William J. Gedney's Concise Saek-English English-Saek Lexicon. Edited with an introduction by THOMAS JOHN HUDAK. Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication No. 37. Honolulu: UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I PRESS, 2010. Pp. ix + 252. $35.

William J. Gedney (1915-1999) was the 20th century's leading American authority on Tai languages and dialects. After his retirement in 1980, several of his students collaborated with him in preparing for publication the voluminous field-notes he had collected all over Thailand in the 1950's and '60's. Hudak has played a key role in this effort, helping to produce detailed treatises on the Lungming dialect (1991), on Tai Lue (1996), and on Saek itself: *William J. Gedney's The Saek Language: Glossaries, texts, and translations.* Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of Michigan (1993). The present volume is a reworking of that 1993 study, which is now out of print.

The Saek dialect (the people's autonym is **thrɛɛk³**) is now spoken in a couple of villages in Nakorn Pathom province of Thailand, right on the border with Laos, and in a few villages on the Laotian side as well. It was first noticed by French travelers and missionaries in the late 19th/early 20th cc., and early opinion placed it erroneously in the Mon-Khmer family, although the French comparativist André-Georges Haudricourt, in a series of articles beginning in 1958, soon demonstrated that Saek is a Tai dialect – more specifically, and surprisingly given its geographic location, that it is a member of the Northern Tai dialect group.

Gedney's meticulously recorded data on Saek, generously made available to his fellow scholars via personal communications for decades, has nourished subsequent research, including Paul K. Benedict's *Austro-Tai Language and Culture* (1975; henceforth ATLC) and Fang Kuei Li's *A Handbook of Comparative Tai* (1977; henceforth HCT). Benedict used certain key Saek forms to buttress his case for a genetic relationship between Tai and Austronesian, e.g. **pra** 'eye' (ATLC 283), **pra:i** 'die' (269), **ʔblian** 'moon' (423). Most recently, Luó Yóngxiàn has published "An introduction to the Saek dialect" (in Chinese: *Shíjiā-huà de jièshào, Mínzú Yǔwén* 2009.5:60-81), based largely on the data in Gedney 1993.

Tai specialists have been fascinated by Saek for several reasons, first of all because of its geographical displacement southward from the Northern Tai dialect area. Traditionally they are said to have come down 200-300 years ago from Yunnan's Qiānxǐ 迁徙 area to their present location, for obscure reasons discussed in Haudricourt 1958 («Les Sek de la province du Cammon (Laos): migration thai ou déportation chinoise?» *Journal Asiatique* 246:107-8). More importantly, Saek preserves certain archaic features, foremost of which is the preservation of syllable-final **-l**, uniquely among all the Tai dialects.

Since Gedney's *Saek Lexicon* is arranged by rhyme, it is easy to locate the words with final **-l** (pp. 88-92), e.g.:

	Saek	*Siamese*
'fly' (v.)	**bɯl¹**	**bin**
'stone'	**riil²**	**hĭn**
'sweet'	**vaal²**	**wăan**
'teach'	**sɔɔl²**	**sŏɔn**
'wasp/hornet'	**thiil⁴**	**tɛɛn**
'wild; of the woods'	**thual⁶**	**thɨan**

Interestingly, **-l** can cooccur in the same syllable as medial **-l-**, e.g. **blɛl³** 'protrude', **mlɛl⁴** 'body louse'. (Similarly, **-w** can occur in the same syllable as medial **-u-** (e.g. **khuaw⁴** 'scratch', **ruaw²** 'laugh', p. 32), although this is impossible in Siamese. The rhyme **-iay** is impossible in both dialects.)

The criteria for including Saek in the Northern Tai group are both phonological and lexical. On the lexical level, there are items like:

·**biin³** 'mat' (called «a Northern Tai word» in HCT:71; cf. Po-ai **min**)

·**maaŋ⁴** 'spirit, ghost; corpse' («This is a typical Northern dialect word, not found in the Southwest or Central Tai dialects»: HCT 74). ATLC (242) quotes the Saek form, crediting Gedney with a p.c. (Fortuitously perhaps, there is a very similar widespread PTB root ***s-maŋ** 'corpse', represented by forms like Chepang **hma:ng**, Garo **maŋ**, Jingpho **maŋ³³**, Lashi **maŋ³¹**.)

On the phonological level, Saek displays a number of special features in addition to its retention of final **-l**:

·Treatment of pTai ***ɣ-**:
Proto-Tai ***ɣ-** merged with ***g-** in many dialects, including Siamese and Lao. In Siamese this voiced velar stop (whether from pTai ***g-** or ***ɣ-**) became voiceless aspirated **kh-**. Saek preserves **ɣ-**, while other N.Tai dialects (e.g. Wuming) have developed **x-** (see HCT 214-219):

	Saek	*Siamese*
'gold'	**ɣam⁴**	**kham**
'rice'	**ɣaw⁶**	**khâaw**

·The Proto-Tai cluster ***ʔdl-** or ***ʔdr-** (HCT cannot decide between them) becomes Siamese **d-** but Saek **r-**:

