



Ruma'ai glottalized vowels in historical perspective

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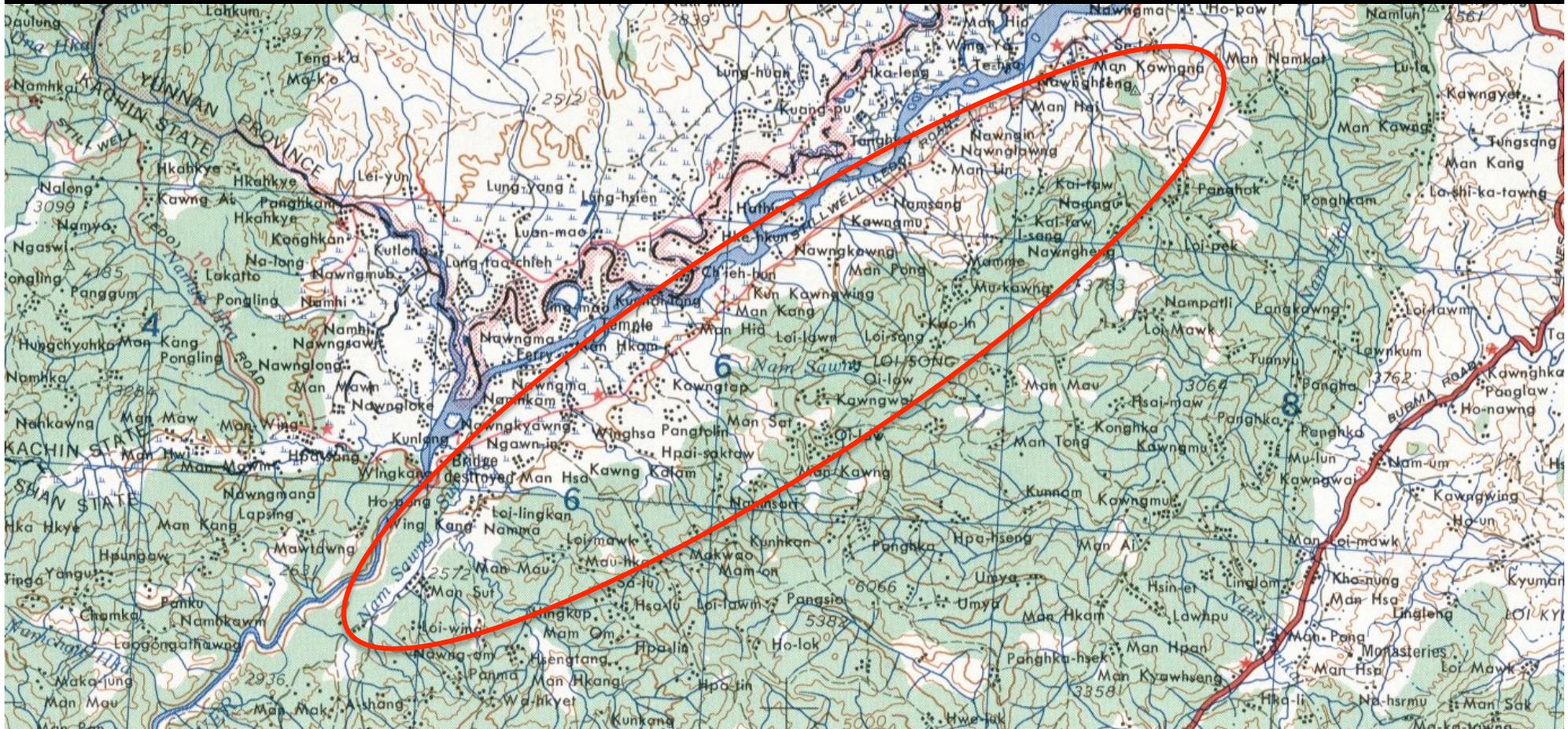
Ruma'ai language

