# Linguistic synchrony and diachrony on the roof of the world – the study of Himalayan languages*

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## 1. The study of Himalayan languages

In the Himalayan region, divergent social patterns are seen on many fronts. While some groups in this region are nomads who move regularly from one place to another with their livestock, others live permanently in villages; while some follow Buddhism as their only religion, others follow Hinduism or Christianity as their only religious faith or follow one or more of these in addition to their local deity. Differences can also be seen in other fields, spanning from the methods of cultivation (while some engage in terraced cultivation, others engage in shifting cultivation), matrimony (polygamy – both polyandry and polygyny – in some societiesbut monogamy in others) to architecture.

The Himalayan region presents an exciting field of research to the linguist. It offers a rich *smörgåsbord* of languages belonging to different linguistic stocks and languages representing different typological characteristics. It also has a long tradition of multilingualism. The term "Himalayan languages" usually covers languages and language communities of the Himalayan region, i.e., languages spoken in north-western and north-eastern India, Nepal, Bhutan, the Tibetan Plateau, northern Burma, Sichuan, Nuristan, Baltistan and the Burushaski-speaking area in the west. Languages spoken in this region represent the Indo-European language family (the Indo-Aryan and Iranian subgroups, and the Germanic language English), the Dravidian language family, the Tibeto-Burman language family, and the Austro-Asiatic language family. Additionally, there are language isolates (Burushaski and Kusunda). There are some major practical problems in specifying the number of languages spoken in the region. For one, the information available on languages is not comprehensive. Second, the same language is, at times, referred to by more than one name: the name which its speakers use and the name which outsiders use to refer to that language.[1] Matisoff (1999) notes that people of a Naga group call their language Memi, but outsiders know it as Mao or Sopvoma (the name of their main

village). Furthermore, the same language name is used, at times, to refer to a language but, at other times, it is also used as a cover term to refer to a group of genetically or culturally related languages. Most inhabitants of the Simla state listed Pahaaṛii (without any further specification) as their mother tongue in the 1901 census (Bailey 1908: ii). Pahaaṛii (listed as "Pahari" in the *Ethnologue*), besides being the name of a particular Indo-Aryan language, is also at times used as a cover term to refer to a set of related languages spoken in this region.

The Himalayan region has a long history of linguistic diversity and multilingualism, reaching back several millennia. Societal multilingualism is an established tradition, where not all languages which are spoken in one community are employed in all spheres of activity. Instead, in the Himalayan language situation, as in the wider South Asian context, language use is often situationally differentiated, where one language is used, for example, in school or at work, another at home, and possibly yet another for religious purposes. Individuals in such communities may be fluent in all the languages involved or fluent in their mother tongue, but have working knowledge of other languages for use in particular social situations. The choice of language in the religious sphere in Kinnaur is illustrative. Most Kinnauris follow three religions: Hinduism, Buddhism (Lamaism), and worship of their local deity. Sanskrit and Hindi are used while performing Hindu rituals, Tibetan while performing Buddhist rituals, and Kinnauri while performing rituals for the local village deity. The linguistic situation in South Asia differs in this regard from the pattern which migrating social groups in the Western world commonly display, where the second or third generation immigrants give up their mother tongue, and accept the language of the new country (for example, English in the US) as their own language. In such cases language shift is the norm, and language maintenance is an exception. In the South Asian setting, on the other hand, language maintenance is the norm, not the exception. Studies (for example, Gumperz and Wilson 1971 and Subbarao and Arora 1990) have shown that as a result of close long-term language contact, shift from one language to another does not necessarily mean shift from one grammar to another. Instead, the grammars of the languages involved have converged to the point that switching from one language to another often entails nothing more than the exchange of lexical items of one language for those of another in a grammatical framework which remains invariant across languages.

Despite this stable multilingualism, language death is not uncommon in the Himalayan region. Here, as elsewhere in the world, languages have died

and are dying at an alarming rate because of the social upheavals brought about by industrialization and urbanization. Indigenous languages with no written tradition and with little or no political and/or economic power at the local and national level are especially likely to fall by the wayside en route to modernity. Speakers of these languages in many cases favor the neighboring dominant language rather than their own language, seeing the latter as more of a liability than as an asset. Some languages completely vanish from the face of the earth, while others are given up in particular contexts. While minority speakers, in many cases, learn the language(s) of the dominant group, the reverse is usually not the case. Many adult Kinnauri speakers, for example, speak Kinnauri as their mother tongue, and many of these speakers living in villages are monolingual. The children, on the other hand, tend to be active bilinguals, with preference for Hindi or the regional Indic variety. Many young people migrate to cities and towns for education and employment, where the lingua franca is not Kinnauri. Such social situations have important linguistic consequences for these lesser-known languages. Asymmetrical situations may lead to the acceptance of the dominant language as the predominant language, which subsequently becomes their only medium of communication. Winter (1993), however, rules out external factors (for instance, large migrating groups) as the prime factors contributing to language death. He presents the Walapai and Bantawa case studies to highlight the important role language attitudes of its speakers play in language preservation vs. language death ("language suicide"; Winter 1993). Irrespective of the factors contributing to this negative trend, it is a fact that a large number of minority languages of this region are threatened with extinction and that very little is known about many of these languages.

