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Book Reviews

A Grammar of the Thangmi Language: With an Ethnographic Introduction to the Speakers and Their Culture. MARK TURIN. 2 vols. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library 5/6. Leiden: Brill, 2012. Pp. xxxviii + 958. \$232.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by David Bradley, *La Trobe University*

This is an excellent and comprehensive grammar of a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in north central Nepal (more often called Thami in the literature, from the Nepali name for the group). It includes forty-five texts (pp. 485–754) from a variety of genres and a very extensive Thangmi-to-English lexicon (pp. 755–918), which make it an extremely valuable record of this endangered language.

The book starts with a chapter on the linguistic classification of Thangmi. In the earliest classification of Tibeto-Burman by Grierson (1909), usually followed by later scholars such as Benedict (1972) and Shafer (1974), Thangmi is grouped most closely with Baram and then with Tibeto-Burman languages of far northwestern Nepal and to the west in India. But following recent work by van Driem (2001), Turin has now clearly demonstrated that Thangmi is indeed closely related to Baram, and should be linked further instead with Newar, Chepang, and related languages, and only more distantly with the Kiranti languages to which it is geographically closest. There are minor problems with some of the evidence adduced for this connection. The negative verb prefix *ma-* is not just found in Thangmi and a few surrounding languages (p. 7); in fact, it is near-universal throughout Tibeto-Burman, as correctly noted later (p. 371). It is clear that the numeral classifier systems of Tibeto-Burman languages are secondary, and as Thangmi has been in extensive contact with Dolakha Newar for over a millennium, it would be surprising if the systems did not line up closely (pp. 13–16); one might also wonder whether the Thangmi classifier *gore* for houses, Newari *gar/gur*, should also be linked with Nepali and other Indo-Aryan *ghar* 'house'. Similarly, some of the lexical similarities between Newar and Thangmi cited (pp. 25–28) may be due to contact, as Turin indicates, and some have Tibeto-Burman etymologies outside this subgroup, but there are many shared innovations in basic vocabulary, such as Thangmi *daŋ* 'year', Newar *da/dam*, among many others; this may be further related to the Kiranti form **toŋ* reconstructed in Michailovsky (2003:246) as a bound form for 'year'.

The second chapter (pp. 31–161) begins with an extremely comprehensive overview of all the literature on Thangmi, including popular as well as more scholarly efforts. It then moves on to a thorough discussion of ethnic group names, location and population information (38,500 people in the ethnic group, including about five thousand in Darjeeling and Sikkim in India, but mainly in northern central Nepal and scattered further east), discussion of the two dialects of Thangmi with extensive examples and comparison with materials collected since 1901 by previous scholars, and a discussion of the degree of vitality of the language (it is most fluently spoken by those over fifty, less fluently spoken by young people under twenty). The Thangmi origin story is briefly summarized (pp. 108–29); this includes the source and meaning of the original seven patrilineal and seven matrilineal clans, with additional clans resulting from contact with Dolakha Newar and others. There is a thorough discussion of the Thangmi kinship system (pp. 130–49), with numerous excellent charts showing kinship terminology (pp. 919–33). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Thangmi ritual life, led by the shaman who is called *guru* (using the Nepali word for 'teacher'), the rites of passage in which he assists,

and a brief speculative history of the long-standing contact between Dolakha Newar and Thangmi.

Chapter 3 is on phonology. Thangmi has a typical Indic system with four types of stop or affricate consonants (voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, voiced and breathy voiced), and five places of articulation for these consonants including bilabial, dental, retroflex, and velar stops, as well as alveolar affricates *c* [ts], *ch* [ts^h], *j* [dz], and *jh* [dz^h]; these last are typical of Nepali and other surrounding languages, replacing the palatals found elsewhere in the Indian linguistic area. The only unusual consonant is a breathy voiced nasal, contrasting with a normal *n*. The fricative system is also unusual, with only *s* (realized as [s̺] or [ʃ] but never [s]), and *h* (realized as cavity friction, misdescribed [p. 90] as “glottal approximant”, voiceless [h] initially, and usually breathy voiced [ɦ] intervocally). There are six vowels *i e u o*, plus *a*, which is [a] or [æ], and *ã*, which is [ɑ] or [ʌ]. It is indicated that the last “occurs only infrequently” (p. 166); however, it is found in the very frequent nominal object suffix *-kãi*, the first person singular pronoun *gãi*, and the frequent modal *mãi* ‘must’, as well as in Nepali loans such as *makãi* ‘maize’. Unfortunately, the diacritic distinguishing *ã* from *a* is missing in chapter 6 and nearly all of chapter 7; apart from this, the entire volume is remarkably free of typographical problems.

