目 次

論 文
Children’s Voices from Kathmandu and Lalitpur, Nepal .......................... GELLNER, David N. 1

ジタ語ムランギ方言の動詞音調分析 ........................................... 加賀谷 良平 49

Newar-Thangmi Lexical Correspondences and the Linguistic Classification of Thangmi .......................... TURIN, Mark 97

資料・研究ノート
バサリ社会のうた65曲 .............................................................. 山田 重周 121

The Future of the Kisafwa Language:
A Case Study of Ituha Village in Tanzania .............................. MSANJILA, Yohana P. 161

Not “Divided Places”, But “A Living Space”:
Chinese Women on the Thai-Malaysian Border ........................ TAKAMURA, Kazue 173

『歴史の精華』第三巻にみるサファヴィー朝の政治文化に関する予備的考察 ........................................... 前田 弘穂 193
Newar-Thangmi Lexical Correspondences and the Linguistic Classification of Thangmi

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Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language of two mutually unintelligible dialects spoken by upwards of 30,000 people inhabiting the districts of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok in central-eastern Nepal. The Thangmi language occupies a half-way house between a canonical Kiranti-style verbal agreement system and that of the less inflecting Tibeto-Burman languages.

Drawing on manuscript sources and recently compiled dictionaries, this article is devoted to an analysis of the linguistic evidence for and against a Newar-Thangmi link, together with a historical evaluation of the competing theories suggesting a close genetic relationship. Thangmi has numeral classifiers (not a common feature among the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal) which are largely cognate with the numeral classifiers used in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. There are also over seventy lexical correspondences which appear to be cognate between Thangmi and Newar which are not attested in other extant Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal.

Two key questions emerge. First, are the Thangmi and Newar languages close genetic relatives? Second, if not, how can the range of lexical correspondences between the two languages best be explained, and in which direction did the borrowing take place?

1. Introduction
2. Early classifications of Thangmi within the Tibeto-Burman language family
3. Cultural interdependence between the Newar of Dolakhā and the Thangmi
4. Before and after Mahākirānti
5. Thangmi-Newar lexical correspondences and the case for Newaric
   5.1. Shared numeral classifiers
   5.2. The changing face of the Classical Newar language
   5.3. Three classes of Thangmi and Classical Newar lexical correspondences
      5.3.1. Shared common reflexes of Tibeto-Burman
      5.3.2. Shared Indo-Aryan loans
      5.3.3. Lexical correspondences specific to Thangmi and Newar
6. Concluding thoughts on the genetic affinity of Thangmi

Keywords: Newari, Thami, Nepal, Tibeto-Burman, Linguistics
1. Introduction

Over the past six years, in conference papers and publications, I have demonstrated that Thangmi occupies a half-way house between a canonical Kiranti-style verbal agreement system and that of the less inflecting Tibeto-Burman languages. Moreover, I have provided evidence that Thangmi has numeral classifiers (not a common feature among the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal) which are largely cognate with the numeral classifiers used in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. During my research, two key questions have emerged. First, are the Thangmi and Newar languages close genetic relatives? Second, if we argue against a close genetic relationship, how can we best explain the range of lexical similarities between the two languages, and in which direction did this borrowing take place?

The present article is a much-revised version of Turin (2000) with two notable differences. First, a number of typographical errors were mistakenly introduced into the earlier article by the editors of the journal. As a direct result of these mistakes, many of the facts and arguments I presented were no longer coherent.¹ Since then, colleagues have urged me to republish the article in its correct form to offer both the data and my conclusions in their original light. The second motivation for reworking the earlier article stems from the recent publication of the Dictionary of Classical Newari by the Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee in September, 2000, and James A. Matisoff’s immediately definitive Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman in 2003. The Dictionary of Classical Newari, edited by Kamal Prakash Malla and colleagues, marks a genuine watershed for scholars working on the Newar language and culture. Compiled from manuscript sources, the 530-page collection is a mine of information on the lexicon and grammar of what the editors call “Classical Newari”. In light of entries in this new dictionary, I have modified, and at once extended, my proposed list of Newar-Thangmi lexical similarities. Matisoff’s Handbook, on the other hand, provides an excellent index of proto-forms and proto-glosses to facilitate lexical comparison. The remainder of this article is thus devoted to an analysis of the linguistic evidence for and against a close Newar-Thangmi link, together with a historical evaluation of the competing theories suggesting a close genetic relationship.

2. Early classifications of Thangmi within the Tibeto-Burman language family

Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language of two mutually unintelligible dialects spoken by upwards of 30,000 people inhabiting the districts of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok in central-eastern Nepal.² While anthropologists have paid little attention to the

¹ Of the 41 key lexical similarities that I proposed were shared by only Newar and Thangmi, eight were misspelled so significantly that it was no longer clear how these words might have been cognate with one another.
² The Nepali name for this ethnic group and their language is Thāmī, an Aryan-inspired term
Thangmi in their ethnographic accounts of Nepal, the same should not be said for linguists. Since the birth of Tibeto-Burman linguistics, scholars have been intrigued by the genetic position of the Thangmi language. The three-page grammatical description of Thangmi (then referred to as ‘Thāmi’) in the Linguistic Survey of India compiled by George Abraham Grierson does not begin auspiciously:

The Thāmis have formerly been considered to speak the same dialect as the Sunwārs. During the preparatory operations of this Survey the two dialects were confounded in Darjeeling, and separate returns were only made from Sikkim. (1909: 280)

Sten Konow, the author of this passage, concludes his introduction on a more promising note when he states that Thangmi is actually ‘quite distinct from Sunwār’, and that despite being ‘much influenced by Aryan dialects’, it appears to be ‘a dialect of the same kind as Dhimāl, Yākhā, Limbu, etc.’ (1909: 280). This description appears in Volume III, Part I of Grierson’s Survey, in a section entitled ‘Eastern Pronominalized Languages’. The Thangmi language was then classified alongside Barām (then referred to as ‘Bhrāmu’) as forming an ‘Eastern Subgroup’ of the ‘Complex Pronominalizing’ branch of ‘Himalayan Languages’ within the ‘Tibeto-Burman’ language family (1927, Vol. I, Part I: 58). Konow based his putative classification on word lists collected by Brian Houghton Hodgson half a century earlier, specimens of which he provided in the publication. Hodgson himself had recorded these languages as ‘Thāmi’ and ‘Bhrāmu’ respectively, although in the present context, ‘Thangmi’ and ‘Barām’ are more ethnonlinguistically appropriate terms.

The words and phrases presented in Konow’s list were collected from Thangmi speakers in Darjeeling and make for interesting reading. The lexical items are considerably influenced by the Nepali language, as one might expect from linguistic data collected in the tea estates of north-east India where indigenous tongues were soon jettisoned in favour of Nepali, the Verkehrssprache or vehicular ‘language of commerce’. It is revealing that Thangmi words and phrases recorded in Darjeeling almost 150 years ago show a greater degree of Nepalification than contemporary Thangmi spoken in the Nepali districts of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok.

In his Introduction to Sino-Tibetan, Robert Shafer adds his support to the Grierson-Konow proposition of a close genetic relationship between Thangmi and Barām by placing them together in the ‘Eastern Branch’ of the ‘West Himalayish Section’ of the

3) According to George van Driem, the Barām call their language Bāl Kurā, the ‘language of the people’, in which kurā is Nepali for ‘language’ and bāl is Barām for ‘people, person, somebody’. While the term Barāmu is allegedly still known to a few elderly non-Barām Nepali-speakers, the Barām themselves universally reject both Barāmu and ‘Bhrāmu’, and insist on the use of the term Barām in Nepali to describe the group and their language (van Driem 2001: 766).
‘Bodic Division’ of ‘Sino-Tibetan’ (1974: 145). Following Shafer’s classification, Thangmi and Barâm would therefore also be close relatives of other West Himalayish languages such as Byangsi, Manchad and Zhangzhung. Shafer admits that this classification is ‘tentative’, but is in no doubt that ‘Thami and Bhramu are closely related’ (1974: 145). Regarding their affinity to other West Himalayish languages, Shafer is similarly cautious: ‘From the limited vocabularies of them one can only say that they are here placed in West Himalayish because they appear to be closer to that group tham [sic] to any other’ (1974: 3). While the empirical basis for Shafer’s hypotheses was scanty, his belief in a close linguistic relationship between Thangmi and Barâm has been of more lasting interest than his classification of these two languages as West Himalayish.

