

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Thesis Introduction

This section discusses the basic structure and background of the thesis.

1.1.1 Goal of the Thesis

The objective of this thesis is to describe the basic syntax of phrases, clauses and sentences in Bru as spoken in the village of Khok Sa-at (Bru Khok Sa-at) using third-person narrative texts. This includes a look at word classes, noun and verb phrases, clauses, and complex sentences. The thesis provides a foundation for further research in a variety of areas relating to Bru Khok Sa-at grammar.

1.1.2 Scope and Limitations of the Thesis

This thesis provides a look at Bru Khok Sa-at grammar based on narrative texts. It focuses on Bru Khok Sa-at syntax especially phrases, clauses and sentences. It is not intended to be exhaustive and will not examine morphology or analyze in-depth topics like particles, tense, aspect, or mood. The analysis was done using five third person narrative texts: Seven Orphans (203 lines), The Big Snake Son-in-law (183 lines), The Buyeang Fish (121 lines), The Wild Buffalo Ear (134 lines), and The Grandfather Ghost (122 lines). They were collected and originally glossed by Charles Thomas Tebow II with the assistance of Kabin Hunghuan, who was the elected village official, and Thongbai Khunakorn his language assistant. This thesis also made use of his broader database on Bru Khok Sa-at to verify or give further examples if needed. This database includes a lexicon of nearly 3000 words. It also includes another 66 texts, though at least 40 are translations, and many are only tentatively glossed with no free translation.

1.1.3 Benefits of the Thesis

Western Bru is currently a much debated term for languages spoken in Northeastern Thailand, where people refer to themselves as Bru. An examination of Bru Khok Sa-at grammar based on third-person narratives will aid in greater understanding of Western Bru, especially Bru Khok Sa-at. It is hoped that this thesis will foster more research in Bru Khok Sa-at and will aid in language planning and policy among the Bru-So group.

1.1.4 Methodology

This thesis uses a generative grammar approach as is used in *Language Typology and Syntactic Description* edited by Timothy Shopen (2007a, b & c). This theory focuses on how a single word generally functions as the head of a phrase. The phrase retains some of the same properties as the head. So a noun phrase has many of the same properties as a noun. Phrases may then be combined until they form clauses. Clauses can be combined to form complex sentences. Based on this analysis, generalizations can be formed which explain the syntactic structure observed in Bru Khok Sa-at.

The discussion of the analysis starts with word classes, and proceeds onto phrases, clauses, and sentences by combining larger and larger units. This thesis is an attempt to provide a descriptive grammar of Bru Khok Sa-at and will not be concerned with theoretical issues such as formal generative rules or attempt to explain the semantics behind language use.

Each example will consist of the Bru Khok Sa-at transcribed in IPA as well as a word-for-word gloss in English. A more natural gloss will appear underneath the word-for-word gloss. However, this gloss will be much more literal than the gloss that appears with the same stories in Tebow's discourse thesis (2010a), as the grammatical structure is more in focus while connections between separate sentences and discourse structure is not discussed. The examples are occasionally supplemented with tree diagrams, generally in the chapter focusing on phrases, to illustrate their structure graphically.

1.1.5 Corpus

The data analyzed in this study was based on five narrative texts.

1.1.5.1 The Seven Orphans

The Seven Orphans is a story about a married couple who have no children. They pray to the gods who send them seven sons. However, the couple is not able to gather enough food for both themselves and the children, so they plot to abandon or kill the children. Eventually the seven children are abandoned in a tree, where a bird comes to save them. He leaves them in a good land, and after a season they have enough to eat. They eventually meet seven daughters of a nearby king, whose village is experiencing a famine. The seven sons provide food for the daughters and the village. They eventually marry the daughters and live happily ever after.

