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Himalayan Linguistics

The Tangsa-Nocte languages: An introduction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter briefly introduces the languages of the Tangsa-Nocte ‘group’ within the Northern Naga languages. This group is the subject of detailed studies of Hakhun (Boro 2019), Muklom (Mulder 2019), and Phong (Dutta 2019), as well as an overview of agreement in the Pangwa group (Morey 2019).

KEYWORDS

Tangsa Languages, Nocte Languages, Northern Naga Languages

This is a contribution from *Himalayan Linguistics*, Vol. 18(1): 134–140.

ISSN 1544-7502

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*The Tangsa-Nocte languages: An introduction*¹

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This volume includes four papers about agreement in languages belonging to what we will term the Tangsa-Nocte group of language varieties. These consist of an overview of agreement in the Pangwa group (Morey 2019), and detailed studies of Hakhun (Boro 2019), Muklom (Mulder 2019), and Phong (Dutta 2019).

The languages described in these four chapters all belong to the Sal group, also termed Boro-Konyak-Jinghpaw (Burling 1983, Bradley 1997, Burling 2003, Post and Burling 2017) which consists of three sub-groups: Boro-Garo, Jinghpaw-Asakian [Jinghpaw-Luish].and Northern Naga. Tangsa-Nocte fall within Northern Naga, which has also been termed Konyak², Eastern Naga (e.g. Damant 1880:249-50³ and Sten Konow in Grierson 1903:329), and Eastern Barish (Weidert 1987). Hakhun, Muklom, Phong and the Pangwa varieties all belong within Northern Naga. Bradley (1997) suggested that Wancho and Haimi could be tentatively grouped together, and along with Nocte and Tangsa/Rangpan formed a putative group. Our research suggests that Haimi is an alternative name for some groups now included under Tangsa in India and Tangshang in Myanmar (see below for further discussion of the terms Haimi and Rangpan/Rangpang). Furthermore, preliminary work on Wancho suggests that it is more distant from the other varieties and not included under Tangsa-Nocte.

While a Sal or Boro-Konyak-Jinghpaw grouping has wide acceptance, higher level groupings are still being established. Recently, DeLancey (2015) has suggested that on morphological grounds there is strong evidence for connecting the Sal group and South Central (Kuki-Chin).

French (1983) made a detailed comparative study of the data then available on the Northern Naga languages, and suggested reconstructions for the Northern Naga group. Saul (2005: 22) contains a map showing the areas where Northern Naga languages are spoken. In this map, what we term Northern Naga are divided into Konyak-Konyak and Konyak-Khiamniungan. It is

¹ The research that has led to this paper was undertaken as part of an Australian Research Council funded Future Fellowship (ARC FT100100614), taken up at the Centre for Research on Language Diversity, La Trobe University, and a subsequent ARC Discovery Project grant to study the traditional Tangsa Wihu song (ARC DP160103061). A large number of people have given information and/or advice that has led to this publication, and these are named in detail in the acknowledgements to the Chapter on *Pangwa Tangsa agreement markers and verbal operators* (Morey this volume). In particular I'd like to acknowledge Krishna Boro, Niharika Dutta, Mijke Mulder, Nathan Statezni, Vong Tsuh Shi and Kellen Parker van Dam.

² Here referring to the grouping rather than the individual language, also called Konyak.

³ Of the groups we now call Tangsa, whom he almost certainly never visited, he says that, after the Namsang Nocte: "there are a few broken tribes to the east of them; these are of little note, and are in subjection to the Singpho." We interpret 'broken tribes' as a reference to the diversity of Tangsa / Tangshang.

worth noting that on this map, all the Northern Naga varieties are adjacent to each other, each occupying a discreet area with no languages from other groups intervening. In other words, we do not see the patchwork of different languages from different language families that we see in parts of upland Southeast Asia for instance. Rather, we see apparently neat boundaries.

Burling (1983) listed 7 languages within Northern Naga, all of them found on the Indian side of the border – Tangsa, Nocte, Wancho, Phom, Chang, Konyak and Khiamnyungan. Each of these has ISO 639-3 language codes. In the early 2000s, the Tutsa were recognized in Arunachal Pradesh, India as a separate tribe and also received a language code. More recently, as a result of research done on the Myanmar (Burma) side, five more languages are included in the Ethnologue (Simons and Fennig 2018) under Northern Naga: Chen-Kayu (code: nqq), Lainong (lzn), Lao (nlq) Paungnyuan (umn), and Ponyo Gongwang (npg). Of these various languages, only Tangsa, Nocte and Tutsa are known to exhibit verb agreement. Most varieties usually grouped under Tangsa-Nocte for which we have information do show verb agreement, but not all (see Morey 2019).

