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Languages and People of the Eastern Himalayan Region (LPEHR)

Exploring Prefix Diversity: A Comparative Analysis of the Tani Languages, Emphasizing Usage in Nominal Categorial Prefixes

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ABSTRACT

Unlike Japanese, which has honorific and size prefixes, various other categories of prefixes exist in the Mising language, including classifier prefixes, body part prefixes, prefixes related to vegetables, animals, fishes, kinship prefixes, directional prefixes, weather prefixes, and more. A comparative analysis has been conducted, contrasting the Mising language, part of the Eastern branch, with the Galo, Tagin, and Apatani languages, all belonging to the western Tani group. Expanding on the frequently utilized prefixes identified by JTS Sun—specifically, *a-, sa-, ta-,* and *pa*— this research delves into how these prefixes are used with nominal roots in the Tani language. The Tani languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman (Trans-Himalayan) family and lack sufficient research. This paper marks the inaugural endeavor to compare these four languages, explicitly focusing on prefixes.

KEYWORDS Mising, Galo, Tagin, Apatani, prefix, Tani, Tibeto-Burman

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Exploring Prefix Diversity: A Comparative Analysis of the Tani Languages, Emphasizing Usage in Nominal Categorial Prefixes[†]

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1 Introduction

The Tani branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family encompasses various languages spoken by communities such as Apatani, Nyishi, Na, Bangni, Tagin, Galo, Hill Miri, and Adi, among others, along with smaller groups identified by clan or village affiliations like Komkar (Thurgood & LaPolla, 2016). The largest concentration of Tani language speakers is found within the Mising tribe in Upper Assam, India (Doley, 2025). Geographically, Tani languages are predominantly spoken across a contiguous region, bordered to the west by speakers of Miji, Puroik, Koro, and Hruso, to the east by Idu speakers, to the south by Boro and Assamese speakers, and to the north by speakers of Tibetic languages (Post & Sun, 2017). Regarding lingua francas, Assamese is prevalent in the southern regions, while Arunachali Hindi is commonly used in central areas. Historically, Tibetic languages served as lingua francas, though their usage has declined recently. According to the 2011 Census of India, there were a combined total of 1,380,878 people in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam who identified themselves as members of tribes speaking Tani languages as their mother tongue (Census of India, 2011).

The Tani languages are synthetic and agglutinating in nature, meaning morphemes can be separated easily. Each has a meaning, whether they can stand alone or not (Sun, 2003).

Among the languages discussed, Glottolog classifies Mising (ISO 639-3 “mrg”) within the eastern Tani branch, while Galo (ISO 639-3 “adl”), Tagin (ISO 639-3 “tgj”), and Apatani (ISO 639-3 “apt”) are part of the western Tani branch (Hammarström et al., 2024).

Apatani is categorized as a threatened language in India, belonging to the *western* Tani branch of the Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family. While definitive data is lacking, it is believed that the language is increasingly spoken by fewer young individuals as their first language, and it is not typically incorporated into school curricula.

Tagin is another threatened language in India, also falling within the *western* branch. Although direct evidence is scarce, it is presumed to be spoken as the primary language by all members of the ethnic community and is not typically taught in schools.

Similarly, Galo is characterized as a threatened language in India, part of the western branch. It is reported to be the first language of all members of the ethnic community and is not commonly included in school instruction.

Mising, recognized as not endangered language in India and belonging to the eastern branch

[†] Many thanks to my language consultants Dipok Kumar Doley (Mising), Riknggam Dabi (Galo), Tago Tapul Mara and Yari Nayam (Tagin), Nada Tagio, Pamang and Mima (Apatani). Many thanks to my two anonymous reviewers and Kellen Parker van Dam for the suggestions. I bear sole responsibility for any remaining errors and shortcomings in this study.

of Tani, is predominantly spoken within its ethnic community. Although there is limited direct evidence, it is understood to be the primary language used by members of this community and has been recently introduced in school settings. The Government of Assam took a significant step in 1985, on October 30th, by introducing a Mising language subject at Class 3 and Class 4 levels in primary schools located in Mising-populated areas. In alignment with the recent National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Mising has been established as the ninth instructional medium at the primary level in state government schools (The Times of India, 2025).