Shafer posited nine lexical similarities shared by Thangmi and Barâm which he believed indicated a degree of close genetic relationship (1966: 128). These nine lexical items are given in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thami</th>
<th>Bhrámú</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>di-wore</td>
<td>dé</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nis</td>
<td>ni</td>
<td>two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u-ni</td>
<td>u-ní</td>
<td>sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tsala</td>
<td>chala-wani</td>
<td>moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nem</td>
<td>nam</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>su-wa</td>
<td>s-wá</td>
<td>tooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tśiya</td>
<td>chá</td>
<td>eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ku-lna</td>
<td>ká-pá</td>
<td>ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ka-pu</td>
<td>ká-pá</td>
<td>head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the nine lexical correspondences, seven may now be discounted since they are either widely attested in other languages or easily reconstructed to Proto-Tibeto-Burman forms, leaving only two possible words supporting a special link between Thangmi and Barâm. The comparative evidence is as follows: the Barâm and Thangmi words for ‘one’ seem to derive from the Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *t(y)ik ‘one’ (Benedict 1972: 94) or *tyak ~ *g-t(y)ik ‘one, only’ (Matisoff 2003: 616), while the words for ‘two’ in both languages are also reflexes of the widely-attested Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *g-ni-s (Benedict 1972: 16) or *ʔ-niit ~ *ni and *g/s-ni-s ‘two’ (Matisoff 2003: 604). Consequently, the words ‘one’ and ‘two’ only serve to indicate the already indisputably Tibeto-Burman nature of Barâm and Thangmi, and do not indicate any special relationship between the two languages. Likewise, where Shafer suggests that Barâm s-wá ‘tooth’ and Thangmi su-wa ‘tooth’ are unusual forms, both can be recon-
structed to the Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *s-wa ‘tooth’ (Benedict 1972: 106) or *s-wa ‘tooth’ (Matisoff 2003: 604), and Barām chá ‘eat’ and Thangmi tši ya ‘eat’ are similarly reflexes of the common Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *dza ‘eat’ (1972: 28) and *dzya ‘eat’ (Matisoff 2003: 648). When Shafer suggests that Barām ká-pá ‘head, ear’ and Thangmi ka-pu ‘head’ are unique, he was unaware of the Nepali form kapāl ‘head, hair’ and the Kusuvār form ká-pá ‘head’. Even in the little known language of Thochú, the form kapat ‘head’ has been attested (Hodgson 1880: pull-out section containing the Comparative Vocabulary of the languages of Hôr Sôkyeul and Sifân). It seems more plausible to suggest that the words for ‘head’ in both languages are Indo-Aryan loans rather than arguing for a separate lexicogenesis. Finally, the Thulung word nem ‘house, dwelling place’ (Allen 1975: 224) is cognate with Thangmi nem and Barām nam, both meaning ‘house’. All that remain are two lexical correspondences, Barām u-ní and Thangmi u-ni meaning ‘sun’ (perhaps both derived from *nay ‘sun, day’ as noted by Matisoff (2003: 604)), and Barām chala-wani and Thangmi tśala meaning ‘moon’ (both likely cognate with *s/g-la ‘moon, month’ as reconstructed by Matisoff (2003: 599)). Some of the above data were carefully summarised by the Leiden linguist Arno Loeffen (1995), who reached the conclusion that Shafer’s evidence for grouping Thangmi and Barām together is at best based on two lexical isoglosses showing a specific phonological innovation.

Despite the paucity of empirical data for his classification, it appears from more recent research that Shafer’s suspicion of a special relationship between the two languages may indeed be correct. The two proposed lexical isoglosses shared by Thangmi and Barām are now further supported by numerous morphological correspondences, particularly in the realm of verbal agreement affixes (van Driem, forthcoming). While the Barām system of verbal agreement has all but decayed, the verbal morphology of Thangmi is complex and reminiscent of the Kiranti model. The completeness of the Thangmi verbal paradigm thus provides an insight into the degenerated Barām agreement system.

Six years after the publication of Shafer’s Introduction to Sino-Tibetan, Paul King Benedict’s Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus was published. In this classic work, Thangmi and Barām are passed over without specific mention and are classified as belonging to what Benedict labels a ‘Himalayish’ grouping within ‘Tibetan-Kanauri’ (1972: 7).4) More important to the present discussion than the virtual absence of Thangmi and Barām, however, is Benedict’s suggestion that although the Newar language could not be ‘directly grouped with Bahing and Vayu [now Hayu]’ (1972: 5–6), it nevertheless showed ‘interesting lexical agreements’ with them, and ‘might be regarded as a Bodish-Bahing link’ (1972: 8). The ambiguous position of Newar within Tibeto-Burman had also been noted by Shafer, who rejected Konow’s typological classification of the

4) In his Handbook, Matisoff intriguingly suggests that ‘Thami’ is part of the Chin subgroup (2003: 702).
language as ‘non-pronominalised’, but remained unsure of its genetic position.\(^5\) The seeds of doubt shared by Shafer and Benedict about the Newar-Kiranti link would lie dormant for some twenty years before George van Driem’s Mahākirāntī hypothesis.\(^6\)

3. Cultural interdependence between the Newar of Dolakāhā and the Thangmi

The Thangmi and Newar populations of the Dolakāhā area have been in close cultural contact for some time. The Thangmi origin story features a Newar king who first imprisons a Thangmi man and then later impregnates a Thangmi woman story (for more details, see Turin, 1999, and Shneiderman & Turin, 2000). One male Thangmi clan, known as roimirati or roimijati (from Thangmi roimi, ‘Newar’ and Nepali jāt, ‘caste, ethnic group’) reckons its descent directly from this Newar-Thangmi liaison. The indigenous explanation of how the Thangmi ethnic group came to have a Newar clan is described at length in an earlier article, so suffice it to say that the original roimirati brothers are widely believed to have been fathered by a Newar king.

The brief description above demonstrates that the Thangmi have incorporated the Newar into their own socio-cultural world. Such an adaptation would be expected from a low-status ethnic group coming into contact with a regionally-dominant culture, in this case, the Newar. There are, however, many examples of the more surprising reverse situation in which the Thangmi have been incorporated into the Newar social paradigm. The most notable of these inclusions is the key role that Thangmi play in festivals celebrated by the Newar in the bazaar town of Dolakāhā. These calendrical festivals, such as khadgajātrā, the ‘Sword Festival’ held on the eleventh day of Mohani (Nepali dasāi), and matsyendranāthjātrā are explicitly Newar events which are also celebrated in other Newar-dominant areas, such as the Kathmandu valley. For the Newar of Dolakāhā, active participation in certain of their rituals by specific members of the surrounding Thangmi community is obligatory. Should the Thangmi fail to perform their duties, or worse still, not come at all, then the Newar festival is effectively cancelled.

While the precise details of the Newar-Thangmi socio-ritual relationship outlined above are beyond the scope of the present article, there are two particularly salient features of this cultural interdependence worth noting here. First, ritual offerings and implements must be assembled to exact specifications by Thangmi villagers, and only then are they brought to Dolakāhā. Second, Thangmi shamans and laymen have a rit-

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5\) Shafer wrote: ‘From the limited number of comparisons brought together here one may tentatively say that Newarish (Newari and Pahri) is probably neither Baric nor Karenic, but somewhat intermediate between Bodic and Burmic; that is, its ties are with languages to the north (Tibet) and the east (Burma and the Indo-Burmese frontier) rather than with Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam’ (1952: 93).

6\) In the intervening years, Scott DeLancey described an ‘Eastern Himalayan’ grouping, which would include ‘the Kiranti languages and others in eastern Nepal; probably also Newari’ (1989: 321).
ual role in festivals otherwise wholly officiated by Newar priests. These roles are played by Thangmi from specific villages: the devikot and khadgajatrå duties are performed exclusively by Thangmi from the village of Dumkot, while the matsuendranathjatrå involves only Thangmi from the village of Lāpilān. Such a division by village may suggest that these ritual duties originated as a form of taxation on the Thangmi by the local Newar rulers. At any rate, the Newar of Dolakhā view the presence of the Thangmi as essential to the efficacy of their rituals and festivals. Casper Miller describes in detail the happenings that led to the Thangmi villagers’ refusal to play their part in the devikotjatrå of 1912 AD (1997: 89–93), an event which is remembered and discussed to this day.

