

## **Introduction to Volume IV: Tibeto-Burman**

This volume of the set is devoted to articles about the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family, which includes everything in the family aside from the Sinitic (Chinese) varieties (see Volume I on the relationships within the family). The major languages with extant old texts are Tibetan, Burmese, Tangut (Xīxià), and Newar, and much of the literature is about these older languages, though there are hundreds of languages and dialects within the family spread across Southwest China, Myanmar, Northeast India, Thailand, Bangladesh, and northern Vietnam.

Our first two papers are classics that concern the verbal morphology of Old Tibetan. Fang-Kuei Li's 1933 article, "Certain phonetic influences of the Tibetan prefixes upon the root initials" starts off. It is the first rigorous application of the method of internal reconstruction to any Sino-Tibetan language. In the paper, Prof. Li disagrees with Conrady's earlier (1896) analysis (also followed by Wolfenden [1929]) taking the *b-* prefixed forms in the Tibetan verb paradigms as the basic form, and instead argues that the prefixless forms should be taken as basic, and shows how the different initials found in the paradigms are due to the influence of the different prefixes. Prof. Li shows that the voiceless unaspirated forms in the paradigms are secondary, so there is only a voiced-voiceless aspirated contrast at base, and also argues that the voiced vs. voiceless aspirated contrast cannot be shown to consistently mark transitive vs. intransitive, as had been posited by Conrady. He also argues against the analysis of certain forms as passive. He gives several examples of word families and the derivations of the different members of each word family.

Following this, W. South Coblin, who was trained by Prof. Li and also worked closely with him on key Tibetan texts (e.g. Li & Coblin 1987), continued where Prof. Li had left off in his "Notes on Tibetan verbal morphology" (1976). In this article Prof. Coblin applied the results of Prof. Li's internal reconstruction to Tibetan verb paradigms that consist of four forms (present, perfect, future, imperative). He also built on the work presented in Simon 1929, Shafer 1950-1951, Durr 1950, Uray's (1953) critique of Shafer and Durr's work, Nishida 1958, and Chang 1971. He adopts or refines a number of rules proposed in these earlier works, and also posits a number of cluster simplification and vowel assimilation rules that allow him to explain all but a few of the 266 verb paradigms he considered. Hill (2011: 446)

summarises the patterns of cluster simplification that Prof. Coblin pointed out as “Coblin’s Law”: “Prefixes are lost when the resulting cluster is not phonotactically possible”.

As mentioned in the discussion of word families in Sinitic in Volume 3, the discussion of word families in Sino-Tibetan started with Wolfenden’s 1928 article on word families in Tibetan in which the prefix *m-* is involved in some of the forms. He also extended the scope of this work on word families to look at cross-linguistic word families in his 1937 article comparing Tibetan, Kachin, and Chinese forms, as well as in his 1929 magnum opus. Another scholar very much involved in this work was Walter Simon (e.g. 1929, 1941, 1942, 1949, 1971, 1977, 1980). In the carrying out the earlier work on word families the scholars were often quite conservative in terms of what alternations they would allow in their word families, but later expanded the work to include more possible variants.<sup>1</sup> The short paper presented here, Simon 1977, “Alternation of final vowel with dental nasal or plosive in Tibetan”, is still rather conservative in terms of the variants included, but that may be simply a matter of what the paper is trying to show: in their Addenda to the 1929 reprint of Jäschke’s 1881 dictionary of Tibetan, A. H. Francke & Walter Simon had mentioned a pattern of variation such that they found “a final vowel in the case of verbs, a dental nasal in the case of adjectives, and a dental (voiced) plosive in the case of nouns” (Simon 1977: 51). This article presents a large amount of data showing such word families, and concludes (p. 57) that in fact the pattern mentioned “is merely one of several possible patterns”.

The next article is a short but important one by Robbins Burling, “The addition of final stops in the history of Maru (Tibeto-Burman)” (1966). Prof. Burling has a very large number of publications in several different areas of anthropology and linguistics, and has made major contributions to Tibeto-Burman studies, including his early Garo grammar (1961), “Proto-Bodo” (1959), “The Sal languages” (1983; see Volume 1), his overview of genetic relations in Northeast India (2003, now updated as Post & Burling 2017), and his more recent trilogy on Garo (2004), among others.<sup>2</sup> The paper we present here argues that when we do

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<sup>1</sup> LaPolla 1994a was a reaction to some scholars who posited excessively loose associations, as it argued that for word family relations (i.e. irregular correspondences) to be recognized there must be regular correspondence in the majority of the parts of the form, e.g. if we want to say that two forms with different finals form a word family, then all but the finals should be regular, as assumed in Simon’s article presented here.

