

Introduction

Loven (Jruq) is a West Bahnaric language spoken by plantation farmers on the Boloven Plateau in the south of the Lao PDR. There were 40,519¹ Loven in 1995 (*Lao Census*) making them one of the larger ethnic groups of the region.

Bahnaric languages constitute a branch of Austroasiatic, a major Southeast Asian language family which includes Cambodian, Vietnamese and many lesser known languages. There are approximately 700,000 Bahnaric speakers distributed over a region roughly centred on the area where the borders of Vietnam, Cambodia and the Lao PDR meet. Bahnaric is commonly recognised as having three main branches: North Bahnaric, South Bahnaric and West Bahnaric. Thomas & Srichampa offered the following tentative classification of the West Bahnaric family based upon “A comparison of the distinctive vocabulary or distinctive forms of words” (1995:306) (note: spellings according to original)

West Bahnaric

Northwestern

Nyaheun (Yaheun, Nhahon)

Loven (Boriwen, Boloven)

West Central

Sork (Sawk)

Sapuan

“Ta-oy”

Su’ (?)

Southern

Laveh (Rawe)

Brao Krung

Palau

Su’ (?)

Central

Cheng (Jeng)

Oi

Northeastern (North Bahnaric?)

Kraseng

Trieng

¹Interestingly, Parkin (1991) states the Loven numbered about 10,000 in the 1930's and according to Kunstadter, in the 1960's they increased in number to about 18,000. Therefore the current figure indicates the population has more than doubled in the last thirty years.

However, the above groupings could be attributed to undetected lexical borrowings, hence the classification may be simply geographical rather than genetic, so we decided to investigate the problem ourselves. Unfortunately the historical phonology is not very helpful for determining the classification, except that Laveh and Brao appear to be close phonologically. This being the case, we decided to use lexicostatistics. The results of our investigation are presented below in the lexicostatistical matrix. This is based on the Swadesh 100 list for all WB languages for which we have sufficient data, plus other Bahnaric languages which have been linked to WB at various times. Special attention was given to identifying and removing loans, and only cognates which could be justified by historical phonology were counted (see Jacq & Sidwell forthcoming).

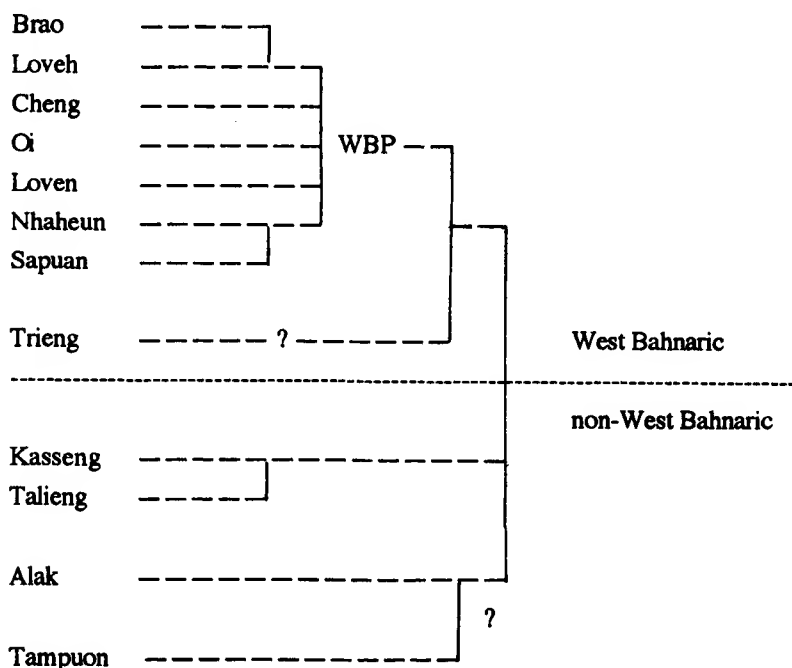
The matrix reveals some interesting results. The most important is that a clear sub-grouping is established of WB languages sharing between 68% and 78% of basic lexicon. The languages are Brao, Loveh, Cheng, Oi, Loven, Nhaheun and Sapuan—these can be considered West-Bahnaric Proper (WBP). It is also possible to relate Trieng to WBP, as it shares at least 51% basic lexicon with these languages. However, the Trieng data is problematic because we have only one wordlist—it was collected by Miller (1988) from a refugee in a camp in Thailand who came from the Saravane area. According to this list Trieng shares rather high cognate percentages with Loven and Nhaheun, which may best be explained as reflecting contact loans. However the possibility exists that Trieng is not especially related to WBP, and the figures above reflect the speech of one man which has been affected by special circumstances. The other languages treated above (Kasseng, Talieng, Alak, Tampuon) show no more affinity to WBP than they do to North Bahnaric or South Bahnaric.

