

# Grammatical Phenomena of Sino-Tibetan Languages 4

## *Link Languages and Archetypes in Tibeto-Burman*

シナ=チベット系諸言語の文法現象 4  
繋聯言語と古態

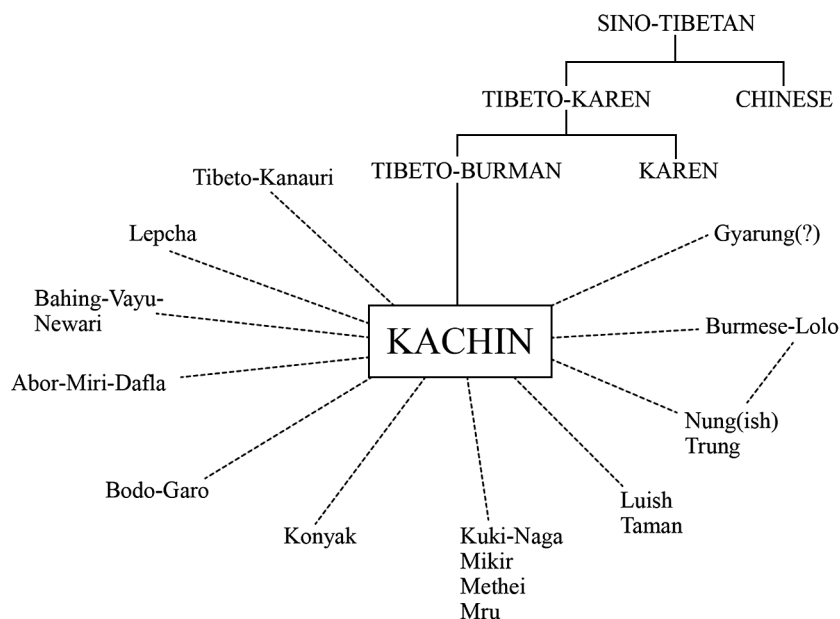
NAGANO Yasuhiko and IKEDA Takumi (eds.)

長野泰彦・池田 巧 編

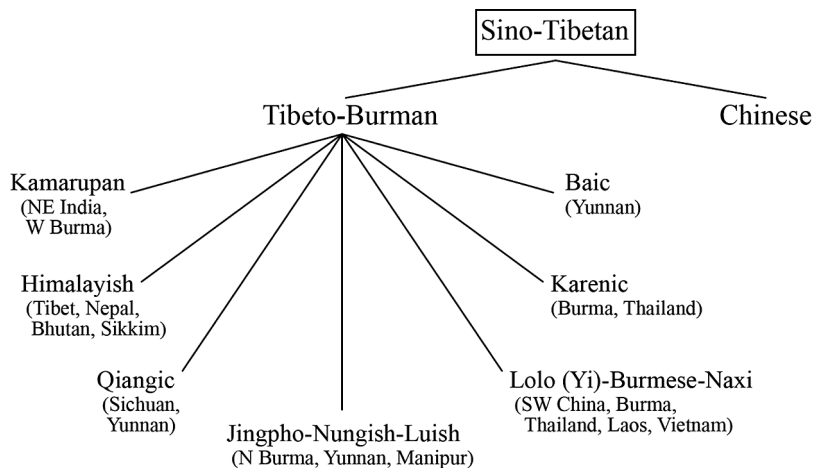
## Preface

This volume presents part of the research results of the JSPS Overseas Research Grant, “International Joint Survey of the Link Languages of Tibeto-Burman Language Family” (ID: 16H02722, headed by NAGANO Yasuhiko), supporting research conducted from FY 2016 through FY 2019.

The Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family, which constitutes part of the larger Sino-Tibetan language family, is distributed in a wide area encompassing Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces and the Tibet Autonomous Region in China, the southern sub-Himalayan region in northeastern and northwestern India, and northeastern Pakistan. The TB languages were established as one language family by Wolfenden (1929), *Outlines of Tibeto-Burman Linguistic Morphology*, and the sound form of the proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) language has since been clarified to some extent through the achievements of Benedict (1972), *Sino-Tibetan*, and Matisoff (2003), *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman*. In this situation, where we cannot draw any persuasive genealogical tree like we have for the Indo-European language family, Benedict and Matisoff proposed the following correlation diagrams as shown below:



[Schematic Stammbaum by P. K. Benedict 1972]



[Provisional Sino-Tibetan family tree by J. A. Matisoff 2003]

Thanks to these previous studies, we have accurate phonetic shapes of PTB and an outline of genetic relations among TB languages. However, reconstructions of the proto-languages of the subgroup languages have not been completed yet, and while occasional efforts have been made toward the reconstruction of the morphosyntax of PTB, we still have some distance to go before obtaining tangible results.