<sup>2</sup> See the full list of his publications and fieldwork, and papers about his contributions, in Post, Morey & DeLancey, eds., 2015.

comparative reconstruction, we can't always take the more complex form as the historically prior one, as Simon (1938: 274) did. In this case, when comparing Maru words with final consonants with cognates in related languages that do not have final consonants, we find that the Maru words are innovative, and he identifies the conditions on the appearance of the final consonant. This finding is also relevant to efforts to determine the reasons for the variants in word families, as we might also be tempted to see the stop finals as suffixes or as part of the original roots if we didn't have good knowledge of the development of the language.

Our next topic is the phenomenon of “pronominalization” first discussed by Brian Hodgson in his description of Dhimál in Hodgson 1847. This refers to the typological feature of having copies of the free personal pronouns of the language appearing after the verb, either as a suffix or as a free form. What he was referring to was not cognate forms shared across languages, but the unique pronouns of the individual languages appearing after the verb or suffixed to the verb, as in the case of Dhimál, for which he gives (1847: 120) *Ká khika* (1sg), *Ná khina* (2sg), and *Wá khiwa* (3sg), *Kyéł khi kyel* (1pl), *Nyel khi nyel* (2pl), and *Ubal khi* (3pl) for the present tense indicative auxiliary, and says of the suffixed forms, “Is this inflection, after all, nothing more than the reduplicated pronoun, added to the root, after the manner of the plural?” (ibid.). Hodgson divided the “Himalayan races”, as he called them, into two groups based on whether they spoke what he called “simple or non-pronominalized” languages or “complex or pronominalized” languages (1880: 105). That is, he wasn't dividing the languages by the manifestation of some cognate features or shared innovations, but dividing the people based on the typological nature of their language as simple or complex, and judged their intellectual and cultural levels accordingly. That this was a typological rather than cognate feature was also understood by Eugénie J. A. Henderson when she wrote her article “Colloquial Chin as a pronominalized language” (1957), which we present here. Kuki-Chin had already been recognised as having a prefixal paradigm, though it was analysed in the *Linguistic Survey of India* (Konow 1904) as nominal prefixing and not a system of pronominalization,<sup>3</sup> but based on Hodgson's work Henderson created a list of typological features that a language should have to be considered a pronominalized language,

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<sup>3</sup> Hodgson (1856) had arbitrarily limited the characterization of pronominalization to nominal prefixing and verbal suffixing of pronouns, and so Konow did not include languages with prefixes only in the pronominalized category, and he also considered the verb in Tibeto-Burman languages to be nouns and so the prefixed forms were seen as possessive forms used as if they were clauses, e.g. ‘my going’ used as ‘I am going’ (1904: 16-18).

and on the basis of that list argued that like Dhimál, colloquial Tiddim Chin could also be considered a pronominalized language, as it also showed a pattern of suffixing (different from the Dhimál pronouns) to the verb, and so she argued that more languages than Hodgson had originally assumed manifest this typological phenomenon, and so the phenomenon (not the forms—she did no comparison of forms—but the use of the pronouns of the individual languages for marking person on the verb) might be a general Tibeto-Burman typological trait.

The following paper, still on this topic, is “Pronominal verb morphology in Tibeto-Burman”, by James Bauman (1974; see also Bauman 1975). In this article Bauman’s main goal was to argue against the idea current at the time that the systems found in the pronominalized languages were the result of contact with the Munda language. In this he was successful, as that idea was no longer current after Bauman’s article appeared. To replace that hypothesis with another possible origin for the system, he argued that it is possible that the patterns found were due to native development. He compared some of the systems described up to that point to show commonalities, but did not try to reconstruct a paradigm to Proto-Tibeto-Burman. In the article it seems he is only considering the possibility that there was just one ancestral system, and is not considering the possibility that different systems were innovated more than once, even given the obvious historical transparency of the Dhimál suffixes as clearly copies of the Dhimál free pronouns and their lack of similarity to forms in other languages. In trying to make his case that the languages that currently do not manifest any trace of “pronominalization” must have had such systems in the past but lost the pattern, he also looked at the free pronouns and compared them with the affixes, and found commonalities, showing that there was a clear grammaticalization relationship between some of them, i.e. that the suffixes derive from the pronouns or obvious sources such as the number ‘two’ for duals, but did not see this as a problem for assuming a deep history for the forms. Based on this he also argued for reconstructing an inclusive/exclusive distinction to Proto-Tibeto-Burman, but LaPolla 2005, based on a much larger sample of languages, shows that the inclusive forms are clearly innovative and largely language-specific. In a later article, Bauman (1979) also argued that the patterns found in the systems of the pronominalized languages represented an ergative pattern.

