

## Negation in the Sino-Tibetan Context —A Brief Introduction—

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### Summary

This paper is a brief overview of the typological features of negation in the Sino-Tibetan (ST) languages (with two branches, Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman languages), utilizing the data of many previous descriptive works and data I gathered by myself. This paper discusses the features of phonology, word order, tense/aspect, morphology, syntax/semantics, and illocutionary acts.

Phonologically, Sinitic languages usually have plosive and nasal onsets for negative morphemes, while Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages mostly have negative forms derived from Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) *\*ma-*.

Most Sinitic and TB languages are of the preverbal negation type, whereas postverbal negation type can be found in Northeast India and Bangladesh, the double type (cooccurring preverbal and postverbal negatives) can be found in Nepal and in Karenic languages.

Some Sinitic and TB languages employ different forms for tense/aspect distinctions that show suppletion or vowel alternation, whereas Burmese “tense” distinctions are neutralized in negation.

Many TB negative morphemes are morphologically clitics or affixes. The negative markers in some ST languages are fused with the copula, auxiliary verbs, or aspectual markers.

As for semantic features, some languages with negative-polarity items, such as Mandarin and Duhumbi, have a structural “double negative,” which is construed as single negation.

Many ST languages mostly have prohibitive forms derived from PTB *\*ta* & *\*da*, while some languages, such as Burmese, utilize concordance with a sentence-final marker to represent the prohibitive.

**Key words:** Negation, Sino-Tibetan, Typology, Historical Linguistics, Areal Linguistics

关键词：否定、汉藏语、类型学、历史语言学、地域语言学

## 1. Introduction

Hashimoto (1978) is widely viewed as a milestone in work on the linguistics of Eastern Eurasia. His macrolinguistic perspectives shed light on the strong relationship between the geographical distribution and linguistic structures of regional languages based on a huge amount of the linguistic data and highlighting typological profiles of some principal languages. He discussed the historical development of negative (negational) elements in East Asian languages (*ibid.*: 83–93); his discussion is summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** Regional Shift of Negative Particles (Adapted from Hashimoto 1978: 83–85)<sup>1</sup>

	North	Mongol	Manchu	Sibe					
	ɣʏ̆	(a)ku	aqu						
	<b>Nanchang</b>	<b>Changhe</b>	<b>Hefei</b>	<b>Xi'an</b>	<b>Beijing</b>	<b>Dungan</b>			
	pət	pu	pəʔ	pu	pu	ɔy			
	<b>Wenzhou</b>	<b>Suzhou</b>							
	fu	fəʔ							
	<b>Cantonese</b>	<b>Swatow</b>	<b>Meixian</b>	<b>Amoy</b>	<b>Fuzhou</b>				
	ṃ	ṃ	ṃ	ṃ	ŋ				
	Zhuang	Tai Lue	Shan	Tai Dam					
	ṃ	ṃ	ṃ	ṃ					
	Khmer	Thai	Sani	Lisu	Lahu	Ong Be			
	mʉn	mây	ma	ma	mâ	mə			
	South								

Hashimoto (1978) notes that apart from the most northern languages illustrated in Table 1 (Mongolian, Manchu, Sibe), which have velar or uvular onsets in negative particles, most languages here include labial or labiodental onsets. This leads us to speculate that areal diffusion or language convergence among the different language groups took place in this area, and indeed, this possibility can be attested in various aspects of the grammar of each language.

Another important issue, regarding negative particles in Old Chinese, is also discussed in Hashimoto (1978). See Table 2.

<sup>1</sup> The language names written in **bold** face in Table 1 represent the varieties of Sinitic.

**Table 2** Negative Particles in Old Chinese (Hashimoto 1978: 90–91)

	Verbal Negation		Nominal Negation
Plosive Type	* <i>piuə(g)</i> 不	* <i>piuət</i> 弗	* <i>piuə(d)</i> 非
Nasal Type	* <i>miua(g)</i> 無	* <i>miuət</i> 勿	* <i>miua(d)</i> 微
	Simple Form	Fusion with Object	

In Old Chinese, the negative element with plosive onset has three forms, namely, \**piuə(g)* 不, \**piuət* 弗, and \**piuə(d)* 非, while that with nasal onset also has three forms: \**miua(g)* 無, \**miuət* 勿, and \**miua(d)* 微. Here, \**piuə(g)* 不, \**piuət* 弗, \**miua(g)* 無, and \**miuət* 勿 relate to verbal negation, and the others to nominal negation. Further, \**piuə(g)* 不 and \**miua(g)* 無 are simple forms of negation, while \**piuət* 弗 and \**miuət* 勿, both reconstructed with the coda \*-t, show fusion with the object. Hashimoto (1978) finds that the difference between the plosive type and the nasal type does not relate to their functions but to differences across the dialects of Ancient China.

Regarding Old Chinese, Tatsuo Ota, another Japanese Sinologist, mentions the negative particles in *Lunyu* 論語 and *Mengzi* 孟子 and points out the complicated but interesting distribution of negative particles in these two texts (Ota 1958).

**Table 3** Negative Particle in Old Chinese (Ota 1958: 298)

	無	毋	莫	勿	亡	罔	未	靡	不	弗	非	否	未	微	盍
論語 <i>Lunyu</i>	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
孟子 <i>Mengzi</i>	+	-	+	+	+	(+)	+	(+)	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

(+: Used, -: Not Used, (+): Citation only)

Ota (1958) explains these negative morphemes. Some of them are summarized as follows.

First, 無 is used as a negative corresponding to the affirmative counterpart 有 in both *Lunyu* 論語 and *Mengzi* 孟子, while 毋 can be found only in *Lunyu*. Next, 勿, found in both texts, functions as prohibitive when the sentence omits objects. Third, 弗 is in concordance with negatives including objects. Fourth, 非 is the negative counterpart of 是, which indicates copular sentences. Finally, 未 is the negative counterpart to perfective 已.

The morphological variety of negation in Old Chinese leads us to speculate that the negative elements in Sino-Tibetan languages more broadly have also differed in many respects and urges us to make finer analyses of the typological features of negation in this language family.

Prof. Takumi Ikeda of Kyoto University launched a JSPS project entitled “A Study on the Historical Development of the Sino-Tibetan Languages and their Typological Geography” (JP18H05219), ongoing since 2018, and this project is now engaged in investigating many linguistic problems of Sino-Tibetan languages. One of the topics in this

project is negation, which discussed in a workshop at the 27th annual meeting of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics, held at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies in May 2019.

This paper surveys the areal linguistic aspects of negation in Sino-Tibetan languages by reviewing previous descriptive works (See **Data Sources** Section) and my own field data (Youle Jino and Menglun Akeu).<sup>2</sup> Though there are many topics with respect to negation phenomena, the topics in this paper mostly relate to so-called “standard negation” (Payne 1985, Miestamo 2005, Miestamo 2015);<sup>3</sup> however, problems of “non-standard negation” will sometimes be mentioned as well.

## 2. Phonological Aspects

As mentioned in Section 1, the negative affixes in Sino-Tibetan languages strikingly often have bilabial onsets, though of course there are also several exceptions. Here are some samples of negative morphemes in Sino-Tibetan languages.

**Table 4** Samples of Negative Morphemes in Sino-Tibetan<sup>4</sup>

Languages	Negative form(s)	Languages	Negative form(s)
<i>Standard Mandarin</i>	bu, mei	Wambule Rai	a-
<i>Wu (Northern)</i>	vəʔ <sup>12</sup> , fim <sup>12</sup> məʔ <sup>12</sup>	Sangla Kinnauri	ma-
<i>Yue</i> (Chappell and Peyraube 2016)	m <sup>4</sup> , mo <sup>5</sup>	Kham	ma-
<i>Minnan</i>	bo <sup>5</sup> , m <sup>7</sup>	Dhimal	ma-, manthu (NEG.EXT)
Garó	-ja-	Bunan	ma-
Hakha Lai	-law	Qiang	/mə/
Mongsen Ao	mə-, -la	Guiqiong	mə- ~ mə- ~ mɛ-

<sup>2</sup> The linguistic fieldwork and linguistic analyses for Menglun Akeu and Youle Jino are financially and academically supported by JSPS Kaken (JP26370492, 16H02722, 18H05219), to which the author expresses his sincere gratitude. The linguistic fieldwork in Yunnan was supported and arranged by the Yunnan Nationality Museum 中国云南民族博物馆 (Mr. Xie Mohua 谢沫华, Mr. Gao Liqing 高力青, Mr. Gao Xiang 高翔, and many staff), which I appreciate very much. Last but not least, I also appreciate all kinds of assistance from the Youle Jino and Akeu people (Hani nationality) in Yunnan Province, China.

<sup>3</sup> Miestamo (2015: 408) notes that “the term ‘standard negation’ was coined by Payne (1985), who defined it as ‘that type of negation that can apply to the most minimal and basic sentence. [...] Today, the term is used for the negation of declarative main clauses with a verbal predicate, more precisely for the pragmatically neutral and productive strategies that languages use for this function.’”