Until the 1950s, the various groups that make up Tangsa-Nocte generally referred to themselves and were generally known by others using what we will term their ‘sub-tribe’⁴ name (a term perhaps first used by Dewar 1931, also in Statezni 2014), but which some term as ‘dialects’⁵ (Khan Lann 2017). These terms were adopted by British authorities on early maps, such as the 1927 Survey of India Map⁶. On this map we see ‘Moklum (Naga)’, ‘Mosang (Naga)’, ‘Yogli (Naga)’ and so on. At around the same time, publications like Needham (1897) used similar terms, such as *Môshâng Nâga* for the Muishang and *Shâng’gê Nâga* for the Shecyü. Each of these subtribes has an autonym, the name they use for themselves, such as Shecyü /ʃe²təu²/. Other subtribes had their own names for them, in other words exonyms. Thus the Cholim term for Shecyü is /kʰai²kʰja²/ and the Joglei is /ʃakeŋ/. There is also a ‘general name’, of uncertain origin, which can be used by anyone to refer to this subtribe: Shangke (which is spelled by Needham 1897 as *Shâng’gê*). In the chapter on Pangwa Tangsa (Morey 2019), the names of the subtribes will be Romanized spellings that represent the autonym (See Morey 2017 for more details), and each of the terms Hakhun, Muklom and Phong are the autonoms for those groups.

Over the years, there have been a significant number of terms for various levels of groups of these ‘sub-tribes’; two of which, Tangsa and Tangshang, have been adopted to refer to a larger group of varieties in more recent times. The other terms such as Rangpang, Haimi/ Heimi and Pangsa, Pangwa, Tutsa, Tutwa and Tangwa have overlapping and often blurred references (see further below for Dewar’s 1931 groupings, also van Dam 2019; Barkataki-Ruscheweyh 2017⁷).

The name Tangsa is recorded as having been coined by an Indian Government official, Bipin Borgohain in the 1950s to include all these groups that had earlier all been referred to by separate ‘sub-tribe’ names (see Barkataki-Ruscheweyh 2017: 67f, Morey 2017 for more details). The name is applied to all the Tibeto-Burman speaking groups in what is now Changlang district

⁴ The term sub-tribe does not carry any negative connotations in the context in India at least, as far as we are aware.

⁵ We prefer not to use the term ‘dialect’ as it implies a level of mutual intelligibility that is not found between all the varieties grouped under Tangsa or Tangshang. (See Statezni 2013 for more discussion of this).

⁶ Kellen van Dam (pers. comm.) pointed out that on the earliest British maps from the late 19th century, it is mostly villages that are named, for example Yugli and Bar Yugli, both villages of the Joglei subtribe (Bar is Assamese [bər] meaning ‘big’).

⁷ Barkataki-Ruscheweyh 2017: 76 discusses the origin of the terms Rangpang and Pangwa.

of Arunachal Pradesh except for the Singpho and Sema Nagas (Sumi) who clearly belonged to other groups. Nocte was the term used for such groups in Tirap district, and this has led to groups like Hakhun and Phong, found in both districts, being included under Tangsa in Changlang and under Nocte in Tirap.

More recently in 2003, the term Tangshang was adopted in Myanmar to cover all the varieties included in Tangsa and others besides. Tangshang is not cognate with Tangsa, but rather is based on the names of two ancestors, *Tangnyu Wang* and *Shangnyu Wang* (Statezni 2013: 5, Khan Lann 2017: 2). Both Tangsa and Tangshang are now listed as names associated with the ISO 639-3 code nst in Ethnologue (Simons and Fennig 2018), where the entry indicates that groups like Wancho and Nocte are included in Tangshang but are separate from Tangsa.⁸ Wancho and Nocte have their own ISO 639-3 codes. (See Morey 2017 for a more detailed discussion⁹ of aspects of this, also Khan Lann 2017).

The present reference of these terms, Tangsa and Tangshang is of recent coinage, but both these terms are grounded in the traditions of the communities and may have been used in former times to refer to some or all of the groups that they now include, although we do not have records of this at present.