While previous scholarship has established the foundation for Tani linguistics, a gap remains in the comparative analysis of nominal prefixes. Sun (1993) provided the crucial identification of Proto-Tani prefixes (a-, sa-, ta-, pa-), and Post (2007, 2017) has extensively mapped the typological and morphosyntactic features of Galo and the wider Tani branch.

However, existing literature has yet to offer a simultaneous, synchronic comparison of how these specific prefixes are currently realized and utilized across Mising, Galo, Tagin, and Apatani. While Post focuses on the morphosyntax, this paper focuses on the semantic distribution and productivity of these prefixes in modern usage. By juxtaposing these four languages, this study demonstrates that while the morphemes have remained stable, their functional usage has diverged in ways not fully captured by previous reconstructions. Thus, this paper moves beyond the identification of prefixes to an analysis of their comparative lexical diversity.

1.1. Aims and Objectives

This study aims to find out different types of nominal categorical prefixes in eastern and western Tani, especially mammals, non-vertebrates, birds, weather, vegetables, flavors, body parts, kinship, and classifier prefixes employed in the Mising, Galo, Tagin, and Apatani languages and discussing them in detail with enough data. Extensive research on nominal categorial prefixes is considered here for analysis and discussion.

1.2. Literature Review

This study delves into the Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) (Matisoff, 2003) and Proto-Tani (PT) (Sun, 1993) and existing partial descriptions of the category prefixes in Tani languages. In Tibeto-Burman, comprehensive prefixation is a major morphological hallmark. Out of all the common prefixes found in modern languages, **a-, *sa-, *ta-,* and **pa-* can be confidently reconstructed to the proto-language because they are widely documented (Sun, 1993, p. 52). Category prefixes are linguistic components that group words according to the size and structure of the objects they refer to and their lexical or grammatical properties. They are also called "categorizers" by Burling (1984, 2004). Post has documented numerous phrases in Galo that refer to animals. The prefix *tV-* is typically found in non-vertebrates like insects, crabs, some fish, and small reptiles, but the prefix *ho-* is found in most higher species. Most birds can be found in pV- (Post, 2007, p. 217). Classifier prefixes in Galo (Post, 2007) and Mising (S. K. Doley & Post, 2009) can be divided into *sortal* and *mensural* and it has been discussed in detail for these two languages.

In the Japanese language, both *oo-* and *dai-* serve as nominal prefixes, represented by the same Chinese character, and typically convey a sense of "largeness" when affixed to a host noun. While phrases such as *oo-doori* 'big street' and *oo-shoobu* 'big game' maintain their original meaning when replaced by the adjective *ookii* 'big', expressions like *oo-bakamono* 'big idiot' and *oo-ganemochi* 'big rich' take on a peculiar or comical quality when substituted with *ookii.* This distinction underscores the complex semantic nuances associated with these prefixes and

their interaction with adjectives in Japanese discourse (Kubota, 2018).

1.3. Methodology

This research is grounded in firsthand data from native speakers of various languages. Specifically, Mising data were supplemented by gathering information from speakers of the Pagro variety in Dhemaji district, Assam; Galo speakers in Namey Village, Lower Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh; Tagin speakers in Lomtak Mara, under Taliha circle, Upper Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh; and Apatani speakers in Hija Village, Ziro, Lower Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh.

Using a structured word list, the data collection involved compiling semantically organized vocabularies in Mising, Galo, Tagin, and Apatani languages. This word list comprised various categories of nouns classified according to their semantic domains, which were then distributed to language consultants for completion. In addition, vocabularies were also collected from (Bouchery, 2016; D. Doley, 2020; Mara, 2010; Post, 2007).

In addition to primary data collection, the study employed a literature review approach. It examined existing grammar and research articles on the subject matter within these languages, spanning different periods. The focus was on exploring the presence and usage of categorical prefixes. The existing literature was thoroughly scrutinized to identify gaps or shortcomings in the current study from a diachronic point of view.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges the existence of an informal Roman-based script, known as the Padam script, which was introduced by missionaries for the Padam tribespeople. However, it notes that this script is not widely accepted among Arunachali writers, who tend to use it reluctantly due to the lack of better alternatives (Barbora & Post, 2008, p. 267).