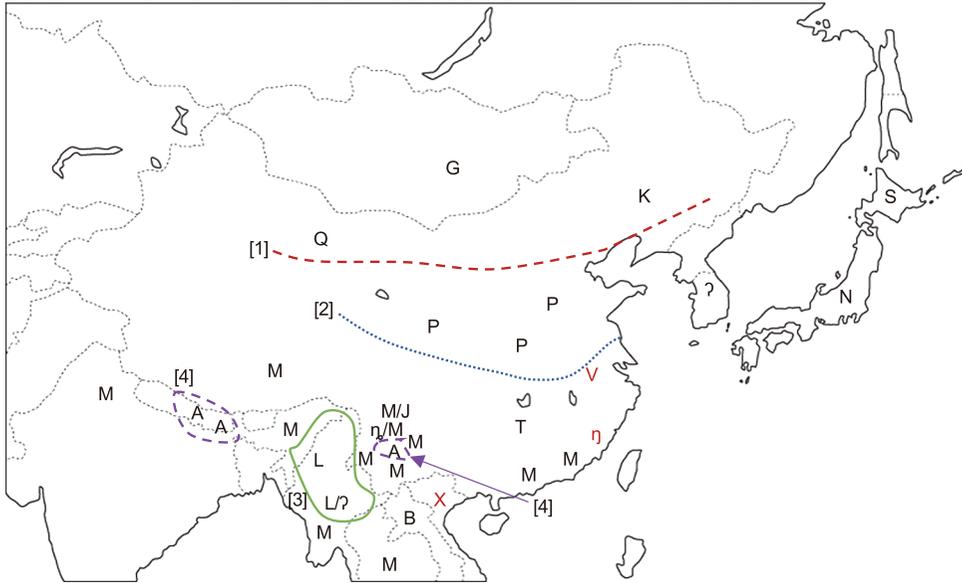
<sup>4</sup> The language names in *italic* in Table 4 represent the varieties of Sinitic. As for the negation phenomena in various Sinitic languages, see also Chen and Sheng eds. (2020).

Karbi	-Cē	Prinmi	ma, me (PFV), tja (deontic)
Tangam	-ma(ŋ)	Mu-nya	ɲu <sup>33</sup> - (IMPV), me <sup>55</sup> - (PFV)
Meitei	-tə	Lizu	mɛ
Lhasa Tibetan	ma	Anong	m̩ <sup>31</sup>
Kurtöp	ma-/me-	Burmese	ma-
Tshangla	ma-	Zaiwa	a <sup>1</sup> -
Kathmandu Newar	mɔ-	Nuosu Yi	ap-
Tamang	<sup>3</sup> a	Khatso	ma <sup>31</sup>
Changtyal	a-	Youle Jino	mɔ- ~ ma-
Manange	a-	Menglun Akeu	ma
Nar-phu	a-	Akha	ma
Tshobdun rGyalrong	mɛ- (IMPV), mə- (PFV, PROH), me- (HAB, NON-FIN, etc.)	Lisu	ma <sup>21</sup>
Cogtse rGyalrong	ma-, dʒa/dʒi (PFV)	Lahu	mâ
Stau	ma- (PST), mí- (NPST)	Phunoi	m <sup>31</sup>
Japhug	mɯ-/mɣ-	Eastern Kayah Li	to
Dulong	mə- [mā]	Pwo Karen	ʔé, lə, bá
Hayu	ma	Lepcha	ma-
Jero	a-	Tujia	ta <sup>55</sup> (OBJ), t <sup>h</sup> a <sup>55</sup> (SBJ), tau <sup>55</sup> (PFV.OBJ), t <sup>h</sup> au <sup>55</sup> (PFV.SBJ)
Belhare	N- ... -n(i)	Jinghpaw	n~ń

Sinitic languages, such as Standard Mandarin (Putonghua), Wu, Yue, and Minnan, have two types of negative, plosive type and nasal type, as mentioned in Section 1, which are related to distinction of simple/existential negation or of aspect.

As many Tibeto-Burmanists notice, the negative element in Proto-Tibeto-Burman can be reconstructed as *\*ma* or *\*maŋ* (Matisoff 2003), as supported by many Tibeto-Burman language data. There are, however, a certain number of different forms marking the negative, such as Garo *-ja*, Hakha Lai *-law*, Manange *a-*, etc.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographical distribution of negative morphemes in Sino-Tibetan and neighboring languages.



**Figure 1** Onset Distribution of Negative Elements in Asian Languages

The area above dotted line [1] exhibits the negative morpheme beginning with velar/uvular onset in the non-Sino-Tibetan language-speaking area. The area between dotted lines [1] and [2] is where people speak varieties of Northern Mandarin, which have the negative morpheme with bilabial plosive onset. The circled area marked by line [3] includes North-east India, Bangladesh, and the adjacent area, where the Tibeto-Burman languages appear with the negative morpheme with *l*-onset. There are also some languages with negative morpheme *a*- scattered in Nepal and China, which is marked by line [4]. Regardless of the language family, the languages in the remaining areas in principle have the negative morpheme with *m*-onset.

DeLancey (2015) picks out Kuki-Chin negative morphemes whose forms are quite different from PTB *\*ma*, such as *#mak*, *\*law*, *#kay*, and *\*no*, and explores their origins. It is plausible that the form variations reflect semantic change.

Tujia has different negative forms with dental plosive onset, such as *ta<sup>55</sup>/tau<sup>55</sup>* and *t<sup>h</sup>a<sup>55</sup>/t<sup>h</sup>au<sup>55</sup>* (Xu et al. 2017). *t<sup>h</sup>a<sup>55</sup>* is used not only for standard negation but also for prohibitive. The origins of the four forms above are not clear at the moment, but it is interesting to consider that these forms may be related to *\*ta*  $\bowtie$  *\*da* (prohibitive) at the Proto-Tibeto-Burman stage, as Thurgood and LaPolla (2017: 991) notes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Thurgood and LaPolla (2017: 991) add a note to Xu et al. (2017)'s paper and comment that the preverbal *t<sup>h</sup>a<sup>55</sup>* in Tujia prohibitive sentences "may be the older pattern, as it is the common pattern in Tibeto-Burman, and seems

### 3. Word Order

In Sino-Tibetan languages, negative elements can occur before the verb, after the verb, or even both before and after. This section discusses the word order of negative elements and its geographical distribution.

The geographical distribution and typology of word order of negative elements and the verb have been investigated by Dryer (2008), who presents the map in Figure 2.

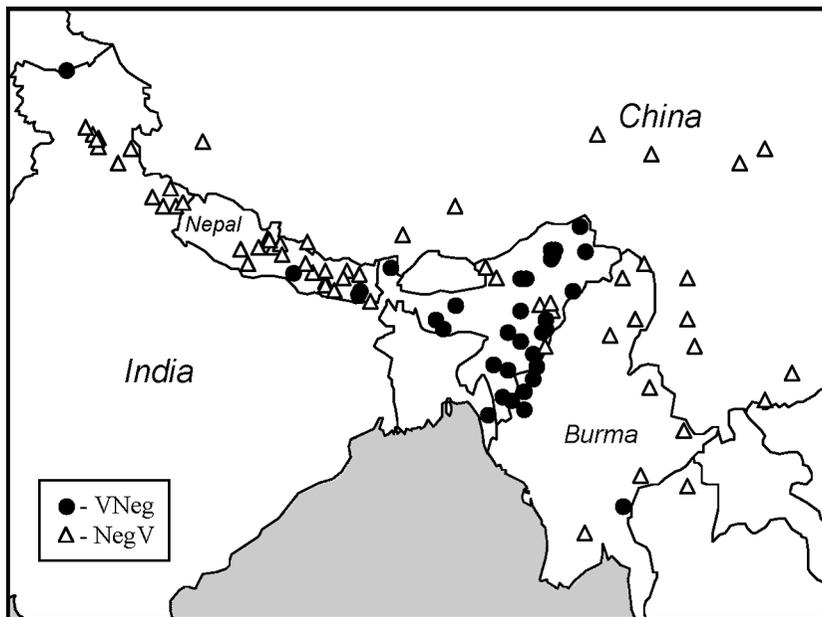


Figure 2 Word Order of Negative Element and Verb (Dryer 2008: 70)

Dryer (2008: 70) summarizes as follows: the postverbal negative appears in a region roughly “corresponding to the section of India east and northeast of Bangladesh and including most Bodo-Garo, Tani, and Kuki-Chin languages, while NegV order is dominant in two areas, one to the west, in Bodic, and one to the east, including Nungish, Jinghpo, Northeast Tibeto-Burman, and Burmese-Lolo languages.”

Here we cite some examples of preverbal and postverbal negatives from reference grammars and grammatical sketches of Tibeto-Burman languages as well as Mandarin Chinese.

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to involve the Proto-Tibeto-Burman prohibitive marker *\*ta*.” The present author agrees with this idea and also further analyzes that in the historical development of Tujia the semantic function of *tʰa<sup>55</sup>* may have extended to standard negative morpheme.

### ■ Preverbal Type

[Mandarin: China; Sinitic] (Yip and Rimmington 2016: 144)

- (1) 他常常不上班。

tā	chángcháng	<b>bù</b>	shàngbān.
3SG	often	NEG	work

‘He often doesn’t go to work.’ [**bold** and glossed by the present author]

[Menglun Akeu: Yunnan, China; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (my fieldnote)

- (2) ḡa<sup>55</sup>    ʎ<sup>21</sup>lu<sup>55</sup>    **ma**<sup>21</sup>-dʎ<sup>21</sup>-tsʎ<sup>21</sup>.
- |     |       |              |
|-----|-------|--------------|
| 1SG | snake | NEG-hit-dare |
|-----|-------|--------------|

‘I dare not hit snakes.’

