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*Report on the relationship between Yolmo and Kagate*

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### ABSTRACT

Yolmo and Kagate are two closely related Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal. This paper provides a general overview of these two languages, including several dialects of Yolmo. Based on existent sources, and my own fieldwork, I present an ethnographic summary of each group of speakers, and the linguistic relationship between their mutually intelligible dialects. I also discuss a set of key differences that have been observed in regards to these languages, including the presence or absence of tone contours, verb stems and honorific lexical items. Although Yolmo and Kagate could be considered dialects of the same language, there are sufficient historical and political motivations for considering them as separate languages. Finally, I look at the status of the “Kyirong-Kagate” sub-branch of Tibetic languages in Tournadre’s (2005) classification, and argue that for reasons discussed in this paper it should instead be referred to as “Kyirong-Yolmo.”

### KEYWORDS

Tibeto-Burman, Central Bodic, Yolmo, Kagate, lexicon

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# *Report on the relationship between Yolmo and Kagate*

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## **1 Introduction**

Yolmo and Kagate are often mentioned as being related languages, and in this paper I will outline what this relationship consists of. Yolmo (ISO 639-3 SCP) and Kagate (ISO 639-3 SYW) are two Central Tibetan languages of Nepal, which are related enough to be considered dialects of the same language. Kagate speakers migrated from the original Yolmo-speaking area at around the same time as other groups who also speak Yolmo languages, and only through circumstances of history did their language come to be seen as distinct from Yolmo. Today, there are a number of mutually intelligible dialects of Yolmo and Kagate spoken throughout Nepal.

Tournadre's (2005) classification of Tibetic languages subcategorises Kagate and Yolmo in a group with other languages including Kyirong and Tsum. In this paper I will demonstrate that while this is a valid grouping, the name given to this group, 'Kyirong-Kagate', is not appropriate. Instead, I will show that for historical, linguistic and political reasons it is better to refer to this group of languages as Kyirong-Yolmo.

This paper draws together previous research on Yolmo and Kagate (§2) before tracing the history of migration away from the Yolmo-speaking areas (§3). I then present basic ethnographic information on Yolmo speakers of the Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok districts (§3.1), the smaller groups of Yolmo in Lamjung (§3.2) and Ilam (§3.3) and the Kagate speakers of Ramechhap district (§3.4). Next, I look at the historical and social importance of the different language and group names used (§4), before I look at the features of linguistic similarity and innovation within the group (§5) and difference (§6) that have been observed to date. Finally, I return to a discussion of the naming of the Kyirong-Yolmo sub-grouping of Tibetic languages (§7).

## **2 Previous research**

Extensive documentation of Yolmo was undertaken by Anna Marie Hari over a twenty-year period. This has resulted in the publication of a large and comprehensive Yolmo-English-Nepali dictionary (Hari and Lama 2004) as well as a short grammar (Hari 2010). Yolmo has also been the subject of several anthropological studies. Graham Clarke wrote a series of papers on social structure and religion in Yolmo life (Clarke 1980a, 1980b, 1983, 1985, 1990, 1991), and more recently Robert Desjarlais has written two monographs on the Yolmo people of Helambu, one on shamanic healing practices (1992a) and the other looking at life, death and the senses (2003), as well as a series of articles on similar themes (1989a, 1989b, 1991a, 1991b, 1992b, 2000). Peters and Price-Williams (1980) also briefly discusses fieldwork with Yolmo shamans. Bishop (1989, 1993,

1998) has looked at the changing lifestyle of the Yolmo of the Melamchi area and the reduction in grazing agriculture, as well as the migratory patterns of present-day residents of the area. Bishop refers to the Yolmo speakers as Sherpas, however she also acknowledges their difference from the Sherpa of the Solu-Khumbu area. Bishop has also been involved in the production of a documentary film (Bishop and Bishop 1997) that also explores these themes. The changing lifestyle of the Helambu Yolmo in recent years has also been examined by Pokharel (2005).

The earliest reference to Kagate is in Grierson's (1909/1966) linguistic survey of India, which is much earlier than the first mentions of Yolmo, which was not discussed as a distinct language until the anthropological work of Clarke in the 1980s. Bonnerjea's (1936) survey of the phonology of several Tibeto-Burman languages, also makes mention of Kagate. He refers to speakers as living in "the east of Nepal" and in Darjeeling, India. An initial look at the lexical items used in Grierson and Bonnerjea's work indicates that it is, at the least, a cognate of what is identified today as Kagate. As I will discuss below, the name Kagate is related to a profession-based status, so it should not be expected that all references to "Kagate" definitely have an origin in the Yolmo language speaking community. Although Kagate has a much smaller speaker population than Yolmo it has, until recently, received much more attention from linguistic researchers thanks to the attention Grierson's survey brought to it. Höhlig and Hari (1976) produced a detailed phonemic summary of the language, and Höhlig (1978) went on to publish a paper on speaker orientation. Höhlig also created a typewritten Kagate-English-German-Nepali dictionary. I have started a project with the Kagate speakers who have this dictionary to digitise it and make it more accessible for both speakers of Kagate and the wider community. Nishi (1978) has published a paper on Kagate tone and register as well as a survey paper (1979) on a range of languages, including Kagate, drawing on Höhlig and Hari's (1976) data. Kagate has also been discussed in Goldstein, Tsarong and Beall (1983).

Lamjung Yolmo has been the focus of my own documentation work, which I commenced in 2009. This previously unattested dialect has been the focus of my PhD research, which includes a grammatical sketch and detailed discussion of copula verbs, question and reported speech structures (Gawne 2013). There is also a short dictionary of the language (Gawne 2011a).

There is currently no known descriptive work published on Ilam Yolmo. Thokar (2009) presented a summary of work done in the Ilam district as part of the linguistic survey of Nepal (LiSuN). I have subsequently talked to people who assisted in that survey, and independent sources that confirm that there are a number of villages in Ilam where Yolmo is spoken. Of the dialects discussed in this article, it is the one that we currently know the least about.

### **3 Related dialects—a story of migration**

The story of Yolmo and Kagate is one of migration. Yolmo speakers of Ilam and Lamjung, as well as the Kagate of Ramechhap all trace their origins to migration away from the Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok districts in the last century or so. Although it is not known why these groups left the original settlements in the Helambu and Melamchi valleys, it would appear that this was a way to either reduce population pressures in the area, or for those migrating to seek new opportunities. It may have been the case that speakers who moved to Ramechhap and Lamjung were non-land-owning skilled workers, as I discuss below, which may have been the motivation for migration.

It appears that there has been almost no contact between these groups until recently. The rise in road travel and affordable telecommunications has helped to alter this. In recent years the Yolmo speakers of the Lamjung District have had contact with Yolmo speakers from other areas through the Yolmo Society, which was formalised in 1998. This society has a branch in Besisahar - the capital of the Lamjung district - and distributes calendars and organises occasional events.

As can be seen from the map below (Figure 1), the groups who migrated spread out across different parts of Nepal, all of which are at lower altitudes than the original villages in the Helambu and Melamchi valleys.

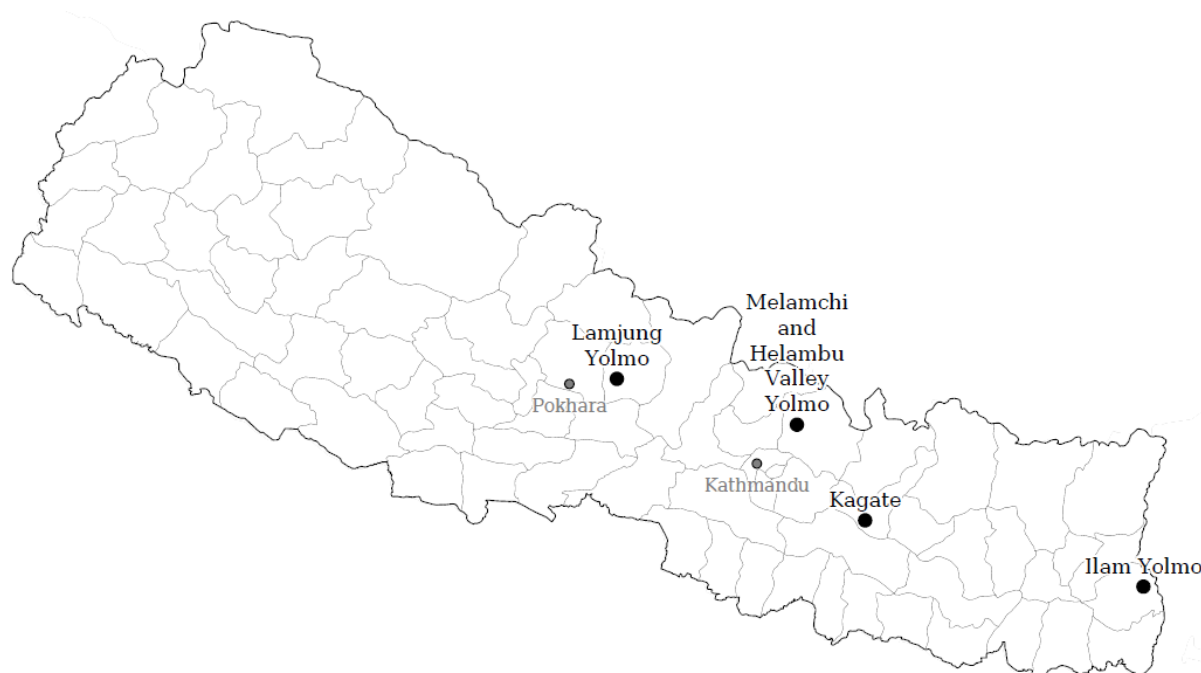


Figure 1. A map of Nepal with the different Yolmo varieties marked

In the sections below I present ethnographic information for each group of speakers.