## 2. Linguistic synchrony in the Himalayan region

### 2.1. Descriptive linguistics

There are a handful of languages of the Himalayan region – languages such as Burmese, Nepali and Tibetan – for which a substantial body of data and analyses is available. There are, for example, fairly detailed dictionaries available for Classical Tibetan as well as modern Tibetan (for example, Jäschke [1881] 1987; Hahn 1974; Beyer 1992 for Classical Tibetan; Gold-

stein 1978, 1984; Mazaudon 1978; Denwood 1999 for modern Tibetan). Further, the works of DeLancey (for example, 1985, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992), Bielmeier (1985, 1988, 2000), Tournadre (1991) and Tournadre and Jiatso (2001) are other examples of important descriptive works on Tibetan. There is now work being done on dialects other than Central Tibetan, for example by Jackson Sun (1986) and by Roland Bielmeier and his team at Bern. But, for the vast majority of the languages and language groups of this region, there is little or no information available.

There is an increasing awareness among linguists about the need to take into consideration data not only from the much-studied Western languages, but also from lesser-known languages. We are, at present, witnessing some positive efforts in documenting and describing Himalayan languages. Here I will name a few. Van Driem (2001) is a recent description of Himalayan languages. This two-volume work provides an introduction to the languages, cultures and the linguistic history of the greater Himalayan region.[2] In addition to the broad overview given by van Driem (2001), there have appeared in recent years detailed linguistic descriptions of several smaller languages of the region (for example, van Driem 1987; Genetti 1994; Chelliah 1997). The present volume is also a contribution in this direction. Several papers in the volume (Bickel, Grunow-Hårsta, Heegård and Mørch, Turin, and Schmidt) contribute towards documenting and describing some aspects of lesser-known languages of this region.

Ruth Laila Schmidt in this volume compares the Kohistani and Gilgiti dialects of Shina (an Indo-Aryan language belonging to the Dardic subbranch, spoken in Pakistan, Indian Kashmir, and in Ladakh) by describing the development and composition of verb tenses in these dialects. Comparison is also made here with two additional Shina dialects, Drasi and Guresi, in the area of noun and pronoun case-number inflection. This study makes contributions to the determination of the historical development and the exact genetic relationship of these dialects.

Jan Heegård and Ida Elisabeth Mørch provide much-needed information on the sound system of Kalasha (a Dardic language spoken in north-west Pakistan). For a long time, Morgenstierne (1973), which is based on material collected in the 1920s, has been the main source of information on this language. Primarily because of the nature of the data used by Morgenstierne, there is a slight lack of clarity concerning the phonetic system of Kalasha as it emerges from his description. The aim of Heegård and Mørch's paper is to shed light on some aspects of the Kalasha sound system. Apart from presenting an overview of the segmental system of

Kalasha (with a discussion on the status of the two *l* sounds found in the language, aspiration, vowel length and nasalization), they also direct our attention also to the peculiar feature of the retroflex vowels in Kalasha and their plausible origin, which crucially involves a language contact situation.

Karen Grunow-Hårsta discusses the use of the dative case marking in Syangja and Tanahu, two dialects of Magar (a Central Himalayish language of the Bodic subgroup of Tibeto-Burman spoken in central and west-central Nepal). The dative case marker *-ke* in Magar is, at times, also suffixed to arguments which function as patients (or direct objects, grammatically speaking). As has also been observed in several other languages, the dative case marking on "patients" in Magar occurs in certain specific conditions (for example, when direct objects are animates and higher on the empathy hierarchy). Grunow-Hårsta discusses further the development of this phenomenon in Magar: Is it a borrowing from Nepali, the *lingua franca* of Nepal, or does it reflect traces of the Tibeto-Burman direction system? Her conclusion is that it is not simply a borrowing; rather, it also includes a reanalysis of an earlier direction marking system.

Mark Turin's article provides a valuable detailed description of the kinship terms in Thangmi (a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in central eastern Nepal) as a system. For obvious reasons, discussions on kinship terms have concerned both linguists and anthropologists. Beside providing a cautiously optimistic assessment of the possibility of making sociological inferences on the basis of the kinship term systems of a language, he also presents a historical morphological analysis of Thangmi kinship term formation, and puts forward a proposal of possible Tibeto-Burman etyma for a number of Thangmi kinship terms.

The aim of Balthasar Bickel's article is to discuss the mismatches which sometimes occur between syntax and morphology. This, according to Bickel, has consequences for current syntactic theories. The basis for his argument involves his observations in Belhare (a Tibeto-Burman language of the Kiranti subbranch spoken in south-eastern Nepal), where there are some syntactic processes which are sensitive to more traditional syntactic "pivots of constructions" – the various conflations of semantic verb argument types forming the basis of nominative-accusative, ergative-absolutive, etc. agreement or case-marking systems, which play such prominent roles in modern language typology. Other syntactic processes reflect purely semantic roles (mainly 'actor' and 'undergoer'). In contrast to the situation in many other languages, in Belhare none of the linguistic devices of phrase structure, verbal inflection, or case marking is used to encode any of the

three pivots discussed by Bickel, the accusative, the ergative, and the restricted ergative pivot. Instead, these devices operate on the basis of semantic participant roles and information structure, leading to a systematic mismatch between syntax and morphology.

## 2.2. Discourse

The focus until recently has been on linguistic descriptions of Himalayan languages at the grammatical (morphological and syntactic) level (with some notable exceptions). This was, to some extent, due to the limited amount of data available on these languages. We are at present observing a change in the trend. In recent times, the focus in a number of studies (for example, Bickel 1999; Noonan 2001; Saxena 2001, Genetti and Crain 2003) has been on discourse. As has already been mentioned in the previous section, in his contribution to this volume, Balthasar Bickel shows how syntactic and morphological devices in Belhare cannot be analyzed without recourse to the discourse-level notion of information structure.