1.1.5.2 The Big Snake Son-in-law

The Big Snake Son-in-law has two parts. The first is about a couple who have many unmarried daughters. They go in search of mangos, which are all in the possession of a large snake. The snake says they can have the mangos if one of their daughters marries him. Eventually the youngest daughter agrees and eats the mangos. She is later terrified of the snake, but marries him anyway. He eventually reveals that he is a god and can remove the snake skin to look like a handsome man. She plots to destroy the snake skin so her husband will look like a handsome man all the time and succeeds.

The second part is about a couple who have a daughter, and they want a son-in-law like the first family. So they capture a snake and force their daughter to marry it. However, the snake is a normal snake and eats the daughter. Later the snake is caught in a trap by two brothers. When they see the bulge in the snake, they carefully cut it open and discover the daughter. They revive her, and the oldest brother marries her. She cannot remember anything that happened to her before, but plants a pumpkin vine and prays for the gods to send the vine to her parent's house. Eventually her mother follows the vine and finds her. They are reunited and live happily ever after.

1.1.5.3 The Buyeang Fish

The Buyeang Fish is a story about a younger brother who is nice to everyone, but the older brother plots to kill him. The soldiers sent to kill him take pity on him and let him go. However, they tell him never to come back or he will be killed. He runs off into the jungle, and helps three animals: a buyeang fish, a deer, and a wolf. Eventually he comes to a village where everyone but one old woman has been turned into stone. The old woman tells him that a witch has done this. She has a

magic mirror that can see everyone and a wand that can turn them to stone. He challenges the witch, who has to find him three times, and he uses the help of the buyeang fish, the deer, and the wolf. On the third time, she does not find him and in her anger, throws the wand down. It breaks and points at her, turning her into stone. The spell is broken, the king gives the younger brother his daughter in marriage, and they live happily ever after.

1.1.5.4 The Wild Buffalo Ear

The Wild Buffalo Ear tells the story of a grandfather and grandson who get meat from some hunters. However, they discover it is only a wild buffalo ear. The gods decide to help the grandfather and his son, and turn the wild buffalo ear into a beautiful woman to help them in the house. After they discover her, the grandson marries her. She also helps in the field by magically controlling the weeds. During a famine, she is also able to turn rice leaves into rice. When the grandfather sees her doing this, he criticizes her. She goes out to the field and removes her magic and is never seen again.

1.1.5.5 The Grandfather Ghost

The Grandfather Ghost is about a grandfather who dies and leaves his grandson alone in the village. When the grandson cries, the grandfather takes pity on him and gives him medicine to be able to see the dead. The grandson lives with his grandfather and goes hunting with some friends. He is not able to see the deer the friends tell him to shoot, only a grasshopper. He brings the grasshopper home to his grandfather only to discover that the grasshopper is the deer. Later the grandson goes and hunts for birds. His grandfather comes home and is horrified to discover that he has killed the village elders, which the grandson thought were birds. The grandfather takes the grandson out of the villages and forces him to leave. The grandson lives alone in the land of the living.

1.2 Language Introduction

This section discusses the linguistic background of Bru Khok Sa-at.

1.2.1 Linguistic Affiliation

Bru is a difficult linguistic term to define. Linguists are still trying to determine whether certain related languages are mutually intelligible. In addition, the term “Bru” is used to refer to a broader number of groups than would call themselves Bru. Other spellings of Bru include Bruu and Brou.

The Ethnologue (Lewis 2009) has two classifications: Eastern Bru and Western Bru. Bru Khok Sa-at would fall under Western Bru. While most linguists would agree that Bru Khok Sa-at is an Austro-Asiatic language in the Mon-Khmer family belonging to the Eastern Mon-Khmer branch and, more specifically, is a Katuic language (Lewis 2009) agreement diverges from there.