### *3.1 Yolmo of the Helambu and Melamchi Valleys*

This is the largest group of Yolmo speakers, residing in the original area from which the other groups migrated. Spread along the Helambu and Melamchi valleys that crosscut the Nuwakot and Sindhupalchok districts, there are over 10,000 speakers of Yolmo in this area (Hari and Lama 2004: 702-03). This population traces their origins to an older migration event. Some two hundred to three hundred years ago their ancestors, Buddhist Lama males, made the journey from Kyirong, in what is now Southwest Tibet, across the Himalayas to settle in the Helambu and Melamchi valleys, marrying with women from the local Tamang communities (Clarke 1980a: 83, van Driem 2001: 864, Desjarlais 2003: 7). There is a great deal of lexical and grammatical affinity between Kyirong (Huber 2002, Hedlin 2011) and Yolmo, which provides linguistic evidence to support this history.

The Yolmo speakers in this area live in family units, and until recently grazed buffalo. Their houses are much more in the traditional Tibetan style than those of speakers who have migrated to

lower-lying areas of Lamjung and Ilam. While they practice Buddhism of the Nyingma school, there is also a tradition of uninstitutionalised non-Buddhist religious practices that has been discussed in detail by Desjarlais as a form of shamanism (1992a, 2003).

It is worth observing that the Yolmo of this area have had long-term close contact with the Tamang speakers who also live in the area. This was discussed by Clarke in detail (1980a, 1980b, 1985) and also in Hall's (1982) study of near-by Tamang groups. This contact has traditionally taken the form of Tamang women marrying into the Yolmo villages, and means there is a close interrelationship between the Yolmo and Tamang speakers of the area. This is not considered a relationship of equals, with the Yolmo speakers generally observed to be the traditionally dominant social group (Clarke 1980a, Desjarlais 1992). Recent work by Owen-Smith and Donohue (2012) has looked at the linguistic influence that Tamang may have had on the development of Yolmo as a separate language to Kyirong. The social and linguistic relationship between Yolmo and Tamang is certainly worth further investigation.

Hari's (2010, Hari and Lama 2004) work on Yolmo has mainly focused on the Melamchi Valley area in the East, specifically in the villages of Sermathang and Chhimi. She observes that there is some dialect variation, and indicates some lexical differences throughout the dictionary. We do not know the extent of the dialect variation found, although Hari notes that they are mutually intelligible, with the Tärkeghāyng village dialect being the most distinctly different in Hari's observations (2010:5). The Melamchi Valley variety is considered more prestigious according to Hari (2010:4).

Some speakers who migrated away from the Melamchi and Helambu areas recall the names of villages their ancestors are said to have come from. Hari (2010: 1) reports that Kagate speakers refer to the Pawa Kohmba area, and Yolmo speakers in Lamjung have told me that their families originally came from Mane Kharka and Thola Kharka. Mane Kharka is further east of Sermathang, separated by a valley, indicating that we might expect there to be differences between Lamjung Yolmo and the Melamchi Valley variety. Thola Kharka is not apparent on any maps, but given that *thóla* means 'above' in Yolmo, it may have been a separate settlement in the Mane Kharka area. I have still yet to account for the location of Pawa Kohmba.

### *3.2 Yolmo of the Helambu and Melamchi Valleys*

There are at least 6 villages of Yolmo speakers in Lamjung district, as well as a sizable population in Besisahar. There are around 700 speakers of Yolmo in this area, with no major variation in language use between these villages. The area is heavily agricultural and surrounding villages are populated by Buddhist Gurungs and Tamangs as well as smaller numbers of Chetri and Brahmin (Hindu). Yolmo speakers in Lamjung generally agree that migration from the central Yolmo area took place around five to six generations ago, although there is no definitive date. One 92-year-old (now living in the Terai), one of the eldest remaining speakers, says that it was his grandparents' generation who moved, so we can assume that it was around a century ago that speakers settled in the area.

Although I have found little documented evidence to support the oral history of the Yolmo speakers in Lamjung, there is corroboration in the field diaries of legendary anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. In 1957 von Fürer-Haimendorf spent a period of time in the prosperous Gurung village of Ghalegaun, which is one of the highest villages of the area near the Yolmo villages and a regional centre. He recorded that "[o]n the land of Kapurgaun there are three

Tamang settlements, only some 25 years ago... [t]he Tamangs came from the east of the Nepal valley” (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 89). It is probable that the Yolmo speakers in the area were referred to as Tamang at some point; indeed, the Kagate speakers of Ramechhap have been noted as historically referring to themselves as Tamang when talking to outsiders (Höhlig and Hari 1976: 1). Von Fürer-Haimendorf’s report would place the migration some time around 1932, whereas the report of the 92-year-old Yolmo speaker I interviewed would put it around 1920 at the earliest (as he was born in Lamjung), and possibly earlier.

Further on von Fürer-Haimendorf’s (1957: 306) notes that there are “Lamas” residing in Maling, who were quite different from Gurung Lamas, and came across from “Yelmu” [sic] three generations earlier. He reports that some twenty to twenty-five households migrated but by his report there were now around 120, and they still spoke the Yelmu language. It is possible is that von Fürer-Haimendorf received two different reports on the same community of Yolmo speakers, who were sometimes also considered to be Tamang because of their social standing. With so few written records it is unlikely we will ever know for certain. Von Fürer-Haimendorf’s report also indicates that the migration event was not an immediate exodus from the original language area, but a slower process where more and more families came after an initial wave of settlers.

Unlike the Yolmo living in the Helambu area, the people of Lamjung do not maintain a culture of shamanism, although they still practice institutionalized Nyingma Buddhism. They are also much less likely to wear traditional Tibetan-style ethnic dress, and have not maintained traditional Yolmo-language songs, nor the traditional dance style. Instead, the women wear Nepali *kurta* or *lungi* and the men wear Western shirts and trousers, and they mostly sing and dance to popular Nepali music. As Lamjung speakers of Yolmo become more aware of their roots they are beginning to embrace more aspects of their language and culture. At least one Lamjung Yolmo speaker creates songs in his native language, and another speaker in Besisahar is reported to have started a group for people to perform traditional *càpru* <zhabs bro> dance, including wearing traditional Tibetan dress. It is still not entirely clear whether this was a practice maintained by a small number of Yolmo in the area, or a revival acquired from other Tibetan groups in the area, but there is certainly a growing interest in further reviving these practices, especially for cultural events and weddings. Many people still participate in agriculture, and the production of woven bamboo baskets. Today these are mostly made for people’s own use and for sale in nearby villages, previously this was one of the main forms of industry for Yolmo speakers in this area. Traditionally they made paper as well for export to Tibet.

### 3.3 *Yolmo of Ilam*

It has also been reported that there is a group of Yolmo speakers in Ilam that migrated around the same time as those who now live in Lamjung (Thokar 2009). This report was part of the larger Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LiSuN), which involves a general socio-linguistic survey, rather than specifically collecting linguistic data. Although the results of this survey have not been formally published, Professor Novel Kishore Rai (p.c., 2012) who oversaw the survey confirmed that there are around 2000 speakers of Yolmo in a concentrated area in the Ilam district around Nayabazar area. This would mean that there are more Yolmo speakers in Ilam than in either Lamjung or Ramechhap. Yolmo speakers in this area appear to have stronger economic status, being mostly business owners. It is possible that this occurred after migration, or that the Yolmo speakers who migrated to Ilam were already in a better position than the other groups of speakers.

Children are not acquiring this variety of Yolmo as they are in the other districts. It is also not recognised as a variety on Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons and Fennig 2013) even though other small varieties such as Lamjung Yolmo are. As yet there is no documentation of Ilam Yolmo.