There has been a growing interest in how the information conveyed in discourse is organized ("packaged"; Noonan 2001) into larger units such as texts, and how the choice of linguistic constructs available in a language contribute to the fulfilment of the overarching goals of the text. According to Slobin's "thinking for speaking" hypothesis, the linguistic categories available in a language influence how speakers of that language think. The term "rhetorical styles" is used in Noonan (2001) to refer to a group of related constructions. The choice of one construction over the other has its effect on the discourse. Consistent with Slobin's hypothesis, Noonan suggests that the presence of a set of related constructions in a language directs its speakers to organize their thoughts along certain lines. Direct quotes in Chantyal (a Tibeto-Burman language of the Tamangic subgroup spoken in Nepal) are encoded by means of a set of constructions which Noonan refers to as "quotatives". They obligatorily contain the verb 'say' as the main verb and direct speech as its complement (the grammaticalized form of the verb 'say' may, but need not necessarily, occur in this construction). Quotatives in Chantyal occur in a number of contexts, e.g. as a purpose and reason marker. Noonan argues that the quotative construction in Chantyal has narrative functions – it yields an effect in discourse.

The Deictic Center Theory (Duchan, Bruder, and Hewitt 1995; Li and Zubin 1995) is a cognitive science-based approach for the analysis of lin-

guistic structure in narratives. According to this framework, in a story-telling situation there is a real world where the story-teller (the narrator) and her audience are situated, and a world created in the story (the story world). The narrator decides on the perspective from which the story will be narrated. The origin of the perspective (or "the deictic center"; Mushin 2000) can either be the story world (in the *expressive* mode of narrating) or the real world (in the *descriptive* mode), but the object of the perspective is always the story world. The same event can be narrated in the descriptive mode as well as in the expressive mode. Which perspective is chosen is conventionally signalled by a number of linguistic devices (for instance, the selection of lexicalized linguistic forms, such as directional verbs).

The ergative marker in Kinnauri occurs only with transitive verbs. Its occurrence is, however, not obligatory. The distribution of the ergative marker in Kinnauri narratives is analyzed in Saxena (2001) using the Deictic Center Theory. Ergative occurs in these narratives in two contexts: (i) It occurs regularly (almost obligatorily) with the subject of the main clause of a direct speech event (the 'he said'-clause) and (ii) it occurs, at times, with subjects of transitive clauses in constructions other than 'he said'-clauses (both inside and outside direct speech). In (ii), the ergative marker occurs regularly in situations which run counter to the expected behavior (including violations of social norms). It comprises a contrastive focus. Ergative, it is suggested, has a "deictic" function – it indicates a shift from the descriptive mode to the expressive mode. This accounts for the almost obligatory occurrence of the ergative in 'he said'-clauses. Ergative in (ii) also has a deictic function – it steers the listeners' "perspective" away from the default expectation mode. In this way, the ergative marker in Kinnauri narratives, which is still governed by transitivity, encodes a shift in the perspective.

The relevance of the "sentence" level is well-established in the written language, but its status and relevance in spoken language is debatable. Halliday (1985) and Miller and Weinert (1989), for example, rule out the sentence as a relevant unit in spoken language. On the other hand, Chafe (1980, 1987, 1994) and Genetti and Crain (2003) argue that the sentence is a significant linguistic unit, essential for the organization of "cognitive material" within spoken language.

DuBois (1987) proposed the Preferred Argument Structure hypothesis, according to which nominal arguments should occur primarily in the subject position of intransitive clauses (S), in the subject position of transitive clauses (A), and in the direct object position in transitive and ditransitive

clauses (O). He proposed the following constraints: (i) *One Lexical Argument Constraint*: Avoid more than one lexical argument per clause, and (ii) *Non-Lexical A Constraint*: Avoid lexical A's. These two constraints are complemented by the following two constraints: (a) *One New Argument Constraint*: Avoid more than one new argument per clause, and (b) *Given A Constraint*: Avoid new A's. Genetti and Crain (2003) followed DuBois (1987) in their investigation of the referential mention in Nepali (an Indic language spoken in Nepal and India). They expanded the scope of their study to also include the distribution of pronominals and zero anaphora. The results of their investigation reveal that DuBois' constraints account for the patterns observed in Nepali both at the clause level and at the sentence level. At the sentence level, a referent is explicitly mentioned once in a sentence. Thus, both DuBois' (1987) and Genetti and Crain's (2003) results suggest that the sentence is a relevant unit in the choice of the referential mention in oral narratives.

With a somewhat different focus, Bickel (1999) suggests that languages differ in how integrative their event framing structure is. In more integrative event framing structures NPs are "more central for clause structure" (1999: 27) whereas in languages with less integrative event framing structures, "argumental NPs are relatively marginal additions to clause structure" (1999: 27). He accounts for the observations made in Genetti and Crain (2003) concerning the sentence as a significant syntactic unit in Nepali (see above) by suggesting that the pattern observed in Nepali is a reflection of the language having a more integrative event framing structure. Languages with a less integrative event framing structure, according to Bickel, are not likely to have the sentence as a significant unit for information organization.

The relevance and functions of the "sentence" level is also the theme of the articles by Oetke and by Saxena in this volume.

Claus Oetke takes as his point of departure the claim that sentences in Classical Tibetan are marked by a set of three final particles, one of which will appear last in a Classical Tibetan sentence. He then sets out to investigate some of the theoretical assumptions underlying this claim and its alternatives, and the consequences of those assumptions for the notion of sentence in Classical Tibetan, based on empirical evidence from a Classical Tibetan text material.

