Verb for 'to butcher, to kill' from 'flesh' -- an attempt in Burmo-Qiangic dialectology

Gong, Xun


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Xun GONG 龔勳
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**Upper Rgyalrong**

Zbu Rgyalrong (Rgyaltsu): *kv-ntchêʔ (ntchê ntchî ntchó)*

(0.1) ɕəkhrî 跛 apsed

there: E Han.Chinese IMP-kill

‘Kill the Han Chinese over there!’ (robbers)

Other Zbu dialects:
- Central Zbu: (*ntfḥê ntchî ntchô) “to kill” (Sun, 2004);
- High zbu (Wampa): (*ntchê ntchî) “to skin (an recently slaughtered animal)”;
- Zbu B (Zamgo): (*ntcho ntchî) “to kill”.

Pre-zbu: *n-câ *n-ca *n-caw

Other Upper Rgyalrong languages:
- Japhug: *kv-ntchâ’ to kill, to cut up (animal)’ (Jacques, 2016);
- Tshobdun: *kv-ntchê ‘kill (vt), 杀’ (DB-CAOA ka’ *tɕʰe, DB-CAOB ka’ *tɕʰe, #0671); *kv-ntʃhê (*ntʃhê ntʃhêʔ) ‘kill’ (Sun, 2014 inter alia).

Situ/Eastern Rgyalrong:
- Cog-tsê: *ka-ntʃhâ ‘butcher, dissect, 宰殺, 解剖’ (*ntʃhê ntʃhê) (Huáng and Sūn, 2002; Lín, 2003);
- Kyom-kyo: *ka-ntʃhâ ‘butcher’ (Prins, 2016);
- rGyalrongic Languages Database (edited by Yasuhiko Nagano and Marielle Prins): in 29 Situ dialects (among 52), the primary translation of ‘to kill’ (DB-#671) is a cognate of *ka-ntʃhâ.
West Rgyalrongic:
- Khroskyabs: ɲɕî (ɲɕî ɲɕi) ‘tuer (un animal), 宰’ (Lai, 2017);
- Stau: ntɕha ‘cut up, kill (animal)’ (Jacques et al., 2017)

Database: 3 Stau-Horpa dialects (among 13), where the on primary translation of ‘to kill’ is a cognate of ntɕha (D#-671).

Tangut: ʡʡ ʡʡ¹, stem B ʢʢ¹ ʢʢ¹ ‘kill (animal)’ (Jacques, 2014, 97–98).

(0.2) 马肠 马肠

rjij¹ ſjii¹ tʃhji¹ dzji¹
horse butcher meat eat

‘butcher the horse and eat the meat’
屠馬食肉 (The Art of War 26A-3, 26A-4a, Lin, 1994)

Etymology:
The etymology of Japhug verb kɤ-ntɕha was discussed in Jacques (2014, 97–98). The point of reference is the Tibetan verb bsha·ba (bsha bshas bsha shos) ‘butcher’ which derives transparently from sha ‘flesh, meat’. There are two hypotheses on the relationship between the Rgyalrong verb and the Tibetan verb.

The first hypothesis, mentioned in Jacques (2014, 97–98), suggests that the Rgyalrong verb is a Rgyalrong-internal denominal from a flesh noun, taken in the sense of ‘meat’. Hence, the form is made with the short form of the N-denominalization n- based on one of the most widespread Sino-Tibetan nouns, reflected in Zbu as ɕéʔ. Hence, the prenasalized affricate in most Rgyalrongic languages reflects an epenthetic form from *n-ɕa akin to Khroskyabs ɲɕî.

Jacques (2014, 97–98), on the other hand, prefers another hypothesis suggested by Nathan Hill, that the verb kɐ-ntɕhéʔ is borrowed from the Tibetan bsha·ba, from a hypothetical stem †cha. Other denominals, like jo·ba ‘to milk’ from zho ‘yoghurt < *milk’ has a present stem which oscillates between bzho and jo. In modern Tibetan

1 Sea of characters: ʡʡ ʡʡ¹ ཡཤ༧ ཡཤ༧ ཡཤ༧, equivalent to ʢʢ¹ taar¹ (butcher and skin an animal), means killing something alive and cutting off life.’

