CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This thesis studies the phonological relationships between Bisoid speech varieties. Fifteen speech varieties are analyzed to find the lexical similarity using lexicostatistics. These fifteen speech varieties are Bantang (Laos), Bisu (Thailand), Cantan (Laos), Cauho (Laos), Coong (Vietnam), Pyen (Myanmar), Laomian (China), Laopan (Laos), Laopin (China), Laoseng (Laos), Mpi (Thailand), Phongku (Laos), Phongset (Laos), Sinsali (Laos), and Tsukong (China). The main focus of this thesis will be a phonological description and comparative description discussion of four selected speech varieties – Bantang (Laos), Bisu (Thailand), Cauho (Laos), and Tsukong (China).

1.1 Background

Bisu is a relatively recently discovered language considered by some linguists (e.g. Bradley, Matisoff, Nishida) as an endangered language. Bisu was first described in Thailand in the 1960s by Nishida (1973). During the 1960s Nishida investigated languages belonging to Burmese-Lolo group in northern areas of Thailand (mainly Chiang Rai and Tak Provinces). On his survey trips, not only were Loloish languages discovered, but also unreported dialects of the Thai language. The mixing of languages in this linguistically complex region motivated his investigations. During the investigation, he was able to study the language of Akha, Lahu Na, Lahu Shi, and Lisu. Bisu was the last language encountered in the investigation.

One of the Bisu informants reported by Nishida (1966) states that the Bisu originally came from China. Shixuan (2001) states that Bisu is spoken in the border areas of China, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos. In addition, Bradley (1979) states that Bisu is spoken in Northwestern Vietnam, but there is almost no linguistic data available from that area. Gordon (2005) states that the Bisu in China are found in the Xishuangbanna area of southwestern Yunnan province. The term Bisoid quoted from Bradley (1979) was coined by Matisoff to refer to the Southern Loloish subgroup. Bisoid denotes Bisu as the head of a group of speech varieties related to Bisu.

Bradley (1979) states that Bisoid is a subgroup within Southern Loloish. This subgroup includes three subbranches: Akoid, Mpioid, and Bisoid (Bisu and Phunoi). The Akoid group comprises of Akha, Akeu, and Sila. For the Akoid group, there have been numerous studies already done. Therefore, the author selected Bisoid as the scope for this study as so little study has been done on this cluster. In this study, the subgroup Bisoid was selected because the author would like to know the internal relationships in terms of phonology. During the process of collecting wordlists an Mpi wordlist was also collected. Many words in Mpi are very close to speech varieties in Bisoid. Within Southern Loloish, the subgroups are as follows.

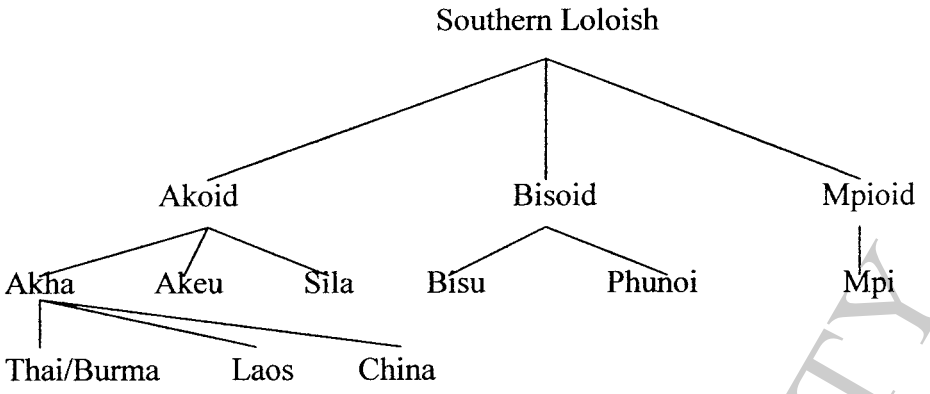

Figure 1.The Subgroups of Southern Loloish from Bradley (1979)

From the figure shown above, Southern Loloish forms three main sub groups, one of which is the scope of this study.

