

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This thesis presents a sociolinguistic survey of the Bisoid varieties known as Pyen, Laomian and Laopin. Pyen [phin<sup>53</sup>] is spoken in Yaw Tan and Namt Theun villages, Mong Yang Township, Eastern Shan State, Myanmar. Laomian [lao<sup>33</sup>m'an<sup>33</sup>] and Laopin [lao<sup>33</sup>pin<sup>33</sup>] are related varieties spoken in Yunnan Province, China. In Lancang County, Ximeng County and Menglian County the varieties in focus are known as 'Laomian' or 'Law Meh'. In Menghai County the variety known as 'Laopin' is spoken in a single village (Van Phin).

Phase I of the survey targets the two Pyen villages in Eastern Shan State, Myanmar. Phase II surveys the Laomian and Laopin varieties in China, and compares these with the Bisu language spoken in Chiang Rai Province of Northern Thailand. The main purposes of this thesis are to assess the need for vernacular language development among the Pyen people in Myanmar and the Laomian and Laopin people in China, to evaluate the suitability of each variety for development and to determine the best approach to language development.

Chapter one introduces the background information of the Bisoid people and their language, the goals, research questions and rationale for this thesis. Chapter two gives a review of literature relating to the languages studied in this thesis. In Chapter three, the theoretical foundations for this study are given. Chapter four presents the design for the Pyen Survey, and Chapter five presents the analysis of the Pyen data. Chapter six lays out the design for the Laomian/Laopin Survey, and chapter seven presents the analysis of the Laomian/Laopin data. Chapter eight presents conclusions of this survey along with suggestions for further research.

In this chapter, Section 1.1 gives background information. The goals of this study are presented in Section 1.2. The scope and benefits of the study are presented in Section 1.3.

## 1.1 Background

This section provides the background information of the Bisoid peoples and their language. First, Sub-section 1.1.1 presents the ‘big picture’ of the geographical distribution of Bisoid languages. Sub-sections 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 give the names of the Bisoid peoples and estimates of the total population respectively. The language genetic classification is given in Sub-section 1.1.4. Finally, Sub-section 1.1.5 provides the rationale of the thesis.

### 1.1.1 Geography

Bisoid peoples are located in five different countries: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. In China, the Laomian/Laopin people live in the southern part of Yunnan Province. They are located in Lancang, Ximeng, Menglian and Menghai Counties (Xu 2001:4).

In Laos, the Sinsali (Phu Noi) people are located in the Phongsali area (Schlesinger 2003:184-185). Also in Laos, Lao Pan people live in one village near Mung Sing in Luang Namtha Province (Gustafson 2010:5). Sinsali (Phu Noi) is also known as Coong in Vietnam (Lewis 2009). Bradley (2007:401) reports that the official name of the Phu Noi ‘changed from pejorative Phu Noi (Lao for ‘small man’) to Sinsali in the late 1990s’.

In Thailand, the Bisu people are mainly located in two main villages in Chiang Rai Province: Doi Chumphu in Mae Lao District and Doi Pui Kham in Muang District (Person 1999:34). There are a handful of Bisu speakers in Pa Daeng village in Phan District (Person 1999:34).

In Myanmar, the Pyen people are located in two villages of Mong Yang Township: Namt Theun and Yaw Tan. Namt Theun was formerly known as “Namt Kheun”, after a river near to the village. The village name “Yaw Tan” – a transliteration of the biblical River Jordan – was adopted after the villagers had converted to Christianity. According to the village leaders of Namt Theun and Yaw Tan, the combined number of Pyen inhabitants living in Namt Theun and Yaw Tan villages is 615. Figure 1 gives the ‘big picture’ of the geographical distribution of Bisoid languages.