The data utilized for this study were initially gathered in Roman script and later transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The primary focus of transcription was on identifying historical evidence related to the occurrence of categorial prefixes such as *a-, sa-, ta-,* and *pa-*.[1]

2 Nominal prefixes in Tani languages

Nominal prefixes are affixes affixed to the onset of a noun or nominal root, altering its semantics or conveying grammatical details. These prefixes exhibit considerable diversity across languages, encompassing variations in their form, purpose, and degree of productivity. Integral to morphological operations, they exert a profound influence on the configuration and arrangement of noun phrases within a linguistic system. In this chapter, we will deal with frequently utilized prefixes identified by JTS Sun—specifically, **a-*, **sV-*, **tV-*, and **pV-*, which are employed in *mammals, invertebrates, birds, weather, vegetables, flavors, body part, kinship, classifier, and cardinal numbers*.[2]

2.1. Mammals

This category refers to mammals, characterized by being four-footed, warm-blooded, and vertebrate animals possessing features such as hair or fur, secretion of milk, and typically giving birth to young ones. This category's categorial prefix in Tani languages is either sV- or hV- in Table 1.

[1] Abbreviations- ISO=Internationally Recognized Codes, PTB=Proto Tibeto-Burman, PT= Proto Tani
[2] V in **sV-*, **tV-*, **pV-* stands for vowels

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
cow	*so:bo*	*hobe*	*svvh*	*sii*
goat	*soben*	*hobin*	*yaben*	*siibiñ*
bear	*situm*	*hottum*	*situm*	*siitiñ*
elephant	*sité*	*hoté*	*svttv*	*siitii*
deer	*sidum*	*hocér*	*svdom*	*siidiñ*
monkey	*sibe:*	*hobe*	*svbi*	*siibi*
pig	*ek*	*erek/e-yek*	*a-rwk*	*a-ljih*

Table 1 – Noun classifier for Higher animals in Mising, Galo, Tagin and Apatani

In Lare Galo, roots denoting mammals are typically prefixed by "ho-". When reconstructing **ɕa-,* TS Sun links this prefix to Proto-TB **sya*, meaning 'meat,' 'flesh,' or 'animal.' Reflexes of this prefix vary among Tani languages; for example, Apatani uses si- (e.g., *sɨbi* for 'monkey') (Abraham, 1987), Mising typically employs either si- or so:- (e.g., Pagro Mising has *sibe:* for 'monkey' and *soben* for 'goat'), and Galo generally uses ɕo-, so-, ho- (depending on dialect). The origin of the back, rounded vocalism in Galo remains uncertain and intriguing, as it does not regularly reflect **a* in Lare or Pugo Galo (Post, 2007). In Tagin (Mara, 2010), we mostly observe *sv-* as a prefix, here, the open-mid central unrounded vowel /ɜ/ is represented by "v"[3]. Irregular rules are also observed in Mising, such as /mɛndaɾi/, which means 'cat,' it has been borrowed from Assamese 'mekuri' and nativized into Mising. Vowel copy and tongue-root harmony are evident in most of the words in Table 1. The PT form for "pig" **rjek* will be discussed in Table 15.

2.2. Non-vertebrates or invertebrates

Invertebrates or lower animals typically encompassed insects, worms, mollusks, etc. They generally refer to groups of animals, such as invertebrates (animals without backbones). However, it's essential to note that this classification is outdated and not scientifically accurate[4].

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
grasshopper	*takom*	*takom*	*takkam*	*koha*
cockroach	*taksi*	*taksi*	*chakchi kori*	*tati*
frog	*tatíg*	*tatíg*	*tatwk*	*tatii*
snake	*tabí*	*tabé*	*tabw*	*tabu*
mosquito	*tamig*	*taruh*	*tarung*	*taru*
lice	*tayíg*	*tayíg*	*tahak*	*takhii*
bee	*tangud/tamud*	*bere/taík*	*tangu taga*	*tayañ*

Table 2 – Noun classifier for invertebrates in Mising, Galo, Tagin and Apatani

Reflexes of **ta-* are found on terms denoting insects and other lower animals. They are also attached to plants. Vowel harmony is an interesting phonological pattern found in Tani languages, in which vowels within some domain – typically the word – share one or more phonological features, like lip rounding or tongue position (Katamba, 1989). While TS Sun

[3] Earlier Misings also used "c" and "v" to represent /ə/ and /ɨ/.

