CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This thesis is a basic language survey of the Tai Nua language. Language survey attempts to determine distinctive linguistic and sociolinguistic language boundaries and language development needs. This survey has two parts: lexical and sociolinguistic. The lexical study focuses on lexical comparison (lexicostatistics). Lexicostatistics is the comparison of wordlists which shows lexical similarity between speech varieties. It helps to group closely related speech varieties. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society in order to understand how languages function in communication (Wardhaugh 1998:12). In this research the sociolinguistic focus is on the language vitality and language attitudes of Tai Nua. The language vitality research includes the domains of language use among the Tai Nua as well as use among the younger generation and their desire to use the language. The language attitudes section considers Tai Nua attitudes toward their own language and other speech varieties.

Before the first century A.D., the Tai were separated, and they now reside in southern China and parts of Southeast Asia. In the past, the Tai tribes slowly began to separate into smaller groups that had distinctive traditions and languages. In the Dehong region, they evolved into two groups: the lowland farmers, called Shui Tai and the mountain dwellers, called Han Tai. They live in self-ruling districts, farming in the Dehong region (Joshua Project n.d.).

Tai Nua, sometimes called Dehong Tai and Chinese Tai, is spoken in the Yunnan Province of China as well as Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. The majority (250,000) is found in China, and 357,400 are found in other countries (Gordon, 2005). This thesis focuses on a survey of Tai Nua in Dehong, Lincang, and Sibsongbanna Prefectures. Their villages are found in river valleys and basins.

They are mainly farmers growing rice, garlic, and a variety of other crops. In terms of religion, they are Buddhists and animist, but they also keep their own native folk religion (Goetz 2001). Figure 1 shows the location of Yunnan Province in China.
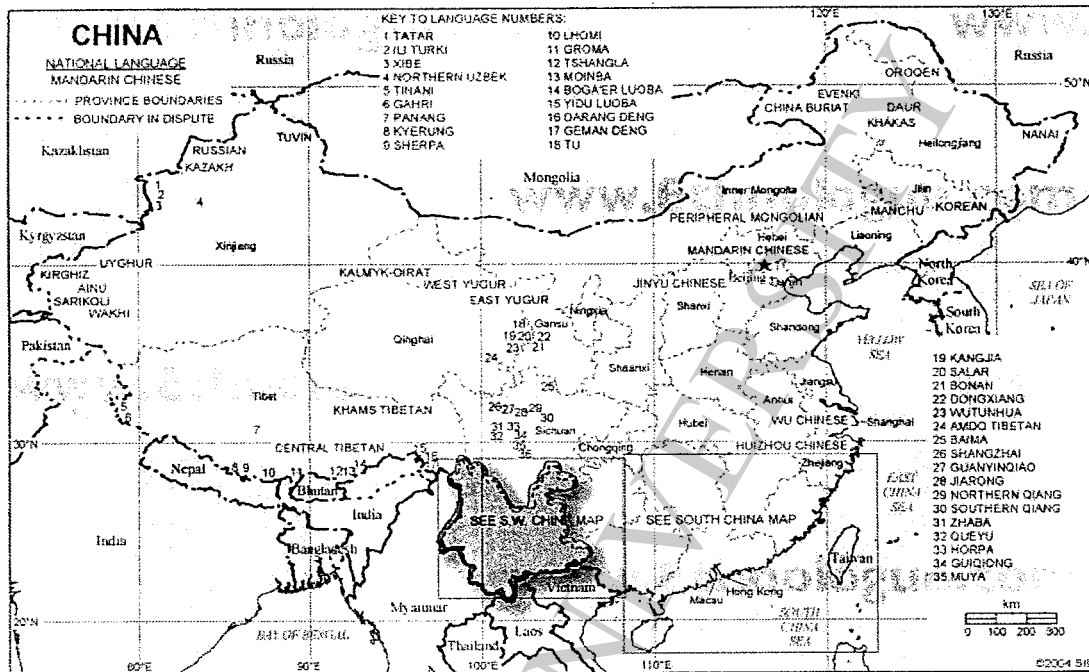

Figure 1: Location of Yunnan Province in China

(Gordon 2005)