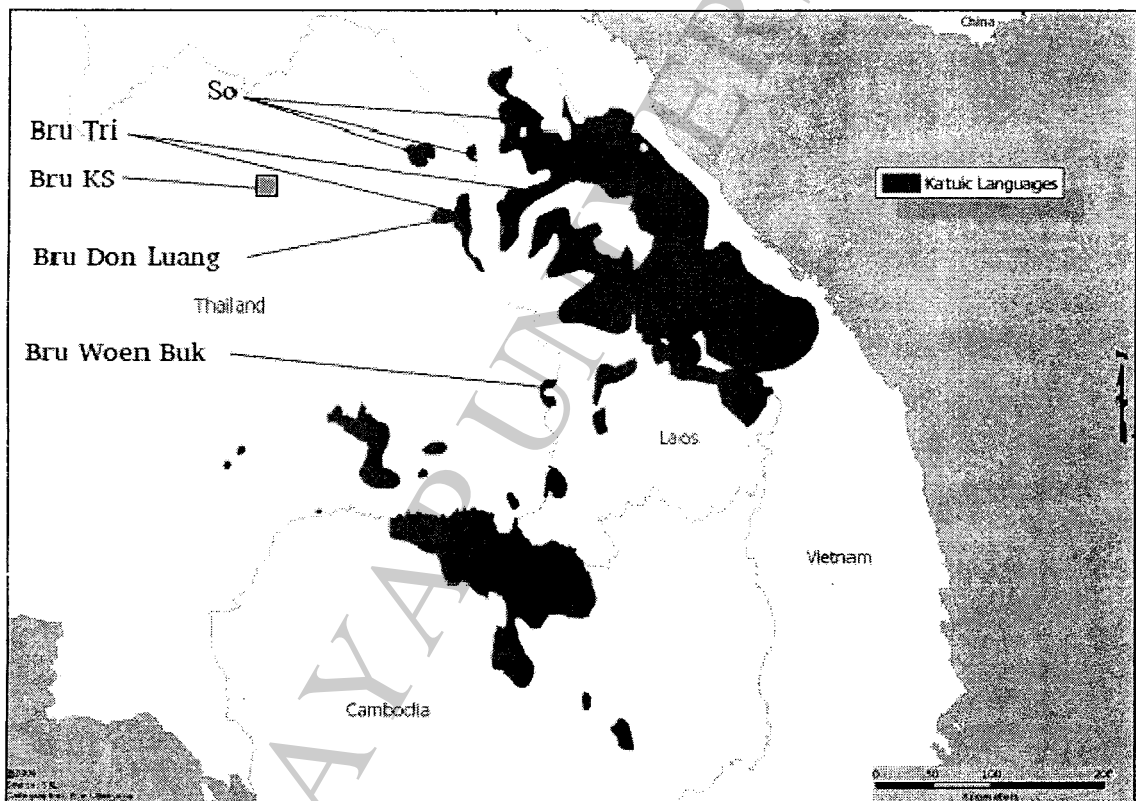


Figure 1 Katuic groups in Southeast Asia
(adapted from Mann, et. al. 2009: 10 by Tebow 2010a: 2)

The Katuic branch is large, among the Mon-Khmer family, but the majority of the languages are in the Western Katuic subgroup and live mostly in Eastern Thailand and Cambodia (SEALang 2009). Western Bru is among the Western Katuic branch in the Brou-So group (Lewis 2009). Bru is found in Northeastern Thailand, Southern Laos, and Central Vietnam (Green 1996: 2).

Austro-Asiatic
 Mon-Khmer
 Eastern Mon-Khmer
 Katuic
 West Katuic
 Brou-So
 Bru, Eastern
 Bru, Western
 Khua
 Sô
 Kuay-Nheu
 Kuy
 Kuay-Yoe
 Nyeu

Figure 2 Bru linguistic tree
(Lewis 2009)

However, Miller and Miller (1996) argue that Bru actually fits under the North Katuic branch along with So and Katang.

