

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND OUTLOOK

8.1 Summary

The goal of this study was to analyze the phonology of two Kim Mun varieties, one in Laos and one in Vietnam, in order to find out whether future language development work such as orthography development, literacy work, and translation could encompass Kim Mun speakers in both Vietnam and Laos, or if it would have to be divided among several different pockets of Kim Mun speakers. It was also hoped that this study would yield insight on a possible extension of language development work to the other Kim Mun varieties found throughout China.

After giving an overview on previous research done in Kim Mun varieties in China and Vietnam, the study investigated the four main applications of the frequently used but not clearly defined term preglottalization and applied the result to Lao and Vietnam Kim Mun. For both varieties, what has been reported as preglottalization by some researchers seems to be the laryngeal setting of stiff voice for voiced and voiceless plosives, with the features [+constricted][+stiff][-spread][+/-voice]. The voiced stiff plosives [b, d,

[ɕ] may contain a moderate glottal stop prior to voice onset as documented in Edmondson's instrumental analysis (2004). This is not audible in the data available for this study and might be a physiological artifact of the stiff laryngeal setting. The voiceless stiff plosives [p*, t*, t*] do not contain a pre-glottal stop. Stiff voice is not distinctive for the Kim Mun varieties under study and seems to be an areal feature as it is found in neighboring Tai-Kadai languages (cf. Section 4.5).

Two more areal features noted in this study are alveolo-palatal segments (cf. Section 4.3.2.2), and the open central unrounded vowel /a/ [a] (cf. Section 5.1.2.2). The alveolo-palatal place of articulation is common in South Asia but not fully represented in the phonetic alphabet of the International Phonetic Association where only affricates for this place of articulation are symbolized. Both Kim Mun varieties under study document the voiced and voiceless alveolo-palatal plosives /t/ [tʰ] and /ɕ/ [ɕʰ] as well as the alveolo-palatal nasal /ɲ/ [ɲʰ]. Vietnam Kim Mun also documents the alveolo-palatal lateral /l/ [lʰ]. For the Vietnam variety, the alveolo-palatal stop has the same phonological environment as the velar stop in that it does not occur syllable-final whereas bilabial and alveolar stops do. In addition, alveolo-palatal and velar consonants in Vietnam Kim Mun both affect the allophonic rule that causes /ɔ/ to become [aʊ] whereas alveolar consonants leave the

vowel unaffected. This provides some evidence that alveolo-palatal consonants cannot be considered a palatalized version of alveolar consonants but that they are closely linked with back-articulated velar consonants.

Both varieties also documented the central unrounded vowel /a/, another common areal feature of South Asia and not represented in IPA.

This study documents a high phonological similarity between the Kim Mun varieties in Laos and Vietnam. Both varieties have an almost identical consonantal system, with only an additional voiced counterpart for the dental fricative in Lao Kim Mun and an additional alveolo-palatal lateral in Vietnam Kim Mun. The places of articulation are found to be the same for both varieties. Apart from a slight deviation in pronunciation, the vowel system is identical. Both varieties have the same amount of tones and identical word and syllable structures.

Both Vietnam and Lao Kim Mun seem to be undergoing sound change. They are losing long and short vowel distinction, and the open-mid front unrounded /ɛ/ and the close-mid front unrounded /e/ seem to be merging. Even though the open-mid front vowel shows more restrictions, it is yet uncertain which of the two vowels will emerge dominant. However, regardless of which vowel emerges dominant, it is expected this will lead to further change in the vowel system of Kim Mun. It is likely that one of the

mid vowels will begin to migrate towards a front vowel to maintain vowel symmetry. Similarly, the open-mid and close mid back vowels which already show a slightly restricted environment for the open-mid rounded /o/, might undergo merging and show the same amount and opening degree as their front counterparts.

