Verb for ‘to butcher, to kill’ from ‘flesh’
– an attempt in Burmo-Qiangic dialectology

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Upper Rgyalrong

Zbu Rgyalrong (Rgyaltsu): kv-ntchéʔ (ntché ntchî ntchó*)

(0.1) ṣəkhrî e kepʔ Han.Chinese imp-kill₃
    'Kill the Han Chinese over there!' (robbers)

Other Zbu dialects:
• Central Zbu: (ntf hô ntchî ntchô) “to kill” (Sun, 2004);
• High zbu (Wampa): (ntché ntchî) “to skin (an recently slaughtered animal)”;
• Zbu B (Zamgo): (ntcho ntchî) “to kill”.
Pre-zbu: *n-ɕá *n-ɕâ *n-ɕáw

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

Situ/Eastern Rgyalrong:
• Cog·tse: ka-ntʃhâ ‘butcher, dissect, 宰殺, 解剖’ (ntʃhâ 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 ɲɕî) 'tuer (un animal), 宰' (Lai, 2017);
- Stau: nṭcha '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 nṭcha (DB-#671).

Tangut: ǝrš ǝjii¹, stem B ǝjoo¹ 'kill (animal)' (Jacques, 2014, 97–98).

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-ntɕh’ét 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
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 çéʔ. The Japhug cognates of Zbu word, which means ‘flesh’ in general, are ça ‘raw meat’ and tu-ça ‘muscle’. Guillaume Jacques considers that ça 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 çéʔ and tu-ça are Tibetan borrowings, it would be chronologically difficult to postulate that ke-ntchéʔ is a denominal from çéʔ.

According to the correspondence rules between Tibetan and Japhug, it is indeed impossible to tell if ça/tu-ça 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 -ɛ/-ɨ in inherited words, but to è in words borrowed from Tibetan. This can be confirmed in cultural words where the borrowedness is certain: tamdè ‘rifle’ » < tib. mda, mnè ‘swearing’ < tib. mna, cf. værjì ‘hundred’, cognate to Tib. brgya. The supposed form would be çè if it is borrowed from Tibetan. However, there is one Tibetan borrowing that shows cognate phonology, mphrèvì ‘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 nçì comes necessarily from a parallel formation < *n-çì. 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-çì is older than Proto-Rgyalrongic: as Jacques (2014, 97–98) suggests, a connection can be drawn with the Tangut form शjii¹, stem B शjoo¹. 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 ntʃhɿ˥˧), with the same rime as *ʃi² ‘meat’ (Kala Lizu ʂɿ˥˧). It is obvious that there is a pre-proto-Ersuic formation *n-ʃi² which made the proto-Ersuic *ntʃhi².

- Lolo-Burman are also possible witnesses of this formation. In Northern Yi (Liángshān), there is the verb sɯ˧˧˧ ‘剐, butcher, cut up an animal and prepare its meat for cooking’, homophone to sɯ˧˧˧ ‘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-xa² in the older stage of Eastern Yi.

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

Bibliography


