CHAPTER 2

Reconstruction of Proto-Hlai Initials

The primary goal of this chapter is to present the sets of initial correspondences which have been used to reconstruct the Proto-Hlai (PHl) inventory of initials, and explain reflexes of Proto-Hlai initials in the daughter languages if they have followed divergent paths. The reconstruction here will also be compared with those of Matisoff (1988), Thurgood (1994), Peiros (1998), and Ostapirat (2004), and these alternative reconstructions will be considered and discussed. It is the purpose of this chapter to motivate the reconstruction of Proto-Hlai proposed herein so that it may in turn be used for comparative work with other branches of Kra-Dai and/or used for more detailed study of specific types of change exemplified below.

The reconstruction in the chapter will be of Proto-Hlai, as opposed to Pre-Hlai which will be reconstructed in chapter four. Proto-Hlai is meant to be the best possible reconstruction of the single proto-language which existed just prior to its first division into daughter languages. The reconstruction of the Proto-Hlai system of initials in this chapter results in an inventory with distinctive asymmetries and gaps. The discussion of Pre-Hlai in chapter four will demonstrate how this system originated in a much more balanced and typologically common system.

Before a discussion and reconstruction of specific natural classes of initials is initiated, there are two preliminary issues which are addressed briefly below. The first is a reiteration of the theory of sound change adopted here. The second is a discussion of how two specific sound changes which occurred after the break-up of Proto-Hlai, initial obstruent devoicing and regirogenesis, interact with each other in ways that are meaningful in the context of Proto-Hlai reconstruction. With this background, we will be in a position to properly examine the various classes of initials themselves and the evolution of their individual members into their present forms in the daughter languages.

2.1 Sound Change: Initials

In the reconstruction of Proto-Hlai initials undertaken in this chapter, the following criteria described in chapter one are adhered to:
(i) Directionality of Change: typologically natural changes are referred to and used as a model whenever possible; changes are assumed to occur one feature at a time unless evidence forces a different analysis.

(ii) Commonality of Features: phonemes are reconstructed based on the features common between reflexes of daughter languages; greater heterogeneity of reflexes is taken to indicate greater complexity of the proto-phoneme.

(iii) Economy: a phoneme is reconstructed to the extent that it satisfactorily accounts for the posited change(s) between it and the reflexes of the daughter languages, and reconstructions assuming more changes than necessary are avoided.

(iv) Symmetry: the reconstructed inventory is checked to make sure that no symmetries have been overlooked in natural classes, either in place or in manner; it is accepted that parts of the inventory may be asymmetrical, and these are checked for typological naturalness.

Throughout the history of Hlai (including Pre-Hlai, Proto-Hlai, and the daughter languages), there are four main categories of sound change which are observable in the initials. These are (1) temporal compression, (2) gesture reduction, (3) onset fortition, and (4) systemic realignment. Of these four, temporal compression has been the most pervasive, and can be observed at all stages of the evolution of Hlai. Gesture reduction is most pronounced in Pre-Hlai, and will therefore be treated in chapter four. Onset fortition can be observed in the transition from Pre-Hlai to PHl through a sound change referred to here as main-syllable aspiration (see chapter four) and in the daughter languages. Systemic realignment is most prominent in the cases of the individual daughter languages, after the breakup of PHl. Temporal compression, onset fortition, and systemic realignment will each be exemplified below, using examples from this chapter. It is sometimes the case that a particular change can fall into more than one of these categories simultaneously.

2.1.1 Temporal Compression

Bybee (2001) proposes that speech, like other motor activities, is an automated phenomenon, and as such is subject to the same kinds of overlap of originally linearized gestures. Bybee posits two main articulatory impetuses of sound change, one of which is temporal compression (the other being gesture reduction). Temporal compression occurs when the gestures associated with two segments that are linearized, and therefore discrete, begin to overlap as the time between the implementation of the first and second segments is decreased,