1.1 Tai language classification

Tai languages are part of the Tai-Kadai language family. Lebar et al. (1964) suggested that there are five subgroups under the Tai branch. These are Western, Southern, Central Mekhong River, Central Upland and Eastern.
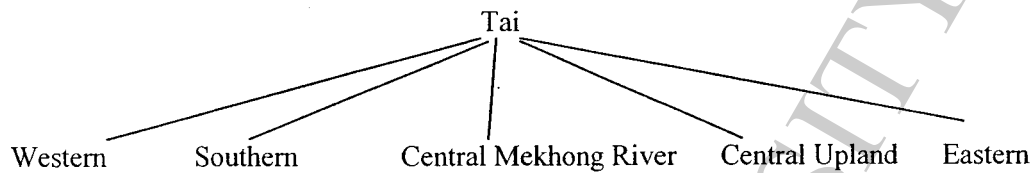

Figure 2: Tai Language family from Lebar et al. (1964)

Lebar et al. (1964) states that Tai is classified under Tai-Kadai, and there are five subgroups that are classified under Tai. However, there is another classification presented by L-Thongkum (2001), who constructs the Tai-Kadai language family as shown in Figure 3:
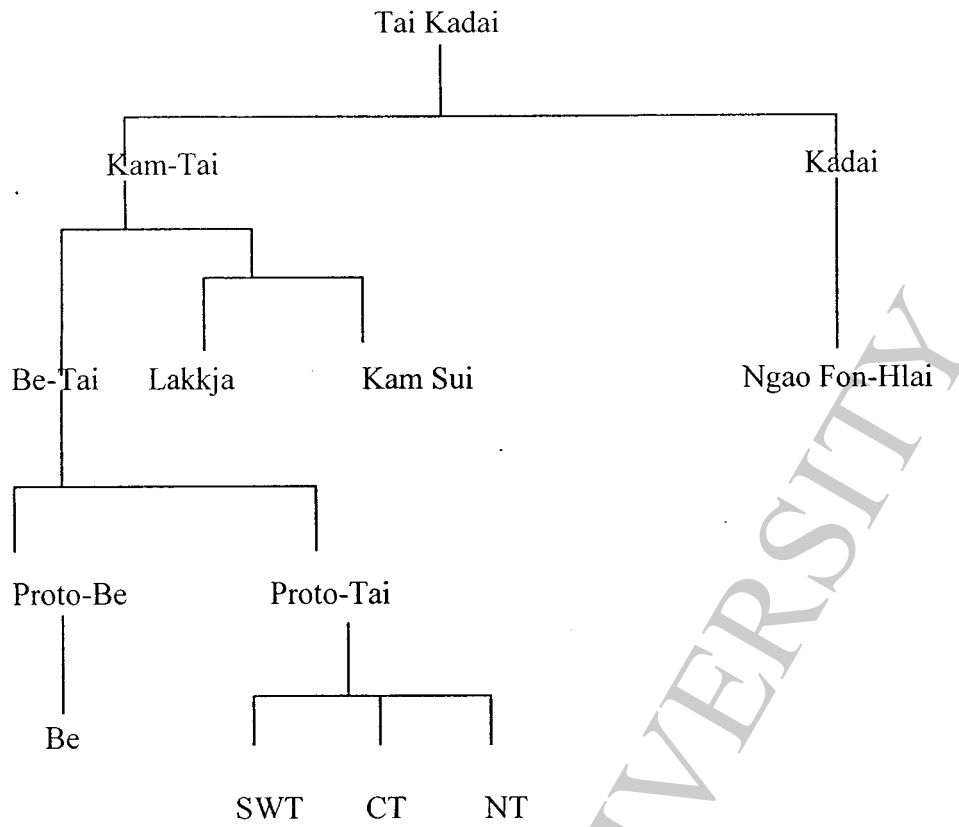
Figure 3: Genetic Affiliations of Tai-Kadai (L-Thongkum 2001:203).