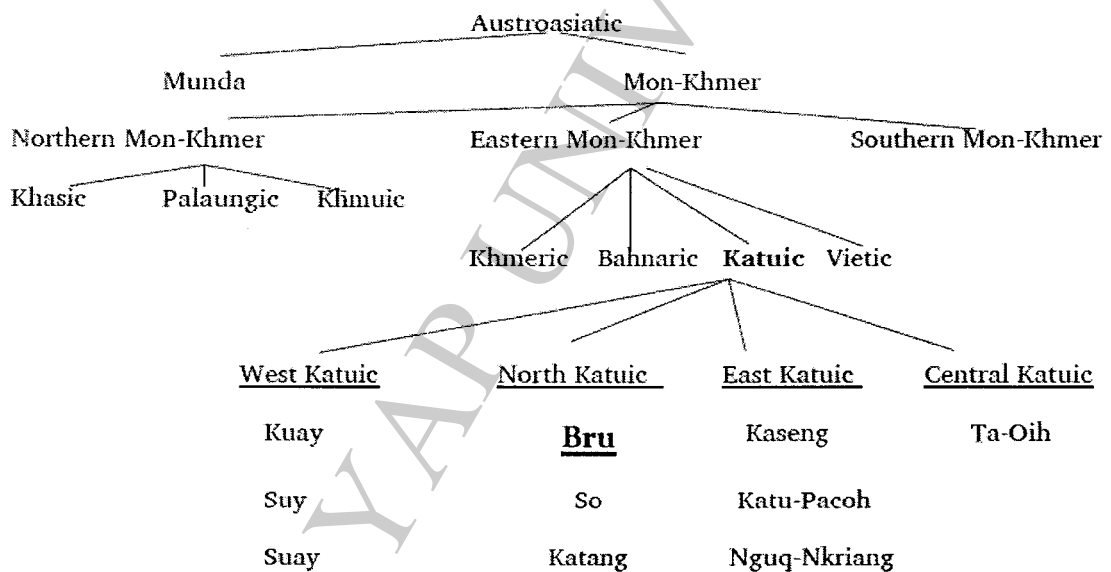


Figure 3 Bru linguistic tree
(Tebow 2010a: 3)

While the exact location of Bru is debated, it is clear that it is part of the Katuic subgroup.

Bru as spoken in the village of Khok Sa-at has also been influenced by Isan, but no attempt will be made to analyze the influence of Isan on Bru in this thesis.

1.2.2 Location

What the Ethnologue (Lewis 2009) defines as Western Bru is spoken primarily in Northeastern Thailand in Ubon Ratchathani province (Bru Woen Buek), Mukdahan province (Bru Don Luang), and Sakon Nakhorn province (Bru Khok Sa-at). Bru Khok Sa-at is a group of eight villages in the Phang Khone and Phanna Nikhom subdistricts of Sakon Nakhorn (Tebow 2010a: 2). Bru Khok Sa-at is not mutually intelligible with the dialects in the other two provinces (Miller & Miller 1996). There are approximately 20,000 speakers in Thailand and also a few speakers in the United States (Lewis 2009).

