

Himalayan Languages and Linguistics: Studies in phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax

edited by Mark Turin and Bettina Zeisler

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The work under review is the twelfth volume in the series 'Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region'. This series has heretofore comprised reference grammars of Tibeto-Burman languages, typically the outcome of Ph.D dissertations originally submitted to Leiden University. These eleven grammars are of uniform high quality, providing detailed and clearly written linguistic information, while eschewing the maelstroms of faddish currents in theoretical or typological linguistics. Indeed, the researchers associated with the Himalayan Languages Project have arguably contributed more to advancing Tibeto-Burman linguistics than all other working scholars combined. This twelfth volume mostly constitutes papers originally delivered at the 11th Himalayan Languages Symposium, graciously hosted by Krisadawan Hongladarom at Chulalongkorn University in 2005. One of the editors (Mark Turin) and three of the contributors are associated with the Himalayan Languages Project.

The volume opens with a paper by George van Driem in which he outlines the contributions of linguistics, archaeology and genetics to the population history of the greater Himalayan region. Most of the genetic data van Driem and his team have compiled remains unpublished; this essay is consequently more exciting for what it presages than what it reveals. I lack some of van Driem's optimism about the role of genetics in the study of prehistory. Historical linguistics and archaeology offer predetermined populations for investigation, but genetics does not. The Tibeto-Burmans are speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages. The Brākhuṭi culture is characterised by a habitation site and unifacial choppers. But how does one assign ethnicity to a blood sample? The answer in the Peoples' Republic of China appears to be to look at the nationality (民族) on someone's identity card. Witness Chen *et al.*'s use of the terms 'Han Chinese', 'Tibetan Chinese' and 'Mongolian Chinese' (2006). The reader

would have benefited from van Driem's insights on this problematic.¹

In the second essay, Plaisier presents a detailed comparison of four systems for the transliteration of the Lepcha script. In addition to the material aid this essay will bring to librarians and students of Lepcha alike, it offers Plaisier an opportunity to present convincing arguments in favour of her own system.

Huysmans offers readers a description of the Sampang verbal system. Like all Kiranti verbs, the Sampang verb is complex and much analytical work is required in order to make sense of it. Huysmans presents seven successive analyses, and contextualises the Sampang verb against the backdrop of proto-Kiranti as proposed in a series of articles by van Driem (1990, 1991, 1992, 1997). The Leiden school has already made great achievements in the description and analysis of Kiranti languages and this glimpse of Huysmans' forthcoming Sampang grammar suggests that this progress will continue unabated.

Scholars without affiliation to the Himalayan Languages Project contribute another six papers; three of these do not disappoint. Suzuki offers an updated English version of his previous article on the phonology of Sogpho Tibetan (2005). As in his other works on the phonology of Tibetan dialects, Suzuki first surveys the consonant, vowel, and tone inventory of the dialect, with special attention to allophonic variation. He then contextualises the dialect, discussing the sound changes that derive Sogpho Tibetan from Classical Tibetan, and compares certain features of Sogpho Tibetan with other Khams dialects. Some text samples and instrumental phonetic data would render Suzuki's study even more useful. The bibliography of this article unfortunately has many mistakes in

1 Equally a problem, and deserving of van Driem's comment, is the grotesque cultural, historical and ethnographic naïveté of so many working in genetics. For example, almost all genetic studies reiterate a claim that the Tibetans are descended from Di-Qiang tribes (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1988: 6005, Gayden 2007, Zhao 2009); such claims are of no historical value (Beckwith 1977: 1-3). Geneticists' use of linguistics is no better. Yao *et al.*'s study of mitochondrial DNA erroneously concludes that 'linguistic and geographic classification of the populations did not agree well with classification by mtDNA variation' (2002: 63). Depending on outdated theories of linguistic classification, they regard the Turkic and Mongolian language families as sub-branches of 'Altaic' and see Tibeto-Burman, Chinese and Zhuang-Dai as three branches of 'Sino-Tibetan' (2002: 65). Commitment to Matisoff's 'Sino-Tibetan' theory similarly vitiates the conclusions of Su *et al.* (2000: 588).

Japanese transcription (e.g. 研究 appears as *kenkyu*, *kenkyuu*, and *kenkyuus*, p.73).

Dotson's study of the vexing Old Tibetan term *khrin* is a model of thoroughness and clarity. Analysing the use of this term in both legal and ritual contexts, he hypothesises that the original meaning is 'tether', which in legal contexts means 'judicial punishment' (p.93). Far from a dry lexical study, this paper insightfully engages a number of themes in early Tibetan society and religion, offering close readings of many passages. The paper deserves to be read multiple times; pearls such as the treatment of verbs of giving construed with the recipient in the absolutive (p.91) might be easily overlooked.

Rehman's paper presents nearly the first information ever on Kundal Shahi and Hindko, two Indo-Aryan languages of the Neelam Valley, and, by way of comparison, also treats Kashmiri. While these languages generally conform to the expected picture of split ergativity in Indo-Aryan languages, there are interesting differences in detail. For example, ergative marking in Hindko is not obligatory (p.228). As the author himself admits (p.231), any discussion of ergativity in three languages over a mere fourteen pages is bound to be cursory.