[Kathmandu Newar: Nepal; Bodish, Tibeto-Burman] (Hargreaves 2017: 465)

- (3) jī:            ja            **mə-nɔy-a**            ni
- |       |      |                |     |
|-------|------|----------------|-----|
| 1:ERG | rice | NEG-eat-PST:CJ | yet |
|-------|------|----------------|-----|

‘I haven’t eaten rice yet.’ [**bold** by the present author]

[Bunan: Himachal Pradesh, India; West Himalayish, Tibeto-Burman] (Widmer 2017: 429)

- (4) *ḡonpo = ɕi ja: elts<sup>h</sup>a madzotts<sup>h</sup>a.*
- |            |           |                      |                                 |
|------------|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| ḡonpo = ɕi | ja:       | el-ts <sup>h</sup> a | <b>ma-dzot-ts<sup>h</sup>a.</b> |
| guest=PL   | yesterday | go-PST.DIRE.ALLO.PL  | NEG-stay-PST.DIRE.ALLO.PL       |

‘Our guests left yesterday, they did not stay.’ [glosses are reformed and **bold** by the present author]

Languages of the preverbal negation type are widely spread in Sino-Tibetan area, regardless of the word order of the basic constituent. Sinitic languages are mostly SVO languages, and the negative element normally precedes the verb. SVO languages spoken in East and Southeast Asia (Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer, etc.) generally are also of the preverbal type in negation (See also Enfield 2019: 188–191 for Mainland Southeast Asian languages). On the other hand, the remaining Tibeto-Burman languages mostly have SOV word order, but most of the TB languages are of the preverbal negation type.

There are some languages with the postverbal negation type in the Tibeto-Burman family. See the examples below.

### ■ Postverbal Type

[Galo: Arunachal Pradesh, India; Tani, Tibeto-Burman]

- (5) ʔó o kaamá a!  
 ʔó o ká      a-má a  
 vegetable      have/exist-NEG

‘There aren’t any/enough dishes (for us to provide you with)!’ (Post 2015: 437)  
**[bold by the present author]**

- (6) ʔək-pək ʔagóm tálii màa.  
 ʔəkə-pəkə      ʔagom      tá-lii-máa  
 ANAP.PL-RDUP      speech      listen-DESD-NEG

‘I’m **not** interested in listening to that sort of thing.’ (Post 2015: 438)

[Hakha Lai: Chin State, Myanmar; Kuki-Chin, Tibeto-Burman] (VanBik 2009: 41)

- (7) Ni Hu      níʔ      vok      ʔa-that      lǎw.  
 Ni Hu      ERG      pig      3SG.S-kill.I      NEG

‘Ni Hu did not kill the pig.’

It is true that the postverbal type is concentrated in northeast India and Bangladesh, but we should not forget Tujia, which is also postverbal, as seen in (8). This language is spoken in Hunan Province, in China, making it one of the easternmost Tibeto-Burman languages.

[Tujia: Hunan, China; Tujia, Tibeto-Burman] (Xu et al. 2017: 987)

- (8) lai<sup>53</sup>      ki<sup>21</sup>      ta<sup>24</sup>.  
 today      hot      NEG

‘It is not hot today.’

Lu et al. (2020), another paper discussing negation in Tujia, find that the negative element of the Tujia language originally preceded the verb and that it might have moved to the postverbal position.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, tʰa in Tujia precedes or follows the verb when it is employed for prohibitive use. The word order depends on whether a modal verb is used (Lu et al. 2020: 2).

### ■ Double Type

Additionally, we should note that there is another type of word order, namely “double type,” both preceding and following the verb, which is attested in some Tibeto-Burman languages, as shown below.

[Pwo Karen: Karen, Myanmar; Karenic, Tibeto-Burman] (Kato 2017: 951)

- (9) ʔəwê ʔè lə ʔán mì bá nɔ́, jə mə ʔán  
 3SG if NEG eat rice NEG that 1SG IRR eat

‘If he doesn’t eat the rice, I will eat it.’

Pwo Karen negates the clause in (9) with two negative morphemes, namely *lə* and *bá*. Kato (2017) explains that *bá* reinforces the negative function of *lə*, which is articulated unstressed. Kato (2017: 950) also exemplifies the post-verbal type of negation in Pwo Karen, as in (10).

- (10) ʔəwê ʔán mì xè xè ʔé  
 3SG eat rice slowly NEG

‘He does not eat rice slowly.’

Colloquial Burmese employs the prefix *ma-* and the particle =*phú* to denote negation, which may also be considered a kind of “double type.”

[Colloquial Burmese: Myanmar; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (Okano 2013: 41, sentential meaning is translated into English by the present author)

- (11) mǎ-sá = **phú**.  
 not-eat=VS:NEG

‘not eat/did not eat/have not eaten’

- (12) sá = **ṭè**.  
 eat=VS:RLS

‘eat/ate/have eaten’

As Okano (2013) analyses, (11) is the negative counterpart of (12). The phrase-final particle =*phú* can be considered a verbal sentence marker in concord with the negative form of the verb; thus, it is also possible to say that =*phú* is not a true negative marker.

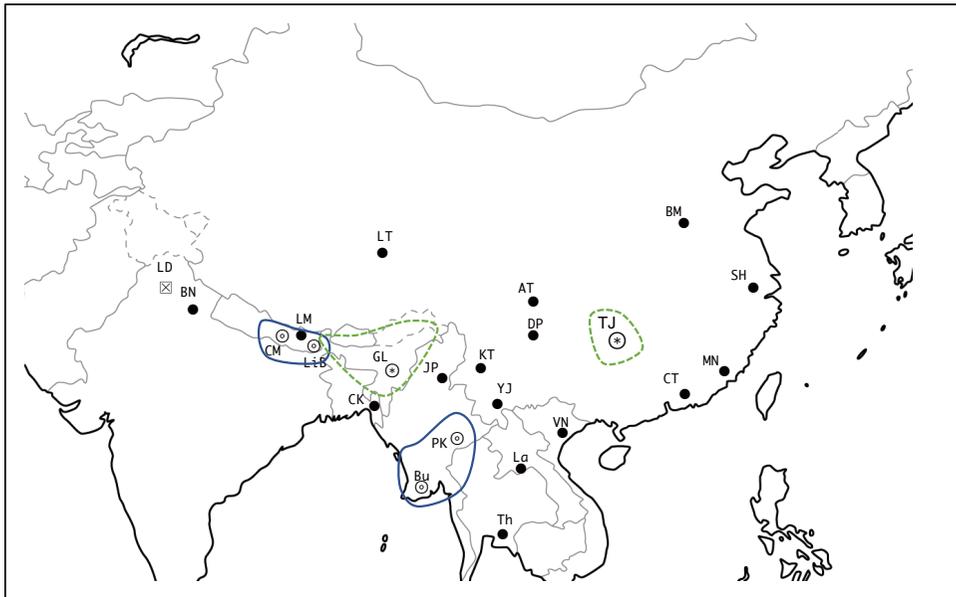
In Camling [Eastern Nepal; Kiranti, Tibeto-Burman], the negation is marked by a prefix *pa-* and a suffix *-na*, *-āi*, *-aina*, which is exemplified in Table 5. However, “negative *pa-* is

not realized before second person *ta-* due to the one-prefix-restriction.” (Ebert 2017: 731)

**Table 5** Negation in Camling (Ebert 2017: 731)

	asserted	negated	meaning
1di	ta-khata-ci	pa-khata-ci-na/-c-āi/-c-aina	‘we did not go’
2d	ta-khata-ci	ta-khata-ci-na/-c-āi/-c-aina	‘you did not go’

Dryer (2008) closely considers only preverbal and postverbal negatives in the map (Figure 2), even though he also notices double negatives and other types.<sup>7</sup> If we include the double negatives and other types and some adjacent non-Sino-Tibetan Southeast Asian languages in the map, it can be depicted as in Figure 3. In this map, ● represents preverbal, ⊕ represents postverbal, ⊙ represents double type, and ⊠ represents preverbal or postverbal (but not both at the same time). [Colloquial Burmese is included in double type in this map.]



**Figure 3.** Negative Elements and Their Positions in East and Southeast Asia

[Abbreviation] (See also **Data Sources** Section)

AT: Amdo Tibetan, BM: Beijing Mandarin, BN: Bunan, Bu: Burmese, CM: Camling, CK: Cak, CT: Cantonese, DP: nDrapa, GL: Galo, JP: Jinghpaw, KT: Kham Tibetan, La: Lao, LD: Ladakhi, LiB: Limbu, LM: Lhomi, LT: Lhasa Tibetan, MN: Minnan, PK: Pwo Karen, SH: Shanghainese, Th: Thai, TJ: Tujia, VN: Vietnamese, YJ: Youle Jino

<sup>7</sup> Dryer (2008: 67) cites the Ladakhi examples from Koshal (1979: 243), and notes that this language employs a prefix in some cases and a suffix in other cases in negation.

As for the double type, it is well known from the development of the French negation system as analyzed by Otto Jespersen (Jespersen 1917), in the so-called *Jespersen Cycle* (Dahl 1979). French negation was originally expressed by preverbal *ne*, and later the post-verbal clitic *pas* came to cooccur with *ne*, making it a double type. This double type is still employed in French literary style, whereas in the colloquial style *ne* is often phonetically reduced and *pas* becomes the “real” negator. In Tibeto-Burman, as mentioned in this section, there are a certain number of languages with double type, which may shift to preverbal or postverbal type due to functional redundancy or language contact. van der Auwera and Vossen (2017) analyzes that some Kiranti languages underwent the Jespersen cycle in their negative strategies. The other Tibeto-Burman languages with double (or multiple) negation should be investigated in further analysis as well.