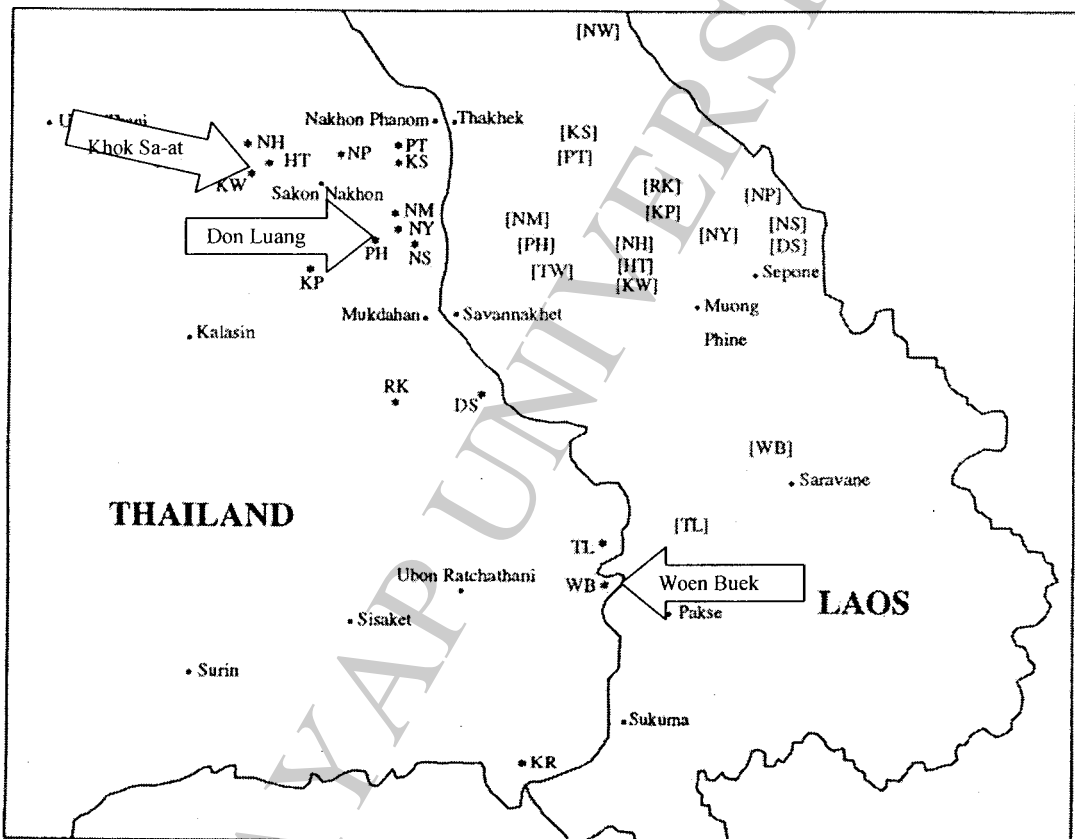


Figure 4 Villages in the three areas where Western Bru is spoken¹
(adapted from Miler 1993: 99-100)

¹KP=Kahm Phakkut, NM=Nong Mak Suk, NS=Na Seua Lai, NY=Nong Yang, PH=Phon Hai, RK=Rom Klau, TW=Tiw, HT=Hin Taek, KW=Kham Wae, KS=Kusuman, NP=Na Phiang Kau, NH=Nang Hai Nyay, NW=Nong Weng, PT=Pho Thi Phai San, DS=Dong Sen Kew, KR=Keng Ruong, TL=Tha Long, WB=Woen Boek

1.2.3 History

There is some debate on where the Bru from Khok Sa-at came from and when. The village leader, Kabin Hunghuan, indicated that they had come from Laos to Thailand. They moved from the nearby village of Nong Hai Yaay in Thailand around 1961 (2010).

However, Kang Thon Kausaiya wrote that the Bru in the village of Khok Sa-at originally came from the nearby village of Nong Hai Noy in Thailand in 1950. Originally the village was named Khok Tho Lo 'visible forested hill'. They had plenty of food and freedom. In 1954 they chose a village leader over the 184 people divided into roughly 22 families. They provided for themselves by hunting and gathering foods in the abundant forest (1993).

Their lifestyle began to change around 1962 when the government started building a dam in the area (Kang Thon 1993). Hunghuan indicated that survey for the dam started in 1959. It was filled in 1968. Water flooded out two villages where Bru used to live: Na Lao and Na Suak (2010). This area was also where they used to hunt and gather food. Life was more difficult after this, and they changed the name of the village to Khok Sa-at 'clean forested hill' (Kang Thon 1993).

From 1965 to the time of writing in 1993 it became more difficult to find food as the forest disappeared. Many of the children and grandchildren of later years would not know of some of the animals that used to be common in the area. The language was also disappearing as people did not teach it to their children (Kang Thon 1993). More and more Isan people, who do not speak Bru, are moving into the area (Kabin 2010).

