CHAPTER 4

Pre-Hlai

The goal of this chapter is to develop a theory of the Pre-Hlai initial and rime inventories, and to trace the evolution of the Hlai initials and rimes from Pre-Hlai to Proto-Hlai.

To this end, cognates between Proto-Hlai and Proto-Tai and its immediate daughters Proto-Northern Tai and Proto-Southern Tai (Central + Southwestern Tai)\(^1\) are compared in order to develop a hypothesis of the original Pre-Hlai inventory of initials. Although reconstructions of other branches of Kra-Dai exist (most notably Proto-Kam-Sui (Thurgood 1988), Proto-Kra (Ostapirat 1999), and Proto-Lakkja (L-Thongkum 1992)), I do not refer to them here so as to keep interphyletic comparisons manageable, limiting the comparanda to Western Kam-Tai.

Section 4.1 gives a brief overview of the prosodic word shape inherited from Proto-Western Kam-Tai (PWKT), and presents a comparison between the PHl initials and the Proto-Tai (PT) initials. Section 4.2 repeats this comparison for the rimes. Section 4.3 reviews and motivates the important changes which are hypothesized between Proto-Western Kam-Tai and Proto-Hlai.\(^2\)

4.1 The Pre-Hlai Initials

As alluded to in chapter two, the PHl phonological word consisted of two types: either (a) monosyllabic or (b) disyllabic. Disyllabic words were certainly iambic, as this stress type is usually a necessary precondition in Southeast Asia for an eventual transition to a strictly monosyllabic inventory:

\[
(1) \quad \begin{array}{cc}
         (a) & \varphi \\
           | & | \\
\sigma \mu & \zeta \nu \\
\end{array} \quad \begin{array}{cc}
         (b) & \varphi \\
           | & | \\
\sigma \mu & \zeta \nu \\
\end{array}
\]

\(^1\) This is the original classification of Tai given in Li (1977). Pittayaporn (2009) suggests that SWT may actually be a subgroup of C Tai.

\(^2\) As in chapters two and three, the four principles of language change and reconstruction given in chapter one are used in this chapter as well.
This first syllable in a disyllabic form (1b) is sometimes known as a semisyllable, presyllable, or minor syllable (in contrast with the second main syllable; the term presyllable will be adopted here), and the disyllabic foot was what is sometimes called sesquisyllabic (‘syllable-and-a-half’), a term coined by James Matisoff in Matisoff (1973) (see also Svantesson (1983), Shaw (1993), Cho & King (1996)).

The first hypothesis adopted here is that moraic weight became assigned exclusively to the main (rightmost) syllable, and that the first syllable in a disyllabic form lost the ability to host a mora. The presyllable could carry segmental features (the inventory of which would become gradually restricted over time), but was not associated with moraic content.\(^3\) I hypothesize that this loss of and subsequent lack of a mora was correlated with the steady erosion of presyllables until their eventual extinction in the Hlai daughter languages. This kind of iambic system stands in contrast to other iambic systems which have remained more stable (such as those of the Semitic languages) and not been reduced to monosyllables. The progression from full presyllable to moraless presyllable to monosyllable is shown below:\(^4\)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\varphi > \varphi > \varphi \\
/ | / | \\
\sigma_{\mu} \sigma_{\mu} \\
\zeta \sigma_{\mu} \\
\sigma_{\mu}
\end{array}
\]

Example: Cihrá:w > C-hrjá:w > hrjá:w

The existence of a length distinction in rimes suggests that codas were optionally moraic, bearing a mora in short rimes but not in long rimes.\(^5\) PHl examples of each type are given below for monosyllabic words (3a) and sesquisyllabic words (3b), with the bimoraic domain of each word in brackets (remembering that the initial \(*C\) in the forms in (3b) represents an initial consonant with unspecified features):

\[
(3) \begin{array}{ll}
(a) & \text{dog} \ *hm[\text{a:}] \\
& \text{break} \ *p^h[^{\text{a:}}]n? \\
& \text{spine} \ *t^h[^{\text{c:}}][^\text{up}]?
(b) & \text{waist} \ *Cfh[^{\text{a:}}]h \\
& \text{rough} \ *Cu[^{\text{r:}}]w \\
& \text{sore} \ *Cu[^{\text{w:}}]
\end{array}
\]

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3 I adopt Cho & King’s (2003) convention of showing a moraless sesquisyllable (or semisyllable) with an \(\varsigma\).

4 A form such as C-hrjá:w in (3) may have been produced as [C\(\tilde{a}\)hrjá:w], with the intervening schwa existing solely as an artifact of phonetic implementation, but not represented in underlying representations.

5 The laryngeal components of rimes in categories B and C do not appear to affect weight in any way, and are not considered to be potential mora-bearing units.