The question Anju Saxena raises in her article in this volume is: What does a finite clause encode in oral Kinnauri narratives? The occurrence of a finite unit is usually regarded as one of the characteristic features of a sen-

tence. Kinnauri being an oral language, Saxena takes the behavior and functions of finite clauses as the point of departure in an investigation of the linguistic status of sentences in this language. She examines the functions of finite and non-finite clauses and the choice of the finite verb morphology in Kinnauri narratives. Traditional Kinnauri narratives have a well-structured form, where finite verbs occur regularly. The presence of a finite verb in Kinnauri, it is suggested, is a linguistic cue to the listener that the present episode is now finished, and that which follows is a separate discourse unit. The default finite verb system in many traditional Kinnauri narratives has the simple narrative past tense. It is the neutral linguistic device used to encode episode boundaries. One of the linguistic devices encoding digressions from the default structure is the use of other tense and aspect markers. Divergence from the default finite verb system is a linguistic resource for discourse functions which the narrator uses in Kinnauri narratives, and it has a rhetorical function.

## 3. Linguistic diachrony in the Himalayan region

### 3.1. Language change

Languages change constantly. This simple fact is the *raison d'être* of historical linguistics, which has set itself the tasks of describing the ways in which languages develop through time and of trying to explain the mechanisms of language change. All levels of linguistic structure are subject to change but, traditionally, researchers in historical linguistics have concentrated their attention to a large extent on the description of sound change and lexical change, while change in the grammar – especially syntactic change – has received less attention, a situation that has changed somewhat in recent years. Increasingly, it is felt that research on how the grammars of languages develop through time – the mechanisms and causes of grammatical change – can make significant contributions to our understanding of the phenomenon of language in general. The growing interest in grammatical change coincides with a general trend in linguistics where language is seen as inextricably rooted in a social and historical context and not merely as an abstract system, which can be studied just as well, if not better, isolated from that context.

How, then, do languages acquire new grammatical constructions and categories and discard old ones? Regular sound changes frequently lead to loss of morphological categories, while new bound morphology often arises through the process of *grammaticalization*, i.e., the development of content words into bound grammatical morphemes via intermediate stages as function words and clitics. Exactly the same developments – grammaticalization clines or pathways – have been attested again and again in languages around the world, for example, the development of nouns into case endings via postpositions, or that of verbs into morphological markers of tense or aspect via an auxiliary stage (Hopper and Traugott 1993: 106ff). The end result of grammaticalization may be zero, i.e., bound grammatical morphemes are ultimately ground into dust by regular sound change. Grammaticalization in many cases is seen as a part of a larger cycle of grammatical change, in which languages move through the successive stages of isolation – agglutination – fusion – isolation. This cycle is fed by the constant mustering of new content words as input to grammaticalization (Givón 1979: 208–209). An important characteristic of grammaticalization is that it is a one-way street, as it were. There is no corresponding – at least no regular – process of "degrammaticalization"; in the overwhelming majority of cases, the development is from a "less grammatical" to a "more grammatical" unit, but not vice versa (Haspelmath 1999).

DeLancey (1985) describes the analysis-synthesis-relexification cycle which many Tibeto-Burman languages have gone through in their development of newer directive systems. The three (non-chronologically ordered) stages are: (i) auxiliary, which provides the deictic information, (ii) each of the basic deictic verbs comprises two elements (MOTION and HITHER/ HENCE) and (iii) lexicalization (the 'go/come' distinction, for example). In (ii) the two semantic components (MOTION and HITHER/HENCE) are represented as two separate formal units, and in (iii) the two semantic components are represented as a inseparable complex unit. The motivation for stage (iii) is that even though deictic verbs comprise two semantic components, they are inseparable in the case of an "motional event". The directive marking, according to DeLancey, can not be reconstructed for Proto-Tibeto-Burman, suggesting that each Tibeto-Burman language where we find it has gone through these stages independently.

The contributions to this volume by Andvik, Gvozdanović, Hargreaves, Honda and Winter to this volume concern the development of a range of grammatical morphemes.

Werner Winter's paper discusses a set of preverbal modifiers in Sunwar (a northern Kiranti language spoken in eastern Nepal). Sunwar has a rich reportoire of preverbal elements which display a high degree of internal variation. In his paper, Winter describes this variation, sets out to show that it is consistent and systematic, and endeavors to throw light on its origins and historical development. The variation is iconic, where the iconicity consists of certain semantic traits being related to certain phonetic traits of the initial consonant and vowel of the proclitic on a fairly consistent basis. By and large, the iconicity hierarchies found are the ones expected from other languages, and the exceptions (lenis stronger than fortis in the consonants) are plausibly explained by historical developments in Sunwar (*voiceless > voiced and *voiced > voiceless). The consistent use of phonetic iconicity also provides a plausible explanation for certain unique features of the proclitics, as compared to Sunwar core vocabulary, e.g. initial *bh-*, *dh-*, *gh-*.

David Hargreaves discusses the morphosyntactic characteristics of directionals and verbal prefixes in modern Kathmandu Newar. A common source of verbal prefixes in Kathmandu Newar is the directional system. *kwɔ*, for example, occurs both as a lexical item (*kwɔ-ne* 'under/below') and as a verbal prefix (*kwɔ-ka(l)-* 'take down' < *ka(l)* 'take/grab'). There are, however, also a large number of verbal prefixes which are synchronically opaque. He then goes on to discuss semantic and discourse factors contributing to the present state of affairs. A number of root morphemes are Tibeto-Burman cognates, making the results of this study a useful source of information for future work on comparative-historical Tibeto-Burman linguistics.

Isao Honda provides a lucid presentation of grammaticalized functions of *kha-* 'come' in three dialects (Chuksang, Tangbe and Tetang) of Seke (a language of the Tamangic subgroup of Tibeto-Burman, spoken in Nepal). He shows how the range of successively more grammaticalized uses of 'come' correlates both with greater phonetic distance from the original lexical verb *kha-* 'come', and with greater difficulty for native speakers to identify the element in question as related to the lexical verb. The most grammaticalized use of 'come' is that as a (morphological) marker of future. Based on morphological evidence, Honda shows that the grammaticalization of 'come' has gone further in Tangbe than in Chuksang and Tetang. The grammaticalization of 'come' as future marker is unique to Seke among Tamangic languages, and not very common even in other Tibeto-Burman languages.