#### 4. Tense/Aspect and Negation

Tense and/or aspect may also affect negation phenomena. One of the best-known languages in the Sino-Tibetan area is Mandarin Chinese, as seen below.

[Mandarin]

*bù* 不 functions as a negator of intention and future action, whereas the sentence is not grammatical if the verb is unintentional (Yip and Rimmington 2016: 144). See (13) and (14). The verb in (13), *qù* 去 ‘to go’, is intentional, while that in (14), *xià* 下 ‘to drop’, is not.

(13) 我明天不去开会。

wǒ	míngtiān	bú	qù	kāihuì.
1SG	tomorrow	NEG	go	meeting

‘I will not go to the meeting tomorrow.’ [glossed by the present author]

(14) \*明天不下雨。

*míngtiān	bú	xià	yǔ
tomorrow	NEG	drop	rain

(‘It will not rain tomorrow.’) [glossed by the present author]

On the other hand, *méi(yǒu)* 没有 negates action that has not taken place (Yip and Rimmington 2016: 145). See the example below.

(15) 他昨天没(有)来。

tā      zuótiān      méi(yǒu)      lái  
3SG      yesterday      NEG(have)      come

‘He did not come yesterday.’ [glossed by the present author]

However, if, thanks to deliberate non-action on the part of the subject, a past action did not take place, the negator *bù* 不 is used. See below (Yip and Rimmington 2016: 145).

(16) 他昨天(故意)不来。

tā      zuótiān      (gùyì)      bù      lái  
3SG      yesterday      (deliberately)      NEG      come

‘He (deliberately) would not come yesterday.’ [glossed by the present author]

The negative morphemes in Lolo-Burmese languages rarely show concord with tense/aspect distinctions, whereas Shirai (2021) investigates the functions and the geographical distribution of the negative forms in Qiangic languages spoken in Sichuan Province, China, which differ by tense/aspect distinction. Her paper summarizes Qiangic negative forms, which have four main types: MA type (*m*+low vowel), MI type (*m*+front vowel), MV type (*m*+vowel [neither low nor front]), and non-M type.

**Table 6.** Negative Forms and Perfective/Imperfective Distinctions in Qiangic Languages (Adapted and summarized from Shirai 2021)

	MA Type	MI Type	MV Type	non-M Type
Prinmi	IPFV/default /ma-/	PFV /me-/	—	—
nDrapa	IPFV /ma-/	—	PFV/default /mə-/	—
Situ	NPST /ma-/	—	—	PST /ʃa-, ʃi-/ (Bhola Situ)
sTodsde	PFV <sub>1</sub> /ma-/	PFV <sub>2</sub> /me-/	IPFV /mə-/	—
Darmdo Minyag	PFV /me-/	—	—	IPFV /nə-/
Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs	—	either /mɛ-/	—	IPFV /mtə-, mətə-/

As is seen in Table 6, Prinmi, nDrapa, and sTodsde have distinct forms for perfective and imperfective negatives, showing vowel alternation, while Situ has a suppletive form for past negative. Darmdo Minyag and Guangyinqiao Khroskyabs have imperfective forms for negative, which are also suppletive. Note that *mε-* in Guanyinqiao Khroskyabs is irrelevant to the tense/aspect distinction (Shirai 2021).

By picking out some sentential examples from Bholā Situ [Aba Prefecture of Sichuan, China], we look into its negative system in more detail. It has two negative prefixes for tense distinctions, namely *ma-* and *ǰa-/ǰi-*.<sup>8</sup> The former is for non-past events, whereas the latter is for past events.

[Bholā Situ: Aba, Sichuan; Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman] (Nagano 2018: 51, sentential meaning is translated into English and glosses are reformed by the present author)

- (17) *wuǰo tsay to-ki-w = ren, məza tshonkhañ ma-čhe.*  
 3SG vegetable PST-buy-3=because 3SG(female) shop NEG.NPST-go

‘Because he bought vegetables, she will not go to the shop.’

- (18) *wuǰo tsay to-ki-w = ren, məza tshonkhañ ǰa-čhe.*  
 3SG vegetable PST-buy-3=because 3SG(female) shop NEG.PST-go

‘Because he bought vegetables, she did not go to the shop.’

- (19) *štə thə kə-nos kə-mak ǰi-čis.*  
 3SG what NMLZ-LKV NMLZ-LKV.NEG NEG.PST-say

‘(S/he) did not say what this was nor what this was not.’

The predicate in (17), *čhe* ‘to go,’ is considered to be non-past and thus can be negated by *ma-*. In contrast, the predicates in (18) and (19), *čhe* ‘to go’ and *čis* ‘to say’ respectively, are viewed as past events and thus can be negated by *ǰa-/ǰi-*.

Dengjongke, a Tibetic language of Sikkim, India, has a more complicated schema for negation, which is summarized in Table 7.

<sup>8</sup> /ǰi-/ can be used for prohibitive. (Nagano 2018: 51)

- (i) *sce ǰi-ro-n*  
 here NEG.PST-come-2s

‘Don’t come here!’

[Denjongke: Sikkim, India; Tibetic, Tibeto-Burman] (Yliniemi 2019: 388)

**Table 7.** Negation of Declarative Final Forms (Adapted from Yliniemi 2019, emphasis by the present author)

Constr.	Affirmative	Gloss	Negated	Gloss
state	<i>lâp</i>	‘is called, says’	<i>mi-lâp</i>	‘is not called’
simp.prs	<i>lâp bɛ?</i>	‘says’	<i>mi-lâp bɛ?</i>	‘does not say’
IPFV	<i>lâp to (EQU)</i>	‘used to say, is saying’	<i>ma-lâp to (EQU)</i>	‘used not to say’
CONT	<i>lâp dɔ: EX</i>	‘is saying’	<i>lâp-o NEG.EX</i>	‘is not saying’
PROG	<i>lâp-tɛn EX</i>	‘is saying’		
periphr. PST	<i>lâp-o EQU</i>	‘said’		
PST	<i>lâp-tɛ</i>	‘said’	<i>mâ-lâp(-o EQU)</i>	‘did not say’
CMPL	<i>lâp-tsʰa:</i>	‘has said’		
PRF	<i>lâp-lâp-o EX</i>	[sic]	<i>lâp-lâp-o NEG.EX</i>	‘has not said’
			<i>lâp-ɛy: NEG.EX</i>	‘has not said’
RES	<i>lâp-jò?</i>	‘has said’	<i>lâp-mè?</i>	‘has not said’
SEN.PST/ SEN.RES	<i>lâp-du?</i>	‘said’	<i>lâp mindu</i>	‘did not say’
			<i>lâp-o mindu</i>	‘did not say’
NPST	<i>lâp-ɛɛ EQU</i>	‘will say’	<i>lâp-ɛɛ NEG.EQU</i>	‘will not say (emphatic)’
			<i>mi-lâp(-ɛɛ EQU)</i>	‘will not say’
FUT.UNC	<i>lâp-ð:</i>	‘will say’		
poss.like	<i>lâp-ɛɛ EX</i>	‘has/had...to say’	<i>lâp-ɛɛ NEG.EX</i>	‘has/had mot (anything) to say’
HAB.PRS	<i>lâp-kʰɛ: EQU</i>	‘said, says’	<i>ma-lâp-kʰɛ: EQU</i>	‘didn’t say’
			<i>mi-lâp-kʰɛ: EQU</i>	‘doesn’t say’
			<i>mi-lâp-o EQU</i>	‘does not say, used not to say’

As seen in Table 7, Denjongke has a very complex system of negative concord. If the verb has a “state” reading, the negative morpheme *mi-* is prefixed to the verb root; on the other hand, if the verb is considered to have an “imperfective” reading, it is negated by the prefix *ma-*. If the predicate has a “continuous” reading or “non-past” reading, it is negated periphrastically by way of existential or equational verbs.

In this section, negative concord for the tense/aspect distinction has been discussed. As noticed, the tense/aspect distinction is neutralized in negative sentences in many languages. A sample is cited from Colloquial Burmese below in (20).

[Burmese: Myanmar; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (Okano 2013, glosses and English translations are added by the present author)

(20) a. cǎnò zé t̃wá=t̃è.  
[1m] market go=VS:RLS

‘I go to the market./I went to the market.’ (Okano 2013: 45)

b. cǎnò zé t̃wá=m̃è.  
[1m] market go=VS:IRR

‘I will go to the market.’ (Okano 2013: 45)

c. cǎnò zé mǎ-t̃wá=p̃hú.  
[1m] market go=VS:RLS

‘I won’t go to the market./I didn’t go to the market.’ (Okano 2013: 46)

In Burmese linguistics, whether there is a tense system or not is sometimes controversial (for instance, Gärtner 2005, Yanson 2005). Okano (2013) recognizes that Burmese employs realis (*t̃è*)/irrealis (*m̃è*) markers for time expressions in affirmative sentences, as in (20a, b). Okano (2013: 46) explains that the realis marker represents (i) a one-time past event or (ii) constant status when suffixed to a dynamic verb, while it represents (i) present status or (ii) past status when suffixed to a stative verb. Additionally, he notes that the irrealis marker represents (i) (immediate) future or (ii) the intention of the speaker when suffixed to a dynamic verb, whereas it represents supposition when suffixed to a stative verb. When negated, the realis/irrealis markers are replaced with the negative verb sentential marker =*p̃hú* and tense/aspectual distinctions are totally neutralized, as in (20c). Miestamo (2005, 2007) calls this type of negation “asymmetric negation.”<sup>9</sup>

## 5. Morphological Problems

### 5.1 Word, Clitic, or Affix?

The first morphological problem regarding negative elements is how the negative morpheme can be analyzed: Is the negative element in a given language a word, a clitic, or an affix? When we write a reference grammar on an undescribed language, it is often difficult

<sup>9</sup> Miestamo (2007: 559) mentions the Burmese negation system as an example, with citation from Cornyn (1944).