4. Before and after Mahâkirânti

At the 13th annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of Nepal, George van Driem advanced his Mahâkirânti or ‘greater Kiranti’ theory: a ‘hypothetical genetic unit’ including Kiranti and Newar (1992: 246). While his idea attracted both immediate attention and criticism, van Driem continued to refine his thinking as new linguistic data (specifically on Thangmi and Baräm) came to light. In 2001, van Driem redefined the Mahâkirânti group as consisting of ‘the Kiranti languages proper and…the Newaric languages Newar, Baräm and Thangmi. The set of languages which are related to Mahakiranti...includes Lepcha, Lhokpu and the Magaric languages’ (2001: 591). In Languages of the Himalayas, van Driem sets out the implications of his idea:

the linguistic ancestors of modern Mahakiranti groups and of Bodic language communities, which appear to be closer to Mahakiranti than to Bodish, peopled the Himalayas from the east and form a cluster of languages connected not only by shared geographical provenance but perhaps also related by more intimate genetic association and shared prehistorical contact situations. (2001: 590–591)

But what evidence does van Driem provide for the existence of Mahâkirânti? Dismissing lexical data as merely ‘suggestive’ and inadequate for ‘systematic comparison to yield decisive evidence’ (2003: 23), van Driem has stressed that the comparison of inflexional morphology provides evidence of a ‘highly sound and compelling kind’ (1992: 246). The morphological evidence of the Kiranti-Newar genetic link comes from Dolakhā Newar, the ‘most divergent...dialect of the language’ (van Driem 2001: 759) spoken in and around Dolakhā, an ancient Newar settlement and trading post ‘dating back perhaps as far as the Licchavi period [circa 300–879 A.D.]’ (2001: 759). The verbal agreement system of Dolakhā Newar is cognate with the conjugational

7) It is fitting to point out at this juncture that the term of choice in English for both the indigenous people and language of the Kathmandu valley is ‘Newar’, and emphatically not the Aryan-inspired ‘Newari’, which is considered offensive to contemporary Newar sensibilities.
morphology attested in Kiranti languages: verbs in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar agree for person and number with the intransitive subject and transitive agent in all tenses. Not only is the structure of Dolakhā Newar verbal morphology reminiscent of the Kiranti model, but Dolakhā also appears to be one of the more archaic and conservative of the extant Newar dialects. Van Driem makes this point succinctly:

Classical Kathmandu Newar...retains vestiges of a verbal agreement system like that of Dolakhā Newar. Therefore, the Classical Newar system is likely to derive from a more complete verbal agreement system, and the Dolakhā Newar verb probably represents a more faithful reflexion of this Proto-Newar system. (2001: 764)

More specifically, however, the Dolakhā dialect of Newar shares an important morphological trait with Thangmi and the Kiranti languages. In Dolakhā Newar, the morpheme <u>, indexing third person future (3/FUT), is a verbal agreement suffix and also a reflex of the Tibeto-Burman proto-morpheme *<-u>. More specifically, the <u> suffix in Dolakhā Newar denotes the involvement of a third person actant in the syntactic role of patient, a meaning also found in Thangmi and the Kiranti languages proper. As van Driem writes elsewhere:

The third person proto-morpheme *<-u> is ubiquitously reflected in Tibeto-Burman...In the Himalayas, these reflexes are all suffixes, and, in Kiranti languages, they all denote third person patient involvement. The Dolakha data likewise reflect third person patient marking: The vestigial suffix <u> in the negative indicative, singular imperative and singular optative of r-stem verbs is clearly associated with grammatical patient marking, as it occurs only after transitive verbs. Similarly, in the past indicative, third singular subject is indexed by the suffix <a> in intransitive verbs, but by <u> in transitive verbs. (1993b: 36–37)

While acknowledging that verbal morphology constitutes only ‘one type of evidence which has yet to be corroborated by regular lexical and phonological correspondences’ (1992: 246), van Driem sees the morphological evidence for the antiquity of the Dolakhā system as ‘decisive because in comparative linguistics conjugational agreement endings such as Dolakhā Newar *<-u> or the third person singular ending <-s> in the English present tense are precisely the type of elements...which are inherited, not borrowed’ (2001: 764–765).9

8) That Magaric languages may be genetic relatives of Mahākirānti is an interesting proposition. A different interpretation is offered by the Newar linguist, Tej Ratna Kansakar, who places Thangmi in a so-called ‘Magar Group’ of languages as distinct from ‘Kirantish Languages’ (1993: 167).

9) It is prudent to note that flexional morphology is the heart of the inherited portion of any
While reactions to the Mahākirāntī hypothesis have been mixed, the strongest reaction against the proposed grouping came not from Western linguists, but from academics and laypeople within the Newar community. Van Driem describes their resistance as ‘inherently suspect’ (2001: 599), pointing out that their unwillingness to accept the Mahākirāntī hypothesis stems from the social exclusivity of the Newar community. Van Driem is, however, careful to acknowledge that while the communities may be linguistically related, in a ‘cultural sense these language communities could not be more different’ (2001: 599), and he points to the gulf in the socio-cultural worlds between the different Mahākirāntī groups:

The Newars have for centuries had an advanced metropolitan culture, and, though they are linguistically Tibeto-Burmans, the Newars cultivated their own flourishing Sanskrit literary tradition. By contrast, the Kiranti, i.e. Rais and Limbus, were rural agriculturalists of the eastern hills, whereas the Barām and the Thangmi have remained amongst the socio-economically most disadvantaged groups of central Nepal. (2001: 599)

After a linguistic field trip to Bhutan in 2001, however, van Driem began to reconsider his Mahākirāntī hypothesis. While in Bhutan, he collected data on the Gongduk language, particularly on its conjugational morphology and biactantial agreement system which contains reflexes of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman third person patient morpheme *<-u> (3/P). On analysing the data, van Driem realised that:

the two specific morphological traits shared between Newar and Kiranti are not unique to Newar and Kiranti, but would appear to be the shared retention of a far older trait of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system. Nothing else about Gongduk suggests any immediate affinity with either Newar or Kiranti within Tibeto-Burman. Therefore, the narrow but morphologically highly specific empirical basis for entertaining the Mahākirāntī hypothesis no longer exists. (2003: 23–24)

In the conclusion to this article, van Driem suggests that while he no longer entertains the Mahākirāntī hypothesis, the ‘case for Newaric or Mahānevārī has grown’ (2003: 25), and he proposes that Thangmi and Barām ‘together form a coherent subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman family’ (2003: 24). Accordingly, the linguistic relationship between the Newaric languages (Newar, Thangmi and Barām) antedates ‘by a large

10) Van Driem draws attention to the Gongduk portmanteau suffix <-uni ~ -oŋe> (1→3) when compared with the first person subject morphemes <-ŋin> and <-ŋin>, and to the Gongduk portmanteau suffix <-uri ~ -ore> (2p→3) when compared with the second person plural subject morpheme <-ire> (2003: 23).
margin the rise of the great Newar urban civilisation in the Kathmandu Valley, let alone the much later emergence in the XVIII\textsuperscript{th} century of the political entity of the kingdom of Nepal’ (van Driem 2001: 599).\textsuperscript{11)  }In section §5.3.3 below, I present a number of specific lexical isoglosses which support the antiquity of the proposed Newar-Thangmi link.

5. Thangmi-Newar lexical correspondences and the case for Newaric

5.1. Shared numeral classifiers

Following the clues suggesting a special relationship between Thangmi and Newar outlined in the first incarnation of the Mahākirāntī hypothesis, I pursued the evidence for the proposed genetic link further. Supporting data came from the unlikely corner of a common set of numeral classifiers shared by the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi and the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. A brief word about numeral classifiers in Tibeto-Burman languages will serve as a suitable point of departure here.

Aside from the well-attested case of Newar, few of Nepal’s Tibeto-Burman languages show any sign of having an involved numeral classifier system. A number of Kiranti languages do show remnants of classificatory systems, however, the best known instance of which comes from the pioneering study of Thulung by the Oxford-based anthropologist Nicholas Allen. Allen reports that in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Thulung, as studied by Hodgson, ‘countable nouns fell into classes defined by classifier particles associated with numerals’ (1975: 113). Allen isolated six classifying particles (CLF) for Thulung: \(<\text{-bop}>\) meaning ‘round objects’ (or ‘rounds’ in Hodgson’s notes), as in \(ko\ \text{bop miksi}\) (one CLF eye) ‘one eye’; \(<\text{-seol}>\) meaning ‘elongated object’ as in \(ko\ \text{seol khel}\) (one CLF leg) ‘one leg’; \(<\text{-phe}>\) meaning ‘flat object’ as in \(ko\ \text{phe nophla}\) (one CLF ear) ‘one ear’; \(<\text{-wan}>\) meaning ‘hollow circular object’; \(<\text{-phu}>\) meaning ‘growing things, trees’ and \(<\text{-si}>\) meaning ‘holes, roads’. Allen goes on to describe what he calls significant ‘variability’ in the choice of particle, adding that this might indicate that ‘the classifier system was beginning to break down’ even in Hodgson’s time (1975: 113–115).