1.2.4 Current Lifestyle

The Khok Sa-at village is made up of 210 houses. Roughly 70% are Bru with the remaining 30% being primarily Isan. The majority of villagers (60%) are rice farmers. Perhaps 10% of those go to work in Bangkok during the off season. Approximately 35% cultivate other crops, and a smaller minority (5%) fish (Kabin 2010).

Animistic beliefs are still held in Khok Sa-at. Cows and pigs are used for sacrifices. Before making a large decision, like studying at the university, people pay their respects to the ancestors or village spirits (Kabin 2010). Further interviews and analysis on this topic would be profitable.

Young people must be eighteen-years-old before they may marry. The village leader married when he was nineteen and his wife was seventeen, but that was back when the road to the village was simple red dirt and the Thai authorities did not visit often. Many young people in their teens or twenties go to Bangkok for work. Some come back with enough money to marry. Some meet people from other provinces and marry and move elsewhere (Kabin 2010).

The village contains a preschool and elementary school, but no secondary school. The teachers speak Isan, but all the textbooks are in standard Thai. There is a government health center and some smaller stores. A village market is held on Tuesdays. The government center at the village is the village leader’s house, though he attends meetings in Phankhone, the district center, about 8 kilometers away where there is also a hospital (Tebow 2010b).

There are concerns about the future viability of Bru in Khok Sa-at, as most of the children do not speak Bru. Some are starting to teach the children again, after becoming concerned about the future of their language.

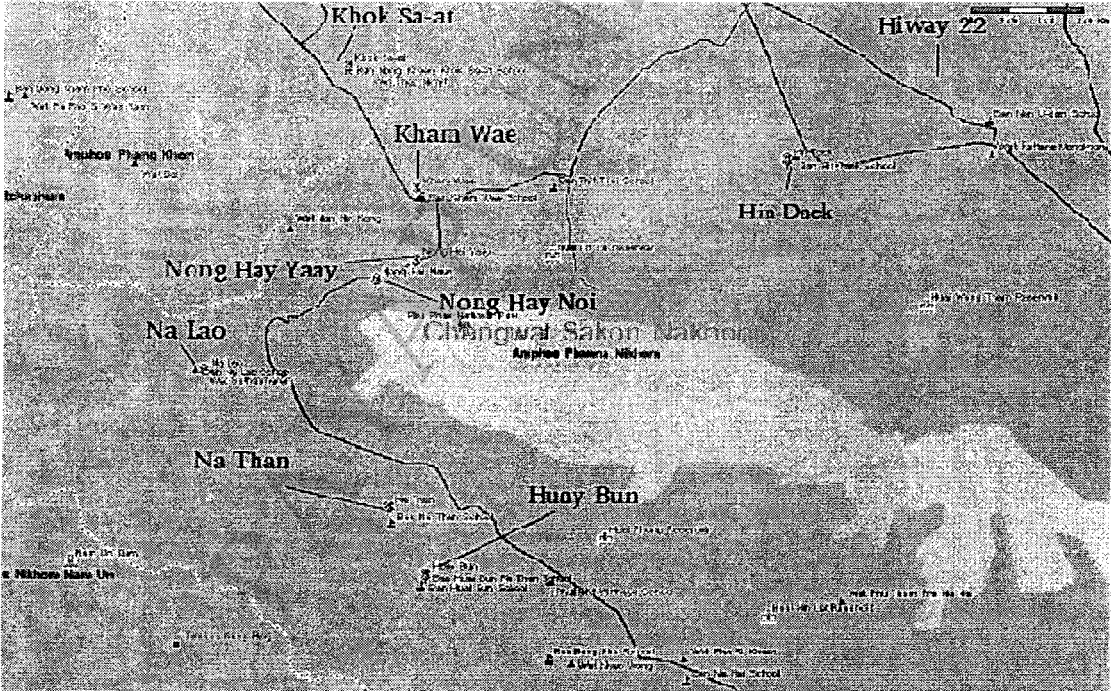


Figure 5 Location of the eight Bru villages that speak the Khok Sa-at dialect (Mapmagic Thailand 2008 from Tebow 2010a: 4)²