In Menglun Akeu, the verb is negated by the negative prefix *ma*<sup>21</sup>-, as in (22a); when the copula is negated, however, it often fuses with the negative prefix to become *mx*<sup>35</sup>, as seen in (22b). This type of fusion can also be found in many other Tibeto-Burman languages.

Sinitic languages also show such phenomena. In Fuqing Chinese, spoken in Fujian Province, China, there are a few negative morphemes, such as *ij*<sup>21</sup> 侬, *mɔ*<sup>44</sup> 无, and others. When an auxiliary *ɛ*<sup>42</sup> ‘can’ is negated, it can be considered to be fused with *mɔ*<sup>44</sup> and become *mɛ*, as in (23).

[Fuqing Chinese: Fuqing, Fujian, China; Mindong, Sinitic] (Chen 2018: 235)

- (23) a. *khɔ*<sup>44</sup>    *ɛ*<sup>42</sup>    *mɛ*    *tiɔ*<sup>51</sup>?  
          □<sup>10</sup>    会    侬    着  
          bump    AUX    NEG.AUX    arrive

‘Does (the car) bump (something)?’

- b. *mɛ*            *liɔ*<sup>51</sup>,    *muŋ*<sup>21</sup>    *kiaŋ*<sup>35</sup>.  
      侬            着            □            行  
      NEG.AUX    arrive        ?            go

‘(It does) not bump. (Don’t worry!) Go (ahead).’

Note also that Beijing Mandarin has a word for ‘Don’t’ *béng* 甬 that is derived from a fusion of the negative morpheme *bú* 不 with a verb *yòng* 用 ‘to use’, then lexicalized as *béng* 甬 ‘Don’t V, don’t need to V’ (Aihara et al. 2004: 66); this ‘was created recently’ (Ota 1958: 303).

Another type of fusion can be attested in Tujia [Hunan, China; Tibeto-Burman]. The Tujia *t<sup>h</sup>a*<sup>35</sup> is the original negator, but some of the other negators, such as *t<sup>h</sup>au*<sup>35</sup>, *t<sup>h</sup>ai*<sup>35</sup> and *tau*<sup>35</sup>, “resulted from the fusion with either an existential verb or an aspectual particle”, in other words, [*t<sup>h</sup>a*<sup>35</sup> + *liau*<sup>21</sup> (PFV)] > *t<sup>h</sup>au*<sup>35</sup>, [*t<sup>h</sup>a*<sup>35</sup> + *ciə*<sup>35</sup> (EX)] > *t<sup>h</sup>ai*<sup>35</sup>, [*ta*<sup>35</sup> + *liau*<sup>21</sup> (PFV)] > *tau*<sup>35</sup> (Lu et al. 2020).<sup>11</sup>

### 5.3 “Reduplication”

In Menglun Akeu, when adjectives are negated, the negative morpheme *ma*<sup>21</sup>- is generally prefixed to the adjectival root, as can be seen in (24).

<sup>10</sup> □ in (23) means that there is no corresponding Chinese character for the morpheme.

<sup>11</sup> Note that Lu et al. (2020)’s tonal notation is not the same as Xu et al. (2017)’s, probably due to their dialectal differences.

[Menglun Akeu: Yunnan, China; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (my fieldnote)

- (24) a. a<sup>21</sup>li<sup>55</sup>    a<sup>21</sup>mɔ<sup>33</sup>    da<sup>21</sup>-mɔ<sup>33</sup>.    b. a<sup>21</sup>li<sup>55</sup>    a<sup>21</sup>mɔ<sup>33</sup>    ma<sup>21</sup>-mɔ<sup>33</sup>.  
           Ali (PSN)    body            PREF-tall            Ali (PSN)    body            NEG-tall  
           ‘Ali is tall.’    ‘Ali is not tall.’

The adjective in (24a), *da<sup>21</sup>mɔ<sup>33</sup>*, consists of the prefix *da<sup>21</sup>-* and the root *mɔ<sup>33</sup>*. The negative form of this adjective is *ma<sup>21</sup>-mɔ<sup>33</sup>*, where the root *mɔ<sup>33</sup>* is prefixed by *ma<sup>21</sup>-*, as seen in (24b). This general principle, on the contrary, does not apply to the word for ‘long’. See (25).

- (25) a. xɣ<sup>55</sup>-ma<sup>33</sup>            b. xɣ<sup>55</sup>-ma<sup>33</sup>            ma<sup>21</sup>-ma<sup>33</sup>            c. ??/\* ma<sup>21</sup>-ma<sup>33</sup>  
           PREF-long            PREF-long            NEG-long            NEG-long  
           ‘long’                    ‘not long’                                    (‘not long’)

As seen in (25a), the affirmative form for ‘long’ is *xɣ<sup>55</sup>ma<sup>33</sup>*, which consists of the prefix *xɣ<sup>55</sup>-* and the root *ma<sup>33</sup>*. If the general principle is applied to this adjective, the predicted form will be *ma<sup>21</sup>-ma<sup>33</sup>*, as seen in (25c), which is rather difficult to accept. Next, we see that (25b) is the attested negated form for this adjective, where the forms of (25a) and (25c) are juxtaposed. It seems that the root is “reduplicated,” but in fact in this language the negative morpheme needs to be hosted by the root and to be preceded by the affirmative form when it negates an adjective.

## 6. Problems in Syntax and Semantics

This section briefly highlights two problems of negation in syntax and semantics, namely scope and redundancy.

### 6.1 Scope of negation and the position of the negative morpheme

One of the major issues in the semantics of negation is scope. The scope of negation generally relates to the word order of the negative morpheme and the predicate. (26) and (27) are the examples from Mandarin Chinese.

[Mandarin]

- (26) 太不好                                    (27) 不太好  
           tài    bù    hǎo                                    bú    tài    hǎo  
           too    NEG    good                                    NEG    too    good  
           ‘too bad’                                    ‘not so good’

In (26), the negative morpheme *bù* precedes the adjective *hǎo* ‘good’ and becomes a phrase ‘bad’. The adverb *tài* ‘too’ then modifies the whole phrase *bù hǎo* and intensifies the ‘bad’ meaning. On the other hand, (27) has a different word order from (26), in that the negative morpheme *bù* precedes the adverb *tài* ‘too.’ The negative morpheme in (27) scopes the whole phrase ‘too good’, so that the entire phrase denotes ‘not so good.’ This is a case where the position of the negative morpheme affects the scope of negation. The semantic analysis of these two examples (26, 27) is confirmed by my personal communication with Chinese speakers, namely, Liu Lingxiao, Shen Hong, Zhang Ling, and Zhang Yan.

Word order of negative morphemes inherently relates to the scope of negation. The relationship between “what is negated” and “where the negative morpheme is placed” is sometimes rather complicated.

Scope of negation is also discussed in languages of postverbal type, such as Galo [Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India; Tani, Tibeto-Burman], which is described in Post (2015). Post explains that the scope in Galo generally applies leftward; thus, in the following example (28), the negative *máa* only scopes *dó* ‘eat,’ while the irrealis marker *ró* scopes over the two preceding morphemes, *dó-máa* ‘not eat.’ Hence, Post (2015: 438) notes that (28) “should be literally translated with a feel more like *They [will [not eat it]]* (i.e. not eating it is what they will do) rather than the standard English auxiliary-scoping *They [[will not] eat it]* (i.e. eating it is what they will not do).”

(28) <sup>?</sup>ʔɿɿ̃ gò <sup>?</sup>ɛɲə domáa ró.

<sup>?</sup> ʔɿɿ̃	gó	<sup>?</sup> ɛɲə	dó-máa-ró
year	IND	yam.variety	eat-NEG-IRR

‘They won’t eat yam for a year (when under a taboo restriction).’ (Post 2015: 438)

The negative morphemes in Sino-Tibetan languages are generally placed directly before or after what they scope, as can be seen in the Galo example (28).

### ■ Verb Serialization/Concatenation and Negation

Verb serialization and verb concatenation are also related to the scope of negation, which will be discussed here.

In Mandarin Chinese, the negative morphemes *bù* 不 and *méi* 没 can be placed in different slots when they occur in verb-compliment structures. See examples (29, 30, 31, 32).