[4] The concept of "lower animals" is considered obsolete in modern biology due to its subjective and arbitrary nature. Non-vertebrates or invertebrates are more appropriate and scientifically accurate.

employs the term "checked rhyme" for this concept, we will maintain the term "vowel harmony" in our discussion. The prefix **ta-* does not show vowel harmony like the prefix **a* (Post, 2007). In Table 2, we see tongue-root harmony only for "grasshopper." In Table 2, the prefix *ta-* is dominant for almost all the languages. From the available data, it can be inferred that the prefix "ta-" is commonly used in the Tani languages to denote invertebrates.

2.3. Birds

In Lamkang (Northern South-Central) language, /pwá/ is the word for 'bird,' and it is compounded with *khú* to mean 'male bird' and *nú* to mean 'female bird.' *khú* does not have a meaning on its own, but *nú* means 'female' (Thounaojam & Chelliah, 2007). In Garo, a category prefix "do-" is employed for bird names, as seen in examples like *do-gep* for 'duck,' *do-po* for 'owl,' and *do-ka* for 'crow' (Burling, 1984). Additionally, in Tani languages, the prefix "pV-" is predominantly utilized to indicate birds (Post, 2007; Sun, 1993).

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
hen	*porog*	*porog*	*puruk*	*paro*
dove	*pékí*	*taaké*	*taakv*	*paku*
duck	*péjab*	*péjab*	*pvjap*	*paje*
parrot	*pébe:*	*pébe*	*pvlwng pvyi*	NA
crow	*píag*	*pag*	*poak*	*piiha*
owl	*pépukulu*	*pupé*	*taapu*	*ngiila*

Table 3 – Noun Classifier for birds in Mising, Galo, Tagin and Apatani

The prefix "pV-" denotes small rounded objects in various words such as 'ball,' 'birds,' 'fruits,' and 'uvula.' The proto-Tani (PT) term for birds cannot be reconstructed uniformly, as some bird names incorporate the prefix "po-" (e.g., *hen* in Mising and Galo), while in Apatani, the prefix "pa-" is apparent for terms like 'hen,' 'dove,' and 'duck.' Although 'crow' and 'owl' have distinct names in the languages under consideration, the phoneme /p/ appears to be the proto-form, with variations in the attached vowel observed across languages. In the Apatani language, there is not a designated term for 'parrot,' likely because of the geographic context. The Apatani people reside in high-altitude regions where parrots, adapted to warmer climates, might not be prevalent.

2.4. Weather

Weather-related words often begin with the formative "do:" which originates from the PT /do/, as demonstrated in examples like /dɔ:/+/miɾ/, resulting in /dɔ:miɾ/ 'clouds' and /miɾduŋ/ 'thundering,' indicating thundering clouds. This illustrates a form of partial reduplication observed in this example. Similarly, /jaɾi jaɾduŋ/ for 'lightning that is happening.'

In Table 4, we see the initial formative /do:/, for which the PT form /doŋ/ is prominent among the languages. The words for 'thunder' and 'lightning' in Galo and Tagin seem to have a similar semantic origin. In Mising, we see the addition of /ŋ/ in /pədɔŋ/ 'rain' and /dɔ:ɾəŋ/ 'sunny.' The western Tani languages taken in this study show the addition of *dV-* and the PTB form *rji* for 'wind.' Mising uses the PT form *sar* for 'wind.' The word for 'sun' across Tani languages is *donyi*, and in table 4, we see the term /dɔɲi/ and /dɔnɲa/ for "sunny" in Tagin and Apatani.

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
wind	*ésar*	*dore*	*diro*	*alji*
rain	*pédong*	*nyido*	*nido*	*mwdo*
thunder	*do:mír*	*dogum*	*dogum*	*japũ-gẽ*
lightning	*yari*	*dorak*	*doryak*	dolya?
sunny	*do:réng*	*doré*	*donyi*	*donnya*

Table 4 – Weather formative in Mising, Galo, Tagin, and Apatani

2.5. Vegetables

In PTB, the term for vegetables is **r-tsay*, while green vegetables are referred to as **raŋ*, and vegetable dishes are denoted by **h(yan)*, and in PT, it is **ĥo*. According to Post (2007), in Galo, the superordinate category label *óo*, which is used for 'vegetable,' transforms into its subtype ó. Additionally, many vegetable names in Galo and other languages have been borrowed from neighboring languages. Indigenous communities often rely on other languages for everyday conversational terms such as kinship terms, flowers, vegetables, days of the week, and numbers. This borrowing reflects the linguistic exchange and cultural interaction among neighboring communities. The incorporation of loanwords into indigenous languages highlights the dynamic nature of language contact and adaptation. Such lexical borrowing can serve as a marker of cultural exchange and integration within a linguistic community. The borrowing phenomenon demonstrates the multifaceted nature of language evolution and its close ties to cultural dynamics.

