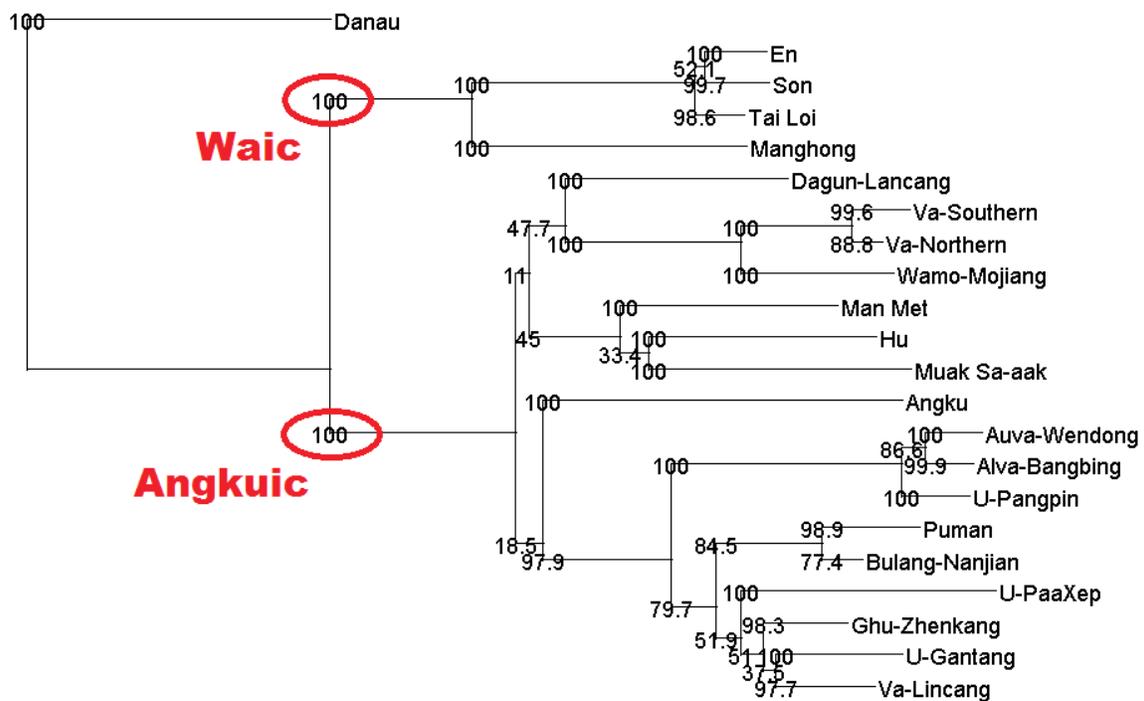


Figure 3. Phylogram of Palaungic languages, with Danau (the most divergent Palaungic language) included to root the tree