Note: SWT = Southwestern Tai

CT = Central Tai

NT = Northern Tai

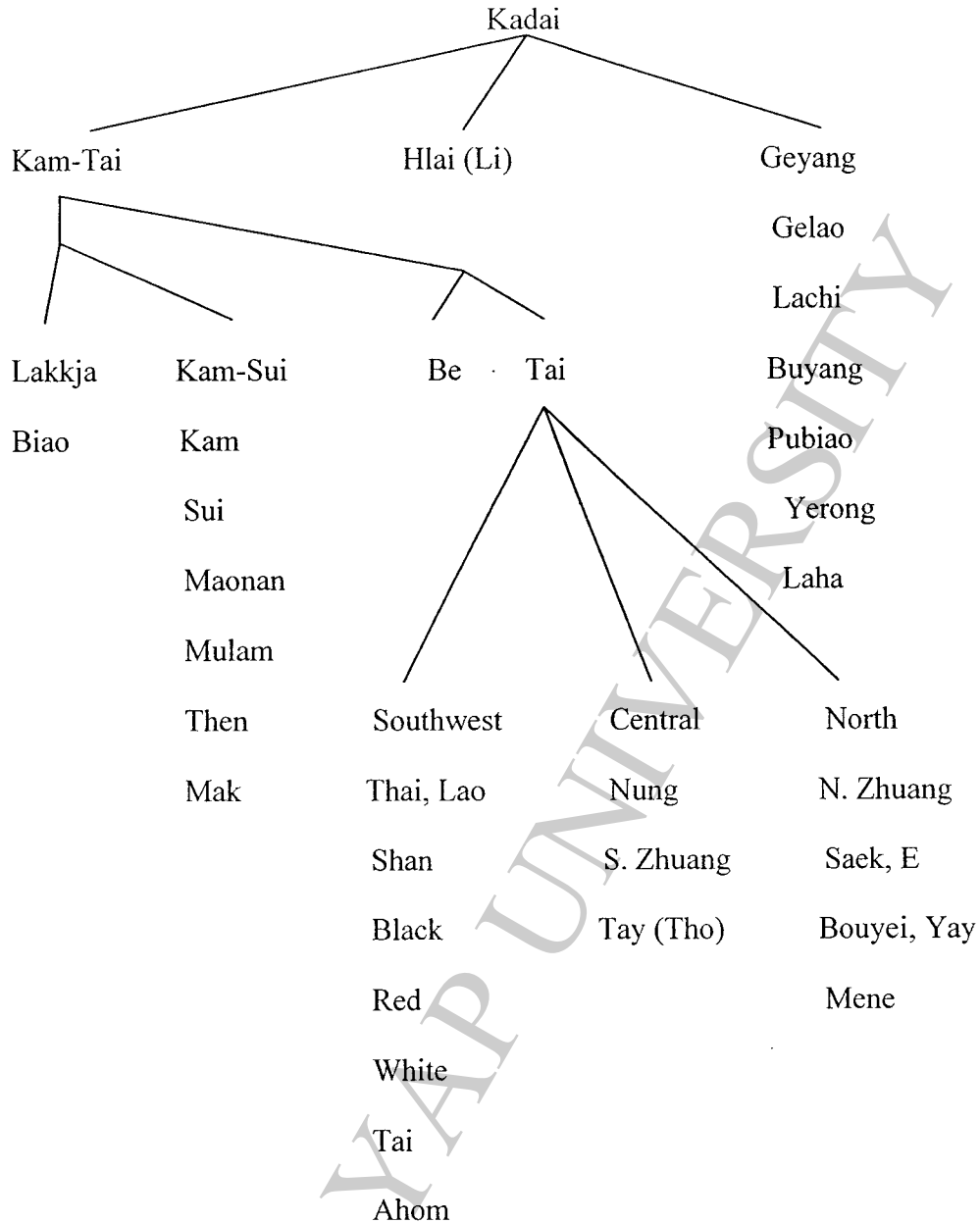Edmondson and Solnit (1997) suggest a Kadai branch analysis as follows.

Figure 4: The Kadai branch (Edmondson and Solnit 1997).

The Tai sub branch in Kadai suggested by Edmondson and Solnit is the same as what Li (1977) presented.