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
ginger	*take:*	*take*	*taki*	*taki*
garlic	*talap*	*talap*	*talap*	*tale/losun*
chilly	*mírsí*	*yaluk*	*jaluk*	*tero*
pumpkin	*tapa*	*tapí*	*tapv*	*tape/epe*
coriander	*o:ri*	*ori*	*tuniya*	*dunyañ*
bamboo shoot	*i:kung*	*iku*	*hikung*	*byapu/behe*

Table 5 – Vegetables in Mising, Galo, Tagin and Apatani

Vowel harmony is evident for 'ginger' and vowel copy for 'garlic' in these languages. **lap,* which is the root word for 'slippery,' is added for 'garlic.' It seems Mising has adopted the term for "chili" from Indo-Aryan /marichī/, and Galo and Tagin have adopted the term from Assamese /zaluk/.

2.6. Flavors

Flavor refers to the sensory perception experienced when consuming food or drink, typically arising from the combination of taste and aroma. Sourness, saltiness, and bitterness are three primary taste sensations commonly associated with flavor.

In Galo, the terms describing flavors exhibit vowel harmony, while in Mising, the suffix "-dag," likely derived from the proto-Tani (PT) form meaning 'stand' or 'exist,' is attached. Additionally, the Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) term for 'mouth' is **ka,* from which the *kV-* prefix in these Tani languages seems to have originated (Matisoff, 2003). Additionally, in Apatani *alo tihi* is used, where *alo* means 'salt' and *tihi* means 'taste.'

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
sour	*kuːdag*	*kuucúk*	*kungsuk*	*khuyi*
bitter	*kodag*	*kaacák*	*kvchak*	*kocchi*
salty	*koyadag*	*kiicík*	*tippu*	*alo tihi*

Table 6 – *kV-* prefix for flavors in Mising, Galo, Tagin and Apatani

2.7. Body part Prefixes

Many core body part terms in various languages exhibit a pattern where superordinate terms are prefixed with "a-", such as *alák* in Galo, meaning 'hand/arm,' and *alə* in Mising, meaning 'foot/leg.' This prefix "a-" is consistently used for 'hand' and 'leg' in Mising, Galo, and Apatani. However, in Tagin, the prefix "a-" is omitted, and the prominence of the second syllable, *"lV,"* is seen in the first syllable. The proto-form **mik* for 'eye' in Tani languages remains prevalent, especially in Eastern Tani languages like Mising, Padam, and Bori, where it appears in words related to the eye such as /miksap/ 'eyebrow,' /miksi/ 'tears', and /migzeɾ/ 'rheum'. Comparative evidence indicates that in some varieties of Tani, the original bilabial initials before the high front vowel /i/ have undergone a process known as labial palatalization[5] (Sun, 1993, p. 247).

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
hand	*alak / alag*	*alak alag*	*laak*	*ala*
leg	*alé*	*ale*	*lvpa*	*ali*
eye	*amik*	*anyik*	*nyik*	*ami*
eyebrow	*miksap*	*nyikmi*	*nyiksitambw*	*ami mibu*
tear	*miksi*	*nyikla*	*nyikla*	*mila*
skin	*asíg*	*asig*	*apin*	*alyo*
hair (head)	*dumud*	*dum*	*dwm*	*adin dimu*
hair (body)	*amud*	*aamít*	*amw*	*adin amu*
grey hair	*dumpí*	*dumpuu*	*dompong*	*dyimpu*

Table 7 – Body-part prefixes in Mising, Galo, Tagin and Apatani

The general hair root **mwt* is seen across these Tani languages, such as Mising, Galo, and Tagin. However, bilabial /m/ is still prevalent, and alveolar /t/ has been omitted; henceforth, distinct terms are employed to denote different aspects of hair, both on the head and body. For instance, in Mising, the prefix "du-" is added to refer to 'head hair' *(e.g., dumud),* while "a-" is used for body hair *(e.g., amud).* Similarly, in Galo, 'dum' signifies *hair (head),* whereas *dumpuu* denotes 'grey hair.' Tagin employs terms like *dombin* for 'bald' and *dompong* for 'grey hair.' Hair for both head and body is distinguished by adding *a-* and *di-* to the root word '-mu' in Apatani (Bouchery, 2016).