### *3.4 Kagate*

At about the same time as the Lamjung group migrated from the Helambu and Melamchi valley areas, a similar group moved east to the Ramechhap district, and their language is now referred to as Kagate (Höhlrig and Hari 1976). Their stories are almost identical, except that while Lamjung is around 100 kilometres west of the Helambu valley, Ramechhap district, now the home of the Kagate is a similar distance to the east. Both groups left at around the same time (5-6 generations ago), in similar numbers.

Like the Yolmo of Lamjung, Kagate speakers traditionally made woven bamboo items, as well as paper. The Nepali term for paper is *kagate*, and both the Kagate of Ramechhap and the Yolmo of Lamjung have been referred to exonymously as Kagate. The profession of paper maker is considered to be a low caste occupation in Nepal. Yolmo in the Melamchi area were recognised as non-enslavable alcohol drinkers in the Nepali civil code Muluki Ain of 1854 (Gellner 1995), while it appears that the Lamjung Yolmo and Kagate populations were treated more like the Tamangs that they are sometimes referred to as, and treated as enslavable alcohol drinkers, one of the lowest of the “clean” castes (Holmberg 1989: 26). There are still memories amongst older people in the Lamjung community of Yolmo speakers being unable to enter houses in the Gurung speaking villages, which reflects this lower status. Whether this is a remnant of their historic social position within Helambu society, or came about as a result of their travels, has not been established. Perhaps it was the non-landowning skilled paper-makers who left their original settlements to move to Lamjung and Ramechhap and had to content with a new social status in a new place.

From what I have observed, Kagate speakers have retained more traditional stories than the Yolmo speakers of Lamjung. Older speakers also have some memories of traditional songs, although no one today is proficient at playing traditional musical instruments. Kagate speakers still use the language with their children.

Kagate people that I have spoken to are proud of their language, and its name, and now often refer to themselves as Syuba, the word for paper in their own language. This is a very different attitude to Lamjung Yolmo speakers, who are now embarrassed by the social-status allusions of the term “Kagate”. Speakers of the Ramechhap variety see their language and culture as being separate from that of Yolmo, but closely related. While Kagate is mutually intelligible with Yolmo, and from a linguistic perspective can be treated as a dialect of Yolmo, I believe that there is nothing to be gained for Kagate speakers in terms of their self-identification in removing their language from the ISO 639-3 list.

### *3.5 Other Yolmo groups?*

Bishop (1998: 14, 24) makes passing references to a group of Yolmo speakers in the village of Siran Danda in the Ghorka region, which is not too far from Lamjung. According to Bishop these speakers moved to the area with a Yolmo Lama some time in the mid 20th century. People in the area still spoke Yolmo when Bishop met them, however they married with Tamangs and other ethnic groups in the area. Although there are no other records to support this observation, it does indicate that there may be other diaspora groups of Yolmo speakers in Nepal, as well as in expat

communities in India and now also in the United Kingdom. As Bishop (1998) notes, the ecology in the Melamchi and Helambu valleys does not have the capacity to sustain a large population, which may account for these waves of migration away from the area over time.

#### 4 Language names

The various names given to Yolmo-speaking groups at different times gives an insight into their social status. The name *Helambu* is said to be a corruption of the name of the language and cultural group *Yolmo* (Hari 2010: 1), although Goldstein (1975: 69) and Clarke (1980b: 4.) give a less commonly agreed with etymology, deriving from a combination of the words *hee* (potato) and *laphug* (radish), a supposed reference to the main crops of the area. The people and their language are still often referred to as Helambu Sherpa, a reference to their cultural similarity to the relatively prestigious Sherpa of the Solu-Khumbu region, with whom the Yolmo people aligned themselves in the 1970s and 1980s (Clarke 1980a). With the rise of interest in smaller cultural groups in Nepal since the introduction of democracy the Yolmo people no longer identify as Sherpa and see themselves as being a distinct cultural unit (Desjarlais 2003: 8). There are also orthographic variations on the name Yolmo; it is also often written *Yohlmo* or *Hyolmo*, reflecting the low tone of the word (Hari 2010: 1).

The speakers of Yolmo in Lamjung have been referred to by other ethnic groups in the area as *Kagate*, like the speakers in Ramechhap – unsurprising given their historical occupation. In his notes, von Fürer-Haimendorf observes that the Tamangs of the area (although he most likely means the Yolmo group) “are sometimes described as ‘Kagate Bhote’” (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 278),<sup>1</sup> reflecting their occupation. Even today Yolmo in Lamjung is occasionally referred to as *Kagate Bhoti* although this is considered pejorative, even by non-Yolmo speakers. With a greater sense of their historical relationship to the Yolmo of the Helambu and Melamchi valleys, Yolmo speakers in Lamjung have sought to reassert an identity that does not have a historically negative caste basis.

Members of the Ramechhap Kagate group I have spoken to are proud of their name and their heritage. This may be the result of the linguistic interest shown in their language by Höhlig and Hari in the 1970s, or because the conversion of a small but sizable number of speakers from Buddhism to Christianity means that they no longer feel the stigma of the occupation-based name. The Kagate of Ramechhap also refer to themselves internally as *Syuba*, which, like *Kagate*, also means paper, but in their own language. Although many speakers are comfortable with the term *Kagate*, even Ethnologue (Lewis et al. 2013) now acknowledge *Kagate Bhote* as pejorative.

To complicate the relationship between Yolmo and Kagate, earlier anthropological work by Clarke (1980a: 79) and Desjarlais (1992b: xiii) also referred to Helambu Valley Yolmo people as speaking Kagate, although as Hari (Hari and Lama 2004: 701) notes, this should not be taken too seriously as there was little ethnographic work at that point that established Yolmo as a separate group to Kagate.

It is possible that there are other groups that have been given the exonym *Kagate*. Therefore it is not a particularly definitive or differentiating name. Similarly the people of Lamjung, Ramechhap and Helambu are often referred to as Lama, and their language referred to as or *Lama Bhasa* in Nepali (*bhasa* being the Nepali word for language) or *pèepa tám* (‘Tibetan people’ and

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhote* means ‘people of Tibetan origin’ (Adhikary 2007: 270).

‘language’ in Yolmo) – although this is related to their Buddhist faith and is a term used for, and by, many other Buddhist groups as well.

## **5 Similarity of dialects**

In this section I will place these dialects in their larger context by demonstrating how existing literature aligns them with Kyirong (§5.1). I will then focus on the similarities of Lamjung Yolmo, Kagate and the Yolmo spoken in the Melamchi and Helambu valleys. There is currently no linguistic data for Ilam Yolmo. I have regularised all orthographic conventions in the representation of data to make comparison easier (discussed in the appendix). I will first look at lexical similarity (§5.2) before turning to grammatical features including the evidential system (§5.3).

### *5.1 Relationship to Kyirong*

Hedlin (2011) has already demonstrated that Kyirong and Yolmo are closely related, here I note some of the more readily observable similarities. He notes that they share stronger lexical affinity than either do with Standard Tibetan (Hedlin 2011: 12–13). Hedlin also observes that they also share a number of phonological innovations including an absence of word final glottal stops found in Standard Tibetan (2011: 20) and compensatory vowel lengthening for coda deletion (Hedlin 2011: 28–29).

Syntactically, Kyirong and Yolmo feature prenominal determiners (Hedlin 2011: 139). Yolmo and Kyirong also show innovation in the use of *kal-* as the generic verb ‘to go’ (Hedlin 2011: 121), which is likely related to the more specific Standard Tibetan *brgyal* ‘to cross’. This evidence supports Tournadre’s (2005) argument that we should include Yolmo and Kyirong in the same group within the larger Central Tibetan grouping.

### *5.2 Lexical similarity between dialects*

Given their recent common history, we would expect a strong level of similarity between Yolmo spoken in Melamchi and those varieties spoken in the diaspora communities that have developed. Hari (2010: 1), who worked extensively with both Melamchi Yolmo and Kagate, observes that “to quite a large extent they are mutually intelligible dialects.” This assertion has been supported by my fieldwork. I have been present while speakers of Lamjung Yolmo and Kagate carried out an extended conversation using their own dialects, and Melamchi Valley speakers of Yolmo can understand a recorded story from a Lamjung speaker – although people did acknowledge that the other dialects were notably different.

Gawne (2010) presented a small-scale survey of the lexical similarity of the main branch of Melamchi Valley Yolmo, Lamjung Yolmo and Kagate following the method outlined in Blair (1990). All three have a very high lexical similarity. Kagate and Lamjung Yolmo have the highest lexical affinity at 88%, with Melamchi Valley Yolmo having an 85% affinity with Lamjung Yolmo and 79% with Kagate. Having done more research on these languages now I would say that the lexical affinities are probably even higher, as the original data contained fewer cognates than I now know exist.