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                              Tai
            _____/  |  _____
           /                   |                   \
  Southwestern Tai        Central Tai            Northern Tai
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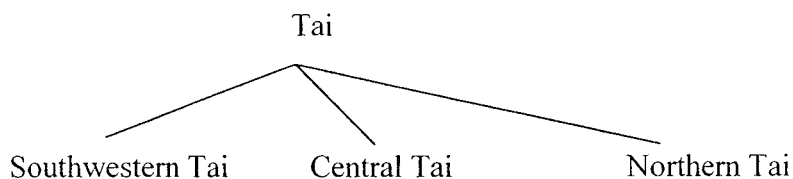
Figure 5: Proto-Tai Division (Li 1977:958)

Li divided Tai languages into 3 groups based on the distribution of vocabulary and the distribution of certain special phonological features.

Since most recent research agrees with the classifications presented by Li (1977), Edmondson and Solnit (1997), and L-Thongkum (2001), their studies will be the basis of the classification used in this thesis.

1.2 The subdivision of Southwestern Tai (SWT)

Many researchers have offered ideas on the sub-classification of SWT languages. The following sketch is based on a combination of several sources: Li (1977), Edmondson and Solnit (1997), and L-Thongkum (2001).

```
                              Southwestern
              /                    |              \
        East Central         Unclassified       Southern
      /      |      \              |                 |
Lao-Phutai  Chiang Saeng  Northwest
    |            |            |
   Lao         Phuan       Tai Nua        Tai Moung        S. Thai

 Phu Thai      Song         Ahom         Tai Thanh         Tai

 Hongin      Tai Daeng      Aiton

 NE Thai     Tai Dam        Khamti

 Nyaw        Tai Don        Khamyang

             N Thai         Khun

             Thai           Lu

             Tay Tac        Phake

                            Shan

                            Nyaw

                            Tai Mao
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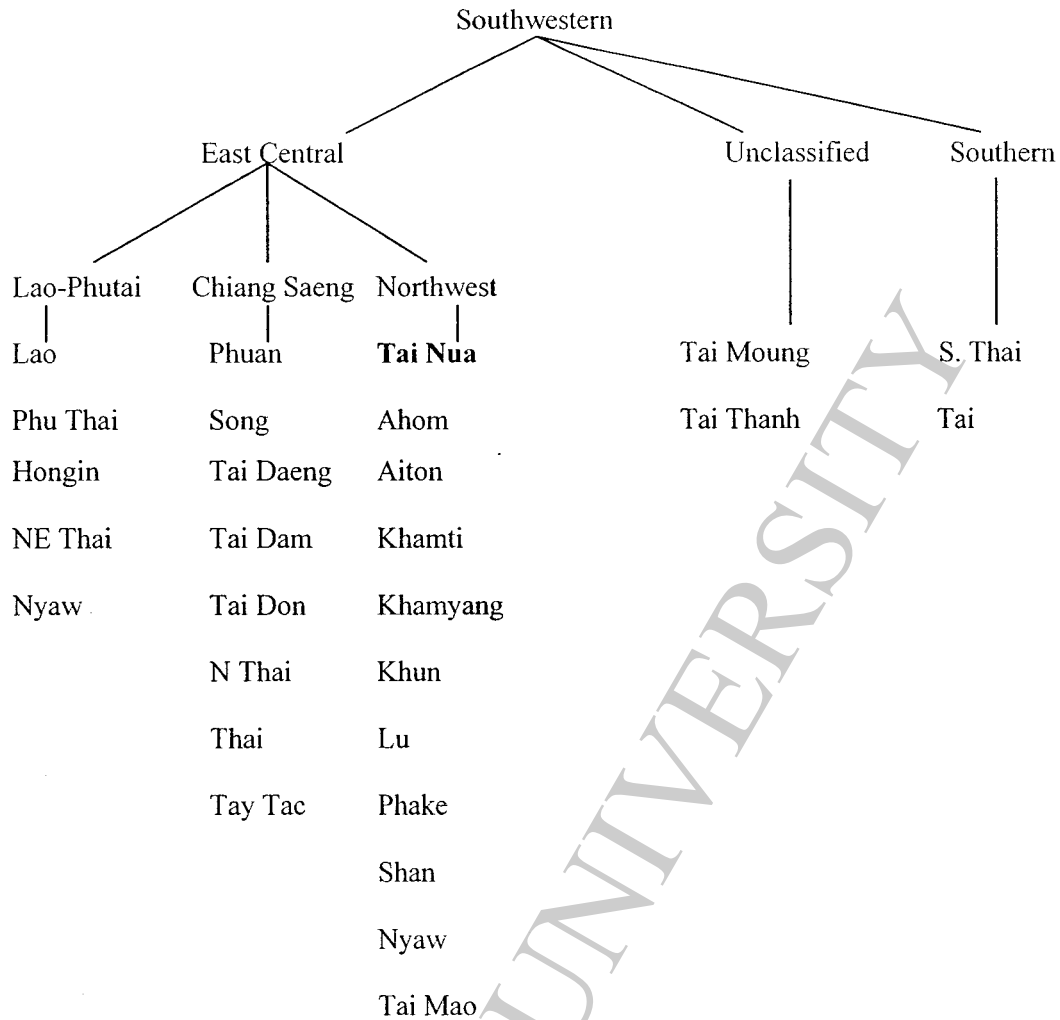
Figure 6: SWT subdivision (L-Thongkum 2001, Edmondson and Solnit 1997, and Li 1960)

However, Smalley (1994) proposed a Tai language family model which shows a few differences from the one above. His tree is displayed in Figure 7.

Tai

Central Tai   Northern Tai   Southwestern Tai

Saek

Southern   Eastern   Northwest

Paktay   Cheche   Chiang Saeng   Lao-Phutai   Tai Yai

Songkhla   Thaiklang   Lao   Yong

Satun   Kammuang   Phu Thai   Lue

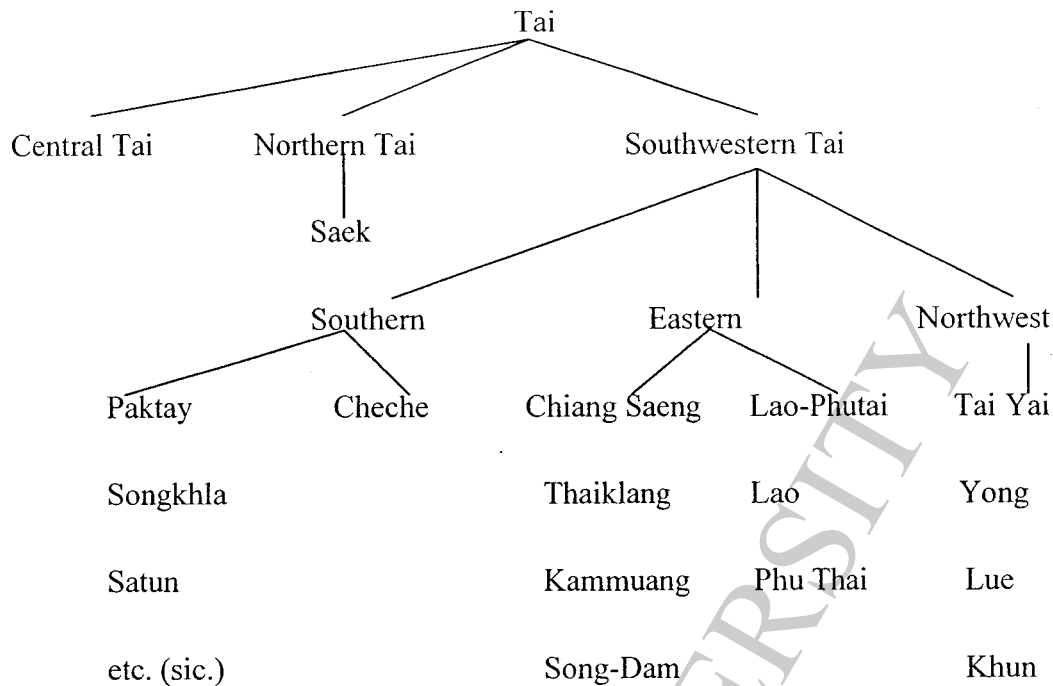etc. (sic.)   Song-Dam   Khun