	Siamese	*Saek*
'black'	**dam**	**ram¹**
'raw'	**dìp**	**rip⁴**

·Proto-Tai ***f-** and ***v-** receive opposite treatments in Siamese and Saek; both dialects merge them, but the merger is in favor of **v-** in Saek, but **f-** in Siamese. Tonal constraints still distinguish the two proto-phonemes in both dialects:

	Siamese	Saek	pTai	Proto-tone
'rain'	**fŏn**	**vɯɯn²**	***f**	A1 (HIGH, i.e. *voiceless series)
'fire'	**faj**	**vii⁴**	***v**	A2 (LOW, i.e. *voiced series)

·Saek is innovative even within the N. Tai group, as witness the treatment of pTai ***kl-**, which is kept as such in other N.Tai dialects like Wuming, but which in Saek has become **tl-**, for which the younger generation tends to substitute **tr-** (HCT 220, 224):

	Siamese	Wuming	Saek (OG)	Saek (YG)
'drum'	**klɔ̌ɔŋ**	**klöŋ**	**tlɔɔŋ¹**	**trɔɔŋ¹**
'salt'	**klɨa**	**klu**	**tlua¹**	**trua¹**

Synchronically, Saek has a rich system of some 183 segmental rhymes (see chart, p. 5), as well as six tones, and a vocalic system very similar to standard Thai, i.e. a 3 x 3 system of 9 vowels, all of which may occur long or short, as well as three centering diphthongs /ia ɯa ua/. The non-low central vowels are transcribed with "ɯ" and "ɤ" instead of with "ɨ" and "ə", as is usual for Siamese.

The Saek lexicon shows abundant evidence of old contact vocabulary from Khmer and Indo-Aryan, undoubtedly filtered through the medium of Lao or Thai, e.g.:

(< *Indo-Aryan*) **seet⁶thii²²** 'rich man'; **khuu⁴** 'teacher'; **niʔ⁶thaan⁴** 'story/fable'
(< *Khmer)* **kɤɤt⁶** 'born'; **thriam²** 'prepare'; **kam¹laŋ⁴** 'progressive marker'

However, Saek is in general less Khmericized than Siamese. Several words where Siamese has the Khmer-derived prefix **krə-** appear without the prefix in Saek:

	Siamese	Saek
'bone'	**krədùuk**	**rɔɔk⁶**
'garlic'	**krəthiam**	**thiam⁴**

Most Saek words, however, preserve this prefix as **kə-** (*Lexicon*, pp. 128-30). The first syllable of Saek **pak⁴tuu¹** 'door' clearly means 'mouth; opening' (HCT 101), although this is disguised in the Siamese word **p(r)ətuu** (vs. Si. **pàak** 'mouth'), where the first element has lost its morphemic identity, and is generally identified with the Khmer-derived prefix **prə-**.

There is even at least one example of a Saek word that seems to be derived from Chinese: Saek **lit⁶** 'power'; cf. Chinese 力 (Mand. lì).

By any criterion, Saek is endangered. According to the generous estimate in *Ethnologue (16th ed.)*, there are only about 25,000 speakers, with more than half of them in Laos. Contact pressure from Thai and Lao is naturally growing. An interesting longitudinal study («Saek revisited»), comparing the speech of the older (OG) vs. the younger generation (YG) of speakers. was recently carried out by Wilaiwan Khanittanan (in Anthony V.N. Diller, et al, eds., *The Tai-Kadai Languages*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 389-392), who recorded the pronunciation of initial consonants in a 1300-word list read by a 23-year-old student, compared with their pronunciation 30 years before by a 45-year-old teacher.

The Gedney/Hudak *Lexicon* distinguishes in many cases between OG and YG pronunciations. Often a loss of contrast has been suffered in the passage between the generations, the most painful of which for linguists is the merger of OG final **-l** and **-n** to YG **-n**! Other developments include the occlusivization of OG **ɣ-** to YG **g-**; and the merger of OG **pr-** and **pl-** to YG **pr-** (variation here had already been noticed by Gedney in the 1960's), e.g. 'fish' OG **plaa¹**/YG **praa¹**; 'leech' PG **pliŋ¹**/YG **priŋ¹**. YG speakers have also lost the OG cluster **ml-**, merging it with simple **m-**. (Siamese lacks **ml-**, except in few words (HCT:93-94), where the **m-** is retained thanks to a schwa, e.g. 'grain/seed' Saek (OG) **mlɛt⁶** ~ **mlɛk⁶**, Si. **məlèt**.)

Yet, as Wilaiwan points out, certain new contrasts have entered the phonology of YG Saek speakers:

·An /f/ phoneme has been introduced via Tai loanwords, replacing an earlier borrowing pattern with **ph-**.

·There is now a stable Saek phoneme /g/ (a sound which does not occur in Siamese), which has resulted from the merger of Proto-Tai *x-, *k-, and *ɣ-.

·YG speakers now contrast **-iw** and **-iiw**, as well as **-uy** and **-uuy**, where the OG just has the long variant (*Lexicon*, pp. 30-31, 37).

There is evidence that the language revitalization projects now underway in Saek villages are having some success, raising the hope that this historically important dialect will survive.

Hudak is to be congratulated for yet another major contribution to Tai studies, as well as another fitting tribute to Bill Gedney's memory.

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