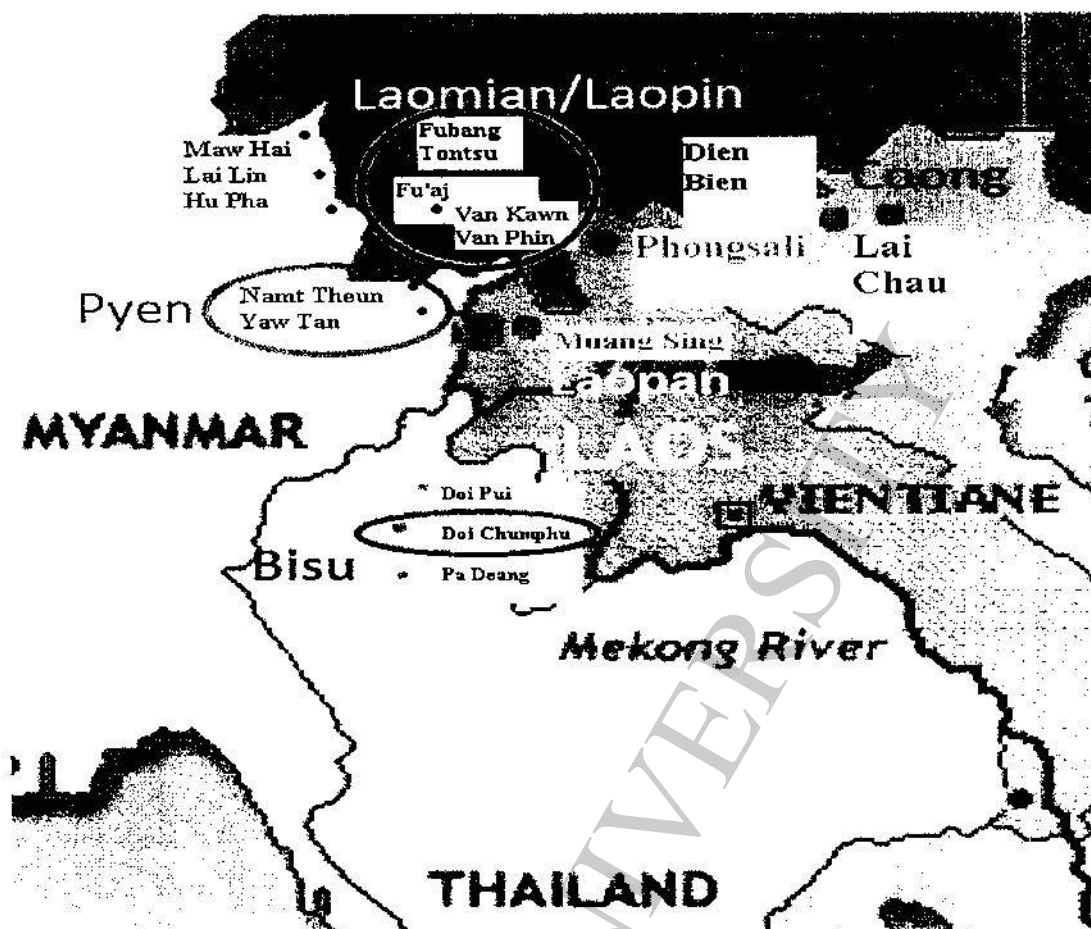


Figure 1 Map showing areas where Bisoid languages are spoken

### 1.1.2 Peoples

This survey thesis is focused on the Pyen people in Myanmar and the Laomian/Laopin people in China. The Pyen and Laopin people call themselves “Phin” [Phin<sup>53</sup>]. Lahu people call Pyen and Laopin “Law Phe” [lɔ<sup>53</sup>phe<sup>53</sup>]. All of the Pyen in Namt Theun and Yaw Tan speak their mother tongue, Pyen, although the most-used LWC appears to be different in the two villages. In Namt Theun the church uses Lahu whereas the Yaw Tan church uses Shan. The Namt Theun Pyen can communicate with tradesmen in either Lahu or Shan. The Yaw Tan Pyen normally use Shan to communicate with outsiders, but a few people can speak Lahu.

Laomian people are known as “Law Meh” [lɔ<sup>53</sup>mɛ<sup>35</sup>] among the Lahu people. They are known as “Law Meh” [lɔ<sup>53</sup>mɛ<sup>21</sup>] in Yunnan Province, China.

The word “Pin” – which means “to change” – derives from Shan (Ji 2005:5). Person (2007:193) gives the following account of the name.

Their exonym is said to stem from a partial exodus, generations ago, from Laos to Burma. Fleeing from their former Lao masters, these people took refuge with the Plang tribe. In return for protection, they agreed to be adopted as the “younger siblings” of the Plang. As such, they were not allowed to intermarry with the Plang (a ban which still holds), were also compelled to exchange their traditional clothing for Plang clothing. Thus, when the pursuing Laos arrived at the Plang village, they were informed that no Bisu were present, only Pyen.