² Khok Sa-at ‘clean hill’, Kham Wae ‘precious type-of-vegetable’, Hin Daek ‘broken stone’, Nong Hay Yaay ‘big banyan-tree’, Nong Hay Noi ‘small banyan-tree’, Na Lao ‘sugarcane-like field’, Na Than ‘jujube field’, Huay Bun ‘climbing-vine creek’

1.3 Phonology

While phonology is not investigated in this thesis, some notes have been made to aid in reading the Bru examples. Further research in this area would be valuable. For a fuller discussion of Bru phonology see Gainey (1985), Green (1996), John Miller (1966), Phillips, Miller, & Miller (1976), Theraphan (1979), and Vuong Huu (1999).

1.3.1 Consonants

Bru Khok Sa-at has 21 consonants. The consonant chart generated by Phonology Assistant³ based on five Bru Khok Sa-at narratives gathered by Tebow (2010a) follows:

Table 1: Consonants

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal
Plosive	p	b	t	d	tʃ		k		ʔ
	p ^h		t ^h		tʃ ^h		k ^h		
Nasal		m		n		ɲ	ŋ		
Trill				r					
Fricative			s						h
Approximant				l	j		w		

1. Weakening: /tʃ/ → [c]/_#
2. Assimilation: N → m/#_p
N → n/#_t
N → ŋ/#_k
3. Free Variation: [v] ~ [w] (Tebow 2010: 18).

1.3.2 Vowels

Bru phonology is especially complicated when it comes to vowels. The total number of distinct vowels is highly contested. Different Bru dialects also have a different number of vowels. In Green's phonology, she presents 51 vowels: 37 oral monophthongs, 3 nasal monophthongs, 10 diphthongs, and 1 nasal diphthong (1996: 21).

In Bru Khok Sa-at there are both long and short vowels. There are also clear and breathy vowels. The vowel chart generated by Phonology Assistant based on five narratives follows:

³ Phonology Assistant 3.0.1 SIL International © 2008

Table 2: Vowels

	Front	Central	Back	
Close	i		ɯ	u
	ĩ		ɯ̃	ũ
	i:		ɯ:	u:
	ĩ:		ɯ̃:	ũ:
Close-mid	e		ɤ	o
	ẽ			õ
	e:		ɤ:	o:
	ẽ:		ɤ̃:	õ:
		ə:		
Open-mid	ɛ		ʌ	ɔ
	ẽ		ʌ̃	ɔ̃
	ɛ:		ʌ:	
	ẽ:		ʌ̃:	ɔ̃:
		ɒ		
Open			ɑ	
			ɑ̃	
			ɑ̄	
			ɑ̄̃	
			ɑ:	

The diphthongs found in the five narratives are: [iɯ:], [iɤ:], [iu], [iɔ], [ia], [ia:], [iɑ], [i:ɑ], [i:ɑ], [eɑ], [uɑ], [ɯɑ], [ɯ̃ɑ], [uɑ], [ɯ̃ɑ], [oɑ], [õɑ], [o:ɑ], [eɑ:], [ɯɑ:], [oɑ:] and [uɑ:]. There are no triphthongs in the narratives.

Bru Khok Sa-at syllable structure is (C)(C)V(V)(C)(C). All consonants may appear word initial, but only the unvoiced, unaspirated plosives, nasals, trills, approximants, and [h] appear word final. Initial consonant clusters that appear in the five narratives are [pr], [pl], [br], [bl], [tr], [tʰr], [kr], [kl] and [kʰw]. Final consonant clusters that appear in the five narratives are [jh], [jʔ] and [wh]. The vowel may be any of 38 monophthongs or 22 diphthongs.