More recent evidence of numeral classifiers present in extant Kiranti languages has been collected by members of the Himalayan Languages Project of Leiden University, corroborating Hodgson’s early findings. For example, Joyce van Hoorn documents the numeral ‘three’ as \(\text{sumbo}\) in Chiling (personal communication), a fusion of the Tibeto-Burman numeral \(\text{sum}\) ‘three’ and a numeral classifier \(\text{bo}\), most likely cognate with Thulung \(<\text{-bop}>\) meaning ‘round objects’. Similarly in Sāmpāng, another Kiranti language, \(i\text{-bo}\) ‘one’ is made up of the numeral \(i\) ‘one’ and the classifier \(<\text{-bo}>\), once again cognate with Thulung \(<\text{-bop}>\) meaning ‘round objects’ (René Huysmans, personal communication). Dumi also attests a numeral classifier cognate with Thu-

\textsuperscript{11)  }For a list of major Newar settlements which are believed to date back to the Kiranti period, see van Driem (2001: 732).
lung <-bop>, in mu-bo ‘six’, segmented by van Driem as mu ‘six’ and the classifier <-bo> (1993a: 87–89). While interesting for comparative and historical reasons, however, these Kiranti classifiers have little in common with those attested for Thangmi or Newar.

Newar numeral classifiers, on the other hand, have received considerable attention from linguists of Tibeto-Burman languages and beyond.12) A full discussion of the scholarship on this feature of Newar grammar is beyond the scope of the present discussion. In the following paragraphs, attention is focussed on the set of classifiers apparently cognate between Newar and Thangmi.

In her descriptive and historical account of the Dolakhā dialect of Newar, Carol Genetti notes that numerals are ‘always followed directly by numeral classifiers’ and then describes ten classifiers which ‘are not used with any other nominal modification besides numerals’ (1994: 68). In Dolakhā Newar, she writes, numerals are ‘always followed directly by numeral classifiers’ (1994: 68). Seven of these classifiers appear to be cognate with Thangmi numeral classifiers or nouns that I have collected from the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi. In each case, the Newar and Thangmi classifiers are similar in both form and function.

The Thangmi noun dan ‘year’ from the Sindhupālcok dialect is likely cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-da> ‘years’ (Genetti 1994: 69), and the Thangmi classifier <-pate> ‘clothes, bamboo mats’ is probably cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pta> ‘clothes (vests, pants, rugs, shirts, raincoats)’ (Genetti, personal communication). The Thangmi classifier <-pur> ‘branches, trees, long things’ may well be cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pu> ‘hairs, bananas, ropes, necklaces, garlands, tongues, branches, sticks, brooms, pens’ (Genetti 1994: 69), and the Thangmi classifier <-pa> ‘leaves, paper, thin or flat things’ may be cognate with either the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pat> ‘leaves, pieces of paper, silver leaf’ (Genetti 1994: 69) or the classifier <-pâ> ‘fingers, knives, legs, arms, wings, ears’ (Genetti 1994: 68).13) Finally, the Thangmi numeral classifier <-gore> ‘houses, general things’ may be cognate with either the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-gar> ‘eggs, rice, rocks, noses, apples, balls, houses, stars, autos’ (Genetti 1994: 68) or the classifier <-gur> ‘(general classifier)’ (Genetti 1994: 69). The above examples provide powerful evidence of lexical similarities between the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi and the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. Three further Thangmi numeral classifiers have no obvious cognates in Newar, and concomitantly, the five remaining classifiers present in Dolakhā Newar are not found in Thangmi.14)

12) I refer the reader to Austin Hale and Iswaranda Shresthacarya (1973) and Peri Bhaskararao and S. K. Joshi (1985).

13) According to Dörte Borchers, the Sunwar language (also known as Koĩnts) has a numeral classifier <-pa>, as in nim-pa koel (two-CLF leg) ‘two legs’ (personal communication). This may well be cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pâ> ‘fingers, knives, legs, arms, wings, ears’ described above.

14) There are only two numeral classifiers attested in the Dolakhā dialect of Thangmi: <-gore>
All Thangmi numeral classifiers are grammaticalised forms with no clear derivation from any related Thangmi nominal lexeme, apart from the classifier for human referents <kapu>, which is also the Thangmi noun for ‘head’. The similarity between the Dolakhā Newar numeral classifiers and those found in the Sindhupâlcok dialect of Thangmi are striking, and leaves open the question of whether these forms are borrowed or whether they reflect a close genetic relationship between the two languages.\footnote{Quite why and how numeral classifiers attested in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar should have cognates in the Sindhupâlcok dialect of Thangmi rather than the geographically closer Thangmi dialect spoken in Dolakhā remains unexplained. It is, however, possible that these classifiers were once also present in the Dolakhā dialect of Thangmi but are now no longer remembered, and are retained only in the Sindhupâlcok dialect. This issue certainly warrants further exploration.}

If the numeral classifiers are borrowed, which direction the borrowing took place remains unresolved. The Thangmi forms may be the more archaic as two of the Thangmi classifiers are disyllabic whereas their Newar counterpart are monosyllables: Thangmi <gore> and <pate> versus Newar <gar ~ gur> and <pta>. If the Thangmi classifiers were borrowed from Newar, then the suffixation of a velar nasal [ŋ] in the Thangmi classifier for ‘years’ <dan> to the original Newar classifier <da> ‘years’, and the presence of a trill [r] at the coda of the Thangmi classifier <pur> are also difficult to explain.

Numeral classifiers are used to enumerate things in trade relations, and there is significant evidence of social and economic contact between the Thangmi and Newar groups as outlined above in section §3, which may provide an argument for suggesting that these are borrowed forms. Whether the shared classifiers can be used to argue for a close genetic relationship between the two languages or whether these impressive lexical similarities are merely a sign of intensive borrowing between Thangmi and Newar remains a central question.

\section*{5.2. The changing face of the Classical Newar language}

Pursuing the idea of the alleged Thangmi-Newar link still further, I searched though lexical lists and dictionaries of contemporary and Classical Newar in search of possible correspondences. As this section illustrates, my findings add weight to the suggestion that when taken together, Newar, Thangmi and also Barâm, form the higher-level grouping of Newaric.

The time depth of the Classical Newar language has long been debated, as has its variational breadth. The controversy can be traced back at least as far as Hans Jørgensen, who described Classical Newar as simply ‘the language of the MSS [manuscript]’ (1936: 3). Five years later, in the Preface to his grammar of the language, he...
noted the explicitly 'historical' nature of Newar: ‘since the manuscripts, on which it is based, range from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, and the natural changes in the language during this period have to some extent been reflected in them’ (1941: 3). The editors of the recently published *Dictionary of Classical Newari* are well aware of the implications and make their position extremely clear. In the *Introduction*, they state:

> All we know at this stage is that Classical Newari is not a single homogenous monolithic stage nor a variety, dialect or stylistic label. (Malla *et al.* 2000: vii)

‘Classical Newari’ is thus an umbrella term to describe the older forms of the language used in the 96 manuscript sources consulted for the dictionary, the chronological span of which ranges from 1115 A.D. to 1900 A.D. The editors reiterate their point by precluding comparisons between ‘Classical Newari’ and features of other so-called ‘Classical’ languages, such as Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic. As they see it, ‘Classical Newari’ is little more than a convenient term used to separate a range of older Newar language varieties from Colloquial Newari (2000: viii).