In his paper, Erik Andvik discusses the grammaticalized functions of 'do' in Tshangla (a Bodic language spoken predominantly in eastern Bhutan) comparing them with the grammaticalized functions of 'say' which is also found in Tshangla. 'do' in Tshangla shows a higher degree of grammaticalization than 'say'. Andvik further discusses the historical development of this grammaticalization and the correlation that is found between the grammaticalized functions of 'do' and negated subordinate clauses. This can be seen, for example, in that Type 2 (the embedded nominalized clause with *-wa*) occurs more often as negative than affirmative propositions. Further, in Types 3 and 4 (both representing nominalized clause with *-la*), only negative subordinate clauses occur.

Jadranka Gvozdanović addresses the time-honored issue of abstract characterizations of linguistic items in her contribution, which deals with the morphosyntactic expression of agentivity in nouns and verbs in the Kiranti language Bantawa. She proposes that the formally coinciding – both are expressed with a suffix *-a* – nominal morphosyntactic categories 'agentive' (which she identifies as 'ergative') and 'instrumental' are one and the same also semantically, and that their interpretation as one or the other is dependent on the semantics of the noun to which they are attached. Furthermore, she proposes that, with a more abstract analysis, this category, together with the formally identical – in that it, too, is expressed with a suffix *-a* – verbal category 'past tense/deictic inactuality', can be subsumed under an abstract grammatical category 'deictically disfocal', opposed to the verbal category 'agent'. The latter is expressed with a suffix *-u* but it does not always co-occur with the nominal 'agentive', a circumstance which calls for an explanation, and which in Gvozdanović's analysis becomes an exponent of the abstract grammatical category 'focus' (pertaining to the goal in the clause, rather than to the agent or instrument).

### 3.2. Language contact

One crucial prerequisite for most kinds of contact-induced language change is an extended period of close contact between the target and the recipient languages. The Himalayan region provides an excellent basis for investigating contact-induced changes. Van Driem (1991) presents a description of the complex linguistic situation of Lohorung and Limbu (Eastern Kiranti languages), where speakers of these languages strive to adopt Nepali, the language of the high-caste people in the region whereas the "low artisanal

castes" whose mother tongue is Nepali adapt their mother tongue (Nepali) to the Kiranti language of the region – illustrating a situation where both sets of languages are affected in one and the same geographical area.

Areal linguistics examines issues that arise when a group of languages have been in contact with each other for a long time and the languages in question share structural features which cannot be ascribed to common heritage. The best-known linguistic areas are the Balkans (first described by Sandfeld 1930) and South Asia (Emeneau 1956; Masica 1976). The OV pattern has been suggested as an areal feature of the Indian subcontinent (Masica 1976). Indo-Aryan languages, like other language families in the region, exhibit OV word order and display the "left-branching pattern" (Dryer 1992) whereas other Indo-European languages such as English and Swedish display VO word order and the "right-branching pattern". Matisoff (1990) groups Tibeto-Burman languages into "Indo-sphere" and "Sino-sphere" languages, because of the areal influences which these languages have been subjected to. Languages of the Sino-sphere are spoken in the region where Chinese is the dominant language and languages of the Indo-sphere are spoken in the region where Indic languages are the dominant ones. Tibeto-Burman languages of the Indo-sphere typically display retroflex stop consonants, postsentential relative clauses and the extended grammaticalization of the verb 'say' (Saxena 1988, 1995),[3] and typical linguistic features in the Sino-spheric languages are the development of tone, monosyllabicity and "an isolating structure" (LaPolla to appear).

Long-standing contact between different language families, as well as among different subbranches of the same language family (for example, within the Tibeto-Burman language family) in the Himalayan region has resulted in intense lexical and grammatical borrowing, generating a situation where the genetic classification of some of these languages (especially those belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family) is not clear (the genetic classification of Newari, for example, is still under discussion).

For languages where we do not have historical data, it is hard, or sometimes impossible, to distinguish similarities between languages due to common heritage from those due to contact in such cases. This is at the root of the so-called Sapir/Boas controversy in the early decades of the last century in American linguistics. The controversy concerned the grouping of the American Indian languages, where Franz Boas tended to see common traits as areal phenomena, i.e., spread through borrowing, while his student Edward Sapir was more inclined to posit genetic relationships on the basis of the same traits (Haas 1976: 66–67; Emeneau [1962] 1980: 56–57). Boas

argued that in contact situations all levels of grammar can be influenced, and that there is no level of language that can remain unaffected (1911: 48). Sapir, on the other hand, was convinced that it is only the "superficial" aspects of language that can be affected by borrowing: this includes non-basic lexicon and phonology, but not the "deeper kernel" of language, for example, bound morphology (Sapir [1921] 1971: 192ff). The Sapirian viewpoint became more popular in mainstream – especially American – linguistics.[4] In this vein, Bickel (1999) argues that some linguistic features are more stable, i.e., tend not to bow down to external influence in contact situations. The basis for his suggestion involves the different event-framing structures observed in Indo-European languages (including Indo-Aryan) and Sino-Tibetan languages. LaPolla (1994) discusses the development of a number of grammatical markers (the "anti-ergative" marker, ergative marker, directive systems, causative marking, person marking and existential verbs) in Tibeto-Burman languages in support of the Boasian viewpoint. He argues (like DeLancey 1985, referred to above, for directive markings) that these developments could not be reconstructed for Proto-Tibeto-Burman, suggesting that each of these languages has undergone similar changes independently.

