Grammatical change in North East India – the case of Tangsa

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Location

India

North-East India

Tai Ahom

Nemi Mang Manuscript

Translation of Nemi Mang

ᰠᰢᰲ ᰝᰧ ᰛᰳ ᰀᰬ ᰈᰧᰲ ᰈᰧᰮᰬᰲ ᰜᰧ ᰈᰬᰮ ᰛᰧ ᰀᰬᰮ ᰛᰳ ᰛᰧ ᰀᰬᰲᰲ ᰛᰳ ᰈᰬᰮ ᰠᰢᰲ ᰝᰧ ᰀᰬᰮ ᰛᰳ ᰈᰬᰮ ᰛᰧ ᰠᰢᰲ ᰈᰨᰲ ᰍᰧ ᰝᰬ ॥

sang ba phav au tho phrat laai cham ya am bai ya
svng bai cham sang ba am bai cham pha sang nv
nu mau.

သင် ဝ�; ဖၞ် ကၢဝ် ထေၺ ဆတ်း လ'း ထမ်း ယၞ, ကၢမ် ဝံ. ယၞ, သိုၚ်,
ဝံ. ထၢမ်း သင် ဝၞ; ကၢမ် ဝံ. ထမ်း ဖ္ၞ. သၢၚ် ခၞိဝ် လူ မ်း ॥

'And if a person is working to read and understand this
book, do not conceal it, do not hide it, but if you do try to
conceal it, the creator above in the sky is looking at you.'

The Tangsa

- The two 'languages' called Tangsa (ISO 639-3:nst under the name 'Naga, Tase') and Nocte (ISO 639-3:njb 'Naga, Nocte') are internally diverse and closely related to each other.

- In Myanmar, the name Tangshang (not cognate with Tangsa) was adopted in 2003

- 70+ sub-tribes within Tangsa and Tangshang (listed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tangsa_people

- Each sub-tribe has a distinct linguistic form, sometimes mutually intelligible with others, and sometimes not. The linguistic diversity is in terms of (1) sound change, (2) vocabulary, (3) different word structure, and (4) differences in grammatical features.

Mungray dance troupe – led by Yonglun

Linguistic Variation – Pangwa, Tikhak, Muklom and Hakhun

Gloss:	Cholim	Lo-chhang	Rera	Joglei	Tikhak	Yong-kuk	Muklom	Hakhun	Hehle
drinking water	k^ham^2	$k^h\epsilon^2$	k^ham^2	kham	k^ham^2	k^ham^2	jung	$\mathrm{d}\!\!\mathrm{zu}^2$	zu^2
river (water)	zo^2	$\mathrm{d}\!\!\mathrm{zja\eta}^2$	zo^2	jong	k^ham^2	k^ham^2	jung	$\mathrm{d}\!\!\mathrm{zu}^2$	zu^2
alcohol	c^hai^1	$c^ha\mathrm{w}^1$	c^he^1	chol	zu^2	zo^2	kham	k^ham^2	k^ham^2

The lexemes (words) for 'drinking water', other types of 'water' and 'alcohol' can be used as a diagnostic, a suggestion first made to us by Rennan Longri of Kharang Kong village. We have shaded the form *kham* in grey to demonstrate the differences.

Comparison – Champang and Cholim

Gloss:	Champang	Cholim
snake	punu	pu^3
bee	nɐʔnu	ɲɤʔ^2
monkey	jukku	βo^1
pig	wɛkku	βak^1
mouse, rat	juʔpo	ʒuʔ^2
buffalo	lumo	ɲe^2
elephant	bokla	c^{h}a^1
tiger	sɐpbe	c^{h}jɤʔ^1
bear	sɐpba	cap^{2}ba^1
ant	sjamu	xip^{1}xa^1
deer	kahu	k^{h}i^{1}go^2
cattle (bovine)	mɛnsu	men^{1}su^2
frog	lutja	luk^{1}ha^1

Table 1: Jinghpaw SFW agreement endings (From DeLancey 2010)

1st	-iŋ/ -eŋ	-iʔ / -eʔ
2nd	-in / -en	-it / -et

Observations I - Transitivity

Mueshaungx has two verb classes, with different endings in the future, depending on whether the verb is transitive or intransitive

Rinkhu possibly has different endings for transitive and intransitive verbs in the past

Observations II - Negation

2) Negation. All varieties have a postpositional particle / postclitic / suffix to indicate negative, except for Rera and Khalak. Mergers in the NEG singular – 1-3 in Mungray, 2 & 3 in Mueshaungx, Ngaimong, Joklei, and Phong 1 & 2 in Lochhang (but not in Chamchang)

3) Rera (and Rinkhu) express negation with a prepositional particle / prefix mi- followed by agreement markers. Khalak, same as Singpho and song language.