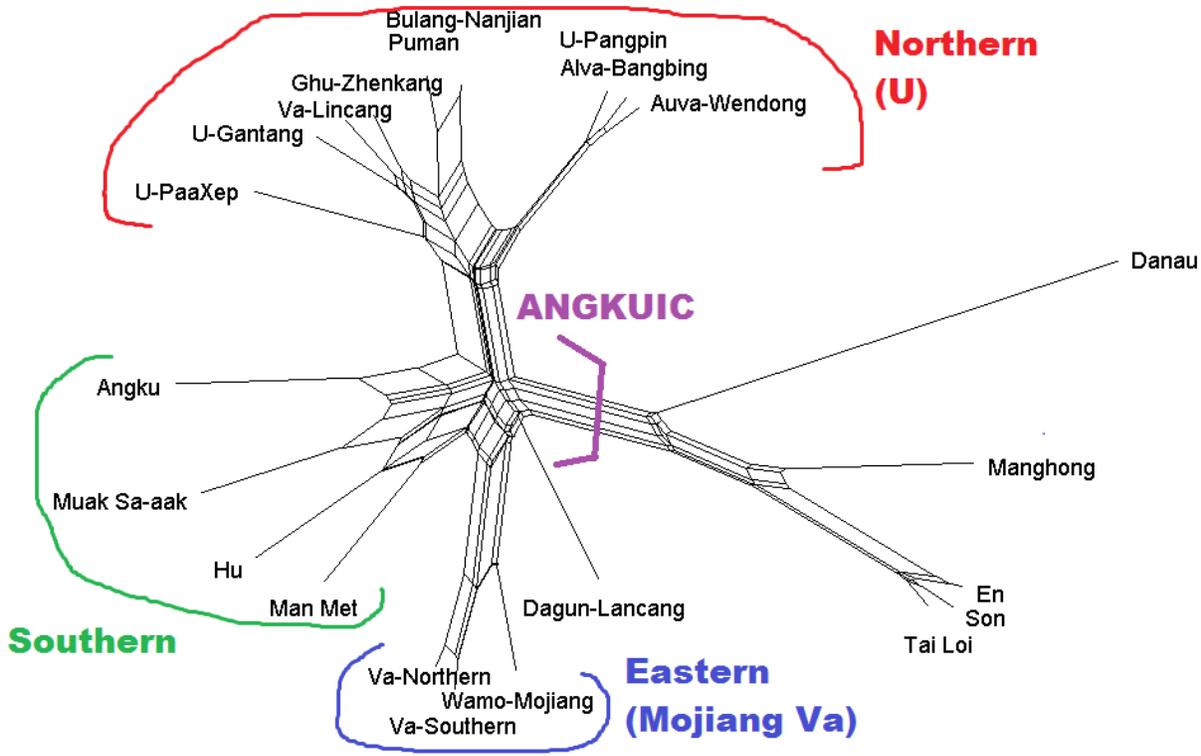


Figure 4. NeighborNet graph of Angkuic and selected Palaungic languages

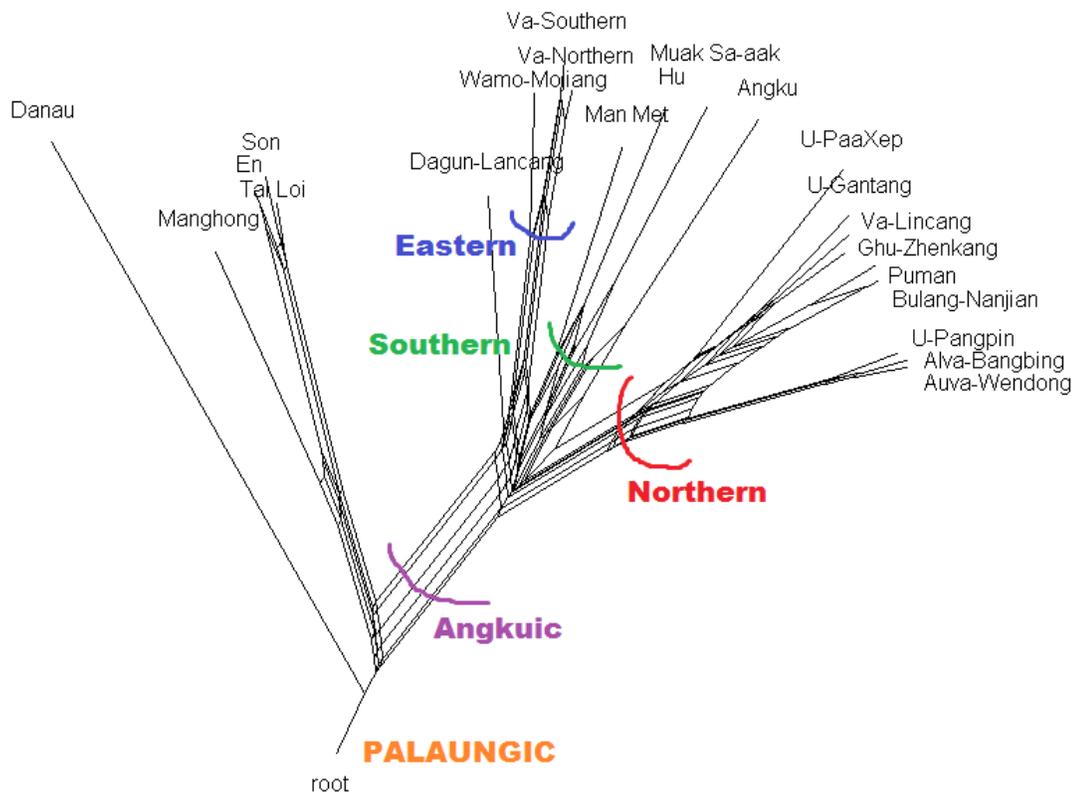


Figure 5. Rooted tree network diagram of Angkuic and selected Palaungic languages.

It is unclear where Bulang of Dagon, Lancang County fits in within Angkuic. The data in Simao (1990) is of very poor quality and unreliable.

Synthesis: Tentative internal classification of Angkuic languages

Angkuic

- Eastern (Va)
 - Va, Northern
 - Va, Southern
- Northern (U)
 - Xiaoheijiang U (Alva, Auva, U)
 - Northeastern U (P²uman, Avala)
 - Northwestern U
- Southern (?)
 - Man Met
 - Hu
 - Muak Sa-aak
 - Angku (?)

The most internally diverse group is Southern Angkuic, which may or may not be a coherent subgroup. It is also possible that Southern Angkuic may be in fact a linguistic area that had existed before Southwestern Thai speakers dominated the Sipsongpanna region. Further research will be needed to determine whether or not Southern Angkuic is indeed a group. It is also uncertain whether Angku is part of this group, due to the scanty data provided in Luce's field notebooks.