8.2 Conclusion and Outlook

Overall the Lao and Vietnam varieties are phonologically quite similar, and from a cursory look, there seem to be many similarities and patterns among the other varieties of Kim Mun (Mao 2004; He 1999; Liu, et. al. 1998; and Shintani 1990). Further phonological comparison is needed between the other varieties of Kim Mun. One of the largest inconsistencies between the varieties of Kim Mun in this study and other varieties of Kim Mun are the amount of tones reported in varieties of Kim Mun in Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of China. The tone systems of the Lao, Vietnam, and Hainan Island varieties of Kim Mun seem very similar. However the tone systems documented by Mao (2004), He (1999), and Liu, et. al. (1998) are quite different, in particular all three record three or more tones than documented in the Lao, Vietnam, and Hainan Island varieties of Kim Mun. Further analysis is needed on Kim Mun tones from Yunnan and Guangxi provinces and subsequent tonal comparison between the Lao, Vietnam, and China

varieties of Kim Mun, including the Kim Kun on Hainan Island. Further tonal analysis on the eight-tone system and its application to Kim Mun may also produce valuable results, in particular the possible relationship between Kim Mun voicing quality and Kim Mun tones.

Further study is also needed on Kim Mun vowel systems. The Lao and Vietnam varieties seem to have slightly more complicated vowel systems than reported in the Chinese varieties. It was also noted that the Lao and Vietnam varieties are losing long and short vowel distinction and have two front vowels that seem to be in the process of merging. Both of these phonological changes have some documentation in the Chinese varieties. Mao and Chou (1972) report the disappearance of vowel length distinction, however He (1999) reports that a variety of Kim Mun under study in Yunnan has abundant examples of vowel length distinction. Furthermore, Mao (2004) documents the close-mid and open-mid front vowels /e, ε/ in a Yunnan variety while Liu, et. al. (1998) only documents the open-mid /ε/ and He (1999) only documents the close-mid /e/ in other areas in Yunnan. In the Guangxi variety Mao (2004) only documents the /ε/. This seems to confirm the merging of the vowels /e, ε/ in the Lao and Vietnam varieties. However, further study is needed to analyze the consistencies and differences of changes in the vowel systems of each variety of Kim Mun.

The corpuses used in this analysis were adequate for this study, but a larger corpus from both Vietnam and Lao Kim Mun will also be useful for future Kim Mun studies. A larger corpus will be useful in analyzing rarely occurring phonemes, i.e. the voiced and voiceless bilabial fricatives /f, v/, the voiced dental fricative /ð/, and the voiced alveolo-palatal lateral approximant /ɮ/. A larger corpus will also be useful for analyzing motivation behind sound changes between the two varieties, i.e. the open central /a/ in the Lao variety occurs as either the open central /a/ or the near-open central /ɛ/ in the Vietnam variety.

Kim Mun and Yao languages in general may be characterized with palatalized and labialized segments (Downer 1961). Further study could reveal a possible correlation between the alveolo-palatal segments in Kim Mun and the feature of palatalization.

One of the aims in this thesis was to address the issue of preglottalization, as it was termed by previous researchers. In addressing this phenomenon questions arise for future studies. Shintani (1991) analyzed the preglottalized segments as voiced implosives that originated from voiceless segments. Further study could determine whether Hainan Kim Mun has voiced implosives in place of voiceless plosives or a laryngeal setting similar to that of the stiff voice in Lao and Vietnam Kim Mun.

One other area for future Kim studies is that of the syllable. This study only presented a very brief phonological analysis of Kim Mun syllables. Further study could more accurately determine word breaks from syllable breaks and further describe in more detail the possible syllable types in Kim Mun, i.e. various types of major and minor syllables as documented in Mien (Purnell 1965). None of the researchers of the Chinese varieties describe the syllable structure of Kim Mun in China.

Regarding the *phoneme inventory*, the Lao and the Vietnam Kim Mun varieties are similar enough for a literacy project to include both of them.²⁵ More comparative studies, such as lexical comparison, need to be done in order to decide whether cognates are close enough to create one common dictionary. A tentative comparison with data from China shows both similarities and differences in the phonological systems. Therefore, in order for future language development work to include Kim Mun outside of just Laos and Vietnam, further Kim Mun studies are needed.

²⁵ This statement is based solely from a phonological perspective and is not meant to circumvent further linguistic research necessary for the development of a common literacy program, such as Social Linguistic research. Such further research is outside of the scope of this thesis and is for future Kim Mun studies.