

TITLE: TANGSA – A DIALECT NETWORK IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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Abstract:

Tangsa is the name given in India to a group of people who speak a variety of languages within the Konyak subgroup of the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw (Sal) group within Tibeto-Burman. Within India there are perhaps 30,000 Tangsa people speaking at least 30 different varieties not all of which are mutually intelligible. The following table shows a comparison of words from six Tangsa varieties, with data from my own field work, from an unidentified Tangsa variety in Weidert (1987) and a couple of examples from Das Gupta (1980) (Where the contrasts of tones are known, tones are marked H for high, L for low, with glottalisation for Lochhang. For Youngkuk a rising and low tone are identified at a phonetic level; we make no claims about the phonemic status of these.)

| | ‘one’ | ‘two’ | ‘three’ | ‘hill’ | ‘fire’ | ‘water’ |
|----------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Cholim | βe ^H si ^H | βe ^H ni ^L | βe ^H dim ^L | ku ^{H?} , pɣm ^L | βai ^{H?} | kham ^L |
| Lochhang | sai ^{L?} | nai ^L | dam ^L | kau ^{L?} | βee ^{L?} | khē ^L |
| Youngkuk | así | anǎi | arǒm | kàaŋ | βùu | khàm |
| Weidert | ¹ Λ ¹ si (ʔ) | ¹ Λ ² nΛi | ¹ Λ ³ ḍim | | ¹ vΛl | ³ ḍui ‘juice’ |
| Longri | ashi | anyi | adim | kan | wei (vei) | kham |
| Morang | ashi | anai | atam | kin | war (var) | kham |
| Ponthai | ingat | inyi | injom | kan | we | tong |

This paper will discuss comparative lexical data for Tangsa, and also present information about the verbal agreement system and how it differs from variety to variety. We will propose that Tangsa should be viewed as a ‘dialect network’, rather than a dialect continuum as there is no sense in which there is a lineal progression within the varieties.

Some preliminary data will also be presented relating to the vocabulary and phonology of song language, at least for the Cholim variety of Tangsa. It appears that in some ways the traditional song language is more conservative and may point the way towards a ‘proto Tangsa’.

References:

Das Gupta, K. 1980. *The Tangsa Language (a Synopsis)*. Shillong
Weidert, Alfons. 1987 *Tibeto-Burman Tonology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins

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