Ndeu ‘one’
PT *ʔdeu A1, PKT *ʔdeu

This morpheme is found in all three branches of Tai, but not in all languages. Among the Kam-Sui languages, it is found in Maonan (deu2), Mien (deu1), and Mak (?deu6). These examples are probably borrowings from Zhuang or Bouyei. Ndeu is not found in Kam, Sui, Mulam, Then (Yang-huang), Lakkia, Pubiao, or the Kadai languages of Hainan.1

In Thai, Lao and Longzhou (the SW and CT languages), this morpheme usually has the meaning ‘alone, single’. This lexical meaning is also found in NT. Use of this morpheme as a numeral probably developed from this lexical meaning (see Gàilùn 256).

A more common word for ‘one’ in the SW and CT languages is nɯŋ2, attested in Siamese, White and Black Tai, Shan and so on.2 Among the NT languages, nɯŋ5 is found in Saek.3 Otherwise, this word is reportedly not found in NT languages (HCT p. 116), but the ZHCH lists niengh as a synonym of ndeu (ZHCH 598; likewise Zhuàng-Hàn cíhuì chūgǎo 1959, p. 128).

Li HCT reconstructs both nɯŋ2 and ndeu. For ndeu ‘only, one, single’, Li reconstructs PT *ʔd- A1,4 noting that in Lung-chow deeu B1 the tone is irregular, other CT dialects showing A1.5 Pittayaporn reconstructs PT *ɗiǝwA for this etymon (733).

For nɯŋ2 Li reconstructs PT *hn- A2, B1.6 Pittayaporn reconstructs PT *nuːŋB for this etymon (723). Li notes tone variations – B2 in a number of SW dialects, and A1 in some CT dialects. His inference is that “This indicates there is an alteration of PT *n- and *hn-” (p. 116). This is possible, but it is more likely that such variation is a result of tone sandhi in more recent times. Numerals in tonal languages are particularly prone to tonal variation, given the high frequency of use; Vietnamese is an example, but

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1 Gàilùn p. 256.
2 CTSB 0240 ‘one’, p. 93.
3 Ibid.
4 HCT 6.4.17, p. 108.
5 HCT 110.
6 HCT 6.6.29, p. 115.
Map 47.1
Common Characters in Traditional Texts

Sources: Traditional texts from survey locations.

 Vance 10

 ‘one’