The terms Rangpang and Heimi were used in Dewar (1931) and were used to divide some or most of the groups now included in Tangsa-Nocte into a northern group and southern group. These terms have also been followed in van Dam (2019). Statezni, in his introduction to the discussion about the adoption of the name Tangshang, wrote as follows (2013: 32)

In the past, the Tangshang area was divided up into smaller groups under the names Rangpang (for the northernmost clans, which are today seen as descendants of Shangnyu Wang) and the Heimi (in the south, which is primarily Tangnyu Wang).

In the west, some of the groups which are part of Tangnyu Wang were formerly called Pangmi or Kuwa [ku va] ‘mountain people’.

Dewar classes Rangpan¹⁰ (as he spells it) and Haimi as tribes, along with Pyengoo and Htangan, the latter also including groups now subsumed under Tangshang. The division of Rangpan and Haimi was more or less ‘north’ and ‘south’ respectively, whereas Khan Lann (2017) uses the terms Upland Tangva and Eastern Pangva.

Dewar (1931: 295), listed ‘Naga’ tribes, subtribes and villages, and in Table 1, we have listed all the sub-tribes (for the area east of the Namphuk Hka) and the villages (for the area west of the Namhpuk Hka¹¹) that are given by Dewar (1931: 295) and compared these with the

⁸ Ethnologue states as follows “The name ‘Tangsa’, which is used in India, refers to only [nst] varieties. ‘Tangshang’, which is the official name in Myanmar, also includes Nocte [njb], Tutsa [tvt], and Wancho [nnp], which are spoken in India.”

⁹ Some of the information about the ISO codes in Morey (2017) has been superseded. The name associated with the code on Ethnologue (Simons and Fennig 2018) is no longer Naga (Tase), but now Naga, Tangshang in Myanmar and Naga, Tangsa in India. Myanmar is listed first because Ethnologue is arranged by countries and the number of speakers on the Myanmar side is estimated to be more. However, a search of the SIL ISO 639-3 webpage indicates that the name Naga, Tase (or Tase Naga) remains the name attached with the code nst. https://iso639-3.sil.org/code_tables/download_tables, accessed 20180803. Tase is the pronunciation of the word Tangsa in the Chamchang (Kimsing) variety.

¹⁰ Barkataki-Ruscheweyh (2017: 76) points out that *pang* means ‘spread all over’. van Dam (forthcoming), has pointed out that in Muishaug, this word is pronounced *pan*.

¹¹ Dewar does not list ‘subtribes’ for the western side.

preliminary classification given in Khan Lann (2017).¹² As can be all the groups in this table termed Upland Pangva by Khan Lann are listed under the Rangpan tribe by Dewar, but the groups listed as Eastern Pangva by Khan Lann, are found as both Haimi and Rangpan in Dewar, along with some groups regarded by Khan Lann as not being Pangva. Of particular note is that Khalak is listed as Rangpan but Lungkhi is listed as Haimi, whereas both Khan Lann (2017) and Morey (this volume), suggest these groups are linguistically very similar.

Subtribe spelling in Dewar (1931: 295)	'Tribe' (Dewar (1931: 295))	Dialect (Khan Lann 2017: 8)	Subgroup (Khan Lann 2017: 8)
Pangaw	Haimi	not listed	
Rasa	Haimi	Rasa	Eastern Pangva (B)
Kumga	Haimi	Kumgaq	Ole
Kawlum	Haimi	Kotlum	Eastern Pangva (B)
Punlum	Haimi	not listed	
Kuku	Haimi	Kuku	Kunyon
Wanga	Haimi	not listed	
Galawn	Haimi	not listed	(this is Gaqlun)
Ranu	Haimi	Raqlu	Eastern Pangva (B)
Risa	Haimi	Rasi	Eastern Pangva (B)
Rangsa	Haimi	not listed	
Ranghku	Haimi	not listed	
Hkangchu	Haimi	not listed	
Longhkai	Haimi	Lunkgi	Eastern Pangva (A)
Lakai or Lokai	Haimi	Nakhhi	Eastern Pangva (B)
Sanching	Haimi	Shanchin	Eastern Pangva (B)
Ranchi (village)	Haimi	not listed	(this is Rangsi)
Chawang (old and new) (village)	Haimi	Chawang	Kon-Pingnan
Mihku (village)	Haimi	Miku	Kon-Pingnan
Gaha (village)	Haimi	Gaqha	Eastern Pangva (B)
Sherung (village)	Haimi	not listed	
Samse (village)	Haimi	not listed	
Mawshang	Rangpan	Mueshaungx	Upland Pangva
Sangche	Rangpan	not listed	
Langshin	Rangpan	Lochang	Upland Pangva
Myimu	Rangpan	Ngaimong	Upland Pangva
Hkalak	Rangpan	Khalak	Eastern Pangva (A)
Gashan	Rangpan	not listed	Upland Pangva
Tulim	Rangpan	Cholim	Upland Pangva