The 76% figure for Loven and Nhaheun may be best explained as resulting from the history of contact between those two languages on the Boloven plateau. Our knowledge of Loven and Nhaheun oral history suggests that each group settled separately on the plateau—the Nhaheun coming up the valley of the Se Nam Noi on the eastern side, and the Loven coming around the north and ascending in the area of Thateng (Saravane Province). Nhaheun has subsequently innovated many sound changes which give it a distinctive character from all other WB languages (see Ferlus 1971, 1998).

Lexicostatistical matrix of West Bahnaric and some other languages:

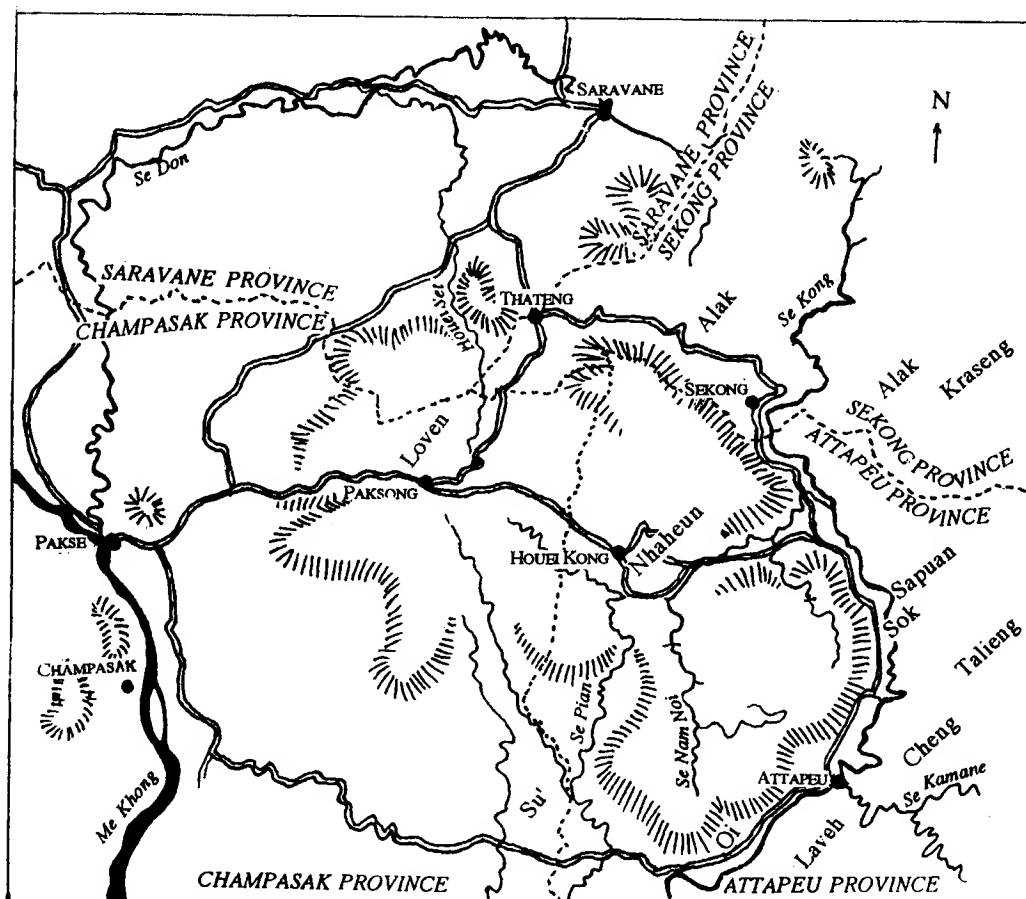
	Bra	Lvh	Che	Oi	Lvn	Nha	Sap	Tri	Tal	Kas	Alak	Tam
Brao		75	74	70	71	70	71	56	49	51	48	48
Lovoh	75		72	71	68	70	74	59	49	51	48	46
Cheng	74	72		74	68	73	73	51	47	49	48	41
Oi	70	71	74		71	72	69	51	43	45	43	42
Loven	71	68	68	71		76	72	66	53	57	51	48
Nhaheun	70	70	73	72	76		78	61	52	52	51	48
Sapuan	71	74	73	69	72	78		55	47	51	48	43
Trieng	56	59	51	51	66	61	55		51	48	42	37
Talieng	49	49	47	43	53	52	47	51		76	45	39
Kasseng	51	51	49	45	57	52	51	48	76		43	40
Alak	48	48	48	43	51	51	48	42	45	43		52
Tampuon	48	46	41	42	48	48	43	37	39	40	52	