This view is not shared by the Newar scholar Kashinath Tamot (*Kāśināṭh Tamot*). Tamot believes that the existing linguistic divergences are more than ‘mere spatial variations—variations of individual dialects, (social/regional) or evidence of diaglossia [sic] (high style/low style)’ (Malla *et al.* 2000: viii). According to Tamot, there are ‘at least two stages of Classical Newari, i.e., Early and Late...This is approximately equivalent to the division of Nepal’s history into Early (879–1482) and Late (1482–1768) Medieval periods’ (2002: 13). Tamot is quick to point out the linguistic implications of this argument: Jørgensen’s dictionary would now only cover the Late Classical and Early Modern periods of the Newar language (from 1675 A.D. to 1859 A.D.). Tamot suggests that Early Classical Newar exhibits pre-Aryan features which were replaced by Sanskritic vocabulary in the Late Classical and Early Modern periods. Professor Kamal Prakāś Malla, Chief Editor and Project Leader of the *Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee*, is palpably non-plussed by this theory and others of what he refers to as ‘Tamot’s hobby-horses’ (Malla *et al.* 2000: iv).  

At the 9th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in June, 2000, Kashinath Tamot presented a paper entitled ‘Some characteristics of the Tibeto-Burman stock of Early Classical Newari’. I was interested to find cognates between Thangmi as spoken to this day in Dolakhā and Sindhpālcok and certain ‘Early Classical Newar’ words, lexical items which were replaced by Sanskritic loans in Late Classical Newar.  

Subsequently, Tamot and I realised that a number of Thangmi ritual words for body parts closely resemble Classical Newar forms, a discovery which lends

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16) Sadly, this important lexicographical project on the Newar language was not without its tensions and disagreements. Malla writes of ‘unexpected and unhappy turns’ (2000: iii), which included the resignation of Kashinath Tamot, the Chief Compiler of the project.

17) Now published as an article with the same title, see Tamot (2002).
further credence to the proposed closeness of the Newar and Thangmi peoples and their languages. In the following sections, I present an overview of the lexical similarities between Thangmi and Classical Newar.

5.3. Three classes of Thangmi and Classical Newar lexical correspondences

Lexical items shared by Thangmi and Classical Newar fall into three categories. The first, and also the least spectacular, are words which are well-attested reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman roots found across the genetically-related languages of Nepal and the higher Himalayas. That Thangmi and Classical Newar share these words does little more than reconfirm their membership in the Tibeto-Burman language family. The second class of shared items are Indo-Aryan loan words which have entered both Thangmi and Classical Newar. While many of the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal are considerably influenced by Indic, the Newar are the sole Tibeto-Burman people to have adopted both a Sanskrit literary tradition as well as a version of the Indo-Aryan caste system, a result of which is a heavily Sanskritised lexicon. The most likely explanation for these shared Indic loans is that one of the two languages loaned words from Sanskrit which were then, at a later date, borrowed by the other. Another possibility is that both Thangmi and Classical Newar were in contact with the same Indic language, perhaps even at approximately the same time. At any rate, as can be seen from the examples below, there are a number of shared Indic loans for words where one might have expected to find a non-loaned and native Tibeto-Burman form. The third and final class of lexical items shared by Thangmi and Classical Newar is by far the most interesting. This category consists of the numerous correspondences between the two languages, few (if any) of which are attested in other Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayan region.

A brief disclaimer at this point would be prudent: Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics is still in its infancy in comparison with the depth of comparative and historical scholarship which exists for Indo-European languages. It is likely that some of the lexical items I include in the proposed list of those shared by only Thangmi and Classical Newar will prove, over time, to be reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman roots or cognate with elements found in other extant Himalayan languages.

The data are presented according to the three categories outlined above. Following each citation of a proto-Tibeto-Burman form or Classical Newar word, its provenance is indicated by brackets with the following abbreviations: (B) for Benedict’s Sino-Tibetan, (J) for Jørgensen’s Dictionary of the Classical Newārī, and (NB) for the Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee’s recent Dictionary of Classical Newari. Matisoff’s recent Handbook builds on, and further develops, many of Benedict’s early protoforms, and I refer to these reconstructions in the forthcoming sections when cognates or reflexes are apparent. I refer interested readers to a helpful index of reconstructed

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5.3.1. **Shared common reflexes of Tibeto-Burman**

In this section, I present the list of Thangmi and Classical Newar words which are reflexes of well-attested Proto-Tibeto-Burman forms, or clearly cognate with lexical items in other extant Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayas.

The reflexes of common Tibeto-Burman proto-forms include body parts, animals, food stuffs and verb roots. Reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman *s-wa ‘tooth’ (B) are Thangmi suwa ‘tooth’ and Classical Newar wā ‘tooth’ (J); reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman *kliy ‘excrement’ (B) are Thangmi kli ‘excrement’ and Classical Newar khi ‘excrements’ (J) and khi ‘faeces’ (NB); *(g-)yak ‘armpit’ (B) has reflexes yakho ‘armpit’ in Thangmi and yāko ‘armpit’ (J) in Classical Newar; Thangmi nyu ~ nyu ~ nyi ‘brain’ and Classical Newar hni-pu ‘brain’ (J) and nhipu ‘brain’ (NB) are cognate with Proto-Tibeto-Burman *nuk ‘brain’ (B); Proto-Tibeto-Burman *r-mi(y) ‘man’ has reflexes mi ‘person, man’ in Thangmi and mīm ‘man’ in Classical Newar (NB); Proto-Tibeto-Burman *r-sa ‘vein’ (B) has reflexes sasa ‘vein, tendon’ in Thangmi and śaśa ‘sinews, vein’ in Classical Newar (NB); Proto-Tibeto-Burman *syā ‘meat’ (B) has reflexes in both Thangmi and Newar indicating bovines, since these were once eaten by Newars (and still are eaten by the Thangmi): sya ~ shya ‘cow’ in Thangmi and śa ‘cow’ in Classical Newar (NB). The related forms syaca ‘calf’ in Thangmi and sacā ‘calf’ in Classical Newar (NB) are derived from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *syā ‘meat’ (B) and *tsa ‘child’ (B) respectively. Proto-Tibeto-Burman *srik ‘louse’ (B) has reflexes sirik ‘louse’ in Thangmi and śi ‘body louse’ in Classical Newar (NB); and Proto-Tibeto-Burman *lak ‘arm, hand’ (B) has reflexes lak ~ la? ‘hand, arm’ in Thangmi and lā ‘hand, arm’ (J) and laka ‘arm’ (NB) in Classical Newar.

Other reflexes for animal and organic words are as follows: Thangmi amu ‘eagle’ and Classical Newar imā ~ yumā ‘eagle’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *muw=maw ‘eagle’ (B); Thangmi kucu ‘dog’ and Classical Newar khicā ‘dog’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *kwi=-kay ‘dog’ (B); Thangmi kucua ‘puppy’ and Classical Newar khicācā ‘puppy’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *kwi=-kay ‘dog’ and *tsa ‘child’ (B); and the related forms ma-kucu ‘bitch, female dog’ in Thangmi and mā-khicā ‘bitch’ in Classical Newar (J) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *ma ‘mother’ and *kwi=-kay ‘dog’ (B); Thangmi naru ‘horn’ and Classical Newar ā ‘horn’ (J) and ā ~ ākura (NB), both evidently containing another element than just reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman *krew=krw or *ruŋ=rwan ‘horn’ (B); Thangmi nāna ‘fish’ and Classical Newar ā ‘fish’ (J) or nām ‘fish’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *nya ‘fish’ (B); Thangmi pyā ‘pig’ and Classical Newar phā ‘hog, boar’ (J) or phā ‘pig, boar’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *pwak ‘pig’ (B); the Thangmi bound morph <-sek> ‘fruit, round organic object’ and Classical Newar se ‘fruit, corn, grain’ (J) and se ‘fruits’ or cākuse ‘a kind of sweet yellow citrus fruit about the size of an orange’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman proto-forms available on the STEDT project website at: <http://stedt.berkeley.edu/data/HPTBEtymav1.html>.
*sey ‘fruit’ (B); Thangmi jake ‘rice’ and Classical Newar jāke ~ ke ‘rice, husked rice’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *dza ‘eat’ (B); Thangmi chya ‘salt’ and Classical Newar chi ‘salt’ (J) or cī ‘salt’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *tsa ‘salt’ (B) and Thangmi marci ‘chilli’ and Classical Newar maracabhātā ‘chilli’ (NB) which are cognate with Yamphu marchu ‘Spanish pepper, red pepper, Capsicum annum’ (Rutgers 1998: 555) and many other Tibeto-Burman languages, and most probably derived from Sanskrit marica ‘pepper’. Two notable kinship terms are nini ‘husband’s sister, father’s sister’ (J) and nini ‘aunt, father’s sister’ (NB) in Classical Newar and nini ‘father’s sister’ in Thangmi, from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *ni(y) ‘aunt’ (B); Thangmi bubu ‘elder brother’ and Classical Newar phupa ‘elder brother’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *puw=p ‘brother, older’ (B), another reflex of which is Kulung bu ~ bubu ‘elder brother’ (Tolsma 1999: 197).