This affinity is stronger than that between Yolmo and other Tibeto-Burman languages identified as sharing similarities according to Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons and Fennig 2013). Yolmo has a lexical similarity of 65% with Standard Tibetan and 61% with Sherpa. Also interesting to note is that Kagate and Lamjung Yolmo have a higher lexical affinity with each other than with the

main Yolmo language, which may lend weight to the folk history of their concurrent migration. Hedlin (2011: 12), using a different wordlist and methodology to Gawne (2010) and Lewis et al. (2013), observed 89% lexical similarity between Kyirong and Yolmo, compared to 83% similarity between Kyirong and Standard Tibetan and 79% similarity between Yolmo and Standard Tibetan. These numbers are higher than both other sets of studies, but still points to a larger trend wherein the various Yolmo groups are closest in lexical similarity, after that they are closer to Kyirong, followed by other members of the Central Tibetan group, including Standard Tibetan and Sherpa.

One particular feature that makes the Yolmo dialects more similar to each other than other varieties is that they have lost the front rounded vowels *y* (high close), *ø* (mid-close), and the front unrounded vowel *ɛ* (mid-open) found in Kyirong. This is discussed further in Hedlin (2011: 32) and can be seen in the wordlist below (Appendix 1). Another feature that makes Yolmo distinct from Kyirong is that there are only two tone levels in Yolmo (Hari 2010, Gawne 2013), while Huber (2005) posits three for Kyirong. While I discuss in §6.1 that there is some variation in the analysis of Yolmo tone, the absence of the mid tone from Yolmo does create a point of distinction between it and Kyirong, with which it otherwise shares a great deal of similarity.

### 5.3 Grammatical similarity between dialects

As well as a strong lexical affinity, there are many points of grammatical similarity between the three dialects of Melamchi Yolmo, Lamjung Yolmo and Kagate. Instead of focusing on features that are similar to those found in other Tibetic languages, I wish to focus on two features that appear to be innovations from Kyirong. Description of basic features of Yolmo grammar can be found in Hari (2010) and Gawne (2013).

The first is that there are a subset of verbs that take dative subjects. This is for internal state verbs, and is most likely an innovation modelled on Nepali, which has a similar subset of verbs that occur in the same syntactic structure (Acharya 1991: 150). Verbs that take dative subjects include *kà* ‘like’, *éé* ‘know’, and description of states like *tóoba* ‘hungry’. I give an example from Lamjung Yolmo using my own data, and Melamchi Valley Yolmo from (Hari 2010) below:

(1)

- a) *mò=la*      *tóoba*      *yèto*  
3SG.F=DAT    hunger    COP.DUB  
‘She is probably hungry.’ (AL 100929-01)

- b) *ɲà=la*      *hé*      *kà-en*  
I=DAT    potatoes    like-CUST.PRS  
‘I like potatoes.’ (Hari 2010: 43 ex. 34)

Hari (2010: 34) discusses this in relation to Melamchi Valley Yolmo, and I have observed the use of this form in both Yolmo and Kagate, indicating it is an innovation found in all of the varieties of Yolmo, and creating a syntactic point of difference with Kyirong.

In regards to the evidential system, all three dialects have a set of modal and evidential distinctions present in the copula verb paradigm, as well as a separate reported speech evidential particle (*lò*). As with Kyirong (Huber 2002: 134), all three dialects have a main distinction between

information that is known or assimilated, broadly within what Tournadre (2008) describes as “egophoric”, although the scope of the egophoric is broader in Yolmo (Gawne 2013). There is also a sensory evidential, which carries with it some degree of “new knowledge” dependent on use and context, in this regard it is very similar to other Central Tibetan languages. Unlike Standard Tibetan there is no form *red* or any cognate of it, which means that to some extent it is not unlike languages of the Western Tibetan area. I have summarised the copula system across all three dialects in the table below, giving only the affirmative forms so as to outline the semantic space. The forms are taken from Hari (2010: 49), Gawne (2013) and my own observations of Kagate. Note that not all varieties have all forms, as I discuss this below.

|                     | Egophoric               | Dubitative   | Perceptual evidence | General fact |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Equation            | <i>yìn/yìngen/yìmba</i> | <i>yìnɕo</i> | <i>(dùba)</i>       | –            |
| Existential present | <i>yè/yèba</i>          | <i>yèɕo</i>  | <i>dù</i>           | <i>ònge</i>  |
| past                | <i>yèke/yèba</i>        |              | <i>dùba</i>         |              |

Table 1. A generalisation of the Yolmo/Kagate copula systems

The first thing to note is that there is no indirect inference as in Kyirong (Huber 2002: 134). Instead the dubitative can be used to indicate inference if needed, although it is primarily a dubitative form marking epistemically weaker evidence. There are a number of innovations that also set the copula systems in this group of dialects apart from other varieties. The first is the specific past tense egophoric existential form *yèke*, a curious innovation given that *-ke/-ge* is the standard non-past marker on lexical verbs. The second is the broadening of the emphatic form of the perceptual *dùba* to equational contexts, although I have only observed this in the Lamjung variety to date. The final innovation is the general fact copula *ònge*. The general fact copula is used for statements of commonly known fact. The facts are usually attributes or properties of things. In (2) I demonstrate the general fact in contrast with the egophoric copula in the Lamjung variety, although the use in the other dialects is the same

(2)

- a) *dì kágati kyúrpu yè*  
 this lemon sour COP.EGO  
 ‘This lemon is sour.’ (AL 091016-02)

(3)

- b) *kágati kyúrpu ònge*  
lemon sour COP.GF

‘Lemons are sour.’ (AL 091016-02)

Unlike other copula verbs, it does not have an additional function as an auxiliary in a complex verb phrase. It is most likely derived from the lexical verb *òŋ* ‘to come’, although there is clearly some morphological reanalysis underway, as many speakers will leave the non-past tense marker on the verb when there is a negator prefix. It is likely that this is calqued from Tamang, which has an equivalent form in similar limited distribution (Owen-Smith and Donohue 2012).

There is some degree of variation between the dialects. For example, Hari (2010: 49) only observes *yèba* occurring with present-tense use, whereas I have also found it used in past-tense constructions. In Lamjung Yolmo only the *yimba* form of the egophoric equational is still used. With more detailed analysis of Kagate, it too may also exhibit its own variations on the known patterns.

## 6 Points of difference

This is by no means an exhaustive list of differences between the dialects of Yolmo and Kagate, but some of the differences I have observed in my fieldwork to date. In this section I will look at tone contours, verb stems, and honorific lexical items as examples of where we see some of the most salient differences. This section will mostly compare Lamjung Yolmo, which I have worked with the most extensively, and the Melamchi valley variety that was the focus of Hari’s (2010) work. Although there has been no documentation of the Ilam variety to include in this section, the distinctions I outline below give a good idea of the features that should be targeted in any description of that variety, or other varieties of Yolmo that may exist.

### 6.1 Tone contours

Tone is a feature of all Yolmo and Kagate varieties documented. Like many Central Tibetan, and tonal Western Tibetan languages this is a binary tonal system, which is different from the ternary system described by Huber (2002: 22–26) for Kyirong. This tone is located on the first syllable of a word, is either high or low, and is partly motivated by the initial consonant (if one is present). In the two Yolmo dialects low tone always occurs with voiced consonants (3), and high tone with aspirated consonants (4). It is therefore only the unvoiced, unaspirated consonant-initial, or vowel initial, words where minimal pairs distinguished only by tone are found (5). The three sets of examples below contain lexical items that are the same in Lamjung Yolmo and Melamchi Valley Yolmo:<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> High tone is marked with a rising diacritic over the initial vowel, and low tone is marked with a lowering diacritic. I have regularised the orthography across all varieties for ease of comparison. Examples taken from other sources have been cited, and examples from my own fieldwork are marked with the speaker initials and filename of the recording. Where possible, the Written Tibetan cognate has also been given.

- |     |              |               |        |
|-----|--------------|---------------|--------|
| (3) | <i>bù</i>    | ‘insect’      | <'bu>  |
|     | <i>ḑù</i>    | ‘grain’       | <'bru> |
| (4) | <i>tʰála</i> | ‘ash’         | <thal> |
|     | <i>tɕʰú</i>  | ‘water’       | <chu>  |
|     | <i>lʰá</i>   | ‘god’         | <lha>  |
| (5) | <i>kée</i>   | ‘voice/noise’ | <skad> |
|     | <i>kèe</i>   | ‘split’       | <gas>  |
|     | <i>pú</i>    | ‘body hair’   | <spu>  |
|     | <i>pù</i>    | ‘son’         | <bu>   |

Kagate patterns much the same, although Höhlig and Hari (1976: 39) give data to show that in aspirated voiceless consonants can have either low or high tone (6), and therefore only voiced consonants are predictable in taking low tone.