Eastern Angkuic consists of two lects, and is the least internally diverse subgroup.

Northern Angkuic is highly widespread. The most northerly dialects are highly endangered and moribund. Its present-day geographical distribution suggests that it had rapidly dispersed upstream along the Mekong River drainage basin.

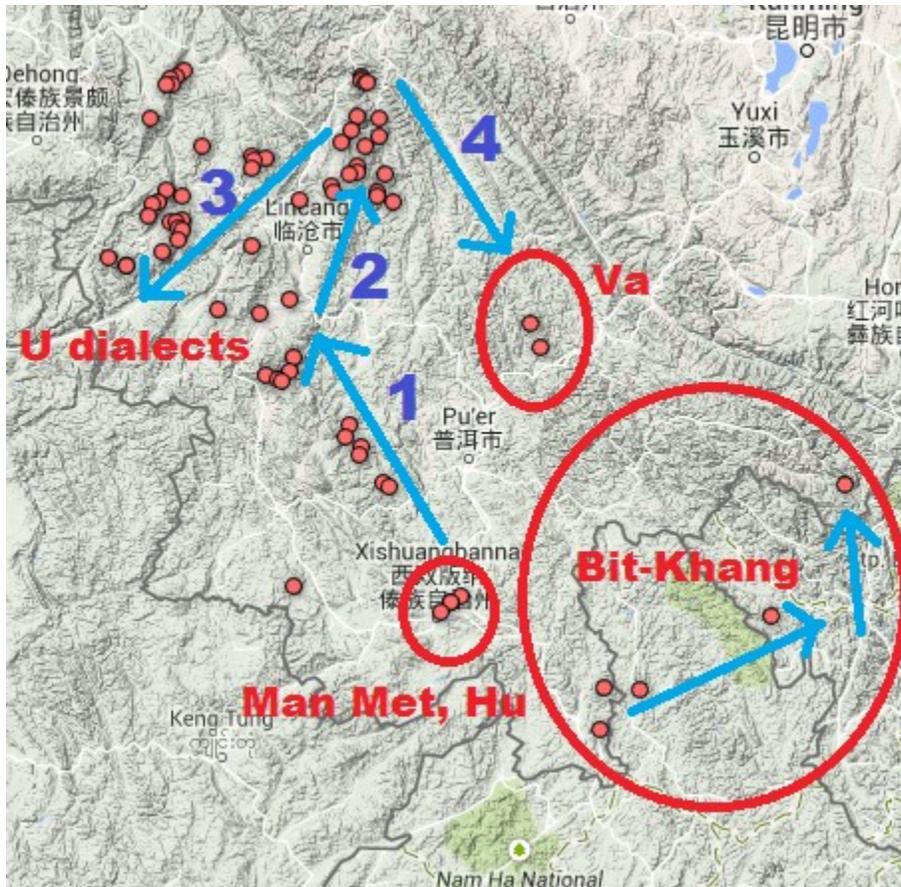


Figure 6. Proposed dispersal of Angkuic languages

Figure 6 commentary: Over 70 Angkuic location names were collected from Chinese county gazetteers and from Tao (2012), and mapped out using Google Maps and Google Fusion Tables. The Angkuic dispersal would have been a riverine one following the Mekong River (Lancang River) upstream. This would have been a continuation of the initial Proto-Austroasiatic dispersal along the Mekong River further downstream in Laos. There is more diversity in the south than in the north. Most Angkuic-speaking villages are located alongside large rivers within the Mekong River drainage basin, which is highly suggestive of a riverine dispersal scenario.

1. In its homeland in the Sipsongpanna area, Proto-Angkuic splits up. Southern Angkuic languages stay behind in Sipsongpanna, while Northern Angkuic disperses upstream along the Mekong River (Lancang River 澜沧江 in Chinese).

2. From the Xiaoheijiang 小黑江 ('Little Black River') and Mekong River confluence, Northern Angkuic disperses further upstream to Yun County and Nanjian County, near Dali.

3. Northern Angkuic disperses downstream along the Nanding River (南定江) towards Shan State, Burma.

4. Eastern Angkuic (Va), which had dispersed alongside Northern Angkuic, then migrates from the Dali area (in accordance with the Va's own migration stories) down the Chuan River 川河 (also known as the Babian River 把边江) to Mojiang County. Eastern Angkuic would have presumably been spoken over a much wider area before speakers became assimilated by Loloish

and Tai speakers. A direct overland migration from the Sipsongpanna area to Mojiang would have been much more difficult due to the mountainous terrain. Since the rivers generally flow from the northwest to the southeast, such a migration would have been perpendicular to the orientations of most river valleys in the region.

List of languages and sources

Eastern Angkuic (= Va)

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Southern Angkuic

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