¹² Khan Lann (2017) classifies the Pangva into two main divisions – Upland Pangva and Eastern Pangva, the latter further divided in A and B. Morey (this volume) shows that on morphological grounds we can identify to groups within what Khan Lann terms upland Pangva, termed Group 1 and Group 2, and two more groups: Group 3 that corresponds to Khan Lann's Eastern Pangva (A) and Group 4 that corresponds to Khan Lann's Eastern Pangva (B).

Longri	Rangpan	Longri	Upland Pangva
Sangtai	Rangpan	Shangthi?	Eastern Pangva (B)
Saukrang	Rangpan	Shokra	Eastern Pangva (B)
Mawrang	Rangpan	Mungre	Upland Pangva
Dongai (village)	Rangpan	Jöngi	Upland Pangva
Maitai (village)	Rangpan	Maitai	Upland Pangva
Sanri (village)	Rangpan	not listed	

Table 1. The Naga Tribes, Sub-tribes and Villages (from Dewar 1931: 295)

Our consultants have told us that two other terms, Pangwa (see Morey 2019) and Pangsa have the same referents as Rangpan. Note that early British researchers noted that the people themselves might not use these terms. For example O’Callaghan 1927 (cited in van Dam 2019) pointed out that Rangpan was a term that was “unknown” to the groups.

Morey (this volume) more or less follows the approach of Khan Lann (2017), and groups the varieties that will be studied in that chapter as Pangwa, using a spelling that follows the practice in India. While Pangwa is not straightforward to define, all the consultants that we have worked with agree that Hakhun (Boro 2019), Muklom (Mulder 2019) and Phong (Dutta 2019), are not included in Pangwa.

The issue of mutual intelligibility between the sub-tribes that make up Tangsa-Nocte remains one to be further explored. Khan Lann (2017: 9), writing from the perspective of a study of Shecyü variety, which is a lingua franca in the Nanyun area of northern Sagaing region¹³, said that

There are 23 known less similar varieties with 70% to 99% lexical similarity with Shecyü (Jay & Khan, 2012) in Myanmar: Mungre, Chawqhyül [IPA: tʰɔxjül], Mueshaungx (Mossang), Lochang, Lungri, Maitai, Haqcheng, Ngaimong, Shangvan, Cholim (Tonglim), Longchang, Gaqyi, Lakki, Lungkhi, Khalak, Yungkuk, Dunghi, Tikhak, Gaqchan, Shangthi, Lama, Haidley, and Rera (Ronrang)

Statezni (2013: 237) wrote of his testing of comprehension of the Shecyü variety that “Overall, the vast majority of the Tangshang sub-tribes were found to have low comprehension of Shecyü,” basing his findings both on mutual intelligibility tests and lexical similarity. Statezni (2013: 251-252) presented his findings and concluded that there were four groups that had ‘high comprehension’ with Shecyü, namely Cyolim (Cholim), Lochang, Maitai and Mungre. The first two of these are included with Shecyü in Group 2 on morphological grounds (Morey 2019) and the others are part of Group 1, and all belong to Khan Lann’s Upland Pangva (2017). Further work on the groupings with Tangsa, and within Pangwa need to be based on criteria such as the following:

- Morphological criteria (see Morey this volume),
- Lexical similarity (see Khan Lann 2017:9, Statezni 2013),
- Sound correspondences, and
- Mutual intelligibility and native speaker perceptions (Statezni 2013)

¹³ The regions of Myanmar were earlier referred to as divisions.

While much more work remains to be done on studying the varieties that are part of Tangsa-Nocte 2019 makes considerable progress in this direction, presenting very detailed accounts of Hakhun, Muklom and Phong, and a more general overview of the Tangsa-Nocte varieties grouped under the name Pangwa.

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