- |     |               |          |           |
|-----|---------------|----------|-----------|
| (6) | <i>tʰóŋ</i>   | ‘plough’ | <thong>   |
|     | <i>tʰòŋ</i>   | ‘see’    | <mthong>  |
|     | <i>cʰyòdo</i> | ‘lip’    | <mchu to> |

It would certainly be worth collecting more data on tone in Kagate to establish if it is all aspirated consonants that take both low and high tone. It should be possible to then compare this to the other dialects to ascertain if there is a pattern to this change. It may possibly be linked to the original preradicals or prefixes in Written Tibetan – note the presence of the initial *m-* for both ‘see’ and ‘lip’ above. If this were the case though, it would be unusual for this innovation to occur in one dialect some period after the loss of these initial clusters, given that Melamchi and Lamjung Yolmo, as well as Kyirong, exhibit consistent high tone with such forms.

Hari (2010; Hari and Lama 2004) describes the Melamchi Valley dialect of Yolmo as having high and low tone, with the addition of level and falling tone contour options for each. While each lexical item is marked as being either falling or level, there are almost no minimal pairs that distinguish this feature. Hari (2010:17) gives one example (7).

- |     |             |           |             |        |
|-----|-------------|-----------|-------------|--------|
| (7) | <i>tɕíi</i> | (level)   | ‘one’       | <gcig> |
|     | <i>tɕíi</i> | (falling) | ‘substance’ |        |

All other examples are near-minimal pairs.

Höhlig and Hari (1976: 40-45) also observe a difference between level and falling contours in Kagate. A greater number of examples are presented for Kagate (Höhlig and Hari 1976: 41) (8) than for Yolmo, although tone contours are not marked in the current iteration of the Kagate dictionary, so it is difficult to gauge just how widespread the presence of contrastive tonal contours is.

|     |                         |           |           |                   |
|-----|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| (8) | <i>kór</i>              | (falling) | ‘weigh!’  |                   |
|     | <i>kór</i>              | (level)   | ‘cackle!’ |                   |
|     | <i>tì</i>               | (level)   | ‘ask!’    | <dri>             |
|     | <i>tì</i>               | (falling) | ‘tool’    | most likely <gri> |
|     | <i>sìŋ</i>              | (level)   | ‘finish!’ | <zín>             |
|     | <i>sìŋ</i> <sup>3</sup> | (falling) | ‘field’   | <zhiŋ>            |
|     | <i>pè</i>               | (level)   | ‘crow’    |                   |
|     | <i>pè</i>               | (falling) | ‘do!’     | <byas>            |

Gawne and Teo (2012) analysed a set of Lamjung Yolmo lexical items that are cognate with those found in Hari and Lama’s (2004) lexicon Melamchi Valley Yolmo and found no acoustic evidence of tone contours in Lamjung Yolmo. It would appear that Lamjung Yolmo speakers have regularised any tone contours, resulting in only a distinction between high and low tone. An acoustic analysis of Melamchi Yolmo and Kagate will indicate how strong and regular the difference in tone contours is for these dialects. Given that there appear to be few minimal pairs in which the tone contour is the distinctive feature, it may be that this feature is not phonologically salient for speakers, and may be an artifact of older syllable-final consonants that are no longer present, however even this would not explain the different contours in many of the examples in (8).

The relationship between this binary system and the high-mid-low ternary system in Kyirong as described by Huber is still in need of further research. As Zeisler (2010) observes in her review of Huber’s analysis, the ternary system of Kyirong is highly unusual. It is then even more unusual that a group of languages whose origins are in the Kyirong area should then go on to demonstrate a binary system. It is possible that the Kyirong system developed after the Yolmo descended into the valleys further south, or that the migrant groups diverged subsequent to moving. Either way, Yolmo offers a contrastive data point, and the number of tones is still one of the main distinctions between Kyirong and the Yolmo/Kagate languages.

## 6.2 Verb stems

The existence and status of verb stem alternations have received different analyses across the three dialects. Hari (2010: 35–39) describes a process whereby verbs stems that end in a short vowel and take a suffix will undergo a change in vowel quality in some contexts. These contexts are varied and include affirmative imperatives, the presence of some auxiliaries, such as the imperfective *tè* and the presence of suffixes including *-pa* and *-ti*. Verbs with front vowels /i/ and /e/ will be lengthened while verbs with back vowels /a/, /o/ and /u/ are fronted and lengthened, with /u/ becoming /ii/ and both /o/ and /a/ becoming /ee/. Unlike verb stem alternation in Written and Standard Tibetan, Hari does not discuss a distinction between control and non-control verbs in stem alternations.

In the examples below from Hari’s (2010: 36) description of Melamchi Valley Yolmo you can see that the vowel quality in the two verbs change in different grammatical structures. For (9) the verb ‘*ma* ‘tell’ becomes ‘*me* when it is before the emphatic *-pa/-ba* past tense suffix (but not the

<sup>3</sup> The cognate of this form in both varieties of Yolmo is *sìŋ*, it is not known why it is *s* in Kagate.

regular past tense) and also before the imperative. Some of these examples were taken from Hari's (2010: 35-39) description of verb stems, and is supplemented with examples found in other parts of the text.

- |     |                    |                                              |
|-----|--------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| (9) | <i>'má-gen</i>     | '(I) say (non-past)'                         |
|     | <i>'má-sin</i>     | '(I) said (past)'                            |
|     | <i>màa-'mé-ba'</i> | (I) didn't tell it! (negative emphatic past) |
|     | <i>'mée-don</i>    | 'say it!' (imperative)                       |
|     | <i>'mée-di</i>     | 'said' (perfective)                          |

In (10) we see the same variation for the perfective suffix, and negative, but we also see that the addition of the dubitative copula triggers the verb stem variation as well.

- |      |                  |                      |
|------|------------------|----------------------|
| (10) | <i>ŋù-ɯ ŋù-ɯ</i> | '(is) crying' (impf) |
|      | <i>ŋù-di</i>     | 'cried' (perfective) |
|      | <i>ŋi yè-to</i>  | 'is probably crying' |
|      | <i>màa-ŋi</i>    | 'did not cry'        |

I have also included the verb eat in (11) as neither this variety of Yolmo nor the Lamjung variety have the irregular past tense form, which is distinct from other Central Tibetan languages, including Kyirong (Huber 2002: 126).

- |      |               |                  |         |
|------|---------------|------------------|---------|
| (11) | <i>sà-gen</i> | 'eat' (non-past) | <(b)za> |
|      | <i>sà-sin</i> | 'eat' (past)     | <bzas>  |
|      | <i>sèe-di</i> | 'ate' (perf)     |         |
|      | <i>mè-sà</i>  | 'do not eat'     |         |
|      | <i>màa-sè</i> | 'did not eat'    |         |

The verb stem alternations that occur in Melamchi Yolmo do not appear in Lamjung Yolmo. Unfortunately the form *má-* for 'say' does not exist in Lamjung Yolmo, instead *láp-* is used, so direct comparison with Hari's Melamchi data is not possible, but below are two verbs with cognates in Written Tibetan in their past, non-past and imperative forms. As you can see, in all of these contexts, where there would be verb alternations in Written Tibetan, the vowel quality is the same.

- |      |               |                  |       |
|------|---------------|------------------|-------|
| (12) | <i>ŋù-ge</i>  | 'eat' (non-past) | <ngu> |
|      | <i>ŋù-sin</i> | 'cried' (past)   |       |
|      | <i>ŋù-ton</i> | 'cry!'           |       |
|      |               | (RL 110204-03)   |       |

- |      |               |                  |         |
|------|---------------|------------------|---------|
| (13) | <i>sà-ge</i>  | 'eat' (non-past) | <(b)za> |
|      | <i>sà-sin</i> | 'eat' (past)     | <bzas>  |

*sò*                      ‘eat’ (imperative)    <zo(s)>  
(RL 101023-03)

Regardless of the construction in Lamjung Yolmo the vowel undergoes no modification, even in cases where there is modification in Melamchi Yolmo, such as the verb ‘cry’ in (10) and (12). There are some vestiges of the Written Tibetan verb stem modification system, such as in the imperative form of ‘eat’ *sà*, which becomes *sò*, but this is a highly restricted irregularity rather than any productive system.