Our next article, LaPolla 1992a, “On the dating and nature of verb agreement in Tibeto-Burman” is a response to the assumptions of Bauman work and those who tried to build on it

by reconstructing a single paradigm of verbal suffixes that were said to pattern in a split-ergative way to Proto-Tibeto-Burman or even Proto-Sino-Tibetan. LaPolla 1992a argues 1) that there is not enough evidence to allow us to assume a system already existed in Proto-Tibeto-Burman (never mind Proto-Sino-Tibetan) and was lost in all of the languages with old documentary evidence except for Tangut; 2) that the Tangut system is clearly a Tangut-specific grammaticalization of the Tangut free pronouns into suffixes (just as happened in Dhimál, but with different forms);<sup>4</sup> 3) that since the systems found are transparent grammaticalizations like this, then from a methodological point of view we should not reconstruct them to the deepest level proto-language of the entire family; 4) that the languages that manifest what might be considered to be cognate systems have a very limited geographic distribution, along a known migration route, so might be due to a single shared innovation later than Proto-Tibeto-Burman; and 5) that the pattern manifested in Tangut and other languages used to argue for a split-ergative pattern actually is a hierarchical pattern, not a split-ergative pattern.

This was followed up in LaPolla 1994, “Parallel grammaticalizations in Tibeto-Burman: Evidence of Sapir’s ‘drift’”, where it was shown that there are many types of parallel grammaticalizations in Tibeto-Burman (and even Sino-Tibetan), that is, functionally and even structurally similar constructions built of unique (often non-cognate) forms in the different languages, and pronominalization is one of them. It is shown that quite a few other languages manifest obvious pronominalization patterns similar to that of Dhimál, where unstressed copies of the pronouns unique to that language become prefixes or suffixes on the verb (see also LaPolla 2001).<sup>5</sup> This is not to deny that some languages share a particular cognate system, but that the system that some people are trying to say was part of Proto-Tibeto-Burman was actually only one of many that grammaticalized in the family, and so represents a shared innovation among those languages and thus can be used as evidence for seeing those languages as a separate subgroup within Tibeto-Burman (see LaPolla 2017,

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<sup>4</sup> Later research by Gong Hwang-cherng (2001; see also Gong 2003) showed that there are actually two parts to the Tangut system, the suffixes, which follow a hierarchical pattern, and changes in the verb root, which occur when the action is direct, that is, when the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person is the actor of the clause. He did not discuss a possible origin for the change in the verb root, though the *-u* direct action suffix that Ebert (1987, 1990) talks about as a common feature of related systems is a very likely possibility.

<sup>5</sup> As argued by Bauman (1974), the difference between the system being prefixal or suffixal is not important; it is still the same phenomenon of pronouns becoming cliticized to the verbs.

2013 for discussion). Other patterns discussed in LaPolla 1994 are the parallel development of non-cognate agentive marking, anti-agentive marking,<sup>6</sup> direction marking, causative marking, and sets of existential verbs in which the type of referent determines the use of the particular existential verb.

Further evidence of parallel innovation of person-marking systems is presented in our next article, by Tej R. Kansakar, “Verb agreement in Classical Newar and Modern Newar dialects” (1999). In this very polite but well-argued article, Prof. Kansakar evaluates some of the opinions that have been expressed about Classical Newar and various Newar dialects in terms of the origin and dating of the so-called conjunct/disjunct marking (see our next article, DeLancey 1992, for more on this phenomenon), and the person marking found in the Dolakha and Pahari dialects of Newar. Comparing the forms and discussing different historical possibilities, Prof. Kansakar argues against reconstructing either type of morphology to Proto-Newar, and argues that as the Dolakha and Pahari dialects are surrounded by Kiranti languages, the patterns found in those varieties (which do not appear to be cognate with each other) might be due to contact.

The discussion of parallel innovations of morphology in Tibeto-Burman leads us to Scott DeLancey’s 1992 article looking at the historical development of the so-called conjunct/disjunct forms in Tibetan varieties, Newar, and Akha: “The historical status of the conjunct/disjunct pattern in Tibeto-Burman”. To quote from Prof. DeLancey’s abstract, “Several Tibeto-Burman languages show a peculiar pattern of distribution of copulas and/or finite verb forms, in which one set occurs with first person subjects in statements, second person subjects in questions, and in complement clauses of *verba dicendi* when the complement and main clause subjects are coreferential, and another set in all other contexts. When the evidence for and against reconstructing the system at the branch or family level is assessed, it appears that this “conjunct/disjunct” pattern is a recent secondary innovation in all of the languages in which it is found” (p. 39). The term “conjunct-disjunct” for this phenomenon was due to the originator of the term, Austin Hale, in his well-known article on this phenomenon in Newar (Hale 1980), trying to discuss all of the patterns found as