Chapter 4 discusses various morphophonological processes of sandhi. The main topic of this chapter is a sandhi process that inserts *w*, *y*, or *h* between a vowel-final verb stem and a vowel-initial suffix (pp. 209–21). Rather than stating this vowel by vowel according to stem-finals, it would have been better to attempt a partial generalization: (1) insert *h* (phonetically [ɦ]) before *u*, (2) insert *y* before or after a front vowel *i e* (with two exceptions: *h* can variably instead be inserted after *i* and before *u* in conformity with rule 1, and *w* is inserted between *e* and *o*), (3) insert *w* after a back vowel *u o* when it is before *a* and between *e* or *u* and *o*, and (4) insert *h* elsewhere (between *a* and *a*, and between *a* or *o* and *o*). Not surprisingly, semispeakers do not always have these alternations (p. 120). One may also wonder whether the sandhi forms represent earlier stem-final consonants which verbs lose in most or all sandhi environments, as in Newar; for example, the Thangmi verb *pi* ‘give’ usually gets *y* inserted; its Tibeto-Burman reconstruction (Benedict 1972:102) is **biy*.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 deal with the Thangmi nominals, verbs, and complex verbal constructions, respectively. One could wish for more on discourse features and some concluding remarks, but the analysis is thorough and convincing.

In the chapter on nominals, as expected in a Tibeto-Burman language, nearly all the affixes are suffixes, and their degree of boundness to the preceding nominal stem differs; some are clitics, others are postpositions, and others appear to be independent words. The claim is made (pp. 349–51) that there are relatively few nominal compounds and that those that do exist are unproductive, but there seem to be a substantial number in the lexicon (pp. 755–918). Some of the nominal morphology is similar to that of Nepali, for example, the genitive *-ko* (p. 248) as well as some other instances that are identified as such. The marking of gender also sometimes uses Nepali suffixes, but there are a few kinship terms that contain Thangmi cognates *-ma* and *-pa* of the Tibeto-Burman female and male suffixes. The first person plural pronoun *ni* can be related to a widespread Tibeto-Burman etymon **ni*, not just to forms in nearby languages such as Chepang (p. 300).

The lexicalized time ordinals (pp. 338–43), days and years in the past and in the future, like English ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’, are very widespread in Tibeto-Burman languages; Michailovsky (2003) has documented them for the Kiranti languages, and Caughley (2000) gives the forms for eight days and years before and after the present day or year in Chepang. The Thangmi forms for up to four days in the past and in the future (p. 338) and four years in the past and two years in the future (p. 442) provide another

example of this area of lexicon. Some of the ordinal forms are also cognate with the most closely-related languages; for example, Thangmi *cit.yaŋ*, Chepang *tsit.nəm* 'day before yesterday'; Thangmi *cit.abas*, Chepang *tsit.səy* 'day after tomorrow'; Thangmi *kimit.yaŋ*, Chepang *k^huk.nəm* 'four days ago', Thangmi *kitriŋ.bas*, Chepang *k^huk.səy* 'four days in the future'. These time ordinal forms often do not follow regular sound change patterns seen in noun and verb stems; furthermore, cognacy among these forms is restricted to very small subgroups of Tibeto-Burman—the Thangmi and Chepang forms show little similarity to the Kiranti forms, let alone forms elsewhere. However, unlike many Tibeto-Burman languages as well as Nepali and some other Indo-Aryan languages, Thangmi has no birth ordinal terms (p. 145).