For the purposes of this thesis, the word “Pyen” will be used to designate the Pyen in Myanmar.

### 1.1.3 Population

Estimates of the total population of all Bisoid peoples vary from author to author. Some authors specifically differentiate between membership of a language group and the ability to speak that language. Table 1 gives population estimates by language name and country. Bradley 2007:289 provides estimates of most of the varieties which are given in the third column. Estimates from other sources are given in the final column.

**Table 1 Population Estimates for Bisoid Languages**

Language	Country	Bradley 2007:289	Other sources
Bisu	China	Laomian of Lancang: 5,000 (4,000 speakers)	6,000 (Grimes 1995)
		Laopin of Menghai 1,300 ( < 1,000 speakers)	---
	Thailand	500 ('far fewer speakers')	< 1,000 (Person 2005:117)
Pyen	Myanmar	'moribund in 1890' – no estimate of current population	800 (Grimes 1995) 600 (pc 2011)
Phu Noi	Laos	no estimates given	35,600 (Lewis 2009 citing 1995 census)
Coong	Vietnam	500 speakers in 4 villages	1,560 (Edmondson nd:2)
Sangkong	China	approx. 2000 speakers	< 2000 (Matisoff 1993:123)

Based on the estimates for the various languages in the final column the total population of the Bisoid peoples is approximately 47,000. Xu (2001:4) estimates that the Bisoid people in China, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos total around 10,000. Gustafson (2010:4) estimates the total population of Bisu in all countries to be between 7,000 and 8,000. Some of the differences between different authors might be explained by the fact that some count all group members whereas others exclude those who no longer speak the particular Bisoid language in focus.

Table 2 gives the local names of Bisoid villages in China, Myanmar and Thailand. The existence of the Laomian villages in Northern Shan State, Myanmar was reported during the second survey trip.

**Table 2 Names of Bisoid villages in China, Myanmar and Thailand**

No.	Village Name	Location
1	A Leh [a <sup>33</sup> le <sup>35</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
2	Law Pi Ka [lɔ <sup>33</sup> pi <sup>33</sup> ka <sup>21</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
3	Leh Lo [le <sup>35</sup> lo <sup>21</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
4	Van Kawn [van <sup>21</sup> ko <sup>53</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
5	Suh Pha Pho [su <sup>537</sup> pha <sup>217</sup> pho <sup>537</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
6	Nan Aw [nan <sup>53</sup> ɔ <sup>21</sup> ]	Menglian, Yunnan, China
7	Hoe Lian [hoe <sup>21</sup> li <sup>35</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
8	Nan Ya [nan <sup>21</sup> ja <sup>53</sup> ]	Menglian, Yunnan, China
9	Ton Fu [ton <sup>33</sup> fu <sup>21</sup> ]	Ximeng, Yunnan, China
10	Hoe Lan [hoe <sup>21</sup> lan <sup>53</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
11	Fu Bang [fu <sup>53</sup> baŋ <sup>33</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
12	Ton Tsu [ton <sup>33</sup> tʃu <sup>53</sup> ]	Lancang, Yunnan, China
13	Fu'aj [fu <sup>53</sup> aj <sup>21</sup> ]	Menglian, Yunnan, China
14	Na Eh [na <sup>21</sup> e <sup>35</sup> ]	Menglian, Yunnan, China
15	Van Phin [van <sup>33</sup> phin <sup>53</sup> ]	Menghai, Yunnan, China
16	Maw Hai [mɔ <sup>21</sup> haɪ <sup>53</sup> ]	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
17	Lai Lin [laj <sup>33</sup> lin <sup>33</sup> ].	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
18	Hu Pha [hu <sup>35</sup> pha <sup>35</sup> ]	Northern Shan State, Myanmar
19	Yaw Tan [jɔ <sup>21</sup> tan <sup>21</sup> ]	Eastern Shan State, Myanmar
20	Namt Theun [namt <sup>537</sup> thən <sup>53</sup> ]	Eastern Shan State, Myanmar
21	Doi Chumphu [doj <sup>33</sup> tʃum <sup>33</sup> phu <sup>33</sup> ]	Mae Lao, Chiang Rai, Thailand
22	Doi Pui [doj <sup>33</sup> pu-i <sup>33</sup> ]	Muang, Chiang Rai, Thailand
23	Pha Deang [pha <sup>53</sup> dɛŋ <sup>33</sup> ]	Phan, Chiang Rai, Thailand

During the second survey trip, Fu'aj villagers reported that the inhabitants in the three Laomian villages in Northern Shan State, namely Maw Hai, Lai Lin and Hu Pha, are their close relatives. These Laomian villages were established by former residents of Fu'aj in 1958.