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<sup>6</sup> See LaPolla 1992b for a more complete discussion of anti-agentive marking, LaPolla 1995a for a more complete discussion of agentive marking, and LaPolla 1995b for discussion of the paths of development of these two types of marking (among others). LaPolla 2004 gives a summary of much of this research.

syntactic patterns, based on a Generative Semantics-style analysis, with covert speech act frames for all utterances, but this name (and presenting it as a syntactic phenomenon) has been criticized by others working on this phenomenon, which is now seen as part of evidential marking systems, such as Jackson T.-S. Sun (e.g. 1993, footnote 15) and Nicolas Tournadre (e.g. Tournadre 1991, footnote 14, Tournadre 2008; see Tournadre & LaPolla 2014 for a more comprehensive discussion of this phenomenon, now often referred to as egophoricity, incorporated in a theory of evidential marking). Also, in the earlier literature, such as Brian Hodgson's work (e.g. 1847), the terms conjunct and disjunct referred to bound and free forms, respectively, e.g. free pronouns vs. affixed pronouns.

The last three articles are about three important aspects of Tibeto-Burman linguistics, though don't form a single topic like the earlier articles. The first is a seminal article on nominalization and its role in various structures, particularly clausal modifying constructions, by James A. Matisoff: "Lahu nominalization, relativization, and genitivization" (1972). Prof. Matisoff shows the different nominalization constructions used in Lahu, in particular those built with the particle *ve*, including what is now often referred to as "stand-alone nominalization", where a nominalized clause is used as an utterance by itself. He also shows how the same pattern of nominalization is found in several other Tibeto-Burman languages and Mandarin Chinese. This article spawned a large number of articles over the years showing similar constructions in Tibeto-Burman and Sinitic languages, and several edited volumes and special issues of journals on the topic (see for example *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 31.2 [2008], *Language and Linguistics* 9.4 [2008], and Yap, Grunow-Harsta & Wrona (eds.), 2011). The article was also intended to counter the idea current among generativists at the time that one could learn everything about languages from just studying English, and that linguistic fieldwork was not necessary.

The next article is a classic and well-known article by Alton L. Becker on the classifier system of Burmese: "A linguistic image of nature: The Burmese numerative classifier system" (1975). It is stated in the article that it was inspired by Robbins Burling's 1965 article on Burmese classifiers, which ended with the suggestion that someone should try to make sense of the forms listed, and also Hla Pe's 1967 article on Burmese classifiers. The article shows that the classifier system is not random, and not straightforwardly based on size or shape, but based on the Burmese worldview. Too little of this sort of work has been done due to the influence of Structuralism, which champions the analysis of forms divorced from

context and culture, even though it has been argued that all conventionalized aspects of language necessarily reflect the cognitive and cultural conceptions of the speakers (e.g. LaPolla 2015). See also Adams & Conklin 1973 for a more comprehensive cross-linguistic discussion of classifier semantics.

Our last article in the volume, and the four volume set as a whole, is another classic article, this time on the origin of tones in Southeast Asian languages, by James A. Matisoff: “Tonogenesis in Southeast Asia” (1973). Prof. Matisoff discusses the relationship between monosyllabicity and the development of tones,<sup>7</sup> and how interrelated the different elements of the syllable are in terms of influencing each other historically, and how changes in the consonants can lead to the development of tones. Although he discusses Paul K. Benedict’s (1972a-b, 1973) view that Proto-Sino-Tibetan had at least two tones in non-stopped syllables,<sup>8</sup> he is non-committal, and argues that tone can be seen as a cyclical feature historically. As always, Prof. Matisoff’s writing is in an informal style (which he says he learned from Yuen Ren Chao), and shows his good sense of humour: the tongue in cheek preface to the article is worth the price of admission alone!

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<sup>7</sup> See also Mazaudon 1977 on tonal development and DeLancey 1985 on the cyclical nature of the grammaticalization of morphology.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict had based this view on his earlier assumption that Karen was a separate branch outside the rest of Tibeto-Burman, and also on the assumption that the Chinese tones go back to the proto stage, but Benedict later (see Benedict 1976 in Volume I) realized Karen should be within Tibeto-Burman proper, as word order is not a proper criterion for determining genetic affiliation, and we now understand Chinese tones to have been secondary, in the case of the *shǎng* and *qù* tones derived from segmental suffixes, with the *píng* tone being the contrasting unsuffixed forms (see the discussion of Downer 1959, Mei 1970, and Pulleyblank’s work in Volume III).

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