

BOOK REVIEWS

SUWILAI Premrirat. *Khmu, A Minority Language of Thailand*. Canberra: Australian National University (= Pacific Linguistics A-75: Papers in Southeast-Asian Linguistics #10), 1987. iii, 190 pp. 1 map, 2 dépliants. A\$ 25.90

William A. SMALLEY

In this volume, Suwilai Premrirat of the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development at Mahidol University in Thailand has published two significant parts of her Ph.D. dissertation (Suwilai 1982). Both enrich our knowledge of the Khmu' language, while the second adds to our knowledge of Thai as well.¹ The first paper, "A Khmu Grammar," provides a solid, 143-page analysis of important aspects of a dialect not previously studied. The second, "A Study of Thai and Khmu Cutting Words," is an original 42-page exploration of one domain in the comparative semantics of the two languages. The book is attractively produced in the usual format of the Pacific Linguistics series.

The Khmu' language about which Suwilai writes is spoken primarily in northern Laos, overlapping into Vietnam and Thailand, with some speakers also in China and Burma. Since 1975 a few thousand Khmu' refugees have moved to France and to the United States as well. In Thailand, where the field work for the research under review was done, the number of Khmu' is probably about 20,000 (Smalley forthcoming), the largest concentrations close to the Lao border in the north. Other Khmu' are scattered over other parts of the country as individuals and in small communities (p. 1), many having entered the country as laborers. The total Khmu' population in the world probably numbers some 400,000.

Suwilai's Khmu' grammar is the third published grammar of that language, preceded by Smalley (1961) and Svantesson (1983), not to mention a few vocabulary lists, articles on small features of grammar and other works.² The three grammars complement each other well, as they differ in dialect described, and some of them differ in features of the language highlighted, as well as in theoretical perspective and descriptive framework.

¹In this review I will use the spelling Khmu', preserving Suwilai's spelling of Khmu only when quoting her directly. The basis for these and some other differences in the spelling of the name will be explained later (Figure 5).

²Huffman (1986: 557) lists about fifty publications for Khmu'. See also Smalley 1973. Proshan 1989, although unpublished, is an important recent contribution.