1.1.4 Language

Pyen, Laomian and Laopin are members of the vast Tibeto-Burman language family. More specifically, these varieties may be classified as Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Burmese-Ngwi, Ngwi, Southern Ngwi, Bisoid (Bradley 2007). Their position in the wider language family is depicted in Figure 2.

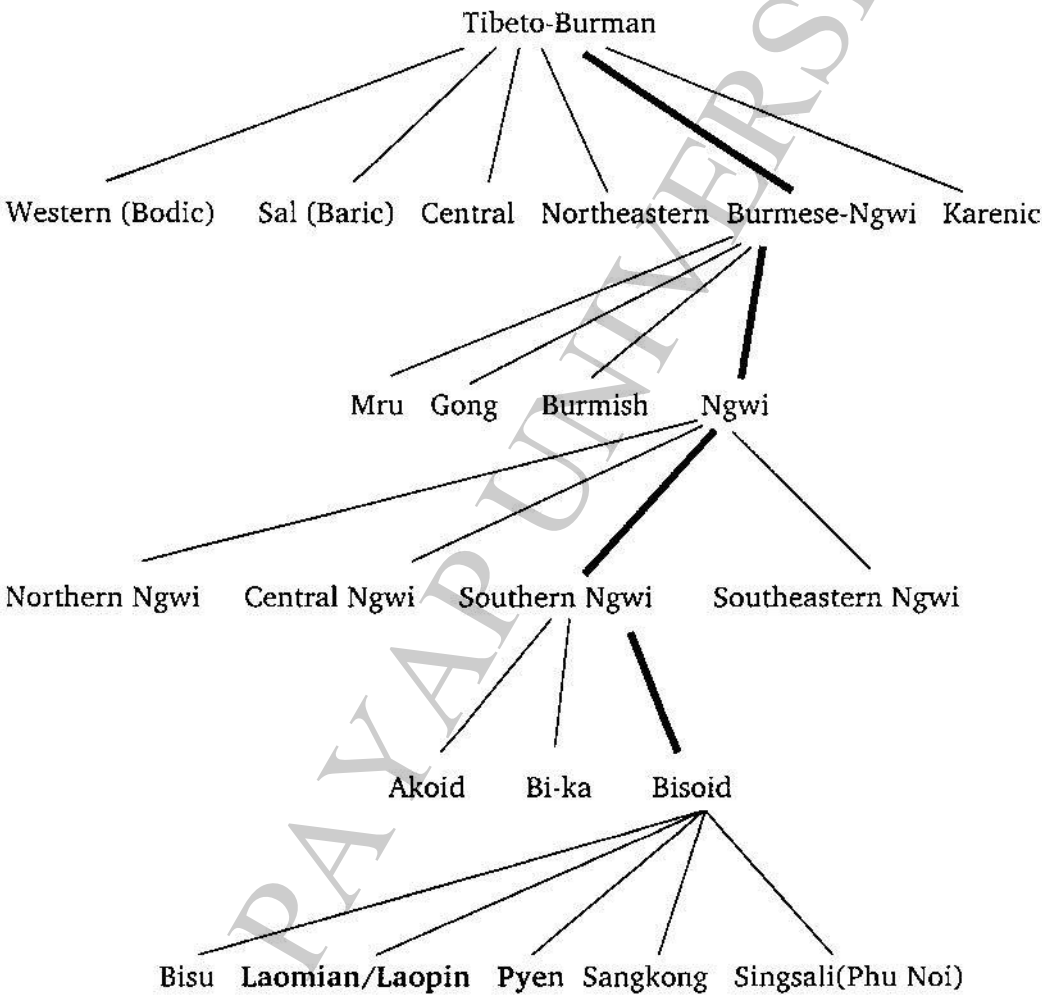


Figure 2 Pyen, Laomian and Laopin Language Classification (Adapted from Bradley 2007)

### 1.1.5 Rationale

Language development of Thailand Bisu has been underway since 1998 (Person 2005) and since 2002 the Pyen have been meeting with the Bisu language development team to adapt materials from Thailand Bisu for use by the Pyen. In 2012 it became clear to those involved that the level of comprehension of Thailand Bisu by the Pyen needed further investigation in order to establish a Pyen language development program on a firmer footing. Pyen community leaders organized language committees in both villages and requested help with language development. This thesis research was undertaken to meet the needs for information on which to base decisions about language development for Pyen.