Figure 7: Tai Language Family (Smalley 1994:298)

According to Smalley (1994), there are three subgroups under Southwestern Tai: Southern, Eastern and Northwest. There are some languages grouped differently in Figure 7. Here, Yong is under Northwest while it is under Southern in Figure 6.

1.3 Subgrouping of SWT dialects in Yunnan

Goetz (1994) investigated ways of grouping dialects of SWT in Yunnan Province, China. She also investigated one dialect from Myanmar near the Chinese border, and one dialect from Assam. She used the following criteria in grouping these dialects:

- shapes of their tonal arrays,
- geographic location,
- reflexes of some Proto-Tai initial consonants, and
- realization of proto-Tai final: -ai, -əi, -ə.

The tonal arrays are tested by using Gedney's "A Checklist for determining Tones in Tai Dialects" (1972) to determine the tone plots. Geographic location divides the dialects in terms of geography. The Proto-initial reflexes refer to the pattern of correspondences of pre-glottalized proto-Tai initial stops: n- and l-, ph- and f-, and velars. In the same way, the reflexes of proto-diphthong -ai, -əi, -ə of each dialects are utilized.

The results of her investigations are shown in Figure 8:

1. Jinghong/LCH (Lue of Cheng Hung)
2. Dai Ya//Yuanyang
3. Gengma//Menglian Tai Mao VPT or Van Poong Tong (with significant ties to Dehong)
4. Dehong///Chefang Tai Khamti (with significant independent features)
5. Unclassified because of evidence for ties to all groups Mengding Tai Nua

Figure 8: Goetz (1994) subgrouping of SWT dialects

Slashes are used to show the relative closeness of the "core dialects" in each group. Fewer slashes indicate a closer relationship.

The solid line separating group 1 represents a strong division, indicating that the remaining groups are more closely related to each other than to group 1. The

dashed line represents a weaker division between group 2, and groups 3 and 4. The lines should be disregarded in assessing the relationship of group 5 to the other groups as there is no clear division between group 5 and the other groups.

1.4 Rationale