Among TB languages, some languages hold characteristic grammatical features found in several different sub-groups and lexical shapes directly comparable with PTB. The late Professor NISHIDA Tatsuo termed these languages *link languages*. Looking into them carefully, however, we now understand that their ways of “linking” comprise quite a variety.

Some languages show very close lexical shapes to PTB that are recognizable as its direct descendants. Others, however, are borrowings of older written forms of Tibetan, Burmese, Newari, and so on. Some languages present highly complicated morphosyntactic procedures, such as pronominalization, directives, and voice systems. We are tempted to simply hypothesize that PTB used to have such complex systems or that they are remnants of PTB shapes. However, recent research has revealed that the majority of these are later developments. The issue we face is, therefore, how to identify so-called “archaic” forms that may point us to PTB forms out of this complexity.

The project members share the following common understanding:

- (1) The link languages that share grammatical features found in some sub-group languages, especially Tibeto-Himalayan languages (mainly West Himalayan and West Bhutan languages), Qiang-rGyalrong languages, and Jingpho languages, have not been described systematically enough to build a corpus.

- (2) A comprehensive morphosyntax database was needed.
- (3) “Comparison” is the most sophisticated methodology of historical linguistics, and this is also true for research on TB languages. Considering the repeated encounters and movements of peoples in the TB-speaking area, however, an approach from the viewpoint of “linguistic substrata” is of critical importance for research on TB languages. Linguistic substrata are closely associated with the archaic forms that are still found in link languages, but there has been little methodological examination of their mutual relations.
- (4) The rapid spread of Chinese and Hindi languages in the communities where these link languages are spoken is posing a threat to the survival of these communities and endangers the link languages.

To address the abovementioned problems, research was conducted focusing on the following objectives:

- (1) To collect detailed descriptive data of rapidly endangered languages/dialects mentioned under item No. 1 of the previous paragraph, by conducting intensive fieldwork and by paying special attention to typological features.
- (2) To reconstruct the archaic stratum of the abovementioned three sub-group languages and recover the vocabulary and morphosyntax of Proto-TB more precisely.
- (3) To build an open database that enables users to search words and grammars collected via (1) and (2) above along with sound data. This database, to be linked to other databases locally and independently compiled worldwide, was expected to play a central role in the reconstruction of PTB.
- (4) To analyze the older forms of these link languages to gain insights into their archaic word forms and basic morphosyntax, and regarding syntax, explore how these languages retain archaic forms in ergativity, pronominalization, direction marking, and affixes in VPs.

After the expiration of research project: “International Joint Survey of the Link Languages of Tibeto-Burman Language Family” (ID: 16H02722, headed by NAGANO Yasuhiko) in 2019, all the project members took part in the new enlarged research project: “A Study of the Historical Development of the Sino-Tibetan Languages and their Typological Geography” (ID: 18H05219, headed by IKEDA Takumi), to continue their own research focusing on the historical development and typological varieties of Tibeto-Burman languages.

This volume is a collection of reports on the research results of the project members, who have long been puzzled by the questions mentioned above. With a deep understanding of the underlying problematics, they carried out fieldwork on the respective languages of

their specialization, as a result of which we are pleased to present eight articles in three categories: grammar, typology, and phonology. I hope their descriptions can be an impetus for Tibeto-Burman linguistics.

Finally, the publication of this volume was supported by Grant-in-Aid of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (18H05219 above).

December 2020

Editors

## Contents

Preface.....	Editors	i
Contents .....		v
<b>Phonology</b>		
Notes on the Phonological Development of Menglun Akeu .....	HAYASHI Norihiko	1
<b>Vocabulary</b>		
Lamei, another dialect of Lamo (mDzogong, TAR) ——Vocabulary and sentence structure—— .....	SUZUKI Hiroyuki, SonamWangmo, and Tsering Samdrup	25
An Introduction to Khengkha: A Language of Central Bhutan .....	IKEDA Takumi	71
Basic Vocabulary of Khengkha with English-Chinese Index Ver. 6.....	IKEDA Takumi	121
<b>Typology</b>		
Negative markers in Qiangic languages .....	SHIRAI Satoko	243
Evidential system of copulative and existential verbs in Lamo .....	SUZUKI Hiroyuki and Tashi Nyima	259
Applicative in rGyalrong .....	NAGANO Yasuhiko	289
<b>History</b>		
History of the Tibetan Language.....	TAKEUCHI Tsuguhito	303
<b>Grammar</b>		
A Grammatical Manual for the Kinnauri Language (Pangi Dialect) .....	TAKAHASHI Yoshiharu	325

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