Inanimate nouns with common reflexes are Thangmi asku ‘smoke’ and Classical Newar kuṃ ‘smoke’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *kuw=kəw ‘smoke’ (B); Thangmi asa ‘oil’ and Classical Newar so ‘oil’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *sa·w ‘oil’ (B); Thangmi uni ‘day, sun’ and Classical Newar hni ‘day’ (J) and nhi ‘day’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *niy=ŋ ‘day’ (B); Thangmi nasa ‘soil, earth, ground’ and Classical Newar cā ‘soil’ (NB) are likely cognate with Tibetan sa ‘earth, the ground’ (Jäschke 1968: 568); Thangmi rapa ‘axe’ and Classical Newar pāo ~ pā ‘axe’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *r-wa=r-pwa ‘axe’ (B); Thangmi khanou ‘door, door-frame’ and Classical Newar khā ‘door’ (J) or kāpā ‘door’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *m-ka ‘door’ (B); Thangmi taye ‘night’ and Classical Newar cā ‘night’ (NB) perhaps from the two Proto-Tibeto-Burman elements *mey ‘fire’ (B) and *tap ‘fireplace’ (B); Thangmi me-thap ‘fireplace’ and Classical Newar mi-thap ‘chimney (culli)’ (J) from the two Proto-Tibeto-Burman elements *mey ‘fire’ (B) and *tap ‘fireplace’ (B); Thangmi kham ‘word, tale, story’ and Classical Newar kha ‘word, tale, story’ (J) or kham ‘matter, fact, talk, dispute’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *ka ‘word, speech’ (B); Thangmi sin ‘tree, wood’ and Classical Newar śīma ~ sīn ‘tree, a plant, wood’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *sin ‘tree’ (B); and Thangmi ulam ‘path, road’ and Classical Newar laṃ ‘road, way, direction’ (J) or laṃ ‘way, road’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *lam ‘road, direction’ (B).

Common verb cognates and other grammatical particles are Thangmi cabusa ‘to carry’ and Classical Newar ku buyu ‘v.t., to carry’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *buw=bəw ‘carry on back or shoulders’ (B); Thangmi gandu sin ‘dry wood’ and Classical Newar gamga sin ‘dry wood’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *kaŋ ‘dry up’ (B); Thangmi valpa ‘five’ and Classical Newar ṇaŋ ‘five’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *l-ŋa ~ b-ŋa ‘five’ (B); Thangmi ca ‘small, young, diminutive’, caca ‘very small’ and

19) Chillies most likely arrived in South Asia some time after the beginning of the 16th century.
cacha ‘grandchild’ and Classical Newar cā ‘a young one (of animals)’ (J) or cā ‘child, young, small, diminutive suffix’, cacā ‘small, minor’ and chaya ‘grand-daughter, grand-son’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *tsa ‘child, grandchild nephew/niece’ (B); Thangmi pisa ‘to give (away)’ and Classical Newar pi-tē ‘to give away’ (J) and biye ‘to give, to pay’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *biy=bøy ‘give’ (B); Thangmi losa ~ loka ‘to pour’ and Classical Newar lu- ‘to pour’ (J) or luya ‘to pour’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *(m-)lu(w) ‘pour’ (B); Thangmi lupsa ‘to sink, to be submerged’ and Classical Newar lop ‘to sink, to be submerged’ (J) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *lip and/or *nup ~ *nip ‘sink’ (B); Thangmi sais ‘to know’ and Classical Newar saya ‘to know, to understand, to be conversant with’ (J) or sayā ~ saye ‘to get notice, to know’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *syey ‘know’ (B); Thangmi the ‘self’ and Classical Newar thao ‘self’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *tsuyu-ŋtuŋ ‘inside’ (B); Thangmi namsa ‘to smell’ and Classical Newar namña ‘to smell’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *m-nam ‘smell’ (B); Thangmi nūsa ‘to laugh, smile’ and Classical Newar nhira ~ nhile ‘to laugh’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *m-nwi(y) ‘laugh’ (B); Thangmi isā ‘to die’ and Classical Newar sisā ‘to die’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman *sīy=søy ‘die’ (B); and Thangmi sū ‘who?’ and susu ‘whoever?’ and Classical Newar su ‘who?’ (of persons only) (J) or sū ‘who’ and susu ‘whoever’ (NB) are cognate with modern written Tibetan su ‘who?’ (Jäschke 1990: 573).

Certain Thangmi and Classical Newar words are also cognate with Sampang, a Kiranti language spoken in the north-eastern quadrant of Khoṭān district.20) Thangmi chusa ‘to fasten’ and Classical Newar chuya ‘to fasten, to attach’ (J) are cognate with Sampang chyuma ‘to fasten’; Thangmi bok ‘inflorescence of corn or rice flower’ and Classical Newar bo ‘flower’ (J) and bo ‘flower’ (Modern Newar buni) (NB) are cognate with Sampang buy ‘flower’; Thangmi mesya ‘buffalo’ and Classical Newar mesi ‘buffalo’ (J) or mes ‘buffalo’ (NB) are cognate with Sampang mesi ‘buffalo’ and Kulung mesi ‘water buffalo’ (Tolsma 1999: 220).

Overall then, the above examples only serve to demonstrate that Thangmi and Newar are Tibeto-Burman languages which contain reflexes of well-attested proto-forms which have cognates in extant Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayas.

5.3.2. Shared Indo-Aryan loans

The second category contains lexical items which both Thangmi and Classical Newar have borrowed from Indo-Aryan, and here I focus solely on the loans which are particularly similar. Thangmi aji ‘mother-in-law’ and Classical Newar aji ‘grandmother (paternal and maternal)’ (J) or aji ‘grandmother’ (NB) may well have been loaned from Hindi āji ‘paternal grandmother’ (McGregor 2002: 82); Thangmi kapale ‘forehead’ and Classical Newar kapāra ‘forehead’ (NB) are both cognate with Nepali kapāl

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20) The Sampang data are provided by René Huysmans, via personal communication.
‘forehead, scalp’; Thangmi kantu ‘throat, neck’ and Classical Newar kāṃṭha ‘throat’ (NB) are probably borrowed from a later reflex of Sanskrit kāṃṭha ‘throat, neck’; Thangmi ṭupuri ‘hat, cap’ and Classical Newar tupuli ‘a sort of head-gear’ (J) from Hindi or Maithili ṭopī ‘cap’; Thangmi ṭhai ‘place, location’ and Classical Newar ṭhāya ‘place’ (NB) are likely etymologically related to Nepalli ṭhāū ‘place’; Thangmi dudu ‘milk, woman’s breast’ and Classical Newar dudu ‘milk, the breast of a woman’ (J & NB) may be loaned from Nepali (or another neighbouring Indo-Aryan language) dud or dudh ‘milk, female breast, udder’; Thangmi dukila ‘common fig, Ficus carica’ and Classical Newar dubala ‘Ficus racemosa (formerly known as Ficus glomerata)’ may derive from Sanskrit udumbara ‘Ficus racemosa’; Thangmi sakalei ‘all, everything, everyone’ and Classical Newar śakala ‘everybody’, sakale ‘all’ (NB) and sakale ‘all’ (J) likely derive from a later reflex of Sanskrit sakala ‘whole’; Thangmi paṭasi ‘women’s traditional dress’ and Classical Newar paṭāsi ‘the lower garment’ (J) or paṭāse ‘a woman’s lower garment’ (NB) may derive from a later reflex of Sanskrit paṭah ‘cloth’ or Nepali pāṭ ‘flax, fibre’; Thangmi naka ‘old’ and Classical Newar naka ‘new’ (NB) are derived from a later reflex of Sanskrit nava ‘new, fresh’; Thangmi sevā ‘greetings, hello’ and Classical Newar sevā ‘a term of address to show respect to elders’ (NB) are derived from a later reflex of Sanskrit sevā ‘attendance (upon someone), servitude’; and finally Thangmi makar ‘monkey’ and Classical Newar markat ‘monkey’ (J) or mākarha ‘monkey’ (NB) are most probably loaned from Nepali markat ‘monkey’ and so ultimately derived from Sanskrit marakaṭa ‘monkey’.