The issue of internal vs. external motivations in language change has been the topic of many debates. Gerritsen and Stein (1992) contains a lucid discussion of internal and external factors in language change. Saxena (1997) raises questions concerning motivations and mechanisms of grammaticalization and syntactic change and argues that it is not always easy to distinguish language-internal factors from language-external factors in a contact situation. Rather, in some cases, a more advantageous approach is to recognize the relevance of both (Aitchison 1981; Mithun 1992). Two frequently observed historical sources of tense/aspect are verb serialization and nominalization. Tibeto-Kinnauri languages display examples of both of these sources, where Lhasa Tibetan, Gahri and Tinani grammaticalize nominalizers as perfective aspect markers, whereas Kinnauri and Paṭani instead reanalyze participle forms as perfective and imperfective aspect markers. The diachronic sources for new aspect morphology are different in the Tibeto-Burman and Indic language groups: Tibeto-Burman – which favors nominalized forms – and Indic – where participles are preferred. The inconsistent pattern in the Tibeto-Burman languages considered here comprise those Tibeto-Burman languages (including Tibeto-Kinnauri languages) which have long been in close contact with Indic languages where Indic languages have long been the dominant languages. In this group of

Tibeto-Kinnauri languages we find new aspect markers that have participle forms as their diachronic source. Yet the very potential for this reinterpretation existed in the structure of the languages themselves, illustrating an interplay of internal and external factors.

The articles by Grunow-Hårsta, Heegård and Mørch (see above), and by Matisoff raise interesting questions concerning contact-induced changes.

Semantic change, in particular change in lexical semantics, has for a long time been among the tools of the trade of comparative linguistics, and more recently, also of areal/contact linguistics (see, e.g., Meillet [1905–1906] 1958; Paul 1909, chapter IV; Weinreich 1963). At the same time, traditional linguistic accounts of semantic change rarely go beyond the cataloguing of individual instances of such change in a particular language or language family, characterizing the instances – if at all – in terms of a few extremely general processes of semantic change, such as 'narrowing' or 'widening' of the sense of a word, as 'analogy', 'metaphor', etc. (Sturtevant [1917] 1961: 85–130; Collinder 1969: 81–89 are typical examples, picked more or less at random). It could be that we cannot even in principle formulate laws of semantic change (this view is explicitly put forth and defended by Anttila 1972, chapter 7), but we can certainly try to find universal tendencies (Anttila 1972: 147; cf. Heine and Kuteva 2002 on grammaticalization), which is largely an empirical endeavor, even if their uncovering must be guided by theory, and even more so their classification and explanation.

James A. Matisoff in his contribution to this volume addresses the issue of semantic change from the point of view of areal linguistics, by posing the two interdependent questions: "[1] Is there such a thing as areal semantics, and if so, [2] can we distinguish between plausible and implausible semantic change/associations in the Southeast Asian linguistic area?" In order to give an answer to these questions, Matisoff looks at a particular component of semantic change, namely *semantic associations*, first defining what he means by the term and then giving a heuristic logical four-way classification of semantic associations from the point of view of areal linguistics, illustrated with many examples – both single words and compounds/collocations – from a large number of languages. The longer-term goal of his work is of course to sharpen this particular tool of the comparative and areal linguist, making it into less of an art and more of a science:

> It is an art to decide how much semantic divergence may be tolerated among reflexes of the same etymon. Roots may indeed undergo spectacular semantic changes through time, and the glottochronological dogma against

> accepting semantically shifted cognates when determining degrees of genetic relationship goes much too far. However, the bigger the semantic leap the better the phonological correspondence must be between the putative cognates. Otherwise the phonological and and semantic arguments are like two drunks supporting each other. Crucially, it should not automatically be assumed that semantic associations attested in one linguistic area are universally valid[.] (Matisoff this volume: 381–382)

### 3.3. Genetic classification

Genetic classification of languages is intimately tied in with the issues discussed in the preceding section. This is because the basis for genetic grouping of languages are common linguistic features, or rather, *recurring* and *regular correspondences* between languages which are thought to result from common ancestry. From the previous section we may conclude that such correspondences could be the result of languages having been in contact for a long time, rather than of their having sprung from some common source. Although genetic classification of languages is in principle beset with this and other kinds of uncertainty, which increase with the time depth involved, we should keep in mind that it is one of the most mature linguistic disciplines, which has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and analytical and methodological tools helping its practitioners separate the wheat from the chaff.

In the Himalayan region, the two dominant (in terms of number of languages) language families are the Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European, and Tibeto-Burman (or the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan; see below). While there is fairly general consensus for Indo-Aryan as to which languages should be included in the family and how these languages are related to one another, there are several competing theories concerning the nature of the Tibeto-Burman language family (including which languages and language groups should be considered part of it).[5] I will summarize here three approaches: the Tibeto-Burman theory, the Sino-Tibetan theory, and the Tibeto-Burman phylogenetic model.

### *3.3.1. The Tibeto-Burman theory*

The Tibeto-Burman theory goes back to the eighteenth century. On the basis of common roots, Julius Heinrich Klaproth proposed that Chinese (or *Sinitic*), Tibetan and Burmese (together with languages which are obviously related to one of these three languages) comprise the Tibeto-Burman language family.

This model became an established theory among comparativists and was also included as a subgroup within larger language families. For example, Müller (1855) and Hodgson (1849) propounded the Turanian theory, according to which all the world's languages except Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic belonged to one single language family, the Turanian language family. Müller and Hodgson excluded Sinitic from the original Tibeto-Burman theory. Their version of the Tibeto-Burman theory is described, at times, as the "truncated" version.