Bradley (1979) classifies Tibeto-Burman, with one of the main branches being Burmese-Loloish, from which Loloish and then Southern Loloish is derived. Southern Loloish contains Akoid, Bisoid and Mpioid languages. Bisoid contains Bisu, Phunoi; Mpioid comprises of Mpi. What was once simply called "Phunoi" is now known to encompass numerous distinct varieties including: Cauho, Bantang, Laopan, Phongku, Phongset, Sinsali, Cantan, and Laoseng. From many classifications of Tibeto-Burman shown in Bradley (1979), with the information in hand, the author adopted and expanded Bradley's classification. This expanded classification is shown in the following figure.

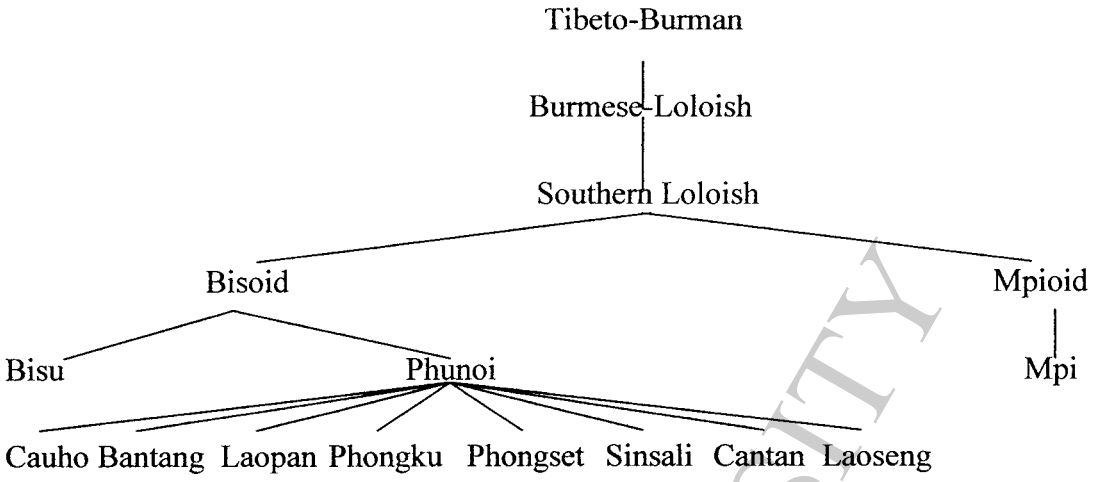

Figure 2.Classification of Bisoid and Mpioid Languages

1.2 Geography

Bisoid people live in several countries in Southeast Asia, including China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Nishida (1973) notes that the Bisu in Thailand live in mountainous areas. This information is also supported by Gordon (2005) who sates that the Bisu live on mountainous slopes in southwest Chiang Rai and in the north of Lampang in Thailand. The populations of Bisu in Thailand is around 1,000. There are two main villages. The largest village has 100 houses. The literacy rate in Bisu is below 1 %. The literacy rate in second language (Thai) is below 5%. They have their own traditional religion. The information about Bisu population is also supported by Person (1999). The Bisu population in Thailand is concentrated in two villages in Chiang Rai Province: Doi Chomphuu (Amphoe Mae Lao, Tambon Pong Phrae) and Doi Pui (Amphoe Muang, Tambon Sa-a Dong Chai) Person (1999).

Gordon (2005) states that Bisu people in China live on high mountain slopes. This group is agriculturalists. Bisu is found in the Xishuangbanna area of southwestern Yunnan Province. The populations of Bisu people in China is around 2,000. Shixuan (2001) states that Bisu is spoken in the border areas of Yunnan Province in several

counties and villages. In Lancang County, there are the villages of Zhutang, Laba, Donglang, and Fubang. In Menghai County, there is the village of Mengzhe village. In Ximeng County, there is the village of Lisu village. In Menglian County, there is the village of Nanya village. They have traditional religion.

