North East Indian Linguistics: Volume 3.

Edited by Gwendolyn Hyslop, Stephen Morey, and Mark W. Post.
New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd. 2011. 253+xxii
pages, ISBN 9788175967939.

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This is the third volume of proceedings resulting from the annual
International Conference of the North East Indian Linguistics Society. The
third meeting took place at the Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati (Assam)
in 2008.[1] The book is divided into six sections: 'the View from Manipur',
'the Sal Group', 'Tibeto-Burman nominalization', 'Tani', 'Eastern Indo-
Aryan' and 'Austroasiatic', the number of papers in a given section ranging
from one to four. Morphology predominates among the themes; the
majority of papers study a specific morpheme or grammatical category
in one language: *ca* in Marma (Kuziwara, chapter 7), *ke-* and *ka-* in Karbi
(Konnerth, chapter 8), *-ə* in Mising (Pegu, chapter 10), person marking
prefixes in Purum (Sharma and H. T. Singh, chapter 1), agreement markers
in Tangsa (Morey, chapter 6), deictic markers in Tani languages (Post,
chapter 9). These papers offer tantalising glimpses into many interesting
phenomena, inspiring the hope that their authors will proceed to study
other morphemes in these languages with equal clarity and detail.

Morey's treatment of agreement markers in the three Tangsa
languages Cholim, Locchang and Moklum stands out as a highlight among
the morphological chapters. The discussion of Cholim and Locchang is
based on Morey's own fieldwork and that of Moklum on Das Gupta (1980).
In addition to the anticipated tables of paradigms and example sentences,
Morey provides wave forms of verbal complexes to support his analysis
of morphological structure (pages 84, 93). In addition to the typological
comparison of the systems found in the three languages, Morey's
presentation of vowel correspondences between Cholim and Locchang
(page 81) allows him to isolate cognate forms in the agreement systems

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1   For the first and second volume see Morey and Post (2008, 2010). Volume Four is
     rumoured to be in press. The mostly recently held conference, the sixth, took place at
     Tezpur University (Assam) in winter 2011.

of these two languages. The chart of correspondences only gives one example for each correspondence. Although this facilitates the clarity of presentation, it renders his conclusions unverifiable. This is however a minor objection. Morey seamlessly combines instrumental phonetics and historical linguistics in service of his morphological arguments without ever compromising the focus and clarity of presentation. The modest conclusion calling for further research does not give proper credit to this feat.

H. T. Singh (chapter 2) presents a discussion of efforts to promote the Meithei script in Manipur and the attendant controversy over whether to include characters to represent voiced consonants. Unfortunately, like all presentations of the Meithei script (e.g. Chelliah 1997: 355-365), the discussion omits mention of many conventions which one must know in order to read Meithei. Two instances occur in the first few lines of the *Cheitarol Kumpapa* (Parrat 2005). The title of the work itself is written *Cay-thā-rol Kum-pau* in Meithei script, transliterated by N. H. Singh into Bengali script as *Caithārol Kumbābabu.* The writing of two vowels on a single consonant appears to indicate that the consonant in question should be repeated; one may therefore transcribe the Meithei version as *Kum-pa[p] u;* this orthographic convention seems to be previously undescribed. Similarly, the ligature sn- in the name Lā-i-sna (folio 1a. Line 4), Laiśnā in Bengali transcription (N. H. Singh 1967: 1), is nowhere described.

Burling devotes an essay to divergent uses of the terms 'language' and 'dialect' in North East India. Few readers will be surprised that linguists use 'language' to mean a 'collection of spoken dialects that are mutually intelligible' (page 36), whereas for others a 'language' is either the collection of speech forms used by a particular ethnic group or written with a particular alphabet. Despite their straightforwardness and predictability, such distinctions of usage are easy to lose sight of; as Burling shows, Bradley's (1997: 28) inattention to such niceties has marred his presentation of a Stammbaum (pages 39-40). Basic lessons must be ever relearned.