As outlined above, Newar has a highly Sanskritised lexicon and it is thus not surprising that even words which might be considered part of the core lexicon, such as ‘very’, ‘milk’ or ‘breast’, have been loaned from Indo-Aryan. More surprising, however, is that Thangmi has also borrowed these terms, and furthermore, that the loans seem to have undergone similar phonological shifts in both languages. Examples are the reduplicative dudu ‘milk’ from Indo-Aryan dud or dudh, and the extra syllable added to the loan for ‘hat, cap’ as in Thangmi ṭupuri and Classical Newar tupuli, from Indo-Aryan ṭopī. 21)

The most plausible explanation for this similarity in loaned words is that one of the two languages borrowed words from a neighbouring Indic language which were then at a later date borrowed ‘once-removed’ into the second language. The sequence of these loans was most probably Classical Newar borrowing from Indo-Aryan and then Thangmi borrowing an Indic or Sanskritised lexical item from Newar. Thanks to the high level of literacy and the extensive written tradition of Newar civilisation, loans directly from Sanskrit into Classical Newar were commonplace. For Thangmi, how-

21) Although less phonologically persuasive, other possible shared Indo-Aryan loans may be Thangmi athu ‘joint(s) of the body’ and Classical Newar aṭhi or aṭhi ‘joints, articulations’ (NB), both perhaps from a later reflex of Sanskrit aṣṭhi ‘bone, joint’ or Hindi aṣṭhi ‘bone’ (McGregor 2002: 70), and Thangmi aṭhe ‘very’ and Classical Newar aṭi ‘very, exceedingly’ (J) which may have been loaned from Maithili, Nepali or Hindi aṭi ‘very, very much’.
ever, which remains to this day an unwritten language far from any urban centre of learning, direct loans from Sanskrit are distinctly unlikely. The transfer scenario outlined above would support the hypothesis that the Thangmi and Newar languages (and hence their speakers) were in close contact with one another from an early date. In the absence of such early contact, one would have expected Thangmi to borrow lexical items directly from Nepali (rather than from Sanskrit via Newar) when the Nepali language was brought to Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok by Nepali-speaking settlers.

5.3.3. Lexical correspondences specific to Thangmi and Newar

The final category comprises those lexical similarities which I believe to be shared by only Thangmi and Classical Newar which are probably not cognate with other Tibeto-Burman languages. I have resisted the temptation to order the lexical similarities into classes (such as animate nouns, body parts and verbs) since this would impose a further arbitrary hierarchical order on the data. As far as possible, I have followed the alphabetical order of the Newar dictionaries, thus facilitating cross-referencing for those interested readers.

Thangmi elepe ‘spleen’ is cognate with Classical Newar al-pe ‘spleen’ (J) and alape ‘spleen’ (NB), and Matisoff reconstructs *r-pay ‘spleen’ (2003: 208); Thangmi pin ‘fingernail’ may be cognate with Classical Newar ḍ ‘nail’ (NB); Thangmi ekate ‘alone’ is cognate with Classical Newar ekāta ‘alone’ (NB), the first syllable of both being cognate with and derived from Sanskrit eka ‘one, a, only, alone, single’; Thangmi kaṭasa ‘to quarrel’ closely resembles Classical Newar kacāda ~ kacāda ‘quarrel, dispute’ (NB); Thangmi kapale kosa ‘skull’ and Classical Newar kapāla kosa ‘skull’ (NB); Thangmi kasyu ‘boil, pimple’ and Classical Newar cāsu kacha ‘a pimple that itches’ (NB) or Classical Newar cāsu ‘boils’ (NB) are most probably cognate, as are Thangmi kimi ‘tape worm’ and Classical Newar kmi ‘hook worm’ (NB).

Other lexical correspondences may include Thangmi cyuku ‘ant’ and Classical Newar kumicā ‘white ant, termite’ (NB), Thangmi kosa ‘bone’ and Classical Newar kvase ~ kosa ‘bones’ (NB); Thangmi papasek ‘testicles’ and Classical Newar si-pā ‘the testicles’ (J) and kvāse ‘testicles’ (NB), Matisoff reconstructs *saw ‘testicles, virility’ (2003: 182); Thangmi ukhiŋ ‘dark’ and Classical Newar khīnu ‘dark, darkness’ (J) and khīmin ‘dark’ (NB); Thangmi gui ~ gui ‘thief’ and Classical Newar khu ‘thief’ (NB); and Thangmi khen ‘face’ and Classical Newar khen ‘face’ (NB). The Thangmi topicaliser guri may be cognate with Classical Newar guri ‘a classifier denoting place’ (NB); Thangmi naṭe ‘cheek’ resembles Classical Newar űṭal ‘cheek’ (J) or űṃṭārha ‘cheek’ and Modern Newar nyatāh ‘cheek’ (NB); Thangmi taṭakdu ‘sweet’ is most likely cognate with Classical Newar cāku ‘sweet’ (J) and cāku ‘sweet thing, molasses’ (NB); and Thangmi cime ‘hair’ is most likely cognate with Classical Newar cimilī=cimi ‘the hair (of the body)’ (J) and cimilisāṃ ‘body hair’ (NB), while Matisoff reconstructs *mil ~ *mul ~ *myal ‘hair (body)’ (2003: 602).
Other possible cognates are Thangmi *jakcho* ‘wheat’ and Classical Newar *cho* ‘wheat’ (J) or *co* ~ *cho* ‘wheat’ (NB); the Thangmi affable suffix *che* and Classical Newar *che* ‘2.s. you (used mostly in addressing superiors or equals)’ (J) or *cha* ‘you’ (NB); Thangmi *cacha jyamari* ‘granddaughter’s husband’ and Classical Newar *chaya jiri* ‘granddaughter’s husband’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *chyosa ~ thosa* ‘to send’ and Classical Newar *chaya* ‘to send, to dispatch’ (J) or *choye ~ choya* ‘to send’ (NB); Thangmi *jukun* ‘only’ and Classical Newar *jak* ‘only’ (J) or *juko* ‘only’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *chyosa ~ ṭhosa* ‘to send’ and Classical Newar *choya* ‘to send, to dispatch’ (J) or *choye ~ choya* ‘to send’ (NB); Thangmi *cacha jyamari* ‘granddaughter’s husband’ and Classical Newar *chaya jīri* ‘granddaughter’s husband’ (NB); the Thangmi noun *jet* ‘work’ and Classical Newar *jyā* ‘work’ (NB); and Thangmi *jyaŋga ṭeŋ* ‘bird’ and Classical Newar *jhaṃgara* ‘a bird’ (NB). Another set of lexical similarities shared by the two languages includes Thangmi *thumsa* ‘to bury’ and Classical Newar ṭhunā ~ ṭhunē ‘to bury’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *ṭhemsā* ‘to destroy, to break down’ and Classical Newar *ṭhoṇa ~ thone* ‘to demolish, to destroy’ (NB); Thangmi *daŋ* ‘year’ and Classical Newar ḍa ~ ḍam ‘year’ and Modern Newar ḍam ‘year’ (NB); the Thangmi male clan *ḍaŋguri* and Classical Newar *ḍhaṅguri* ‘a Newar caste’ (NB); the Thangmi kinship term *tete* ‘elder sister’ and Classical Newar *tatā* ‘an elder sister’ (J) or *tatāju* ‘elder sister (hon.)’ (NB); Thangmi *thope* ‘broom, sweep’ and Classical Newar *tuphe* ‘a broom’ (J) and *tuphi* ‘broomstick, brush’ (NB); Thangmi *du* ‘tiger, leopard, wild cat’ and Classical Newar *dhu* ‘tiger’ (J) and *tedu* ‘leopard’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *ṭhisa* ‘to touch’ and Classical Newar *ṭhiye* ‘to touch’ (NB); Thangmi *thumsa* ‘to immerse’ and Classical Newar *ṭhune* ‘to immerse’ (NB); the Thangmi shamanic and ritual ethnonym for their own ethnic group *thani* and Classical Newar *thāni* ‘one kind of caste’ (NB), and the Thangmi noun *ton* ‘home-made beer’ and Classical Newar *ṭhvaṃ* ‘beer’ (NB).