1.3 People

Bisoid people have many different names. In Vietnam the Bisoid are called Coong [kɔŋ^{33}]. In Myanmar they are called Pyen [p^{h}jiən^{33}]. In Thailand they are called Bisu [bi^{33}su^{33}]. In China they are called Laomian [lau^{33}miən^{351}], Laopin [lau^{33}pin^{33}] and Tsukong [tsu^{33}kɔŋ^{33}]. In Laos, Bisoid people are called Phunoi [p^{h}u^{351}nɔi^{33}]. Phunoi includes Cauho [cau^{33}ho^{33}], Bantang [ban^{33}taŋ^{33}], Laopan [lau^{33}pan^{33}], Phongku [p^{h}oŋ^{33}k^{h}u^{33}], Phongset [p^{h}oŋ^{33}set^{31}], Sinsali [sin^{35}sa^{33}li^{33}], Cantan [can^{33}tan^{33}], and Laoseng [lau^{33}seŋ^{351}]. These names were originally geographical terms – "the Phunoi speakers who live in X" but now these names are used as endonyms.

1.4 Previous Research

There is some previous research on Bisoid linguistics. In Nishida (1973), he discussed the survey study of Burmese-Lolo group in Northern areas of Thailand. From this survey, it is the discovery of Bisu and encounters as a language of Burmese-Lolo. Most of the previous work in this area has been done by David Bradley. In *Proto-Loloish* (1979) Bradley compared Akha, Bisu, and Mpi. This was followed by Bradley's paper "A Study of Nasality in Bisu and Bisoid" (1985), in which he compared nasality in Bisu, Phyen [=Pyen], and Phunoi.

1.5 Purpose of Thesis

There has been very little previous comparison of contemporary Bisoid languages. The purpose of this thesis is to describe and compare selected Bisoid languages. This

comparison will cover lexicostatistics, phonological description and comparative description. The speech varieties of Bisoid used in this study are Bantang (Laos), Bisu (Thailand), Cantan (Laos), Cauho (Laos), Coong (Vietnam), Pyen (Myanmar), Laomian (China), Laopan (Laos), Laopin (China), Laoseng (Laos), Mpi (Thailand), Phongku (Laos), Phongset (Laos), Sinsali (Laos), and Tsukong (China). All fifteen speech varieties will be compared using lexicostatistics to find the lexical similarity between these varieties. The main section of the thesis will focus on four selected speech varieties in Bisoid. The four selected speech varieties are Bantang (Laos), Bisu (Thailand), Cantan (Laos), and Tsukong (China). Theses four representatives will be studied to find the phonological similarities between them.

1.6 Methodology

Most of the Bisoid wordlists were first transcribed and audio recordings were made by other linguists. Since these linguists generously made the audio recordings and transcriptions available, these wordlists were retranscribed to insure a common transcription system was applied throughout the data. This analysis then uses lexicostatistic comparison to provide a lexical subgrouping of closely related speech varieties. For transcription the following software was used: "CoolEdit", "Speech Analyzer", and "Wave Lab". This analysis uses lexicostatistic comparison to classify the subgrouping of closely related speech varieties among Bisoid. In the process of doing lexicostatistics, the program suite "Phylip" was used to take the percentage of similarity to create a tree diagram of the lexical relationships. In the process of describing the phonologies, the computer program "Phonology Assistant" was used to find phones such as consonants, consonant clusters, vowels, diphthongs, and tones. This program also helps to find the distribution of consonants, consonant clusters, vowels, diphthongs, and tones.

1.6.1 Data Sources

The data in this thesis is primarily from other linguists. Dr. Kirk Person provided Pyen data from Myanmar and Laomian, Laopin and Tsukong data from China. Sue Wright provided Phunoi data from the varieties of Bantang, Cantan, Cauho, Laopan, Laoseng, Phongku, Phongset, and Sinsali from Laos. Dr. Jerry Edmonson provided Coong data from Vietnam. The author collected Bisu and Mpi data. All of the data was collected by field linguists transcribing a fairly standard wordlist using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and making audio recordings of the wordlists. The data contained in this thesis was from these sources; however, the author retranscribed the data from the audio recordings to insure uniformity of transcription. Thus, any errors in the data presented are the sole responsibility of this present author.

1.6.2 Analysis

There are two types of analysis in this thesis. These are lexical comparison (or lexicostatistics), and the phonological description and comparison of the phonological inventories. For lexicostatistics, the program "Phylip 3.6" was used to create a tree diagram of lexical relatedness of the fifteen speech varieties of Bisoid used in this thesis. And for the phonological descriptions, the program "Phonology Assistant" was used to study the phonological systems.