[Mandarin]

(29) 听得懂

tīng-de-dǒng  
listen-LINK-understand

‘listen and understand’

(30) 听不懂

tīng-bu-dǒng  
listen-NEG-understand

‘listened but not understandable’

(31) 听懂了

tīng-dǒng-le  
listen-understand-ASP

‘listened and understood’

(32) 没听懂

méi-tīng-dǒng  
NEG-listen-understand

‘listened but didn’t understand’

The analysis and translation into English of the above examples (29–32) are from personal communication with my Chinese students (Chen Hong and Liu Lingxiao). In (29), the verbs *tīng* 听 (V1) and *dǒng* 懂 (V2) are linked with *de* 得, and the phrase denotes ‘listen and understand’ as a whole. In Mandarin Chinese, V2 in this structure can be viewed as a kind of result derived from the event of V1. In (29), the verb ‘understand’ occurs as a result of the event ‘to listen.’

In (30), *bù* 不 is slotted between the verbs *tīng* 听 (V1) and *dǒng* 懂 (V2). This sentence denotes that the event ‘to listen’ has occurred, but the event ‘to understand’ has not occurred. The negative morpheme *bù* 不 scopes the V2 and precedes it. When the events are recognized as past ones, however, the word orders are different from (30). The negative sentence (32) corresponds to the affirmative (31), and the negative morpheme *méi* 没 precedes the V1 *tīng* 听, not the V2. In (32), the negative morpheme *méi* 没 scopes over V2 *dǒng* 懂, though V1 ‘to listen’ is in fact realized.

On the other hand, we should place the negative morpheme before the entire verb serialization. See (33).

(33) 我不去买东西。

Wǒ    **bú**    [qù<sub>VP1</sub>]    [mǎi    dōngxi<sub>VP2</sub>]  
1SG    NEG    go            buy            stuff

‘I will not go shopping.’

In (33), the negative morpheme *bú* 不 comes before VP1 and negates both events, which are represented by VP1 and VP2. A Chinese student of mine (Chen Hong) agreed with this view. The placement of negative morphemes and their relationship with scope are rather complicated, but it is arguable that each morpheme has positional restriction in the VP

structure. For more details on the scope of negation in Mandarin Chinese, see Pan et al. (2016), among others.

In Denjongke, on the other hand, the negative prefix *ma-* precedes the second verb *ko* ‘to throw away,’ even though it negates the entire structure of serial verbs, as seen in (35).

[Denjongke: Sikkim, India; Tibetic, Tibeto-Burman] (Yliniemi 2019: 387)

- (34) t<sup>h</sup>u ko:bo f̃.  
 pick throw.away-2INF EQU.PER  
 ‘(He) picked and threw (it) away.’ (KN e)

- (35) t<sup>h</sup>u ma-ko.  
 pick NEG-throw.away  
 ‘Do not pick and throw (it) away.’ (KN e)

The negation of serial verb construction or verb concatenation varies from language to language. In Youle Jino, as in (36), the negative prefix *ma-* precedes the verb concatenation.

[Youle Jino: Yunnan, China; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (Hayashi 2009: 164)

- (36) a<sup>55</sup>xɔ<sup>44</sup>-m̩a<sup>55</sup> kho<sup>33</sup>jin<sup>33</sup> ma<sup>33</sup>-ŋɔ<sup>55</sup> + su<sup>55</sup>-khju<sup>42</sup>.  
 Han Chinese-PL accent NEG-hear+know-AUX  
 ‘Han Chinese don’t understand our accent.’ (glosses and sentential meaning are translated into English by the present author)

Here, *ma-* here scopes the verb *su*<sup>55</sup> ‘to know,’ but *ŋɔ*<sup>55</sup> ‘to hear’ is not negated; it literally means “When Han Chinese hear our voice, they don’t know our accent.” The negative prefix *ma-* cannot be placed between *ŋɔ*<sup>55</sup> and *su*<sup>55</sup>, because there seems to be a positional constraint requiring the negative prefix to occur before the verb concatenation.

Nuosu Yi also seems to have a positional constraint on the negative particle *ap* (Gerner 2013). Gerner (2013) states that verbs are negated by inserting *ap* before the last syllable of the verb. See (37) and (38).

[Nuosu Yi: Sichuan, China; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman]

- (37) cy hxo pu go syt ap-mu.  
 3P.SG mountain LOC affair NEG-do  
 ‘He is not working on the mountain.’ (Gerner 2013: 406)

(38) *syt cy jjit gat-ap-qip.*  
 affair DEM.PROX CL delay <NEG>

‘The event was not delayed.’ (Gerner 2013: 406)

In (37), *ap* comes before the verb, which looks the same as in the languages of the preverbal type mentioned in Section 3. On the other hand, in (38), *ap* occurs before the last syllable of the verb *gat-qip* ‘delay.’

In Nuosu Yi, when the progressive marker *njuo* occurs in the predicate, the negative particle *ap* precedes *njuo*, not the verb. See (39).

(39) a. \**cy gup ap-ddur njuo.*  
 3P.SG sweat NEG-exit PROG

Intended meaning: ‘He is not sweating.’ (Gerner 2013: 409)

b. *cy gup ddur ap-njuo.*  
 3P.SG sweat exit NEG-PROG

‘He is not sweating.’ (Gerner 2013: 409)

In (39a), *ap* occurs before the verb *ddur* ‘exit’, which is ungrammatical, while in (39b), it precedes the progressive marker *njuo*, which is grammatical.

Interestingly, when the perfect marker *ox* or the future marker *mix* occurs in the predicate, the negative particle *ap* should precede the verb, as can be seen in (40) and (41), respectively.

(40) *bbur ma a zzyx ma bbur ap-yot ox.*  
 character DEM.DIST CL write NEG-wrong DP

‘This character is not wrong.’ (Gerner 2013: 410)

(41) *nga ca pot nyip hxe ap-mgot mix.*  
 1P.SG day after tomorrow fish NEG-catch FUT

‘I will not catch fish the day after tomorrow.’ (Gerner 2013: 410)

Mu-nya [Sichuan, China; Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman] also seems to have a word order problem regarding the scope of negation. Ikeda (2020) explains that in the verb predicate with the perfect marker *-sø<sup>55</sup>* the negator *mb<sup>33</sup>*- is placed before *-sø<sup>55</sup>*.

- (42)  $\eta i^{55}$        $y\ddot{u}^{33}ndu^{55}$        $k^h u^{33}ri^{55}$       =  $me^{33}so^{55}$       ( $ni^{33}$ ).  
 1SG.[ERG]      letter      DIR-√write      =NEG-SFX:PFT      DEC

‘I did not write a letter.’ (Ikeda 2020, **bold** by the present author)

However, the word order of the negative is different in predicates with the declarative marker  $ra^{33}$ . In this type, the target to be negated is the verb, and the negator  $mv^{33}$ - is placed before the verb.

- (43)  $?e^{33}tsi^{55}$        $k^h u^{33}me^{55}ri^{33}$        $ra^{33}$ .  
 s/he [ERG]      DIR- NEG- √write      DEC

‘S/he did NOT write.’ [witness] (Ikeda 2020, **bold** by the present author)

In Kurtöp [Bhutan; Bodish, Tibeto-Burman], Hyslop (2017) says that negation generally scopes over only the verb to which it is attached (44), but that in some cases, negation scopes the entire construction (45).

- (44) *tsheni 'igu the co-si boi ma-bi-shang*

tsheni	'igu = the	co-si	boi	<b>ma-bi-shang</b>
then	letter=INDEF	make-NF	3.ERG	NEG-give-PFV.EGO

‘So after making the letter, they didn’t give (it)’ (Hyslop 2017: 349)

- (45) *ngai nya tshotma co-si ma-zu*

ngai	nya	tshotma	<b>co-si</b>	<b>ma-zu</b>
1.ERG	fish	curry	make-NF	NEG-eat

‘I didn’t cook (and therefore) eat fish curry’ (Hyslop 2017: 350)

Hyslop (2017) analyzes that the potentially important difference between (44) and (45) may be due to the occurrence of the pronoun *boi* ‘3.ERG.’ As *boi* in (44) divides the sentence into two clauses, the negative element *ma-* thus cannot scope over the preceding clause. On the other hand, in (45), “the lack of a pronoun between the verbs [...] allows the two verbs to represent two events which are so tightly intertwined that to negate one entails negation of the other” (Hyslop 2017: 350).

## 6.2 Negation and Redundancy

In Mandarin Chinese, there are certain negative-polarity items, such as *chà(yì)diǎn(r)* 差(一)点(儿) ‘almost’. The interaction between these items and negative morphemes has

been discussed in many previous works, such as Zhu (1959), Lü (1985), Che (2016), Yao (2017), Wang (2020), etc.

Here we raise some examples with *chà(yì)diǎn* 差(一)点 ‘almost’ from Zhu (1959) and Yao (2017). The glosses and sentential meanings in these examples are translated into English by the present author.

[Mandarin]

(46) 差一点摔了一交。(=没摔)

**chà(yì)diǎn**    **shuāi-le**    **yì-jiao**  
almost            fall-ASP            one-CLF

‘(I) almost fell down.’ (Zhu 1959: 435, **bold** by the present author)

(47) 他差点考不上大学。(=考上了)

**tā**    **chàdiǎn**    **kǎo-bu-shang**    **dàxué**  
3SG    almost            test-NEG-over            university

‘He almost couldn’t go to university.’ (Yao 2017: 36, **bold** by the present author)

(48) 差点没考上大学。(=考上了)

**chàdiǎn**    **méi-kǎo-shang**    **dàxué**  
almost            NEG-test-over            university

‘(He/She) almost couldn’t go to university.’ (Yao 2017: 15, **bold** by the present author)

(49) 差点没摔倒。(=没摔倒!)