As in most languages in this part of Tibeto-Burman, there is very extensive verb agreement morphology, both for agent or subject and for object. This shows a split ergative pattern: first person shows ergative-absolutive agreement, while other persons have nominative-accusative agreement. A substantial part of this morphology is cognate with that of the nearby Tibeto-Burman languages including Kiranti, such as the reflexive, Thangmi *si* and Proto-Kiranti **nši* (p. 376). There are some minor contradictions between statements about this agreement morphology in different places; at the beginning of the verb chapter, it is stated that it is obligatory (p. 353), but in various places it turns out to be optional, for example the plural marking on the verb may be omitted when the subject is marked with the nominal plural suffix *-pali* (p. 232), on negated verbs (p. 382) where plural marking is usually absent, and in a variety of nonfinite clauses discussed in chapter 7 where most or all agreement morphology is absent—for example, on transitive preterite participles in *-to* (pp. 470–73) among others.

The copulas discussed in chapter 7 (pp. 407–18) are very interesting. There are three possibilities: *tha*, *hok* and a zero copula. Data from the entire two volumes, including the texts in volume 2, indicates that the zero copula is relatively infrequent and occurs mainly in equative copula environments with two noun phrases, and sporadically elsewhere—for example, when combining a noun phrase and a numeral in the meaning 'to be of a particular age' (p. 496, sentence 2, p. 497 sentence 17, and so on) or for either of the other two copulas in context. The *tha* form is also used as an equational, for change of state ('become'), as an assertive 'be the case', after a predicate adjective, negated in a tag question, and occasionally as a locational (p. 411, sentence 17). The *hok* form is related to a verb meaning 'sit', and thus unsurprisingly is the usual locational (it can be given translations such as 'sit', 'stay', 'live', 'be at'); it is also used for existential ('there is') where no change is involved, and for possessive ('have'). One place where both *tha* and *hok* occur regularly is after a noun phrase plus *uniŋ* 'like', in the meaning 'be like'. One may wonder whether the adverbial form *thaŋun* 'maybe' is derived from the copula *tha* plus *ŋun*, the postposition 'within'.

Chapter 7 also discusses the interesting inventory of converbs and related constructions marking the temporal relationship linking clauses in sequence, which show contrasting patterns of agreement marking. These are mainly clause-final markers of nonfinal clauses; some are nonfinite (that is, no agreement morphology appears on the preceding verb) and others cooccur with agreement. Verb stems followed by the immediate sequence marker *-ca*, completed action *-tiniŋ*, transitive preterite *-to*, sequential *-ŋa*, and the continuous background marker *-ăi* (pp. 464–73, 479, 483–84) show no agreement, while imperfective participial *-le*, intransitive preterite *-ta*, and negative participial *-ki* (pp. 469–78) have agreement on the associated verb; the *-le* form is always followed by the copula verb *hok* with agreement, the *-ŋa* form is always followed by *libi* 'after', and the *-ăi* form is always preceded by a reduplicated verb. Though *-le* and *-ki* have the agreement before the sequence marker, the intransitive preterite form *-ta* precedes agreement marking. One may wonder whether the *-ŋa* form is related to the verb *ŋa* 'say', a widespread source of complementizers. There is also a Nepali conditional

form, Thangmi *-thyo*, which is quite frequent in the texts and is also preceded by agreement-marked verbs; this occurs in final clauses.

One might have wished for a chapter on discourse structure and genres, drawing examples from the extensive texts in volume 2, as well as some conclusions and summary. Also, if the lexicon were to be used to assist the community in language maintenance efforts, it would have been better to use a Devanagari alphabet like that of Nepali, and to cite forms in Devanagari alphabetical order for maximum ease of use, but that is not the purpose of this scholarly study.

Overall, this grammar is an ideal model that provides a thorough background on the language and its cultural context, especially concerning kinship, with a great deal of additional cultural information embedded in the texts provided in volume 2. It also discusses phonology, morphology, and all major areas of clause syntax, and all claims can easily be verified and exemplified in the texts as well as from the extensive text-derived examples throughout the grammar. A large lexicon for comparative and other purposes is also provided. The author is to be congratulated for this excellent and comprehensive work.

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Creoles, Their Substrates, and Language Typology. Edited by CLAIRE LEFEBVRE. *Typological Studies in Language* 95. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. Pp. x + 626. \$158.00, €105.00 (hardcover).

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This is a very focused collective volume. Flanked by the editor's introduction and a concluding commentary by Bernard Comrie on creoles and typology are twenty-five chapters on specific creole-substrate pairings: nine on the Atlantic coast of Africa and the New World, eight on Asia, and eight on Australia and the Pacific Islands.