Further Thangmi-Classical Newar lexical correspondences are as follows: Thangmi *duḥṇ bisa* ‘to enter (inside)’ and Classical Newar *duṃbiya* ‘to enter, to offer’ (NB); Thangmi *dudu pur* ‘nipple of the breast’ and Classical Newar *dudu pipīri* ‘nipple of the breast’ (NB); Thangmi *nama* ‘with’ and Classical Newar *na* ‘with’ (NB); the Thangmi plural suffix *pali* and Classical Newar *paṇi* ‘plural suffix’ (NB); Thangmi *pavan* ‘sour’ and Classical Newar *pānu* ‘sour’ (NB); the Thangmi transitive verb *palsa* ‘to chop’ and Classical Newar *pāle* ‘to cut, to behead’ (NB); Thangmi *priṇ* ‘outside’ and Classical Newar *pi ~ piṃ* ‘outside’ (NB); the Thangmi transitive verb *busa* ‘to cover, fill’ and Classical Newar *puya* ‘to cover, to fill’ (NB), while Matisoff reconstructs *pun* ‘wrap, cover, wear’ (2003: 495); the Thangmi noun *puya* ‘seed, seedling’ and Classical Newar *pu* ‘seed’ (J) or *pū* ‘seed’ and *pūvā* ‘paddy seedlings’ (NB); and the related Thangmi form *puyapasa* ‘grains and seeds’ and Classical Newar *puvāpāṣā* ‘grains and seeds’ (NB); the Thangmi kinship term *pairi* ‘elder brother’s wife’ and Classical Newar *pair-abe* ‘elder brother’s wife’ (NB).

Other plausible lexical correspondences are Thangmi *pokole* ‘knee’ and Classical Newar *paules* ‘knee’ (NB); Thangmi *paṭu* ‘pumpkin’ and Classical Newar *pāṭi* ‘a kind of pumpkin’ (J) or *phatase ~ phatse* ‘pumpkin’ (NB); Thangmi *phaṣa* ‘wind,

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22) As intriguing as this definition is, no supplementary information is provided.
23) Both may be derived from Nepali *pharsī* ‘pumpkin’.
storm, air’ and Classical Newar phas ‘air, wind’ (J) or phasa ‘wind’ (NB); Thangmi pebu ‘field’ and Classical Newar bu ‘a field’ (J) or bū ‘a field’ (NB); Thangmi bosa ‘to grow’ and Classical Newar boye ‘to grow, to come up’ (NB); the Thangmi verb mraṃsa ‘to swell’ and Classical Newar maṃ-gwo ‘swelling’ (J) and māna ~ māne ‘to swell’ (NB); the Thangmi noun maṇa ~ maṇi ‘bread’ and Classical Newar mādhe ‘bread’ (NB); Thangmi mesyaca ‘buffalo calf’ and Classical Newar mesacā ‘buffalo calf’ (NB) (a composite form particular to Thangmi and Newar, although the constituent elements are well-attested throughout Tibeto-Burman); Thangmi moṭe ‘soybean’ and Classical Newar mvāca ‘soybean’ (NB); and the Thangmi transitive verb rasa ‘to bring’ and Classical Newar rāsa ∼ rāye ‘to seize, catch’ (NB).


6. Concluding thoughts on the genetic affinity of Thangmi

Section §5.3.3 above contains over seventy likely cognates between Thangmi and Classical Newar, many of which may ultimately turn out to be derived from attested Proto-Tibeto-Burman roots, but which, at any rate, appear to have a shared history at an earlier stage of both Thangmi and Newar. However, even if half of the above proposed lexical similarities between Thangmi and Classical Newar turn out to be reconstructable to Proto-Tibeto-Burman, over 35 lexical similarities remain. As mentioned at the outset, Shafer’s argument for Thangmi and Barām relatedness was based on nine lexical similarities shared by the two languages, seven of which may be immediately discounted as they are widely attested in other Tibeto-Burman languages. Even though only two of Shafer’s proposed similarities remain, his hunch of a special relationship between Thangmi and Barām has been corroborated by more recent research by van Driem and myself. While many Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal have some lexical cognates with either Thangmi or Classical Newar, to my knowledge there is no other language which shares as many lexical correspondences with Thangmi and Clas-
sical Newar as these two languages do with one another.

I conclude as I started, by asking a question. Should the similarity between Thangmi and Classical Newar simply be put down to borrowing, or does it reflect a deeper genetic relationship? If one opts for the more cautious explanation, explaining the similarities through cultural contact and lexical borrowing, then the question remains as to how the speakers of these two distinct languages could have exchanged so much so long ago. If, on the other hand, one chooses to conclude that the lexical similarities shown above are an indication of a close genetic relationship between Thangmi and Newar, then sound historical evidence must be produced to support this suggestion.

It will be interesting to further examine the linguistic evidence from the Dolakhā dialect of Newar when it becomes available. Genetti has suggested that many of the Thangmi lexical items presented here have clear cognates with Dolakhā Newar (personal communication, February 2001), which is to be expected given the socio-cultural links between the two groups that I outlined above in section §3. Genetti writes of Dolakhā as a ‘centre for trade and commerce’ (1994: 8), but also of the ‘relative isolation of Dolakhā as compared to Kathmandu’ (1994: 8). It is precisely this isolation that van Driem sees as crucial in determining the relative antiquity of the Dolakhā dialect of Newar:

the original Newar grammatical system remains more intact in the language of the descendants of the early Newar mercantile colonists in Dolakhā than in the innovative prestige dialects spoken in Kathmandu and Pāṭan. (2001: 766)

On account of the geographical location of the town of Dolakhā, Genetti suggests that the ‘Dolakha people would have had more contact with the Kiranti peoples of the east’ (1994: 8), a particularly intriguing statement in light of the verbal agreement morphology shared by Kiranti languages and Thangmi on the one hand, and the lexical correspondences described above between Thangmi and Newar on the other. While Genetti dates the split between the Kathmandu and Dolakhā dialects of Newar to a ‘minimum of seven hundred years ago, and possibly much longer’ (1994: 8), van Driem boldly suggests that the ‘divergence between the Kathmandu Valley dialects and Dolakhā Newar may perhaps be datable to a period of unrest between 750 and

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24) Tej Ratna Kansakar, a leading scholar of the Newar language and Tibeto-Burman linguistics, is unconvinced by the argument for a close genetic relationship between Thangmi and Newar. He suggests that the linguistic and cultural links between the two groups are most likely the result of ‘contact-induced changes’ and that there is historical evidence to show that the Newar, wherever they settled, sought the assistance of ‘various caste groups to fulfil religious, social and ritual functions’ for them. Other than the Thangmi of Dolakhā, a further example Kansakar offers is of Tibetans in their native Lhasa, who were conscripted to play a ritual role in Newar festivals (personal communication, 18 September, 2000). Kansakar’s position may in part be a reflection of his status as a prominent member of the Newar scholarly community and thus not divorced from a certain ‘Newaro-centricity’ prevalent in elite Kathmandu Newar circles.

The next step in the analysis of the Thangmi-Newar link will be to determine whether there are any phonological correspondences between the two languages, thereby taking this study to a deeper level beyond the inspection and comparison of surface forms. Only then will we learn more about the essence of the relationship between Thangmi and Newar, and the relative position of both languages in the Stammbaum of Tibeto-Burman.

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References


25) To paraphrase van Driem, the ‘current impression is that the older the Newar vocabulary, the more specific lexical correspondences can be identified with Thangmi and Barâm’ (2001: 761).
CONTENTS

Articles

Children’s Voices from Kathmandu and Lalitpur, Nepal  …… GELLNER, David N. 1

A Tonal Analysis of Verbs of the Mrangi Dialect of Jita
………………………………………………………………………………………………. KAGAYA, Ryohei 49

Newar-Thangmi Lexical Correspondences and
the Linguistic Classification of Thangmi  ……………………………… TURIN, Mark 97

Source Materials and Remarks

65 Songs in the Bassari Society  ……………………………………. YAMADA, Shigechika 121

The Future of the Kisafwa Language:
A Case Study of Ituha Village in Tanzania …………………. MSANJILA, Yohana P 161

Not “Divided Places”, But “A Living Space”:
Chinese Women on the Thai-Malaysian Border …………. TAKAMURA, Kazue 173

Political Culture of the Safavid Dynasty Reflected in the
Third Volume of Afzal al-tavārīkh: A Preliminary Study
………………………………………………………………………………………………. MAEDA, Hirotake 193