The spread of percentages between West Bahnaric languages is rather close, and we must assume that some undetected borrowings have also affected the figures. Therefore it is difficult to determine any clear sub-groupings. We tentatively suggest the following *Stammbaum*:



The Loven (Jruq)

The name of the 'Boloven' plateau literally means 'place of the Loven'. The word 'Loven' is a Lao designation—the Loven people refer to themselves as 'Jruq' in their own language. The locals have a legend that a Lao chief bought the right of suzerainty from a Jruq chief with a ring. The Laotian later stole back the ring, hence the Jruq ethnonym 'he who lost the ring' cf. Lao ພະແກ້ວ /lā? vëen/ 'abandon ring' (Lavallée 1901: 291).



Map of Boloven Plateau & Se Kong river valley.
Bahnaric languages are indicated.

The Boloven plateau is a relatively cool place to live and it offers farmers excellent volcanic soil. It is about 80 kms across, with a highest peak of 1716 meters (in the far north eastern side). Much of it lies between 900 and 1300 meters above sea level. Most of the western side is crop and grazing land while the eastern side is now locked up as the Se Pian Conservation Area.

In the past ten years the Lao Government has prohibited the traditional practices of slash and burn cultivation, and restricted hunting, aiming to eradicate traditional economy by the year 2000. The plateau nowadays is largely cleared of forest (regrowth remains in more inaccessible regions) and tea, pine, cardamon and coffee plantations spread for miles along the roads.

Paksong is the main market centre and district capital. It sits at 1320 metres elevation, along the road which cuts the plateau in half, beginning from the far west (Pakse city—Champasak province) lying on the Mekong River, and ending at Attapeu provincial capital ('Meuang Mai') in the southeastern corner of the country. The other main towns on the Boloven Plateau are Houei Kong which lies 45 kms east of Paksong (and since 1998 includes the forced relocation settlement of the Nhaheun people), and Thateng on the northern approach. Presently the main roads are being upgraded and electric power is being made available.

The Loven are relatively well-off, having cash income from coffee and foreign receipts from relatives living abroad, some of whom worked for the Americans or the Royal Lao Regime during the 1960s and 1970s. They are rapidly assimilating to Lao society, and fewer children are learning to speak their parents language each year. Dr. Harmand, a French medical doctor cum botanist who explored the Boloven region in 1877, reveals that Lao influence on the Loven culture and language was strong more than a century ago:

These Boloven are not real Kha. They have partly adopted Laotian dress and almost all of the men have adopted the hairdos of their neighbors (1997: 91)

30 March - ...I passed the night in a village surrounded by swamps and jungle...It is inhabited by Kha Boloven who only speak Lao and who are indignant for being taken as tribesmen. (1997:106)

There was considerable research interest into Bahnaric languages in the 1960s and early 1970s, particularly by SIL linguists in Vietnam. However, the West Bahnaric languages have received less attention, and much material remains unpublished or has appeared only in fragments. Recently there has been an increase in interest in Bahnaric, reflected in part in the work of the present compilers, Jacq and Sidwell. In 1997 Jacq began collecting materials for a Masters dissertation on Loven, and made contact with Sidwell, who had been working on Bahnaric languages since 1992. They decided to collaborate in their research, focusing on the languages in the southern provinces of the Lao PDR, with one of their major aims being to collect and publish as much lexical material as possible. The collaboration immediately set to work translating, editing and annotating Michel Ferlus' *Nhaheun* fieldnotes, which were published that year by LINCOM as the *Nhaheun—French—English Lexicon*.

Loven Sources

In addition to our own Loven fieldnotes, the present Loven lexicon is consolidated from various sources of other scholars. These sources are marked with the following abbreviations throughout the lexicon:

- (J&S) Pascale Jacq and Paul Sidwell (1997-8 ms.)
- (H) Franklin E. Huffman (1971 ms.)
- (F) Michel Ferlus (1969-70 ms.)
- (T&A) Dorothy Thomas and David Andrianoff (1978)
- (B) Bondet de la Bernadie (1949)
- (P) Phraya Prachakij-karacak (1919, translated by David Thomas and Sophana Srichampa 1995)
- (C) André Lavallée (1901 ms, in Cabaton 1905)

The sources range from the period between 1901 to 1998, and also from a variety of locations on the Boloven Plateau.