2.8. 2.8 Kinship terms

Kinship terms vary significantly across cultures and languages, reflecting unique family structures, social norms, and cultural values.

The kinship terms of address (A) in Saːyang and Moːying variety of Mising for 'elder

[5] Proto-form **mi* for "man" has also gone through this sound change process. In Galo and Tagin, *nyi* is used, and *a-mi* in Mising. In Apatani, *mi-ju/mju*, showing that the originals have shifted not only in the case of front vowel /i/, but also palatal /j/

English	Mising	Galo	Tagin	Apatani
mother	*ouwéng* (A) / *ané* (R)	*ane*	*anv*	*ane* (A) / *anii* (R)
father	*babu* (A) / *abu* (R)	*abo*	*abu*	*aba*
grandmother	*ya:yo*	*ayo*	*ayu*	*ayo* (A) / *ayobo* (R)
grandfather	*ta:to*	*ato*	*atu*	*ato* (A) / *atobo* (R)

Table 8 – Table representing kinship in terms of address and reference

brother's wife' /ma:mɔ/, 'mother' /na:nə/, 'father' /ba:bu/ are derived by omitting the final short vowel sounds, becoming /ma:m/, /na:n/ and /ba:b/. In terms of reference (R) in Mising and in both address (A) and reference (R) in Apatani, the prefix a- has retained its original form. A partial reduplication is seen in the case of Mising, where the terms for 'mother-in-law' and 'father-in-law' are/ajɔ/ and /atɔ/.

2.9. Classifier Prefixes

Grinevald says, "Classifier systems can be identified as specific types of linguistic systems both on lexical and morphosyntactic grounds, although it is true that in some languages, the different systems commonly share lexical sources and seem to be intertwined" (Grinevald, 2015). Classifiers can be divided based on mensural and sortal in Mising and Galo (S. K. Doley & Post, 2009; Post, 2007). In this section, sortal classifiers in the considered Tani languages will be discussed.

Galo	Mising	Tagin	Apatani	Classifies
-dór	*-dor*	*-dor*	*-dor*	large size animals or birds
-bór	*-bor*	*-bor*	*-ber*	flat, broad items
-bár	*-bar*	*-bar*	*-bar*	classifier for coins (money)

Table 9 – Classifier prefixes in Galo, Mising, Tagin, and Apatani

Classifiers are prefixes that categorize nouns based on their shapes, sizes, and structures. Their presence reflects the unusual phenomenon of numeral-noun agreement in Bodo, indicating their inflectional significance in these languages (Brahma, 2022). Similarly, in Tani languages, there is a numeral-noun agreement, which can be seen in Table 10.

Galo	***-dór***	*ikíi* ***dór****-úm go* dogs clf:three(N) ind	'three dogs'
Mising	***-dor***	*eg* ***dor****-nyi ko* pig clf:two(N) ind	'two pigs'
Tagin	***-dor***	*se* ***dor****-nyi go* cow clftwo(N) ind	'two cows'
Apatani	***-dor***	*subu* ***dor****-e* mithun clf:one	'one mithun'

Table 10 – Sortal Classifier *dor*

2.10. Cardinal Number Categorial Prefix

Core numerals 'one' through 'six' and 'ten' share a common structural feature: they possess a prefix **a* as a free form, indicating their fundamental status as nouns. In contrast, numerals

'seven' through 'nine' are considered peripheral, while the remaining numerals are derived. The numeral "ten" displays varying patterns of vowel harmony across different Tani languages. The PT form given by Sun (1993) is:

**a+*kon*=one

**a+*ɲi*=two

**a+*ɦum*=three

**a+*pri=four*

**a+*ŋo=five*

**a+*krəi=six*

**kv+nɨt=seven*

**pri+*ɲi=eight*

**a+*kv-(n)aŋ=nine*

**a+*rjɨɨ=ten*

Core Numerals

English	**Mising**	**Galo**	**Tagin**	**Apatani**
One	*ako*	*aken*	*aken*	*ako*
Two	*anyi*	*anyi*	*anyi*	*anye*
Three	*aum*	*aum*	*aum*	*hin/hinnge*
Four	*appi*	*appi*	*api*	*piilye*
Five	*angngo*	*angngo*	*angu*	*yango*
Six	*akkéng*	*akké*	*ake*	*khii*
Ten	*íyíng*	*iríi*	*areng*	*alyan*

Peripheral Numerals

English	**Mising**	**Galo**	**Tagin**	**Apatani**
Seven	*kíníd*	*kané*	*kani*	*kanu*
Eight	*piːnyi*	*piiné*	*pini*	*pinye*
Nine	*konang*	*kengngáa*	*akia*	*koa/koahe*

Table 11 – Cardinal Number Categorial Prefix

In Mising and Apatani languages, the PT **n* from the coda position in the word for "one" has been dropped. Additionally, in Galo and Tagin languages, the high back vowel /o/ has been replaced by the high front vowel /e/. Furthermore, the rhotic sound /r/ has been omitted for gemination in the terms for 'four,' 'six,' and 'eight,' while vowel harmony is observed in the word for 'ten' in Mising and Galo. Moreover, the omission of the phoneme **t* is evident in the term for 'seven' in the Western Tani languages, including Galo, Tagin, and Apatani.

3 Phonological Changes

Under Sun's (1993) classification, the Tani languages exhibit divergence in phonological features from their Proto-Tani (PT) form, leading to their subdivision into two primary subgroups. Sun delineates four distinct types of phonological processes, as elaborated below.

Initially, there's the phenomenon of *velar palatalization*. This process involves the

transformation of velar sounds into palatal sounds when they are preceded by a high vowel such as /i/ or a palatal consonant like /j/. For instance, let's consider the word "pain," whose Proto-Tani (PT) form is **ki.*

Group A	Group B
Apatani /átɕi/ Tagin /aci/ Galo /cí/	Mising /ki/

Table 12 – Velar Palatalization in Tani languages – Apatani, Tagin, Galo, and Mising

In Table 12, Group A languages, including Apatani, Tagin, and Galo, have experienced this phonological change.

Next, we have the *labial palatalization*, where the original labial initial sound undergoes a change before /i/ or /j/. This was discussed briefly in table 7. We will consider PT form **mik* "eye" and **mi* "man".

Group A	Group B
Tagin /ñik/ Galo /a-ñik/	Apatani /ami/ Mising /a-mik/

Table 13 – Labial Palatalization in Apatani, Tagin, Galo and Mising (1)

In Tables 13 and 14, for the word 'eye' and 'man,' Tagin and Galo languages have shifted from labial to alveolar sounds, while Apatani and Mising, classified under Group B, have preserved the original form.

Group A	Group B
Tagin /ñi/ Galo /ñi/	Apatani /mju/ Mising /a-mi/

Table 14 – Labial Palatalization in Apatani, Tagin, Galo and Mising (2)

Deliquidation, a phonological process, involves the simplification of the PT consonant cluster **rj* into liquid sounds such as /l-/ or /r-/. This change is noticeable in Apatani, Galo, and Tagin languages. Conversely, in the eastern Tani branch, which encompasses Mising, Padam, and Milang, the PT consonant cluster undergoes a transformation into the palatal /j-/. The PT form for "pig" is **rjek* and "bow" **rji*. The table 15 and 16 below show the case of the words "pig" and "bow" (referring to a weapon).

In the case of the word 'bow' (referring to a weapon), traced back to its Proto-Tani (PT) form as **rji*, we observe divergent phonological developments. Western Tani languages, such as Apatani, Galo, and Tagin, maintain the original liquid sound with /l/ or /r/. Conversely, in eastern Tani languages like Mising, Padam, and Milang, this sound evolves into the palatal /j/, reflecting distinct phonological trajectories within the Tani language family.