The remaining three papers fall short of the overall quality of the series and volume. Basing his investigation on work by Dixon (1982, 2004) and Givón (1984), Kiryu explores a grab bag of words that he dubs 'adjectives' in Newar. Sentences such as '[m]ost adjectival words can be negated by *ma-ju*, although some may not be' (p.107) show that Kiryu is using 'adjective' as a pre-established category, and does not classify Newar lexemes according to their structural form classes; the conclusion that Newar has adjectives (p.128) although 'there are no unique morphological properties that distinguish adjectives from nouns and verbs in Newar' (p.101) is consequently circular. Kiryu's choice of theorists is unfortunate; de Saussure, F. (1916) or Bloomfield (1933) are surer guides through strait gates and on narrow ways. The simple English words 'flash' and 'remain' gainsay Givón's proposal that nouns and verbs exist on a 'time scale', with nouns on the most stable side and verbs on the side of rapid change (p.107, cf. Givón 1984: 55). The greater part of Kiryu's essay catalogues Newar words according to 'thirteen concepts that adjectives prototypically

denote' (p.108), according to Dixon. Parts of speech categories are not semantic classes; if they were, 'burn' and 'fire' would be the same part of speech. Semantic categories, even when written in capital letters, exist in the mind of an author and not in the structure of languages. Since 'les entités abstraites reposent toujours, en dernière analyse, sur les entités concrètes' (Saussure 1919: 190), what are the concrete entities on which 'HUMAN PROPENSITY' (p.108) rests?

Bartee's paper is besprent with inaccuracies and omissions, such as the identification of Minhe Mangghuer and Akha respectively with 土族語 Tüzúyǔ and 哈尼語 Hānyǔ² and the categorisation of Naxi as a Lolo-Burmese language (strangely contradicted on p.175, n. 53). Tibetan spelling also gives her some trouble (correct *slob.grwa.ba* on p.136, versus incorrect *slab.grwa.ba* on p.138 and *bslab.grwa.ba* on p.141). In addition, her bibliographic knowledge is weak; the discussion of Khams and Nanzhao history omits seminal studies such as Backus (1981) and makes no mention of the bizarre renaming of the county of her fieldwork in 2001 from 中甸 Rgyal-thaṅ to 香格里拉 Shangri-La. More worrisome than such small mistakes is Bartee's complete mischaracterisation of the Standard Tibetan verbal system. She shoehorns this language's three-term evidential system into a two-term 'conjunct/disjunct' framework. As sources for her data and analysis she cites Denwood (1999), Garrett (2001) and Tournadre (2003).³ She has not read these works carefully. None of these authors employs the terminology 'conjunct/disjunct' and both Garrett (2001: 209 n. 1) and Tournadre (2008) pointedly rejected the value of these terms and the *Denkweisen* that they facilitate.⁴ De Saussure tells us 'la langue est un système dont tous les termes sont solidaires où la valeur de l'un ne résulte que la présence simultanée des autres' (1919: 159); and Haspelmath more recently reminds us that 'pre-established categories don't exist' (2007). Bartee appears not to agree with these opinions.

2 In fact, Tüzúyǔ encompasses both Minhe Mangghuer and Huzhu Mongghul (Dpal-ldan-bkra-shis, *et al.* 1996: 1) and Hānyǔ is a language distinct from but closely related to Akha (Lewis and Bai 1996: 1-2).

3 Tournadre (2003) was published in Ithaca and not in New York, as stated on p.182.

4 Bartee even writes that the sentence *na na-gi-yod* 'I'm chronically sick' is ungrammatical (p.143), apparently unaware of Tournadre's (1996: 223) and Denwood's (1999: 151) discussion of this very sentence.

The last and longest of the papers in the volume is a mixed bag. Zeisler describes a number of phonetic and morphological features of the Šam-skad and Gyen-skad dialect groups of Ladakhi. Confusingly, she treats several dialects at once without offering a phonemic inventory or morphological overview of any one. The paper appears to have three conclusions: (1) these two dialect groups are quite distinct; (2) phonetically conservative dialects are not necessarily morphologically conservative and phonetically innovative ones not necessarily morphologically innovative; and (3) Old Tibetan was already used as a *lingua franca* in Ladakh at the time of the Tibetan empire. The first conclusion is an important contribution to Tibetan dialectology, the second a well known but significant insight of great importance to work in historical linguistics, which always bears repeating. The third conclusion is unwarranted on the basis of the evidence presented.

Zeisler's article is brimming with detailed observations and insights. Her examples of the reanalysis in compounds in the Gya dialect of *b-* from the initial of the second morpheme to the final of an original open syllable initial morpheme (pp.264-265) provide new data for an on-going discussion. She elegantly employs her dialectological observations to elucidate the philological interpretation of the words *yab-med* 'ancestor' and *yas-se* 'from above' in early Tibetan texts (p.276 and p.284). The observation that work on historical linguistics should take inflected verbal forms into account and not just uninflected stems (p.258) may be taken for granted in work on other language families, but in Tibetan linguistics it is trail blazing. Although in places her citations could be more extensive,⁵ there is no doubt she is an accomplished philologist. Zeisler's skills as a field worker are less impressive. Inexplicably uninterested in basing her description on the linguistic behaviour of her consultants, she complains in a number of places of their inconsistent judgments (p.261, n. 44; p.267, n. 58). A native English speaker, asked how many vowels English has, will

5 In her discussion of *hu/ho* as a demonstrative (p.279), the failure to cite Dotson's interesting observations about *ho-tshal* (p.87) is rather surprising. Because *hu* is directly attested as a third singular demonstrative (I.O.L. Tib J 737.1 lines 141-142, cf. de Jong 1989: 112), there is a need to infer the existence of such a usage on the basis of forms such as *hu-bu-cag* 'we' and *huñ-nas* 'and then', etc. The speculation that this pronoun is related to the sentence final morpheme *-ho* requires further demonstration.

normally answer 'five'. Asking one's consultants how many phonemic tones a dialect possesses (pp.251-258) is not an effective way to learn the answer to this question.

Although there is some danger that these three methodologically weaker papers will perpetuate conceptual or factual errors in the hands of the innocent, the auspicious price of €108 will presumably guarantee that only committed professionals will acquire the volume. Such researchers will find it a valued addition to their libraries.

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