Introduction to Chángpáoyáo*

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The Chángpáoyáo language belongs to the Pu-nu language group of the Hmongic branch of Hmong-Mien. The present article describes the phonology, as well as elements of the word morphology of Chángpáoyáo, and gives a list of core vocabulary. It includes a commented presentation of the few data so far published on this language.

Key words: Hmong-Mien, Pu-nu language group, historical phonology, morphology, vocabulary.

Le Chángpáoyáo appartient au groupe pu-nu de la branche hmongique du hmong-mjen. Le présent article décrit la phonologie ainsi que des éléments de la morphologie du mot du Chángpáoyáo et se termine par une liste de vocabulaire. Il comprend une présentation commentée des rares données publiées jusqu'ici sur cette langue.


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1. INTRODUCTION

Chângpáoyáo is a Chinese ethnonym meaning "long dress-Yáo". The autonym of the concerned Yáo, ㄌɔŋ (1)/, resembles closely to those found in different groups of Miáo and is, as such, easy to be misinterpreted. For this reason, the Chinese ethnonym is given preference here.

The Chângpáoyáo count no more than some hundred people\(^1\), who live scattered over three different counties in the district of Libō, situated in the south-eastern edge of Guizhou province\(^2\). Until recently, bilingualism with Bùyì was widespread among the Chângpáoyáo, but young people tend to give up this language of the Tai-Kadai family in favour of Chinese which they use more and more in their daily life.

The Chângpáoyáo language has been mentioned since the fifties by Chinese linguists, who first put it together with various other Hmongic languages sharing the peculiarity of being spoken by ethnical Yáo\(^3\). The resulting rather heterogeneous group was called 'Pu-nu' (bùnū), according to the autonym of its largest community. This non-linguistic classification has been successively abandoned leaving behind it its elements: Ng-nai and Yu-nuo which some linguists have proposed to attach to Pa-hng, Kiong-nai, and Pu-nu gathered with six languages, among which Chângpáoyáo\(^4\). The restricted Pu-nu group as presented by Mèng (2001) is shown below with some explanatory comments on the variety of names used for the involved languages in the literature.

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\(^1\) Bó, Shí, Shí (1990 : 143) indicate an approximate number of 600 people.

\(^2\) Counties of Wèng'áng, Dòngtáng, Mǎolán, all situated southeast of the district town of Libō.

\(^3\) A situation which contrasts with the general tendency of Miáo speaking Hmongic languages, and Yáo Mienic ones.