The Tai Nua live in many different locations by mountains and rivers, where they have not had regular communication for many generations. Since language is continually changing, two main questions are raised: 1) how are the Tai Nua and other dialects lexically related? and 2) what are the attitudes which the Tai Nua have toward their speech variety and the other speech varieties including Chinese? The first question prompts one to ask how close the selected speech varieties are. The second question helps us to explain the maintenance of the language and if there is a preferred dialect among the 14 selected Tai Nua sites.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. How closely related are the selected Tai dialects with one another?

2. Are the selected Tai dialects likely to be maintained to the next generation?

3. Is there a dialect of Tai Nua respected and understood sufficiently for communication among all Tai Nua dialects?

1.6 The scope and limitations of the study

This survey investigates lexical and sociolinguistic data. The data used in this thesis is from the analysis of wordlists and sociolinguistic questionnaires.

The Tai Nua people in China live in a large area in Yunnan Province. Many sites are reported by researchers in various locations. However, only 14 sites, where a number of the Tai Nua are reported and transportation is not a barrier, are selected for the research. The sites are Mangshi, Ruili, Ying Jiang, Zhefang, Shaung Jiang,

Gengma, Mengting, Canyuan, Lincang, Fengqing, Baoshan, Jinghong, Simao, and Jinggu cities. Other areas are not covered in this thesis.

Tone systems can be used to show dialect boundaries within the Tai language family. However, the method of lexicostatistics used in this research excludes tones. Thus, the tones of these speech varieties are not compared although they are shown in data.

1.7 Benefits of the Study

Since the goal of this research is to clarify how closely related the varieties are and how the Tai Nua feel about their own language and other speech varieties, the analysis could be applied to determine the feasibility of a language development project. This research could answer questions such as which speech variety is considered to have more prestige, how much the Tai Nua know or use their language and the national language, and what kind of language development projects may be most beneficial for the language.

It is hoped that this research will encourage the Tai Nua people to value their language more when they see that their language is of interest to outsiders.