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Himalayan Linguistics

Title

Review: Himalayan Languages and Linguistics

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4v976020>

Journal

Himalayan Linguistics, 12(1)

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Publication Date

2013

DOI

10.5070/H912124436

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himalayan linguistics

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Himalayan Linguistics

Review

Himalayan Languages and Linguistics

Edited by Mark Turin and Bettina Zeisler

Leiden: Brill 2011

ISBN 978-90-04-19448-9

Vii + 322 pages

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In addition to its many reference grammars, the Brill series *Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region* (itself subsumed under the *Tibetan Studies Library* series) now also puts out edited volumes of thematic and areal concentrations. This review concerns one such volume organized and co-edited by Mark Turin and Bettina Zeisler in 2011: *Himalayan Languages and Linguistics: Studies in Phonology, Semantics, Morphology and Syntax*. This review is organized into summaries of each chapter, along with comments on particular strengths or gaps. The review finishes with a general commentary about the place of an edited volume such as this in a linguistics library or graduate level curriculum.

This volume emerged from a selection of papers delivered at the 11th annual Himalayan Linguistics Symposium, held at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand in December 2005. In all, there are nine chapters from ten contributors, including the introductory chapter. The introductory chapter, written by the co-editors notes that the volume represents an attempt to fill gaps in our knowledge base on properties and changes through time to selected languages of the Himalayas, including sub-groupings of Tibeto-Burman and some Indo-Aryan languages. As such, it is broad in scope, and so at first glance it is difficult to find unifying characteristics to this volume other than its wide geographic range. However, the impact and importance of this volume becomes more apparent when all contributions are considered in relation to each other.

The first section is focused on “The Himalayas in history,” with a single contribution. George van Driem (“Lost in the sands of time somewhere north of the Bay of Bengal”), in considering the historical geographic homeland of Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman considers the potential benefits and challenges of correlating population genetics, data on major and minor shifts in climate, agricultural practices and other available extra-linguistic information on material cultures with language sub-group movements and re-settlement patterns. As such, he turns an eye to research and findings (as evidenced in his extensive bibliography) on linguistic paleontology, paleoclimatology and paleobotany as they may (or may not) play a role in strengthening hypotheses on linguistic phylogeny for these two families. Although his chapter seems to raise more questions than it answers, he also notes some tentative and tantalizing evidence (through reconstructible roots for rice plant sub-species terms) that ancient Austroasiatic peoples were the original cultivators of rice.

Part two concerns “Phonology and script”, with two contributions. Heleen Plaisier begins her account “A key to four transcription systems of Lepcha” by noting that the orthography of the language is over three hundred years old, and that the transcription alternatives for those wishing to write in Lepcha but without training in the original orthography typically resort to ‘transcriptions,’

either in Roman or Devanagari orthographies. These alternatives come with their own benefits and drawbacks. This account is written in both a comparative tone as well as an instructive one. Plaisier compares four transcription systems with the native orthography in order to observe specific phonological changes in the language, and also to encourage consistent use of symbols that are phonologically grounded. Of particular interest was her coverage of retroflexes, in particular her preference for *Cr*-cluster representation vs. the Mainwaring dot (e.g. *kṛa*, *hṛa*). This is done presumably to recognize the origin of the retroflex in Lepcha and to more closely approximate its phonetic value in the contemporary language. One reaction to this chapter is a question about what dimensions of the larger Lepcha community make use of specific transcription systems. A related reaction is to what extent Plaisier's recommendations have been (or could be) tested by the Lepcha community across different genres.

Hiruyuki Suzuki provides a phonological sketch of Sogpho Tibetan, spoken in Danba County, Sichuan, China. While speakers culturally self-affiliate with rGyalrong, Suzuki provides phonological and some lexical evidence in this account of Sogpho as a distinct variety. Suzuki's description includes a number of sophisticated impressionistic analyses and is data-rich, but some of the more intriguing segmental phenomena in this variety cry out for further instrumental phonetic analysis. This includes co- and secondary articulations like pre-nasalization, pre-aspiration, labialization and also the phonetic status of the varied onset clusters in Sogpho.

Part three of the volume concerns "Semantics (words and word classes)", with two contributions. Brandon Dotson's chapter traces the history of the Old Tibetan legal term *khrin* in administrative and in ritual contexts. He convincingly portrays the co-occurrences of *khrin*-related lexemes and constructions in different domains as a case of ritual-administrative polysemy. In the legislative lexicon, *khrin* translates as 'legal/judicial punishment', while in the ritual lexicon, it is 'a lead/tether' ornament capable of killing a horse. This analysis offers up valuable insight into the historical connections between the punitive dimensions of Tibetan state and religion.

Newar is one of the more comprehensively documented Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal. Kazuyuki Kiryu, himself a known scholar of Newar, continues this in his consideration of adjectives in the Kathmandu varieties spoken in Kathmandu/Patan and in Bhaktapur. Largely working from the proposals in Dixon and Aikhenvald (2004), he argues for two classes of adjectives in Kathmandu Newar, based primarily on morpho-syntactic criteria. His account is a rich description of the heterogeneous nature of adjectival forms in Newar, taking into account morpho-syntax, semantics and to a limited extent, phonology. Adjectives may be a complement before a copula, they may take adnominal suffixes, and they have a special form to indicate plurality. Negation is accomplished via negation of the copula (but Kiryu does not delve into negation patterns of true verbs in comparison). Kiryu does focus in on a particular adjectival construction *-se cwane* with an adverbializing function. But, one remaining question is whether true verbs can also be adverbialized like this (e.g. 'to eat in a slurping manner').