Phase I surveyed two Pyen villages in Eastern Shan State, Myanmar and learned of some contact including intermarriage between one of those villages and the Laopin village in Mengzhe Township, Menghai County. The survey team was also informed that the Laopin variety spoken in Mengzhe in China is 'the same as in Thailand and Myanmar'. Person (2007:199-200) claims that intelligibility between Pyen and Thailand Bisu is hampered more by recent loan words than by phonological differences. Xu (2001:154) asserts that '[Thailand] Bisu and Laopin are entirely mutually intelligible while the degree of intelligibility between Laomian and Bisu varies in different areas. When collecting data for the Pyen survey, relevant issues in the broader context of Bisoid language varieties were borne in mind. Thus, the researcher planned for the second survey trip in order to investigate the need for language development among the Laomian/Laopin people in Yunnan Province, China. The Laomian/Laopin survey is the second phase of a broader study of Bisoid languages in Myanmar, China, Laos and Thailand. The chronology of the research is presented in Table 3.



**Table 3 Research Timeline**

<b>Research Activities</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
Library research	I	June 1, 2011	July 31, 2011
Preparation for data collection	I	August 1, 2011	November 30, 2011
Fieldwork	I	November 25, 2011	December 10, 2011
Data analysis	I	January 1, 2012	February 29, 2012
Writing	I	March 1, 2012	March 31, 2012
Library research	II	April 1, 2012	April 30, 2012
Preparation for data collection	II	May 1, 2012	June 30, 2012
Fieldwork	II	July 9, 2012	August 11, 2012
Data analysis	II	September 1, 2012	December 14, 2012
Writing	II	January 10, 2013	April 15, 2013
Initial draft	I&II	May 1, 2013	September 30, 2013
Revision	I&II	October 1, 2013	October 30, 2013
2 <sup>nd</sup> draft	I&II	November 1, 2013	November 30, 2013
Defence draft	I&II	December 1, 2013	December 15, 2013
Thesis defense	---	---	January 13, 2013

Table 3 states the timeline of the thesis research. The research for Phase I started on June 1, 2011 and finished writing up on March 31, 2012. After finishing the write-up for the Pyen survey, the research continued for the Loamian/Laopin survey. The research for Phase II started on April 1, 2012 and ended on April 15, 2013.

## 1.2 Goals

Having presented the background information of the selected Bisoid varieties in Section 1.1, Section 1.2 provides the goals of the thesis. The main goals of the study are to:

- (1) assess the need for vernacular language development among the Pyen people in Mong Yang Township
- (2) determine which variety should be selected for development
- (3) assess the community's readiness and potential resources in a language development project
- (4) assess the need for vernacular language development among the Laomian/Laopin people in Yunnan Province
- (5) determine which variety should be selected for development
- (6) assess the best approach to language development



### 1.3 Scope and Benefits of the Study

This thesis will cover three Bisoid varieties, namely Pyen in Myanmar, Bisu in Thailand and Laomian and Laopin in China. The research is limited to the seven Bisoid villages: Namt Theun and Yaw Tan in Myanmar; Doi Chumphu in Thailand; and Tontsu, Van Kawn, Fu'aj and Van Phin in China. The total number of subjects for this study is 188. 107 words out of from the 462 Myanmar Tibeto-Burman wordlists are used for lexicostatistic comparison. Seven wordlists are transcribed and compared in this thesis (Appendix A). Each set of Individual Sociolinguistic Questionnaire (Appendix B), Knowledgeable Insider Sociolinguistic Questionnaire (Appendix C), Christian Leader Questionnaire (Appendix D), Dialect Mapping Tool (Appendix E), Observation Question List (Appendix F) is used for studying the sociolinguistic situation. Recorded Text Testing is also used for studying the intelligibility between the selected varieties (Appendix G).

This study will contribute to a more detailed understanding of the sociolinguistic and linguistic relationship of the Bisoid varieties: Pyen, Bisu, Laomian and Laopin. The researcher hopes that the research presented in this thesis will be of use for decisions relating to language development in these varieties. Other Bisoid varieties might also take the results presented here as a basis for further research.