4) The Negative forms in Phong all have back vowels /u/, except for the 1st plural, which still has the /i/ vowel but the consonant is expressed with a labio-velarisation, which we have notated as /mʷi/,

Observations III: Future

5) This is shown by a prepositional particle / prefix commencing in m- in Cholim, Longri, Lochhang, Chamchang, Mungray, Rera; by a prefix a- in Ngaimong and Joklei; in each case these are invariant forms and the person/number is marked by an element following the verb. The initial consonant of this form in Mungray is ŋ- which may be related to the Muklom n-.

6) There is no form prefixing or preceding the verb in the other varieties, but postclitics with initial n- in Muklom, ʃ- in Mueshaungx, c- in Yongkuk, tç- in Tikhak and person/number agreement. There is no preceding consonant in Hakhun or Phong.

Observations IV: Past

7) PAST: All past constructions employ postpositional particle / postclitic / suffix. This commences with t- in Rera, Mueshaungx, Ngaimong, Joklei, Muklom, Yongkuk, Tikhak, Hakhun; in k- (except for 3rd person t-) in Cholim and Longri, and k- and l- mixed with t- in Lochhang and Chamchang. As with the negative, Mungray has merged the forms for all three singular persons to -ta?.

Observations V: Final stops v nasal/open

Final nasals / open throughout found as follows

- all future forms, (ii) all forms in Rera and (iii) Chamchang, Lochhang, Muklom and Yongkuk past

Final stops throughout are found in:

- Mungray negative and (ii) Mueshaungx, Ngaimong and Joklei negative and past

Mixed systems (3 is stop, others open)

- Longri and Cholim, Tikhak negative and past
- Lochhang and Chamchang and Muklom, Yongkuk – negative only
- Hakhun has final stop only in the past and negative 2PL

Observations VI: 1st singular finals

- All the varieties have a velar stop (either oral or nasal) for the 1st person singular, except for

  - Lochhang 1Sg negative, which has merged with the 2nd person in the form *mau*,

  - Lochhang and Chamchang 1Sg future, both of which have -a finals

  - Cholim and Longri 1Sg past, both of which have final -o. This does appear to be a regular sound change between a putative proto -*aŋ and /-o/ in these two varieties for grammatical words, for example the negative existential /agjo/ in Cholim is /aɣjaŋ/ in Lochhang.

Observations VII: Vowels

The vowels of the second plural are /a/ vowels in Lochhang, Chamchang, Rera, Mungray, Yongkuk, Tikhak, Hakhun and Phong; -/i/ vowels in Cholim, Longri, Ngaimong, Joklei, Muklom, mixed in Mueshaungx.

Observations VIII: Irregularities

- Tikhak FUT.3 form with –i? is not found in other varieties.
- Irregular -ŋ in the 2PL in Cholim

Champang

PRESENT   a-V

FUTURE   a-V-kaʔ

PAST   V-wa

DID   V-kɐwa

NEG   V-ɭa

IMP.SG   V-ɭaʔ

IMP.PL   V-paʔ

PROH   V-kaʔ

Hierarchical Marking

Table 1: Hakhun Hierarchical agreement markers – 3rd singular agents

	3SG>3	3SG>1SG	3SG>1PL	3SG>2SG	3SG>2PL
Future	Va^3	V-a^3	V-a^3	V-a^3	V-a^3
Continuous	V-ka^1	V-rɤ^1	V-ri^1	V-ru^1	V-ran^1
Negative	V-ma^1	V-rəmɤ^1	V-rəmi^1	V-rəmo	V-rəmat^1
Past	V-ta^1	V-thɤ^1	V-thi^1	V-thu^1	V-than^1

Questions

- Why do some varieties have hierarchical marking and others not?

- Why is there no person marking at all in Champang?

- What is the historical explanation of the stop-final ~ nasal/open-final alternation

- How did the prefixal / prepositional future develop?

- How did a prefixal / prepositional negative develop? Or is the suffixal form the innovation?

- Why are k- forms found in the past in some varieties?

Proto forms

1		2		3
Sg	Plu	Sg	Plu	
-Cvelar	-V high front	-V high back	-C alveolar	

Past in Chamchang and Lochhang

- adoption of k- initials in the non3 past (in common with Cholim and Longri)

- adoption of l- initials (perhaps taken from the continuous) in 2nd person forms

- creation of a new continuous by prefixing a t-, incidentally the historical past form.

- 3past retains t-, as the most conservative of the person endings (cf English think**s**)

Rera and Lochhang compared

'I am not able to carry'

Rera:			*m*i gun nok laŋ

Lochhang:		ɣui dai *m*au

(*mi* is the **future** prefixal particle in
   Chamchang and Lochhang)

How to access data

- Go to http://corpus1.mpi.nl/ds/imdi_browser/
  - click on **DoBeS archive**
  - and then on **Tangsa, Tai, Singpho in North East India** to access our data.

- Linguistic transcriptions of the Tangsa and Ahom materials are also being made available, in searchable format, via SEALANG at http://sealang.net/assam
- Ahom Dictionary at http://sealang.net/ahom