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 ntchô*)

(9.1) ↹ kɐ-ntɕhéʔ
there: Han.Chinese imp-kill₃
‘Kill the Han Chinese over there!’ (robbers)

Other Zbu dialects:
- Central Zbu: (ntʃhé ntचि ntʃhô) “to kill” (Sun, 2004);
- High Zbu (Wampa): (ntچhé ntchî) “to skin (an recently slaughtered animal)’;
- Zbu B (Zamgo): (ntʃho ntʃhî) “to kill”.

Pre-zbu: *n-ɕá *n-ɕâ *n-ɕáw

Other Upper Rgyalrong languages:
- Japhug: kv-ntʃhâ ‘to kill, to cut up (animal)’ (Jacques, 2016);
- Tshobdun: kv-ntʃhê ‘kill (vt), 杀’ (DB-CAOA ka’ ntings, DB-CAOB ka’ ntings, #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 ɲɕí) ‘tuer (un animal), 害’ (Lai, 2017);
- Stau: ntcha ‘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 ntcha (DB-#671).

Tangut: ʒii¹, stem B ʒiö¹ ‘kill (animal)’ (Jacques, 2014, 97–98).

Etymology:
The etymology of Japhug verb ɲ-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 kw-ntɕhèʔ 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

1Sea of characters: 仾糸兔 糸糸兔 蘇兔 糸糸兔 糸糸兔 蘇兔, equivalent to 糸糸兔 et 糸糸兔 (butcher and skin an animal), means killing something alive and cutting off life.

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2Dag·yig gsar·bsgrigs: sha·pags kyi ched du sgo-phugs sog sgsod·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 indispensible to discuss that of the noun çéʔ. The Japhug cognates of Zbu word, which means ‘flesh’ in general, are ça ‘raw meat’ et tut-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 tut-ça are Tibetan borrowings, it would be chronologically difficult to postulate that ke-ntchêʔ? is a denominal from çéʔ.

According to the correspondence rules between Tibetan and Japhug, it is indeed impossible to tell if ça/tut-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 -é/-ɨ in inherited words, but to ê in words borrowed from Tibetan. This can be confirmed in cultural words where the borrowedness is certain: tamdê ‘rifle’ » < tib. mda, mnê ‘swearing’ < tib. mna, cf. varij ‘hundred’, cognate to Tib. brgya. The supposed form would be †çê 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 ḳñië comes necessarily from a parallel formation < *n-ɕi. 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 šjii¹, stem B šjoo¹. 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 ntsʰi), 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 (Liängshān), there is the verb šuɭɿ which means ‘剐, butcher, cut up an animal and prepare its meat for cooking’, homophone to šuɭɿ ‘meat’. Similarly, in Eastern Yi (Wēiníng), there is the verb fuɭɿ ‘kill’, homophone to the noun fuɭɿ ‘meat’. The semantic evolution is parallel to that in Rgyalrongic.

In the traditional script of Eastern Yi, ‘to kill’ is 𢆈 and ‘meat’ is 𢆇. 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