**chàdiǎn**    **méi-shuāi-dǎo**  
almost            NEG-fall-down

‘(I) almost fell down.’ (Yao 2017: 16, **bold** by the present author)

The examples above (46–49) all can be analyzed from Yao (2017)’s explanation, though (46) is cited from a different source.

In (46), *chà(yì)diǎn* 差一点 functions as a negative-polarity item, and thus the sentential meaning will be negative as a result, in other words, ‘I did not fall down’; (47), on the other hand, has both *chàdiǎn* 差点 and the negative morpheme *bu* 不, so that this sentence denotes ‘He entered the university’, hence the cooccurrence of *chàdiǎn* 差点 and *bu* 不 are decoded as “double negation.”

Interestingly, (48), employing *méi* 没 instead of *bu* 不, can be construed similarly to (47). Additionally, (49), which relates to (46), can also be construed the same as (46). Similar to Zhu (1959), Yao (2017) finds that the lexically specified desirability of the predicate verb relates to the construal of the result; entering university is construed as the desirable event, while falling down is not.

Yao (2017) points out that a new phrase *méi chādiǎn* 没差点 has been recently employed similarly to *chādiǎnméi* 差点没 in (49).

(50) 没差点摔倒。(=没摔倒!)

**méi chādiǎn shuāi-dǎo**  
NEG almost fall-down

‘(I) almost fell down.’ (Yao 2017: 25)

A different but similar type can be seen in Duhumbi [Arunachal Pradesh, India; Kho-Bwa, Tibeto-Burman] and is described as a “double negative” by Bodt (2020). See (51).

(51) *Ga? anu ga baŋba tsəŋi miŋcutbaŋ.*

*ga-a? onow ga baŋ-ba tsəŋi miŋ-cut-baŋ*  
1SG-GEN child 1SG not.be1-NOM never sleep-heed-NEG.PRS

‘My child never obeys (my request) to sleep if I am not there.’ (Bodt 2020: 623, source information is deleted, emboldened, and translation is changed by the present author)

*tsəŋi*<sup>12</sup> ‘never’ and *-baŋ* ‘NEG.PRS’ cooccur in (51), and might be literally construed as a “double negative.” However, the adverb *tsəŋi* “retains its negative meaning, but the negation of the verb is elided” (Bodt 2020: 623).

In Atong [Meghalaya, India; Boro-Garo, Tibeto-Burman], van Breugel (2014: 226, 380) describes a phenomenon with the negative *ca*, which signals “an event that has not yet been realized” and is thus similar to the function the *ne explétif* in French.

<sup>12</sup> *tsəŋi* is a loanword from Tibetan *rtsa-nas*, which is the shortcut form of *rtsa-ba-nas* (Bodt 2020: 623).

(52) “*ətəkciwa naʔa aŋna aro aŋməŋ jəkna naŋʔ kheŋwa dabat aŋ thəyca dabat aŋaw muʔay saʔna hənʔbo*” *nookno*

ətəkciwa	naʔa	aŋ = na	aro	aŋ = məŋ	jək = na
But	2SG	1SG=GOAL	And	1SG=GEN	spouse=GOAL

naŋʔ	kheŋ = wa	dabat	aŋ	thəy = ca	dabat
2SG	live=FACT	LIMIT	1SG	die=NEG	LIMIT

aŋ = aw	muʔ = ay	saʔ = na	hənʔ = bo	no = ok = no
1SG=ACC	stay=ADV	eat=GOAL	Give=IMP	say=ASP=QUOT

“‘However, you keep giving me and my wife to eat as long as you live until I die’, (he) said, it is said.’ (van Breugel 2014: 226, **bold** and reformed by the present author)

van Breugel (2014) explains that in (52), *ca* does not function as negator, but rather signals that an event has not been realized yet, which can be understood as an expletive use.

## 7. Illocutionary Acts and Negation

We have discussed “standard negation” so far in the previous section; this section treats the relationships between illocutionary acts and negation.

### 7.1 Negation and Imperative

Negation is used in imperative sentences, and in this use is called the “prohibitive.” Strategies for expressing prohibition vary from language to language. As noticed, some languages employ a special prohibitive marker, while others utilize a general negative morpheme together with certain imperative markers.

Mandarin Chinese uses various strategies for expressing the prohibitive, as seen in (53–54).

[Mandarin]

(53) 别去!

(54) 不要去!

bíe	qù	bú	yào	qù
PROH	go	NEG	need	go

‘Don’t go!’

In (53), the prohibitive *bíe* 别 precedes the verb, while in (54), a phrase consisting of the negative morpheme *bú* 不 and the auxiliary *yào* 要 precedes the verb. According to my

Chinese students (Chen Hong, Liu Lingxiao, Shen Hong, and Zhang Ling), the prohibitive meaning of (54) is more intense than that of (53). Lü (1985) and Jiang (1991) claim that *bié* 别 derives from the fusion of *bú yào* 不要, though the origin of *bié* 别 is still controversial.<sup>13</sup>

The prohibitive morpheme in Tibeto-Burman can be reconstructed as *\*ta* ⋈ *\*da* (Matisoff 2003), which is attested as a reflex in many modern languages. Some samples are cited here from Yuanjiang Kucong, Hayu, and Darma.

[Yuanjiang Kucong: Yunnan, China; Loloish, Tibeto-Burman] (Chang 2011: 121)

(55) nɔ<sup>31</sup>    tɬ<sup>31</sup>    ki<sup>33</sup>.  
2SG    PROH    go

‘Don’t go!’ [**bold** by the present author]

[Hayu: Kathmandu, Nepal; Kiranti, Tibeto-Burman] (Michailovsky 2017: 685)

(56) t<sup>h</sup>a    dzɔ  
PROH    eat

‘Don’t eat it!’ [**bold** by the present author]

[Darma: Uttarakand, India; Himalayish, Tibeto-Burman] (Willis 2007: 383)

(57) **tha** ga!  
**tha**    ga-a  
PROH    do-2SG.IMP

‘Don’t do (that)!’ [**bold** by the present author]

There are exceptional cases of Tibeto-Burman languages that do not employ the prohibitive *\*ta* ⋈ *\*da*. In the Mu-nya language, spoken in Sichuan, the negative has two forms, namely *nuu*<sup>33</sup>- (imperfective) and *mv*<sup>55</sup>- (perfective), while the prohibitive has a morpheme, *tɕu*<sup>55</sup>-. See (58).

[Mu-nya: Ganze (Garze), Sichuan, China; Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman] (Ikeda 2013: 385)

(58) tshe<sup>55</sup>    qə<sup>55</sup>tshø<sup>53</sup> = tsu<sup>33</sup>    fia<sup>33</sup>-tɕu<sup>55</sup>-ndzi<sup>35</sup>!  
dish    leftover=NMLZ    DIR (downward)-PROH-eat

‘Don’t eat the leftover dishes!’ (glosses and sentential meaning are translated into English by the present author)

<sup>13</sup> Ota (1958) analyzes the prohibitive meaning of *bié* 别 as derived from ‘other’, which is considered to be the core meaning of this word.

In Colloquial Burmese, the prohibitive is expressed by negative concord with *-nê*. See (59).

[Burmese: Myanmar; Tibeto-Burman] (Okano 2007: 25–26, glosses and sentential meaning are translated into English by the present author)

(59) <i>sá-φ</i>	(60) <i>mə-sá-nê</i>
eat-VS	NEG-eat-VS
‘Eat!’	‘Don’t eat!’

As seen in Section 4, Burmese employs double-type negation, *ma-... = phú*, with postverbal element concord with simple negation. In this language, the affirmative imperative can be expressed by the verbal root only, as seen in (59). On the other hand, as in (60), the negative imperative, in other words, the prohibitive, is marked by the postverbal element *-nê*.

## 7.2 Negation and Interrogative

In this subsection, we only discuss the structure of polar questions utilizing negative morphemes.<sup>14</sup> In many Chinese dialects, the verb is “reduplicated” and the negative morpheme “inserted” to express a polar question, the so-called “A-not-A question.” See an example from Cantonese in (61).

[Cantonese: Guangdong, Guangxi, Hongkong; Yue, Sinitic]

(61) 你識唔識我細佬呀?

Léih	sik- <i>m̃h</i> -sik	ngóh	sailóu	a?
you	know-not-know	my	brother	PRT

‘Do you know my brother?’ (Matthews and Yip 1994: 311

[Chinese Character adapted from Chishima and Kataoka 2000: 408])

(61) is a polar question with an “A-not-A” structure. The verb 識 *sik* ‘to know’ is “reduplicated” and “inserted” around the negative morpheme 唔 *-m̃h*. To put it more precisely, it should be better analyzed as a verbal compound like 識 *sik* + 唔識 [*m̃h-sik*].

On the other hand, when it comes to the polar question in imperfective aspect, “A-not-A” is not employed; the negative morpheme 未 *meih* is placed at the end of the predicate, as seen in (62).

<sup>14</sup> There are many issues in the relationship between negation and interrogative, such as the nature of rhetorical questions, etc., that should be investigated in the near future.

(62) 你食咗飯未呀?

Léih    sihk-jó-faahn    **meih**    a?  
 you    eat-PFV-food    not.yet    PRT

‘Have you eaten yet?’ (commonly used as a greeting) (Matthews and Yip 1994: 314) [Chinese characters adapted from Chishima and Kataoka 2000: 412]

“A-not-A” type polar questions are also found in some Tibeto-Burman languages, especially in Lolo-Burmese languages.