### *3.3.2. The Sino-Tibetan theory*

From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century Sinitic was considered closest to Daic (a linguistic grouping comprising Thai and related languages), quite distinct from the original Tibeto-Burman theory in which Sinitic was a member on the same level as other branches of the Tibeto-Burman family while Daic was not included in the family at all. This view of the division into Sinitic vs. the rest as representing the oldest split of the language family is at the heart of all variants of the Sino-Tibetan theory, although the proponents of Sino-Tibetan differ in many other particulars (for example Benedict 1942; DeLancey 1987; Matisoff 1999; see Figure 1). Sino-Tibetan is a very large language family comprising languages spoken in China, India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Thailand, Laos, Burma and Vietnam. Views as to which specific languages should belong to this family have varied among the proponents of this theory. For instance, Shafer (1966/67) included Thai in Sino-Tibetan whereas Benedict (1942) excluded it (the latter corresponds to the currently prevailing view).

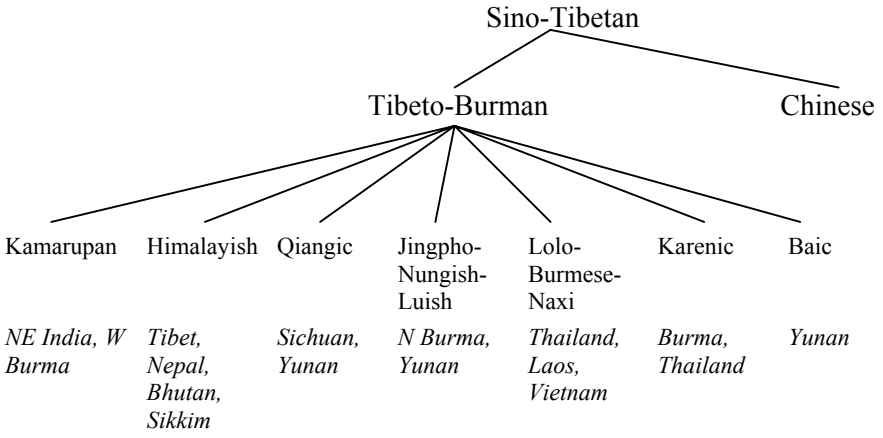


*Figure 1*. The Sino-Tibetan theory (from Matisoff 1999)

There are various proposals for subgrouping the Tibeto-Burman main branch of this language family. Figure 1 represents one such proposal, while Figures 2–5 show another. Note, however, that these two proposals show more similarities than differences.

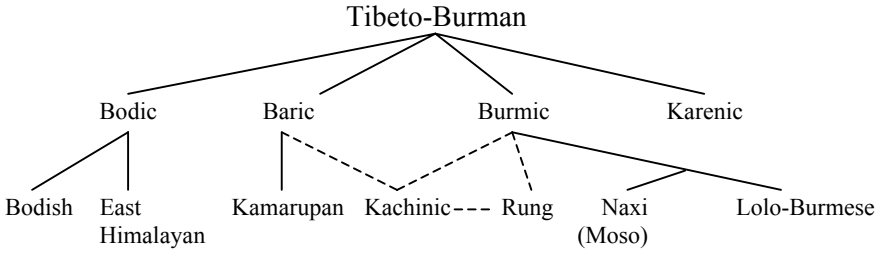


*Figure 2*. Higher-order Tibeto-Burman groupings (from DeLancey 1987: 801)

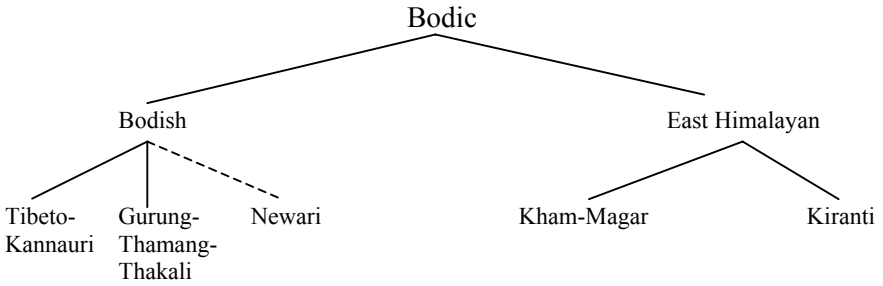


*Figure 3*. Middle-level Tibeto-Burman relationships: Bodic (from DeLancey 1987: 802)

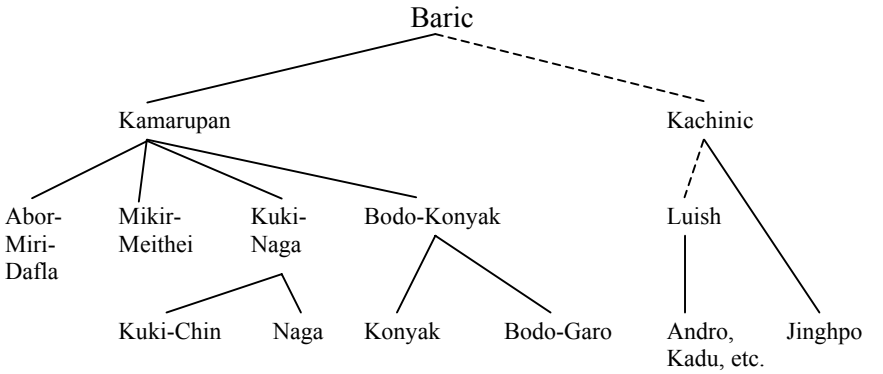


*Figure 4*. Middle-level Tibeto-Burman relationships: Baric (from DeLancey 1987: 802)