The next significant phonological change involves the intriguing phenomenon of Proto-Tani (PT) consonantal codas, where some languages have retained the coda while others have not. Modern Tani languages can be categorized into two groups based on whether the original PT form was lost during the development of the PT -t coda. The PT form for "leech," denoted as **r-p^{w}at*, has been examined in this context.

Group A	Group B
Western Tani	Eastern Tani
Apatani /a-lji/	Mising /ek/ or /e-jek
Galo /e-rek/ or /e-jek/	Padam /ek/
Tagin /a-rwk/	Milang /a-jek/

Table 15 – Deliquidation in Western and Eastern Tani languages (1) (rjek*)**

Group A	Group B
Western Tani	Eastern Tani
Apatani /a-li/	Mising /i-ji/
Galo /ɨ-rə́/	Padam /i-ji/
Tagin /ɜ-ri/	Milang /al-ji/

Table 16 – Deliquidation in Western and Eastern Tani languages (2) (rji*)**

**t* drop is evident in Tagin and Mising in Table 17. Another example for the word "vomit" and "sugarcane" is analyzed in table 14 and 15.

Group A	Group B
Mising /bat/	Apatani /ba/
	Galo /bá/
	Tagin /bɜ/

Table 18 – **t* drop (2)

Group A	Group B
Tagin /bati bapak/	Mising /tabat/
Apatani /tabe/	
Galo /tabə́/	Tagin /bɜ/

Table 19 – **t* drop (3)

The tables exhibit **t* omission in Apatani and Galo, sporadic instances in Tagin, and its absence in Mising. Within examples like /tapat/ 'leech' and /tabad/ 'sugarcane,' both vowel copy and consonant agreement are observed[6]. Specifically, /p/ assimilates in voicing with /t/, and likewise, /b/ mirrors the voicing of /d/. These findings delineate intricate phonological phenomena, contributing to our comprehension of linguistic diversity and evolution.

Vowel Harmony is a phenomenon observed in various Tani languages, where morphemes within a word exhibit consistent phonetic features such as frontness, backness, or roundedness. Similarly, *Vowel Copy*, also referred to as vowel repetition or vowel echo, is another phonological process found in Tani languages, wherein a vowel or sequence of vowels from one segment of a word is duplicated in another part of the same word. These linguistic phenomena are evident across different Tani languages and contribute to the phonological and

[6] In coda position, /t/ and /d/ are used interchangeably with no fixed rules. If the words are succeeded by a suffix beginning with voiceless phonemes, /t/ is used. For voiced ones, /d/ is used.

Group A	Group B
Apatani /ta-pe/ or /tii-pe/ Galo /ta-pék/	Mising /ta-pat/ Tagin /ta-pet/

Table 17 – **t* drop (1)

morphological characteristics of these languages. Examples can be seen from the Galo terms for different "flavors".

	Velar (P)	Labial (P)	Conversion of **rj* into L	**t* drop
Mising	−	−	−	−
Apatani	+	−	+	+
Galo	+	+	+	+
Tagin	+	+	+	+

Table 20 – Distribution of the phonological changes across the considered Tani languages. P=Palatalization, L=Liquid.

The tabulated data in Table 20 summarizes the distribution of the four diachronic phonological features. Each feature's presence is marked with a "+", absence with a "−", and variation across sources is indicated by "+/−".

4 Conclusion

The **a* prefix, extensively employed across Tani languages, showcases notable productivity, primarily associated with body parts, kinship terms, and cardinal numbers. Concurrently, the **sV* prefix maintains its productivity for signifying mammals, while **tV* and **pV* prefixes serve as productive markers for invertebrates and birds, respectively. These morphological patterns underscore the linguistic diversity within Tani languages, delineating specific semantic domains through distinct prefix usage. Additionally, the **kV* prefix is consistently observed across various languages to denote flavors, further highlighting the systematicity of morphological structures across Tani languages. In this study, the prefixes identified by JTS Sun, namely a-, sa-, ta-, and pa-, are examined in conjunction with nominal categorial prefixes, offering insights into their usage patterns and semantic associations. Through comparative analysis, this research aims to elucidate the nuanced functions and distributions of these prefixes across the Tani language family. This endeavor marks the inaugural attempt to systematically compare these four languages, with a particular emphasis on the role and significance of prefixes in shaping morphological structures and linguistic expression within Tani languages.

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