1.4 Literature Review

The following section focuses on literature on Bru, literature on related Katuic languages, and grammar literature.

1.4.1 Literature on Bru

There is a significant amount of literature on Bru, but most of it pertains to other dialects.

1.4.1.1 Eastern Bru

John and Carolyn Miller have written many articles about the Eastern Bru that were helpful for background information. Carolyn wrote on the substantive phrase in Brôu (1964), as well as an instruction booklet for Bru language lessons (1974). John wrote on word classes in Brou (1964). Phillips joined the Millers in an alternate analysis of Eastern Bru vowels (1976).

1.4.1.2 Bru Woen Buek⁴

Julie Green wrote many articles relating to the Bru Woen Buek community that were helpful for background information. These included Bru language lessons (1995) and a phonology (1996). She also wrote an article in conjunction with Feikje Van der Haak that had helpful background information on the Bru Woen Buek. Pattiya Jimreiwat wrote a grammar on Bru Woen Buek focusing on clause and phrase structures (1981). It was very helpful for comparison with Bru Khok Sa-at. Theraphan Thongkhum wrote a phonological paper on the distribution of sounds in Bruu using the Bru Woen Buek dialect (1979). This was also the basis for her later dictionary written in conjunction with See Puengpa (1980).

1.4.1.3 Bru Khok Sa-at

John and Carolyn Miller also wrote a preliminary grammar questionnaire for Bru Khok Sa-at specifically in addition to several other dialects (1980). However, the data was all elicited, and the transcription in Bru based on Thai script makes it more difficult to decipher.

Charles Thomas Tebow II wrote a discourse thesis using Bru Khok Sa-at texts (2010a). The same texts were used in this thesis. He also included a short section on grammar in the front of his thesis.

⁴ Also spelled Wyn Buek, Wyn Boek, Woen Boek, Woen Buk.

1.4.1.4 Comparisons

Brian Migliazza wrote a paper comparing So and Bru in Northeast Thailand (1991). This article was helpful in reading Miller and Miller's article comparing Bru to many other Katuic Mon-Khmer groups in northeast Thailand (1995). Miller and Miller also wrote a lexical comparison of Katuic Mon-Khmer languages that actually compares Bru Khok Sa-at to several other dialects (1996).

1.4.2 Literature on Other West Katuic Languages

Other grammar sketches in the West Katuic branch were very helpful for comparison with Bru Khok Sa-at. This included a preliminary grammar by Kees Jan Bos in Kuy⁵ (2009). Somsong Burusphat wrote an article looking at the function of $k\Lambda?$ in oral Kui narrative, which was more discourse related than grammar focused, but was still good for background information (1989). A grammar of So written by Chollada Jungprasert (1986) was helpful for comparison. A later grammar was written by Brian Migliazza (1998) in addition to many other helpful resources in So including a paper on So procedural texts (2001), So stories (2003), SEA language families (2004). Mark Alves also wrote a helpful grammar sketch on Pacoh (2006).

1.4.3 Literature on Grammar

Timothy Shopen's volumes on language typology and syntactic description give many articles relating to basic grammar concepts. The first volume with its focus on clause structure was used extensively (2007a). The second volume, complex constructions, was used for the later portion of this thesis (2007b). In addition, Paul Kroeger's *Analyzing Grammar* book was helpful with basic definitions (2005).

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is an analysis of the grammar of the Bru language as spoken in Khok Sa-at in Sakon Nakhorn province, Thailand. The analysis is based on five narrative texts. All five texts are third-person narratives. The focus of this grammar is on syntax, clause, and sentence structure. Subtopics are based on data of interest. Chapter 2 examines major word classes. Chapter 3 examines minor word classes. Chapter 4 describes phrases. Chapter 5 describes clauses. Chapter 6 describes complex sentences. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion and gives suggestions for further research.

⁵ Also spelled Kuay and Kui.