The fourth and largest part of the volume is on "Morphology and syntax", with four detailed chapters. One particularly interesting and valuable contribution in this volume is Ellen Bartee's account of the conjunct-disjunct system in Dongwang Tibetan ("Animacy in Dongwang Tibetan"), a Southern Khams variety of Tibetan. Similarly to what has been observed throughout Sino-Tibetan and in other parts of the world, the *c/d* system of Dongwang manifests itself as one set of existential/copula verbs or verbal auxiliaries marked for "first person declaratives, in second person interrogatives, or in reported speech in which the agentive participant of the complement clause is co-referential with the agentive participant in the matrix clause. (134-135)." Another distinct set of

copulas or auxiliaries is used for other clauses and participant types. What makes the Dongwang *c/d* system stand out as areally unique is an additional animacy split in existential copular clauses (including possessives), where the label ‘animacy’ applies to anything capable of volitional movement. Barteo notes that Dechen Tibetan (another Southern Khams variety) exhibits something akin to the situation in Dongwang, an “animacy-neutral” split (172), but that otherwise this phenomenon is otherwise unattested. Barteo turns to the long-term social and political influence of Naxi (Lolo-Burmese) as a possible catalyst for this development in Dongwang, noting that if this were the case, it would be a situation of language contact in which lexical and morpho-syntactic materials were not borrowed, but rather where a strategy was the result of this contact. This is reminiscent of the distinction between “matter borrowing” (the replication of morpho-syntactic material into a language in contact situations) and “pattern borrowing” (strategy re-structuring modeled on an external source) proposed by Matras and Sakel (2007). If so, the rise of this animacy split in the *c/d* system of Dongwang could be viewed as a type of pattern borrowing from Naxi.

René Huysmans undertakes an analysis of “The Sampang verbal agreement system,” in an under-documented Kiranti language. Like its sister languages, Sampang is a ‘complex pronominalizing language’ where the verb simplex shows agreement with the agent and the patient, as well as a rich range of tense and aspect marking. Among the many features of the Sampang verb simplex are redundant copy morphemes in the tense-aspect system. His account illustrates the challenges of articulating the verb paradigm in this Tibeto-Burman sub-grouping, and also the benefits to comparative analyses of affixal allomorphy and to reconstructions of Proto-Kiranti simplex verb structure. In addition to Huysmans’ speculation on the history of the copy morphemes in Sampang, and similarly to what has been demonstrated for Limbu, one cannot help but wonder to what extent such morphemes play a role synchronically in the larger word-prosodic system organization in Sampang (cf. Hildebrandt 2007).

Khawaja A. Rehman is the author of the single account of Indo-Aryan in this volume, an analysis of ergative-marking in three languages of Kashmir. Similar to other languages of the family, these languages demonstrate a split by aspect, but they also demonstrate patterns that are non-canonical in comparison to other Indo-Aryan languages. In Kundal Shahi, the agent is ergative-marked in perfective aspect, and the verb agrees with the object, but in Kashmiri (Neelam, Pakistan variety), the verb agreement is more complex by showing obligatory agreement with second-person *A* arguments and optional agreement with third-person plural *A* arguments. Additionally in Kashmiri, intransitive subject arguments are obligatorily ergative-marked when the main verb indicates noises, bodily functions or undirected motion. This is an example, Rehman notes, of Dixon’s (1994) “active alignment.” The situation in Hindko is similarly complex, with an optional ergative postposition that does not occur with first and second singular pronouns, no matter the aspect, and is also subject to pragmatic constraints. The varying pragmatics of ergative marking in this account are evocative of accounts of ergative marking in Nepali and in Hindi-Urdu, where the system is demonstrated to be neither fully ergative, nor a neat split-ergative alignment, but rather is sensitive to a combination of morpho-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic conditions (cf. Pandharipande and Kachru 1977; Das 2006; Ura 2006; Li 2007).

The final chapter is by one of the co-editors. Bettina Zeisler considers “Kenhat, the dialects of upper Ladakh and Zanskar”. Rather than focusing exclusively on lexical and segmental phonological traits, Zeisler’s extensive account also takes into consideration tonogenesis, the residue of morphological erosion in the verb stem, argument structure differences, and also lexicalization effects of compounding. The diachronic picture that emerges in different Kenhat varieties is a mixed one,

with phonetic changes pointing in some cases towards gradual differentiation and retention of conservative traits, but with morpho-syntactic changes indicative in other cases of more rapid innovation. Zeisler's account, beyond using morpho-syntax as a diagnostic for dialect differentiation and drawing from data from a wide range of Tibetan varieties located elsewhere in the region, is a useful overview of the geo-cultural distribution of Tibetan varieties in this region of the Himalaya.

Structurally, this book is carefully edited and assembled. Overall, aside from very rare typographic errors, the only minor formatting annoyances include irregularity in the presence or absence of introductory chapter abstracts (two chapters have them, the others do not), and also a poorly rendered map in Suzuki's sketch of Sogpho Tibetan. This volume benefits from the inclusion of an index, and as always the attractive cover art that is standard to Brill publications makes this volume a striking addition to any library.

Content-wise, this volume is a valuable contribution to the ongoing need to more fully represent the research contributions across language families in the region and the relevance of these languages to all sub-disciplines of linguistics (and beyond). Beyond this, this book could also find its place in a graduate-level seminar on Himalayan languages or else in a field methods course in which the language of study is located within this geographic and structural continuum. The history and synchronic patterns of languages from two of the major families is viewed through many different types of lenses and within many frames of linguistic thought. These include explorations of long-term within- and cross-family contact, the value of extra-linguistic information in language classification, issues of orthographic representation, and examples of benefits from cross-scholar collaboration and interaction. As such, it is a valuable and inspirational field guide and teaching tool on both practical and analytical levels.

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