Höhlig and Hari (1976: 58) describe a more restricted set of what they refer to as stem modifications for Kagate, but these are not only limited to verbs. In open syllables with short vowels, the vowel is lengthened if the suffix *-ndi* (the “indefinite participle”) is present for verbs or the *-ŋ* suffix (‘also’) is added to nouns (14).

|      |                |                  |                  |
|------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| (14) | <i>sà-</i>     | ‘eat’            | <(b)za>          |
|      | <i>sàa-ndi</i> | ‘eating’         | <bzas-kyin-‘dug> |
|      | <i>‘ɛ́</i>     | ‘die’            | <shi>            |
|      | <i>‘ɛ́i</i>    | ‘dying’          | <shi-kyin-‘dug>  |
|      | <i>tá</i>      | ‘head hair’      | <skra>           |
|      | <i>táa-ŋ</i>   | ‘head hair also’ | <skra-yang>      |

(Höhlig and Hari 1976: 58)

The nominal forms are possibly cognate with the Classical Tibetan suffix *-yang*, as given in the Written Tibetan forms. For the verbs, the etymological source may be the middle Tibetan ‘progressive’, the form becoming highly reduced, perhaps to converge with the nominal form. This means that this is not stem variation, as the lengthening most likely comes from a reanalysed suffix that would possibly be better represented as *-aŋ*. How this was generalised to the lengthening of other vowels – such as the *i* in ‘die’ is not entirely clear, as this process has not been observed in the other dialects. Höhlig and Hari do not discuss verb stem alterations in their analysis.

It is clear that a great deal more work needs to be done on the extent of verb stem modification in Melamchi Yolmo, and how this relates to stem alternations in Written Tibetan. For varieties that do appear to exhibit some degree of verb stem modification, the extent to which this is influenced by the control/non-control verb distinction in Written and Standard Tibetan also needs to be investigated. By looking at the presence or absence of stem alternations in Kagate we can gain an insight into whether the absence of any such alternation in Lamjung Yolmo is shared with Kagate, or specific to that dialect. One thing that appears to be constant across all three dialects is the loss of the past tense stem <bzas> for ‘eat’, making for an innovation that distinguishes all three dialects from Kyirong.

### 6.3 *Honorifics*

As with many other Tibetic languages, Yolmo has a set of honorific forms of common words. These include honorific verbs and nouns, which are used when talking to Lamas or other people of high social standing, as Beckwith (1992: 5) notes for Standard Tibetan, they are never used to refer to oneself, or one's own possessions. It has been noted that the absence of this class of lexical items is one of the most salient ways in which Kagate is different to Melamchi Yolmo (Lewis et al. 2013).

Lamjung Yolmo speakers still retain a small set of honorific verbs, and an even smaller set of honorific nouns. Very few of these honorific forms are ever used in regular conversation, and many speakers do not use them at all. It is possible that these forms were infrequently used in Lamjung Yolmo at all for some time, and have been reappropriated by speakers looking towards the Yolmo varieties spoken in the Melamchi and Helambu valleys.

Honorific verbs still used by Yolmo speakers include:

|      |              |                |         |                        |
|------|--------------|----------------|---------|------------------------|
| (15) | Regular form | Honorific form | English | Written Tibetan        |
|      | <i>sà</i>    | <i>œè</i>      | 'eat'   | <za, bzhes>            |
|      | <i>tè</i>    | <i>œù</i>      | 'sit'   | <bsdad, gzhugs>        |
|      | <i>ɲàl</i>   | <i>sìm</i>     | 'sleep' | <bsnyal ('lay'), gzim> |
|      | <i>òŋ</i>    | <i>pʰép</i>    | 'come'  | <'ong, phebs>          |
|      | <i>làŋ</i>   | <i>œàŋ</i>     | 'stand' | <lang, bzheng>         |
|      | <i>tʰúŋ</i>  | <i>tœʰé</i>    | 'drink' | <mthung, mchod>        |

The nominal set is smaller, and contains mainly the words that form the basis of the more elaborate set of honorific nominals discussed in DeLancey (1998). Unlike the verbs which would sometimes occur in sentence elicitation, were only ever given in isolation:

|      |              |                |          |                   |
|------|--------------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| (16) | Regular form | Honorific form | English  | Written Tibetan   |
|      | <i>ába</i>   | <i>ɣàp</i>     | 'father' | <a pha, yab>      |
|      | <i>làkpa</i> | <i>tœʰák</i>   | 'hand'   | <lag pa, phyag>   |
|      | <i>káŋba</i> | <i>œáp̣ta</i>  | 'foot'   | <rkang ba, zhabs> |

Although these forms are more common in the Melamchi Valley area, they do appear to be a fragile feature of the language. I found that in one family there was an observable difference between speakers in their 20s, 50s and 70s in regards to how many honorific lexical items they knew, and how easily they recalled them. Older speakers knew many more honorific items, especially nominal honorifics, while younger speakers were more likely to recall more common verbal honorific items. Therefore, in the future, it may be that this will become a less salient distinction between the dialects.

## 7 The Kyirong-Yolmo subgroup of Tibetic languages

At the start of this paper I observed that Tournadre's (2005, 2008) current classification of Tibetic languages includes the sub-grouping of Kyirong-Kagate. Yolmo and Kyirong are so closely

related to each other, and to the other languages in this group, that there is no debate about their inclusion. The choice of “Kagate” over “Yolmo” in the name of this subgroup is, however, problematic. In this section I will discuss several reasons why it is preferable for this subgroup to be called “Kyirong-Yolmo” instead.

Firstly, there are many more Yolmo speakers than there are Kagate speakers. At the most recent count there were around 1500 Kagate speakers. This is in comparison to the conservative estimate of 10,000 Yolmo speakers, with Hari and Lama (2004: 703) suggesting that speakers report there may even be as many as 50,000, accounting for expat communities and the problems of trying to conduct a census in remote and isolated areas. Also, there are more groups of people who identify their language as Yolmo as opposed to Kagate. Not only are there the communities in the Melamchi and Helambu valleys, but there are also the groups in the Lamjung and Ilam districts, and possibly other as yet unidentified groups. One reviewer suggested that this name may be beneficial as it captures the western-most (Kyirong) and southern/eastern-most groups of speakers (Kagate) in the name. This is, however not technically correct, as Ilam Yolmo speakers are further south/east than Kagate speakers, and greater in number. It also does not stand to reason, as Lamjung Yolmo is a great deal further west than Kyirong.

Secondly, the name “Kyirong-Yolmo” more accurately reflects the history of migration waves south from the Tibetan area. As I discussed in section 3, it was only after the migration from Kyirong to the Helambu and Melamchi areas that the separate Yolmo language developed. Kagate is only considered to be a separate language because of a subsequent migration further south, and east, to the Ramechhap district. It is a more accurate reflection of the history of migration to include Yolmo in the language group name as this was an earlier stage of migration, and is a name that the majority of speakers of these dialects identify with. To refer to “Kyirong-Kagate” is to ignore a more major migration event in favour of a smaller one.

Thirdly, the use of the name “Kagate” is a culturally sensitive issue. As discussed in section four, the name “Kagate” refers to the occupation of paper-maker. While the caste system of Nepal is no longer officially constituted, the history of stigma associated with the term is still a complex reality for Yolmo speakers in Lamjung. This is still so sensitive an issue for some speakers that when we produced a small Lamjung Yolmo-Nepali-English dictionary I was requested to destroy or correct copies of the dictionary that mentioned Lamjung Yolmo was similar to Kagate in the blurb. The group of Kagate from Ramechhap may be proud of the name of their language, which has given their dialect far greater status than it otherwise would hold if it were considered a dialect of the larger Yolmo language, however referring to this grouping of languages as “Kyirong-Yolmo” as opposed the “Kyirong-Kagate” is less historically problematic. It also solves the more general problem of Kagate being an occupation in Nepal, and thus meaning that other peoples who may be named “Kagate” will not be inadvertently grouped with Yolmo speakers, even if they speak a completely different language.

It appears that the reason to refer to Kagate over Yolmo is that the Kagate language has had a greater presence in the linguistic literature in the 20th century. The name “Kyirong-Kagate” may have been appropriate several decades ago, when so little was known about the Yolmo language. The production of the Yolmo dictionary (Hari and Lama 2004) and an introductory grammar of the Melamchi dialect (Hari 2010), not to mention the observation of Yolmo speakers in Ilam (Thokar 2009) and work on the Lamjung variety (Gawne 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) means that there is now a great deal more published linguistic information about Yolmo, just as there is a great deal more anthropological work that has been done in the area.