Our own notes were taken during two field trips to the Boloven area in December 1997 to February 1998 (Jacq) and between October to December 1998 (Sidwell and Jacq). They include over 1000 Loven vocabulary items and some hundreds of sentences. The data was collected from more than 10

informants with varying competency in the language and from several different villages within a 15 kilometer radius of Paksong. We used a broad (almost phonemic) transcription based on standard IPA symbols. We often provide multiple forms for entries as this is an artifact of having several informants from various places, ages and linguistic competence. Glosses and translations are in English, although most elicitation was in Lao or Loven.

Huffman's (1971) manuscript includes around 900 vocabulary items for Loven (actually covering around 1000 vocabulary items for a total of 30 Mon-Khmer languages). This data is broadly transcribed in standard IPA symbols. Glosses are given in English and some loan words are identified by Huffman. A photocopy of Huffman's original manuscript is in Bangkok SIL library and was partially copied manually by Paul Sidwell in 1995. There is actually no date on the original manuscript, however Huffman refers to these notes as 'Huffman (1971)' in his (1986) *Bibliography*.

Michel Ferlus was kind enough to offer us his 1969-70 "Laven" ms. for inclusion in this lexicon. These notes include over 1000 entries glossed in French/Lao including 'some comparisons to Nhaheun and a detailed presentation of the phonemic sounds and his transcription methods (based on IPA notations). The principal informant was a student in Attapeu College, originating from a village near Houei Kong. This data was then verified with another Loven speaker west of Paksong. We have found this source most valuable due to Ferlus' identification of a two levels of diphthongs, which other sources have not so reliably distinguished.

Dorothy Thomas and David Andrianoff's (1978) list of "Lawen" basic vocabulary is in very close IPA transcription. The 281 word standard SIL list (an extension of the Swadesh list) is in manuscript form, copied from the SIL Bangkok library. The informant originated from a village in Houei Kong district. At first glance at this list, it seemed it might not be Loven as there were some unusual sound changes. In some cases Thomas and Andrianoff record initial *b* for words beginning with *kl* in the other sources (corresponding entries from the present lexicon are in brackets):

<i>biə</i>	'tiger' (<i>kluo</i>)	<i>ʔbak</i>	'abdomen' (<i>klak</i>)
<i>bə'm</i>	'liver' (<i>klâm</i>)	<i>bom</i>	'blow' (<i>klom</i>)

biaʔh 'fall' (*kliēh*)*bo* 'husband' (*klo*)

In many words initial *b* has lenited to *v* or *w* eg.

vruk 'dust' (*brūk*)*vri* 'forest' (*brey*)*vʔh* 'snake' (*biēh*)*wiñ* 'full' (*biñ*)

Bondet de la Bernadie's (1949) description of the "Boloven" grammar, includes large lists of vocabulary and many sentences. This data is written in a script derived from the Vietnamese *quốc-ngữ* orthography, with most non-Vietnamese sounds described in the introduction. The incredibly large number of diphthongs and accented vowels is suspicious, and we think that this is partially a result of poor identification of final consonants. Glosses and translations are given in French. In the initial footnote, it explains that A. Fraisse finished de la Bernadie's manuscript for this publication as the latter was assassinated by the Japanese in March 1945 when he was co-administrator of Thakhek (Lao province north of Saravane)

Phraya Prachakij-karakak's (1919) original publication in Thai of lexicon and sentences in Bahnaric languages includes a "Boloven" list of about 350 vocabulary items (some of which are repeated under different glosses) and 14 sentences. Thomas and Srichampa in 1995 republished the Author's original notes with English translations and comments concerning loanwords, suspected errors in transcription, and remarks concerning their interpretation of Phraya's text. The Editors retranscribed the Boloven lexicon into standard IPA based on their interpretation of Phraya's original Thai-based system. Also included are translations of Phraya's discussion of each language including sociolinguistic information. A tentative 'Proto-West Bahnaric' lexicon is added by the Editors based on their analysis of Phraya's data.

André Lavallée explored southern Laos at the turn of this century—collecting ethnographic information and linguistic data on the ethnic groups encountered on his travels. His 1901 manuscript apparently entails his linguistic data, however this source could not be found. Instead, we use the Loven data included in Cabaton (1905) which is sourced from Lavallée's 1901 manuscript. Whether these have been modified by Cabaton is not known at this stage.

Die Deutsche Bibliothek - CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

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