Rumai is a Palaung language spoken in Myanmar and Yunnan

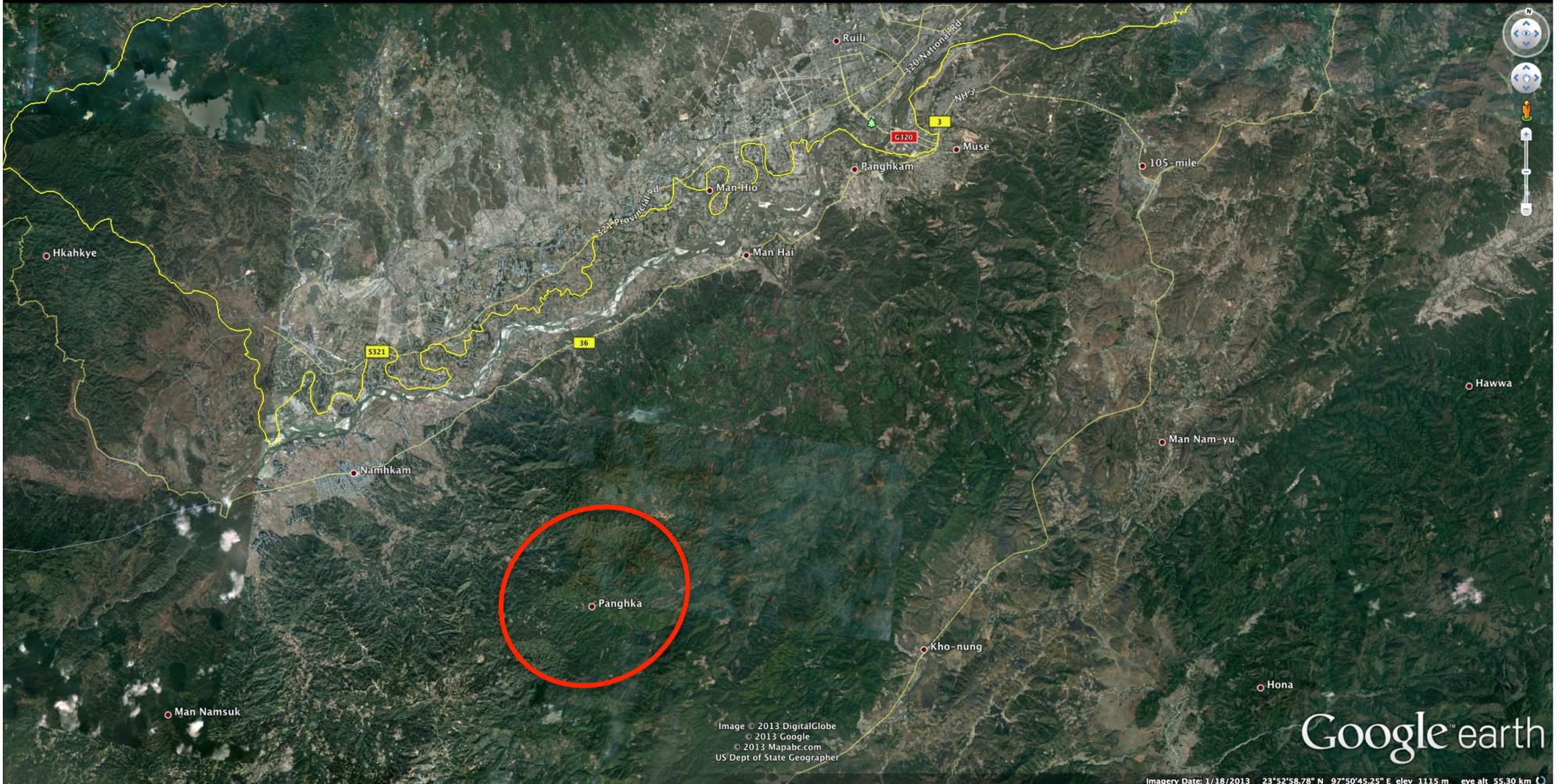
Ruma'ai is a variety of Rumai spoken in the Muse/Namhkam area of Myanmar

- Data presented is from a Ruma'ai speaker from Nam Om (Panghka village), Namhkam Township
- Spoken in at least 4 villages in this area





Namhka area 1954



Namhkam area 2013

Ruma^ʔai Glottalized vowels

Many common words with solid MK etymologies have glottalized vowels

Found on live syllables only

Found in some, but not all, Shan and Burmese borrowings

The exact location of glottalization is sensitive to rime structure

- On long vowels, glottal stricture occurs about 2/3 of the way through vowel-duration.
- On short vowels, glottal stricture occurs at the end of the vowel, before or half-way through continuant finals, or even at the very end.

Ruma'ai Glottalized vowels

 kǎʔaʔaŋ	bone	sɔʔw	dog
 yaʔam	to cry	rɔʔay	housefly
hlaʔa	leaf	 kǎtaʔay	earth
siʔim	bird	 byaʔy	forest
plaʔan	sky	ʔɛʔm	water
lǎŋaʔa	sesame	hraʔŋ	bamboo
pleʔem	leech	pyoʔŋ	fat, grease
 ʃaʔan	foot	huʔun	nest

Quasi-devoicing of initials

There is quasi-devoicing of initial stops involving breathy register
Voiced/unvoiced quality is unstable but can be predicted by breathiness

kɑ:ʔ	cold	kǎləʔa	cheek
gɑ:ʔ	old	gǎləʔa	lazy
kɑ:ŋ	crossbow	tɛh	cracked
gɑ:ŋ	house	dɛh	to come
pɯ:yʔ	to take off	pyaʔw	to frighten
bɯ:yʔ	to suck	yaʔw	to be afraid
cɑʔan	time, occurrence	kǎləʔon	pumpkin
ʃɑʔan	foot	gǎləʔon	clf piece