## 8 Conclusion

In this paper I have outlined the relationship between a number of independent Yolmo dialects, including Kagate which is officially considered an independent language in the ISO 639-3 classification. I have detailed the social history that connects these groups through migration, and also the linguistic features of these mutually intelligible dialects. I have also argued that this group should be part of the “Kyirong-Yolmo” subgroup; names that better reflect the linguistic and social history of these groups of peoples.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|     |              |      |              |
|-----|--------------|------|--------------|
| 3   | third person | GF   | general fact |
| COP | copula       | IMPF | imperfective |
| DAT | dative       | PERF | perfective   |
| DUB | dubitative   | PRES | present      |
| EGO | egophoric    | SG   | singular     |
| F   | female       |      |              |

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## APPENDIX: 100 WORD SWADESH LIST

The words are arranged as per the standard Swadesh 100 word list. The data for Melamchi Valley Yolmo is taken from Hari (2010) and the data for Kagate is a combination of lexical items from Höhlig and Hari (1976) and my own fieldwork. All of the data for Lamjung Yolmo comes from my own fieldwork. For the Melamchi Valley variety Hari (2010) has noted some lexical distinctions between Eastern varieties (including Melamchi Valley) and Western varieties (those closer to Langtang), which I have retained. The data for Kyirong is compiled from Huber (2002) with additional forms from Hedlin (2011), and noted where lexical items are absent. Hedlin does not mark tone, and so any form without tone diacritics is attributable to his work, and I have italicised these forms to make that clear. I have presented a Swadesh list as this formed the basis of Höhlig and Hari (1976) and Hari (2010) as well as serving as my source for Gawne (2010).

I have regularised the orthography across the sources for ease of comparison. Like Hari (2010) I use a double vowel to indicate long vowels. Hari (2010) and Höhlig and Hari (1986) leave high tone unmarked and mark low tone with a “h” following the vowel. I have regularised this transcription to diacritics over the vowel to indicate high and low tone. Length is indicated with double vowel in Yolmo and Kagate, but I have maintained Huber’s (2005) orthographic convention of colon for lengthening for Kyirong, and her diacritics for tone, with a bar (level) or falling diacritic (falling) above the vowel representing high tone, below the vowel for mid tone and below with a superscript *h* representing low tone.

You will noticed throughout the wordlists that there are instances where there are quite different lexical items for basic words. Where I believe this is a case of lexical innovation I have indicated this in a footnote. In other cases, especially where Kagate is different to the others, this may be a case of incomplete documentation.

| English            | Melamchi Valley Yolmo | Kagate            | Lamjung Yolmo     | Kyirong            | Written Tibetan |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. I               | ŋà                    | ŋà                | ŋà                | ŋa                 | nga             |
| 2. thou            | k <sup>h</sup> yá     | k <sup>h</sup> yá | k <sup>h</sup> yá | k <sup>h</sup> yø: | khyod           |
| 3. we <sup>4</sup> | jì                    | jì                | jì                | ji: <sup>5</sup>   | nyid(-rang)     |
| 4. this            | dì                    | dì                | dì                | dì                 | 'di             |
| 5. that            | òo                    | òodi              | òodi              | o:                 | 'o              |
| 6. who?            | sú                    | sú                | sú                | sū                 | su              |
| 7. what?           | téí                   | téí               | téí               | téí                | ci              |

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<sup>4</sup> <nyid> as the cognate is tentatively proposed in Huber (2005:300).

<sup>5</sup> Huber uses a falling diacritic under the vowel to represent a low falling form, which I am unable to replicate.

| English    | Melamchi Valley Yolmo                      | Kagate                | Lamjung Yolmo                                 | Kyirong              | Written Tibetan |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 8. not     | mè-, mi-                                   | má-, mà-              | mè-/(mi),<br>mà-                              | mi-,ma-              | mi, ma          |
| 9. all     | t <sup>h</sup> ámdzi                       | t <sup>h</sup> ámdze  | dzàmma                                        | tērē:                | thams-cad       |
| 10. many   | màṅbu                                      | màṅbu                 | màṅbu                                         | maṅmō                | mang-po         |
| 11. one    | teĩ                                        | teĩk                  | teĩ                                           | teĩk                 | gcig            |
| 12. two    | ṅyĩ                                        | ṅĩ                    | ṅí                                            | ṅi:                  | gnyis           |
| 13. big    | te <sup>h</sup> ĩmbu, te <sup>h</sup> ómbo | te <sup>h</sup> ómbo  | te <sup>h</sup> ómbo,<br>te <sup>h</sup> úmbu | te <sup>h</sup> ümmō | chen-po         |
| 14. long   | rìṅbu                                      | rìṅbu                 | rìṅbu                                         | rìṅmō                | ring-ba         |
| 15. small  | te <sup>h</sup> éemu                       | teéemu                | teéemi<br>tjemi                               | te <sup>h</sup> ũṅĩ  | chung           |
| 16. woman  | pìi <sup>h</sup> mi                        | pèmpiza               | pèmpiza                                       | pì:mè:               | mo              |
| 17. man    | kyép-k <sup>h</sup> yówa                   | k <sup>h</sup> yópiza | k <sup>h</sup> yópiza                         | mĩ                   | khyo            |
| 18. person | mì                                         | mì                    | mì                                            | mĩ                   | mi              |
| 19. fish   | ṅà                                         | ṅà                    | ṅà                                            | ṅa                   | nya             |
| 20. bird   | teà-teiwa                                  | teádzuṅma             | teádzuṅma                                     | teābĩ:               | bya             |
| 21. dog    | kyĩbu, k <sup>h</sup> yĩ                   | k <sup>h</sup> ĩ      | k <sup>h</sup> ĩ                              | c <sup>h</sup> ĩbō   | khyi-po         |
| 22. louse  | kĩĩkpa, kyĩei                              | ei                    | ei                                            | eiķē:                | shig            |
| 23. tree   | tòṅbo, tũṅbu                               | tòṅbo                 | tòṅbo                                         | tō <sup>h</sup> ṅbō  | sdong po        |
| 24. seed   | sén                                        | sén                   | sén                                           | qĩri:                | sa-bon          |
| 25. leaf   | lapti, lòma                                | lapti                 | lapti, lòma                                   | laptĩ                | lo-ma           |
| 26. root   | tsárkyi, tsárnyie<br>tsárnyie              | tsárni                | tsárṅi                                        | tsāwā                | rtsa-ba         |
| 27. bark   | páko, p <sup>h</sup> ĩko, kóldaṅ           | páko                  | p <sup>h</sup> ába                            | -                    | phags-pa        |
| 28. skin   | páaba (E),<br>páko (W)                     | gòoba                 | gòoba                                         | pākò:                | lpags-pa,       |
| 29. flesh  | éá                                         | éá                    | éá                                            | ēā                   | sha             |
| 30. blood  | t <sup>h</sup> áa                          | t <sup>h</sup> áa     | t <sup>h</sup> áa                             | t <sup>h</sup> à:    | khrag           |

| English                    | Melamchi Valley Yolmo                   | Kagate           | Lamjung Yolmo                 | Kyirong            | Written Tibetan                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 31. bone                   | rèko, riiba (E)                         | ròko             | ròko                          | <i>ryko</i>        | rus-pa                          |
| 32. grease <sup>6</sup>    | k <sup>h</sup> yákpa tɛ <sup>h</sup> áa | núm tɛúr         | ɛà                            | -                  | zhag tshi                       |
| 33. egg                    | tɛàmú kòŋa                              | tɛàmú kòŋa       | tʃemendo                      | ko <sup>h</sup> ŋa | sgo-nga                         |
| 34. horn                   | ròwa                                    | rùwa             | ròwa                          | <i>rateo</i>       | ru-ba                           |
| 35. tail                   | ŋáma, ŋéma                              | ŋáma             | ŋámaŋ                         | ŋāmā               | rnga ma                         |
| 36. feather <sup>7</sup>   | tò (E), tòo (W)                         | pú               | ɛókpa                         | to <sup>h</sup>    | sgro                            |
| 37. hair                   | tá                                      | tá               | tá                            | tā                 | skra                            |
| 38. head                   | gòo                                     | gòo              | gòo                           |                    | mgo                             |
| 39. ear                    | námdzo                                  | námdzo           | námdzo                        | nāmdzò:            | rna-mchog                       |
| 40. eye                    | míi                                     | míi              | míi                           | mì:                | mig                             |
| 41. nose                   | náasum (E),<br>nárko (W)                | náasum           | náasum                        | nākò:              | sna                             |
| 42. mouth                  | k <sup>h</sup> á                        | k <sup>h</sup> á | k <sup>h</sup> á              | k <sup>h</sup> ā   | kha                             |
| 43. tooth                  | só                                      | só               | só                            | -                  | so                              |
| 44. tongue                 | tɛéle                                   | tɛé              | tɛé                           | -                  | lce                             |
| 45. <del>finger nail</del> | sému                                    | sému             | sému                          | dze:               | sen mo                          |
| 46. foot                   | kāŋba                                   | kāŋba            | kāŋba                         | kāŋbā              | rkang ba                        |
| 47. knee                   | kāŋba-ts <sup>h</sup> íi                | pìmu             | ts <sup>h</sup> íiŋgor        | -                  | pus mo'i tshigs<br>(knee joint) |
| 48. hand                   | làkpa                                   | làkpa            | làkpa                         | làkpè:             | lag-pa                          |
| 49. belly                  | tèpa                                    | tòpa             | p <sup>h</sup> ó <sup>8</sup> | təpā               | grod-pa                         |
| 50. neck                   | dzìŋba                                  | dzìŋba           | dzìŋba                        | <i>tɛiŋpa</i>      | 'jing-ba                        |

<sup>6</sup> These do not appear to be cognate on initial inspection, whether there are closer synonyms that may be available in these dialects is a target of further research. Another possible cognate is <snun> 'oil'.