2 Dag·yig gsar·bsgrigs: bsha·pags kyi ched du sgo·phyugs sogs gsod·pa'i don ‘kill a domestic animal for meat or hide’
dialects which best preserves Old Tibetan conjugation, like Amdo Tibetan (Haller, 2004) or Zhongu (Sun, 2003), for both verbs, forms corresponding to OTib bsha' and bzho are found in present.

To discuss the etymology of this verb, it is indispensable to discuss that of the noun ɕéʔ. The Japhug cognates of Zbu word, which means ‘flesh’ in general, are ɕa ‘raw meat’ et tɯ-ɕa ‘muscle’. Guillaume Jacques considers that ɕa belong to words for which ‘nous ne disposons pas de preuves qu’ils soient des cognats ou des emprunts’ (2004, 168), but judges the proposition ‘probable’ (2004, 168) or ‘selon toute vraisemblance’ (2014, 92) that the word is borrowed from Tibetan sha. If ɕéʔ and tɯ-ɕa are Tibetan borrowings, it would be chronologically difficult to postulate that ke-ntchéʔ is a denominal from ɕéʔ.

According to the correspondence rules between Tibetan and Japhug, it is indeed impossible to tell if ɕa/tɯ-ɕa and Tib. sha are cognates or borrowings. On the other hand, in Zbu, a tonal language, we have a different situation. In Zbu, Tib. rime -a corresponds to -é/-ê in inherited words, but to ê in words borrowed from Tibetan. This can be confirmed in cultural words where the borrowedness is certain: təmdê ‘rifle’ » tib. mda, mnê ‘swearing’ < tib. mna, cf. varjì ‘hundred’, cognate to Tib. brgya. The supposed form would be *ɕê if it is borrowed from Tibetan. However, there is one Tibetan borrowing that shows cognate phonology, mphrəvî ‘rosary’, Japhug mphruwa < tib. ‘phreng-ba. The correspondence hence strongly suggests inherited cognacy, but is not unequivocal.

The cognacy to the Khroskyabs form, however, is best accounted for with a Rgyalrongic interpretation. The Khroskyabs form ɲɕî comes necessarily from a parallel formation < *n-ɕî. It is more parsimonious to postulate the same formation in Khroskyabs and other Rgyalrongic languages.

In other Burmo-Qiangic languages, data suggest that the formation **n-ɕa is older than Proto-Rgyalrongic: as Jacques (2014, 97–98) suggests, a connection can be drawn with the Tangut form ʸ⁰⁷ⁱ ɕjii¹, stem B ʸ⁴⁵⁷¹ ɕjoo¹. In Burmo-Qiangic languages that are not Macro-Rgyalrongic, there are still parallels:

• In Ersuic languages (Yu, 2012), ‘kill/slaughter an animal’ is *ntʃhi² (Kala Lizu ntʃhɨ), with the same rime as *ʃi² ‘meat’ (Kala Lizu şɿ˥˧). It is obvious that there is a pre-proto-Ersuic formation *n-ʃi which made the proto-Ersuic *ntʃhi².
• Lolo-Burman are also possible witnesses of this formation. In Northern Yi (Liángshān), there is the verb şɯ˧˧˧ ‘剐, butcher, cut up an animal and prepare its meat for cooking’, homophone to şɯ˧˧˧ ‘meat’. Similarly, in Eastern Yi (Wēiníng), there is the verb fu˧˧˧ ‘kill’, homophone to the noun fu˧˧˧ ‘meat’. The semantic evolution is parallel to that in Rgyalrongic.

In the traditional script of Eastern Yi, ‘to kill’ is and ‘meat’ is . It is possible that the Yi script reflects older non-homophony, a case which might
allow us to reconstruct a similar formation \( ^*n-\mathfrak{x}a^2 \) in the older stage of Eastern Yi.

Figure 1: Distribution of etymons of ‘to kill’ in Rgyalrongic languages

Bibliography