Ruma'ai rime history

The drastic upheaval in the Ruma'i vowel system is well-known (Mitani 1977, Diffloth 1991) and is an important criterion in the sub-classification of Palaung languages (Weera 2009)

Glottalization occurs very frequently on open syllables in Ruma'ai, and frequently continuant-final rimes; historically: *-ʔ, *-n, *-ŋ, *-ɲ, *-l, *-r, *-y

Final stop merger with -ʔ

In Rumaɪ, many historical final stops have merged with -ʔ, but a comparable number remain. In Nam Om Ruma'ai, the distribution of merger/retention of final stops is:

historical final stop	Nam Om Ruma'ai
*-p > ʔ	11
*-p > p	14
*-t > ʔ	29
*-t > t	22
*-k > ʔ	29
*-k > k	38
*-c > yʔ	19
*-c > t	2

Loss of final *-r, *-l

	Nam Om Ruma'ai
*-r lost, glottalized V	10
*-r lost, non-glottalized V	16
*-l lost, glottalized V	8
*-l lost non-glottalized V	11
*-y glottalized V	21
*-y non-glottalized V	15
*-h > -h, no glottalization	
*-s > -h, no glottalization	

contributing to the existence of minimal pairs

*-m, *-n, -*ŋ, *-ɲ

historical final continuant	Nam Om Ruma'ai
*-m glottalized V	34
*-m non-glottalized V	22
*-n glottalized V	21
*-n non-glottalized V	21
*-ŋ glottalized V	58
*-ŋ non-glottalized V	37
*-ɲ glottalized V	6
*-ɲ non-glottalized V	3

- synchronically, there is no overwhelming bias favoring glottalization or non-glottalization
- coda history reveals no obvious patterns with regards to the distribution of glottalization
- the reconstructed vowel system is likely much more complex than has been shown, and remains an open question

Summary of findings

Ruma'ai has four voice registers

- breathy/clear is easily explained
- glottalization cannot yet be accounted for historically

For all 4 historical final stops, there is a 2-way treatment

- stop is retained
- stop merges with ?
 - for both, no trace of glottalization remains in the vowel

On live syllables, there is also a 2-way treatment

- glottalized vowel
- non-glottalized vowel

De-glottalization

- Compounds
 - ta^ʔŋ ha^ʔay > taŋ-ha^ʔay ‘tree’
- Semantic intensity of some statives
 - ro^ʔɔn bright red : ro:n light red
 - bla^ʔay dull : bla:y somewhat dull
- Numeral recitation
 - p^ha^ʔan tʃ^hɛh five people : p^ha:n five

Nor Lae Palaung

- Chalermchai (2010) reports glottalized vowels in Dara-ang spoken in Thailand
 - Discussed in the context of denasalized final nasals
 - Minimal pairs are frequent
 - Proposed full set of glottalized vowels, limited to nasal-final rimes

It seems clear that in Ruma'ai we are dealing with a different phenomenon.

Rumai tone?

- Janzen (1978) states that there is a “well-established” three-way tone system for Rumai
 - The system is not described, and tone is not indicated in the wordlists
 - Glottalization is not indicated or discussed
 - It is suggested that tone is related to final stops, which may be supported by Ruma'ai
- Dai and Liu (1997) and Liu (2012) describe an “evolving” tone system in the Guangka variety of Rumai (De'ang) spoken in China
 - The problematic glottalized 412 tone corresponds to some, but not all, of the Nam Om glottalized syllables; glottalization is much more wide-spread in Nam Om Ruma'ai

Rumai tone?

- Nam Om Ruma'ai generally has falling pitch on glottalized syllables, and the initial pitch level appears to be conditioned by breathy/clear voice.
- However, in our data, pitch is unstable and it is difficult to construct a tone system on that basis for Nam Om.
- The interaction of breathiness, glottalization and pitch is crucial for further investigation.

Implications

The glottalization observed in Ruma'ai indicates a problem of some historical depth.

While internal comparison based on new data from undescribed Rumi and other Palaung languages may shed some light on the issue, there is a need to look outside of Palaungic as well.

Glottalization exists in Pearic, Katuic, Khmuic, Vietic, Bahnaric, possibly S Munda, and now in Palaungic, but has not yet been accounted for historically.

Glottalization in these branches corresponds lexically in some cases, but not often enough to explain what is going on.

Given the wide distribution of glottalization and the seemingly different histories of its development in different branches, glottalization is an issue that should be addressed at the AA level.

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