<sup>7</sup> Unlike 32. 'grease' above, these do appear to be the standard forms in each of these languages. Kagate has generalized 'body hair', while Lamjung Yolmo has used a form cognate with Written Tibetan <gshog pa>.

<sup>8</sup> Melamchi Valley Yolmo, Kagate and Kyirong forms pertain to the more specific 'stomach' which I have included for the Written Tibetan forms. Lamjung Yolmo speakers used the more general form related to the Written Tibetan <pho(ba)> which is probably more realistically translated as 'belly'.

| English                 | Melamchi Valley Yolmo | Kagate       | Lamjung Yolmo | Kyirong            | Written Tibetan   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 51. breast              | òma                   | òma          | òma           | omā                | 'o-ma (also milk) |
| 52. heart               | nín̥                  | nín̥         | nín̥          | nín̥               | snying            |
| 53. liver <sup>9</sup>  | teimba                | teimba       | teimba        | teimba             | mchin-pa          |
| 54. drink               | tʰúŋ-                 | tʰúŋ-        | tʰúŋ-         | tʰūŋ-              | 'thung            |
| 55. eat                 | sà-                   | sà-          | sà-           | sā                 | za                |
| 56. bite                | kàp-, áa táp-         | kàp-         | áa táp-       | á: cāp             | rmug              |
| 57. see <sup>10</sup>   | tá, tʰóŋ-             | tá-, tʰòŋ-   | tá, tʰóŋ-     | tā, tʰōŋ           | lta, mthong       |
| 58. hear <sup>11</sup>  | tʰée-, nìn-           | jèn-         | tʰé-, jèn-    | tʰø:, jɛn-         | thos, nyan        |
| 59. know                | éé-                   | éé-          | éé-           | è:-                | shes              |
| 60. sleep <sup>12</sup> | jí lòo-               | jàl-         | jàl-          | jì:                | nyal              |
| 61. die                 | éí-                   | éí-          | éí-           | ēī-                | shi               |
| 62. kill                | sé-                   | sé-          | sé-           | sē-                | bsad              |
| 63. swim                | teál kyàp-            | teʰú-la teá- | teál kyàp-    | -                  | rkyal             |
| 64. fly                 | ùr-                   | ùr-          | ùr-           | pʰū(r)             | 'phur             |
| 65. walk                | dò-                   | dò-          | dò-           | dɔ-                | 'gro              |
| 66. come                | òŋ-                   | òŋ-          | òŋ-           | oŋ-                | 'ong              |
| 67. lie                 | jàl-                  | ríl-         | jàl-          | -                  | nyal              |
| 68. sit                 | tè-                   | tè-          | tè-           | tø̃ <sup>h</sup> - | sdod              |

<sup>9</sup> As one reviewer noted, the Written Tibetan form would lead us to expect aspiration and high tone. Instead it is possible that the *m*- prefix lead to low tone. Cf. the same process did not occur with 'see' (57), where we do find the aspiration and high tone.

<sup>10</sup> The first form is the more volitional 'look' while the second form is the less volitional 'see'.

<sup>11</sup> As with 'look/see' above, the first form is the volitional form. More research needs to be done to ascertain whether Kagate also has both forms.

<sup>12</sup> This is, for Lamjung Yolmo at least, a situation where a near synonym has replaced another and *jàl-*, which formally meant 'lie down in order to sleep' now means 'sleep'. That Höhlig and Hari's unpublished wordlist of Kagate also includes this translation indicates it's a lexical innovation that may have happened before both groups migrated. Published wordlist of Kagate also includes this translation indicates it's a lexical innovation that may have happened before both groups migrated. Note in 67. 'lie' while Lamjung Yolmo speakers use the same form, Kagate speakers have taken on another lexical item.

| English                | Melamchi Valley Yolmo                  | Kagate              | Lamjung Yolmo                   | Kyirong              | Written Tibetan |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 69. stand              | làn-di té-                             | làn                 | làn-                            | lən                  | lang            |
| 70. give               | tér-                                   | tér-                | tér-                            | tēr-                 | ster            |
| 71. say                | má-, làp-                              | làp-                | làp-                            | mē:-                 | lap             |
| 72. sun                | jìma                                   | jìma                | jìma                            | jīmā                 | nyi-ma          |
| 73. moon               | dàwa, dāyum                            | dāgarmu             | dāgarmu                         | dagā:                | zla-dkar        |
| 74. star               | kárma                                  | kárma               | kárma                           | kāmmā                | skar-ma         |
| 75. water              | tɛ <sup>h</sup> ú                      | tɛ <sup>h</sup> ú   | tɛ <sup>h</sup> ú               | tɛū <sup>h</sup>     | chu             |
| 76. rain <sup>13</sup> | nám kyàp-                              | nám kyàp-           | nám kyàp-                       | tɛ <sup>h</sup> āpā  | gnam            |
| 77. stone              | tò                                     | tò                  | tò                              | tɔ̃ <sup>h</sup>     | rdo             |
| 78. sand               | pèma                                   | pèba                | pèma                            | pemā                 | bye ma          |
| 79. earth              | sása, t <sup>h</sup> ása, sáza, sáptɛi | ɛébi                | sá                              | sā                   | sa              |
| 80. cloud              | múkpa                                  | múkpa               | múkpa                           | mūkpā                | rmugs-pa        |
| 81. smoke              | tìpa, tèpa                             | tìpa                | tìpa                            | tīpā                 | dud pa          |
| 82. fire               | mè                                     | mè                  | mè                              | mɛ                   | me              |
| 83. ash                | t <sup>h</sup> ála                     | t <sup>h</sup> ála  | t <sup>h</sup> ála              | t <sup>h</sup> ālā   | thal            |
| 84. burn               | tii-, bàr-, ts <sup>h</sup> íi-        | ts <sup>h</sup> íi- | tii-, bàr-, ts <sup>h</sup> íi- | sə:                  | 'bar, 'tshig    |
| 85. path               | lām                                    | lām                 | lām                             | lām                  | lam             |
| 86. mountain           | kàn                                    | kàn                 | kàn                             | kənṛī                | sgang (ri)      |
| 87. red                | màrmu, màrpu                           | màrmu               | màrmu, màrpu                    | māpō                 | dmar-po         |
| 88. green              | ṇòmbo, ṇumbu                           | ṇòmbo               | ṇómbu                           | teā <sup>h</sup> ṇgū | sngon-po        |
| 89. yellow             | sérpu                                  | sérpu               | sérpu                           |                      | ser-po          |
| 90. white              | kárpū, kármu                           | kármu               | kárpū                           | kāpō                 | dkar-po         |

<sup>13</sup> Speakers gave this form in all three varieties, even when asked for the nominal form, indicating some degree of lexical innovation.

| English   | Melamchi Valley Yolmo                                 | Kagate                        | Lamjung Yolmo                 | Kyirong                       | Written Tibetan     |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 91. black | nàkpu                                                 | nàkpu                         | nàkpu                         | nàkpō                         | nag-po              |
| 92. night | kùŋmu                                                 | nùp                           | kùŋmu                         | nɔ:mō,<br>kɔ <sup>h</sup> ŋmō | dgong-mo,<br>nub-mo |
| 93. hot   | tòmo                                                  | tòmbo                         | tòmbo                         | tɔmmō<br>(warm)               | tshá po             |
| 94. cold  | tàŋmu                                                 | tàŋmu                         | tàŋmu                         | c <sup>h</sup> ā:bō           | grang-ba            |
| 95. full  | kàŋ                                                   | kàŋgra                        | kàŋ                           | kā:                           | gang-ba             |
| 96. new   | sám̐ba                                                | sám̐ba                        | sám̐ba                        | sāmbā                         | gsar-ba             |
| 97. good  | yàabu                                                 | yàabu                         | yàabu                         | ja:bō                         | yag-po              |
| 98. round | kòrmu (circular),<br>r <sup>h</sup> ílm̐u (spherical) | kòrmu,<br>r <sup>h</sup> élmo | kòrmu,<br>r <sup>h</sup> élmu | kɔfíkō:,<br>rj̐:mō            | sgor                |
| 99. dry   | kámbu                                                 | kámbu                         | kámbu                         | -                             | skam-po             |
| 100. name | mìn                                                   | mìn                           | mìn                           | mĩ:                           | ming                |