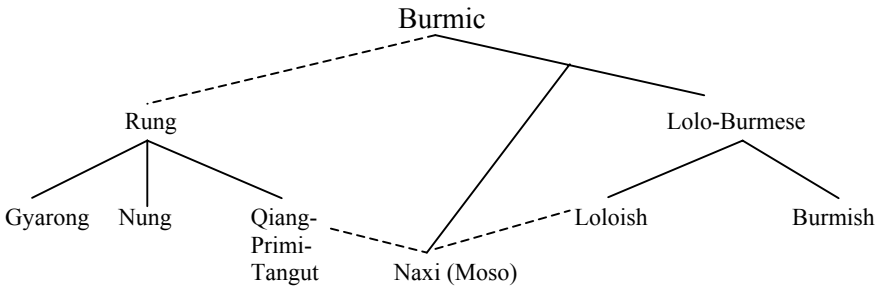


*Figure 5*. Middle-level Tibeto-Burman relationships: Burmic (from DeLancey 1987: 802)

Roland Bielmeier, in his contribution to the present volume, addresses one aspect of the internal structure of the Bodish branch of Tibeto-Burman. The problem is in brief as follows: Are all present-day Tibetan languages – referred to as "Bodish" in Shafer (1974) – descended from Classical Tibetan (= Shafer's "Old Bodish"), or should we posit an earlier branching-off point for some of the languages? Bielmeier accepts Shafer's notion of West Bodish as a separate branch of Bodish (proper), with proto-West Bodish as a separate node on the same level as Old Bodish (see Figure 2 in Bielmeier's article in this volume). On the other hand, Bielmeier sees no reason to accept another of Shafer's Bodish units, proto-East Bodish. Positing West Bodish as a separate unit accounts for certain troublesome verb conjugation correspondences among the Tibetan languages. If they were all posited to be descended from Classical Tibetan, we face the unlikely situation where generally only the perfect stem remains of the (at the most) four stems making up a typical Classical Tibetan verb paradigm. Instead, we can

assume that verb stem differentiation is a specifically Classical Tibetan development not shared with proto-West Bodish. Bielmeier shows that in fact the formation by suppletion of imperfective verb stems – leading to stem alternation – is still a partly productive process in certain conservative Eastern Tibetan languages.

### *3.3.3. The Tibeto-Burman phylogenetic model*

In his article on Tibeto-Burman phylogeny and prehistory, George van Driem (ms.; see also van Driem 2001, chapters 3–6) argues in favor of the Tibeto-Burman phylogenetic model for describing and testing higher-order subgroupings within this language family. Note that for van Driem, 'Tibeto-Burman' means something like the original Tibeto-Burman theory, i.e. a higher-order grouping with Sinitic on a par with the main branches of Tibeto-Burman as defined by the Sino-Tibetan theory (van Driem 2002). On the other hand, language groups are presented here in the form of bubbles and not as well-defined family trees. This, in van Driem's opinion, reflects that we do not, at present, have more specific knowledge concerning the "higher-order branches" and chronological ordering/timing of branching (see van Driem's article in this volume). This should, however, not be taken to argue against the family-tree model for Tibeto-Burman languages.

George van Driem's contribution in this volume illustrates how even historical-comparative linguistics very much must be considered a dynamic discipline. In his paper, he revises his own Mahakiranti hypothesis of a decade ago – the notion that Newaric and Kiranti belong together in a distinct subgroup of Tibeto-Burman – in the light of new linguistic field data. The main morphological traits first thought to distinguish Newaric and Kiranti, i.e. Mahakiranti, from other Tibeto-Burman languages have subsequently been unearthed by van Driem also in Gongduk, a language which otherwise does not bear any evidence of standing in a particularly close relationship to Newaric or Kiranti.

## Notes

* I would like to thank Balthasar Bickel and Scott DeLancey for their comments on the first version of this chapter. Further, I am grateful to Stig Eliasson for his feedback regarding the organization of this volume.

1. Of course, this phenomenon is by no means unique to the Himalayan region; it is very common for speakers of a language and outsiders to use sometimes completely unrelated names for the language in question.
2. By the greater Himalayan region, van Driem means "[t]he region extend[ing] from the Hindu Kush and Tiānshān mountains in the west to Arunachal Pradesh and upper Burma in the east. Hundreds of different languages [are] spoken in this area, which encompasses the sovereign kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan, the once independent kingdom of Sikkim, the vastness of Tibet, large tracts of Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Burma and the Chinese provinces of Sìchuān and Yúnnán." (van Driem 2001: ix).
3. The use of the verb 'say' is found in some Sino-sphere languages, too (Matisoff 1991), but unlike South Asian languages, the verb 'say' in Sino-sphere languages is usually a complementizer and does not normally develop other grammaticalized functions of 'say'.
4. Although probably most linguists – even those of a radically Boasian persuasion – would concede that some linguistic features are more easily and vastly more often borrowed than others, possibly even that there could be a classical implicational scale lurking in the wings, as it were, with open-class lexical items close to one end and fusional inflectional morphology close to the other.
5. Two main factors can be said to jointly determine this state of affairs: (1) the relative maturity of the two fields of inquiry involved. Indo-European comparative linguistics (in the modern sense of the term 'comparative linguistics') has been an active and at times very prestigious branch of linguistics for almost two centuries (Szemerényi 1989: 6–8), while Tibeto-Burman linguistics is only about fifty years old (Matisoff 1999); (2) the relative accessibility to linguistic scholars of the languages in the respective families: "Indeed, we cannot say for certain how many Tibeto-Burman languages there are or even whether there may not still be a few — possibly in western Nepal, very probably in northern Burma and southeastern Tibet — that are yet to be discovered." (DeLancey 1987: 799)

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