[Lianghe Achang: Dehong, Yunnan, China; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (Shi 2009: 293)

(63) xɑ<sup>55</sup>    t̪çi<sup>33</sup>    naŋ<sup>33</sup>    t̪ɑ<sup>33</sup>    lau<sup>33</sup>    n<sup>31</sup>    t̪ɑ<sup>33</sup>    lau<sup>33</sup>?  
 this    CLF    2SG    meal    want    NEG    meal    want

‘At this moment, are you hungry or not?’ [**bold** and glossed by the present author]

Example (63) is cited from Lianghe Achang, where the negative morpheme *n*<sup>31</sup> is “inserted” into the two verb phrases *t̪ɑ*<sup>33</sup> *lau*<sup>33</sup> ‘hungry [= *lit.* meal want]’ and the result is then decoded as a polar question.

The Leqi language, which is affiliated with the same Lolo-Burmese branch and spoken in the same state in Yunnan Province as Lianghe Achang, also has the “A-not-A” structure, though it seems to make the question particle occur sentence-finally.

[Leqi: Dehong, Yunnan, China; Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman] (Dai and Li 2007: 254–255)

(64) naŋ<sup>53</sup>    jɛn<sup>55</sup>    pɑː<sup>255</sup>    a<sup>33</sup>    pɑ<sup>255</sup>    la<sup>53</sup>?  
 2SG    tobacco    smoke    NEG    smoke    Q

‘Do you smoke (tobacco)?’ (Dai and Li 2007: 254) [**bold** and glossed by the present author]

In this language, as in (64), if the verb or adjective has a long vowel, the vowel of the “reduplicated” element is shortened and the question particle *la*<sup>53</sup> is placed at the end of the sentence.

Additionally, (64) is interchangeable with (65).

(65) naŋ<sup>53</sup>    jɛn<sup>55</sup>    pɑː<sup>255</sup>    la<sup>53</sup>    a<sup>33</sup>    pɑ<sup>255</sup>    la<sup>53</sup>?  
 2SG    tobacco    smoke    Q    NEG    smoke    Q

‘Do you smoke (tobacco)?’ (Dai and Li 2007: 255) [**bold** and glossed by the present author]

In (65), the question particle also occurs doubly in a sentence, which is not considered to belong to the “A-not-A” prototype.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

This paper overviewed some typological features of negation phenomena (especially for standard negation) in Sino-Tibetan languages utilizing many descriptive works. The findings can be summarized as follows:

### (i) Phonological Features

Sinitic languages have a “plosive type” and “nasal type” for the onset of negative morphemes, while most TB languages employ the form derived from PTB \**ma-* for the negative. Some TB languages have /l-/ , /j-/ , /a-/ for the onset of the negative.

### (ii) Word Order Features

Most Sinitic and TB languages are preverbal negation type, whereas some TB languages in Northeast India and Bangladesh are postverbal type. Double type can be found in Nepal and Karenic language, such as Limbu, Camling, Pwo Karen.

### (iii) Tense/Aspect Features

Some Sinitic and TB languages employ different forms for tense/aspect distinctions, provided by suppletion (e.g., Qiangic, Rgyalrong) or vowel alternation (e.g., Denjongke), while Burmese has a type of “asymmetric negation,” in which the tense/aspect distinction is neutralized.

### (iv) Morphological Features

The negative morphemes in many TB languages are clitics or affixes (prefix/suffix), whereas the ones in Mandarin Chinese and a few TB languages (e.g., Hayu) are words. Some Sinitic and TB languages fuse the negative with the copula, auxiliary verbs, or aspectual markers.

### (v) Syntactic and Semantic Features

- (a) From the viewpoint of scope, the negative element is placed directly adjacent to the word that is to be negated, although in some languages (e.g., Youle Jino), it is not, because of structural constraints.
- (b) There are some languages with negative-polarity items in which the structural “double negative” is construed as single negation (e.g., Mandarin, Duhumbi). The expletive negative is also attested in some languages (e.g., Atong).

### (vi) Illocutionary Act Features

- (a) Many Sino-Tibetan languages employ different forms for prohibitive than for simple negation; most of the former are derived from PTB \**ta* × \**da*, while some languages, such as Burmese, utilize concordance with sentence-final marker to represent the prohibitive.

- (b) To express polar questions, the negative and the affirmative verb form cooccur in some Sino-Tibetan languages, in the so-called A-not-A question.

The negation systems of Sino-Tibetan languages are, of course, much more diverse than can be described or summarized in this paper, for which more abundant linguistic data and finer analyses are surely needed.

### Abbreviation for Glosses

ACC	accusative	INDEF	indefinite
ADV	adverb	INF	infinitivizer
ALLO	allophoric	INTS	intensifier
ANAP	anaphoric	IPFV	imperfective
ASP	aspect	IRR	irrealis
ASS	assertive	LIMIT	limitative
AUX	auxiliary	LINK	linker
CJ	conjunct	LKV	linking verb
CL(F)	classifier	LOC	locational
CMPL	completive	m	male
CONT	continuous	NEG	negative
COP	copula	NF	non-final
DEC	declarative	NMLZ	nominalizer
DEM	demonstrative	NOM	nominative
DESD	desiderative	NON-FIN	non-finite
DIR	directional	NPST	non-past
DIRE	direct evidence	OBJ	objective
DIST	distal	OBL	oblique
DP	dynamic perfect	P	person
EGO	egophoric	PER	personal
ERG	ergative	PFT (PRF)	perfect
EX(T)	existential	PFV	perfective
EQU	equative	PL	plural
FACT	factive	POSS	possessive
FUT	future	PREF	prefix
GEN	genitive	PROG	progressive
GOAL	goal	PROH	prohibitive
HAB	habitual	PROX	proximate
IMP	imperative	PRS	present
IND	individuating	PRT	particle

PSN	personal name	RLS	realis
PST	past	SG	singular
Q	question	SUB	subjective
QUOT	quotative	SFX	suffix
RDUP	reduplication	UNC	uncertain
RES	resultative	VS	verb sentence marker

## Data Sources

Akha: my fieldnote; Amdo Tibetan: Ebihara (2008), Danzheng (2017); Anong: Sun and Liu (2009); Atong: van Breugel (2014); Belhare: Bickel (2017); Bhola Situ: Nagano (2018); Bunan: Widmer (2017); Burmese: Okano (2007, 2013); Cak: Huziwara (2008); Camling: Ebert (2017); Cantonese: Chappell and Peyraube (2016), Matthews and Yip (1994); Chantyal: Noonan and Hildebrandt (2017a); Cogtse rGyalrong: Nagano (2017); Darma: Willis (2007); Denjongke: Yliniemi (2019); Dhimal: King (2009); Drapa (nDrapa): Shirai (2006, 2021b); Duhumbi: Bodt (2020); Dulong: LaPolla (2017); Eastern Kayah Li: Solnit (2017); Fuqing Chinese: Chen (2018); Galo: Post (2015), Garo: Burling (2004); Guiqiong: Jiang (2015); Hakha Lai: Peterson (2017); Hayu: Michailovsky (2017); Japhug: Jacques (2008); Jero: Opgenort (2005); Jinghpaw: Kurabe (2016, 2017); Karbi: Konnerth (2017); Kathmandu Newar: Hargreaves (2017); Kham: Watters (2002); Kham Tibetan: Häsler (1999); Khatso: Donlay (2019); Kurtöp: Hyslop (2017); Ladakhi: Koshal (1979); Lahu: Matisoff (1973); Lao: Enfield (2007); Lepcha: Plaisier (2017); Leqi: Dai and Li (2007); Lhasa Tibetan: Hoshi and Kelsang (2017); Lhomi: Vesalainen (2016); Lianghe Achang: Shi (2009); Limbu: van Driem (2017); Lisu: Bradley (2017); Lizu: Chirkova (2017); Manange: Hildebrandt and Bond (2017); Mandarin Chinese: Lü (1999), Yao (2017), Yip and Rimmington (2016), Zhu (1959), Personal Communication (Chen Hong, Liu Lingxiao, Shen Hong, Zhang Ling, Zhang Yan); Meitei: Chelliah (1997); Menglun Akeu: my fieldnote; Minnan: Chappell (2019); Mongsen Ao: Coupe (2017); Mu-nya: Ikeda (2013, 2020); Nar-phu: Noonan and Hildebrandt (2017b); Nuosu Yi: Gerner (2013); Phunoi: Dai et al. (2018); Prinmi: Ding (2015); Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB): Matisoff (2003); Pwo Karen: Kato (2017); Qiang: LaPolla and Huang (2003); Sangla Kinnauri: Saxena (2017); Stau: Jacques et al. (2017); Tamang: Mazaudon (2017); Tangam: Post (2017); Thai: Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005); Tshangla: Andvik (2017); Tshobdun rGyalrong: Sun (2017); Tujia: Lu et al. (2020), Xu et al. (2017); Vietnamese: Thompson (1965); Wambule Rai: Opgenort (2017); Wu (Shanghainese): Chappell and Peyraube (2016); Youle Jino: Hayashi (2009), my fieldnote; Yuanjiang Kucong: Chang (2011); Zaiwa: Lustig (2010).

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Notes:

Figure 1 and 3 are adapted and reformed from the following website.

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