The papers by DeLancey and Wood focus on historical linguistics. Wood's paper is a disappointment; his blunt deployment of the comparative method belies an unfamiliarity with standard methodological thinking in historical linguistics. Contravening Antoine Meillet's dictum that "ce qui est probant pour établir la continuité entre une « langue commune » et

une langue ultérieure, ce sont les procédés particuliers d'expression de la morphologie" (1925: 25), Wood bases his reconstructions on regularities; for him 'those case-forms that are consistent across the modern languages will be assumed to represent the case-ending in P[roto-]B[odo-]G[aro]' (page 51). In Germanic this approach would lead to disastrous results. The dative morpheme -e remains in German in only a few fixed expressions (*zu Hause, Stein im Wege*) and lacks cognates in many modern Germanic languages. Wood would either overlook this morpheme or see it as an innovation, whereas in fact it is reconstructible to proto-Germanic. In Bodo-Garo, the Deuri genitive -o or the Kokborok instrumental -bay may be instances of just such overlooked archaisms (page 52).

Without comment, Wood extends to syntax the same method of majority rule. Such an approach simply does not work; it would lead to the false conclusion that the coincidence of constructions such as *je suis allé, ich bin gegagen*, and *Я (есмь) пошёл* is due to inheritance. Wood devotes no discussion to distinguishing cognate constructions from areal patterns. The lack of a syntactic equivalent to a regular sound change at least demands circumspection. To isolate inherited constructions, Calvert Watkins focuses on fixed formulae, stereotypical or archaic constructions found in conservative genres (e.g. legal texts, religious liturgies), or the treatment of traditional subjects (e.g. athletic contests) (1994: 254). Such caveats do not stymie Wood.

In addition to errors of method, Wood also commits errors of fact. Relying upon A. H. Francke, he compares demonstratives such as Boro *be* and Deuri *ba* with a supposed Tibetan demonstrative -bo (page 48). Francke's decision to call -bo an 'article' (not a demonstrative) must be understood contextually. In the section that Francke is annotating, Jäschke follows de Kőrös (1986[1834]: 37) and Schmidt (1839: 50-51) in his choice of nomenclature, but specifies that -bo and its ilk "might perhaps be more adequately termed denominators, since their principal object is undoubtedly to represent a given root as a noun, substantive or adjective" (Jäschke 1929: 17). Subsequent grammars have followed Jäschke's analysis of -bo as a nominalizing suffix (e.g. Beyer 1992: 127-129, Gyurmé 1992: 131-138, Sommerschuh 2008: 50-54). A desultory rummaging through secondary literature is an inadequate basis upon which to build Tibeto-Burman comparative linguistics. A better Tibetan comparison could be made between the Bodo-Garo third singular demonstrative *u and Old

Tibetan *ḥu* [ɣu]; the Old Tibetan version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* furnishes a nice example: *bud-myed-las ḥdod-źen che-ba myed-pas / « ḥu nĭ sñogs! » śes mchi-baḥĭ rigs* / 'Because there is no greater desire than a women's, she will say "Pursue it (a deer)!"' (I.O.L. Tib J 737.1 lines 141-142, cf. de Jong 1989: 112).

DeLancey's paper succeeds exactly where Wood's fails. Continuing in his pursuit of the history of Tibeto-Burman verbal morphology (cf. 1989, 2010), DeLancey compares 'sentence final words' (abbreviated SFW) in Jinghpaw and Nocte; his use of irregular morphology in reconstruction is a model of clarity and insight. Despite Meillet's own pessimistic assessment that 'la restitution d'une « langue commune » dont le chinois, le tibétain, etc., par exemple, seraient des formes postérieures, se heute à des obstacles quasi invincibles' (1925: 26-27) studies such as DeLancey's or the recent paper of Jacques (2007) show that Meillet's method is up to the task.

The editors of this series are to be thanked and congratulated for their hard work, which has already made a significant contribution and promises to do so into the future.

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