

# Can a ‘common language’ work for the Tangsa? The problems of language standardisation in linguistically diverse communities

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## 1 The Tangsa

Our researches and those of the SIL Naga Research Team in Myanmar have identified 70 ‘subtribes’ (the term preferred in India) within Tangsa/Tangshang. These are listed at the *Tangsa People* Wikipedia site, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tangsa\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tangsa_people). Each has its own ethnonym and its own linguistic variety. Some of these varieties are very similar and mutually intelligible; others are quite distinct and unintelligible.

Table 1: Words for ‘water’ and ‘alcohol’ in various Tangsa varieties:

Gloss:	Cholim	Lo-chhang	Rera	Joglei	Tikhak	Yong-kuk	Muklom	Hakhun	Cham-pang
drinking water	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> ε <sup>2</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	kham	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	jung	ɕʒu <sup>2</sup>	yo
river (water)	ʒo <sup>2</sup>	ɕʒaŋ <sup>2</sup>	ʒo <sup>2</sup>	jong	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	jung	ɕʒu <sup>2</sup>	yo
alcohol	c <sup>h</sup> ai <sup>1</sup>	c <sup>h</sup> au <sup>1</sup>	c <sup>h</sup> e <sup>1</sup>	chol	ʒu <sup>2</sup>	ʒo <sup>2</sup>	kham	k <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup>	kam

The diversity of the Tangsa ‘languages’ can be seen from the following table, which gives the words for ‘language’ or ‘speech’ in several Tangsa varieties:

Common name:	Ethnonym:	Word for ‘language’
<b>PANGWA</b>		
Tonglum	tɕolim	bɔm
Kimsing	tɕamtɕaŋ	bɔm
Langching	lotɕ <sup>h</sup> aŋ	bɯ
Ngaimong	ŋaimɔŋ	ðoŋ
Maitai	maitai	do
Joglei	ʒoklɛi	ʒau
Ronrang	rura	fi
<b>OTHER</b>		
Ponthai	nukta (p <sup>h</sup> oŋ)	raʔ
Thamphang	tɕampaŋ	kaʔwa
Hakhun	ha <sup>ʔ</sup> k <sup>h</sup> un	ʒap

## 1.1 Religion

- Traditional belief (animism)
- Rangfraa
- Buddhism
- Christianity (Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, others)

## 2 A “common language” for the Tangsa?

The desire for a common language may arise from a number of factors

- Political
- Educational
- Religious

### 2.1 The language of the Wihu song

Many older people from the Pangwa Tangsa ‘sub-tribes’ have reported that traditionally, although the spoken language may differ from ‘sub-tribe’ to ‘sub-tribe’, the song language was very similar and easily understandable by all. It is exemplified in (1):

1.1) le nang te yo sanwang te yo.  
 PRT.SO 1PL GR.FA PRT.SO PN GR.FA PRT.SO  
 ‘Eh, this is our Sanwang grandfather.’

1.2) e tham nak the wang i ngu räi ta.  
 PRT.SO long time PROH stay come PRT.SO say SEQ LINK  
 ‘Don’t stay a longer time.’

1.3) nang wai ngo homyam wai ngo.  
 1PL GR.MO say PN GR.MO say  
 ‘Our grandfather is called *Homyam wi*.’

1.4) lam phe nak le wang re ngu riita.  
 road sides PROH look go PRT.SO say AUX-LINK  
 ‘Do not go looking on both sides of the road, it says.’

In some ways, the song language resembles the current understanding of proto-Tibeto Burman, as we can see in Table 2:

Table 2: Vowel correspondences, proto /a/

Proto TB	Singpho	(Mungray) Song language	Longri spoken	Cholim spoken	Chamchang spoken	Mungray spoken	Gloss
-a	-a	-a	-a	-e	-i (-e)	-ai	
*m-ka	chinghka	kalue		kelyo	kilü	kailung	‘door’
*na	na	na	na	nekyoe	ni	nai	‘ear’
	-	ka	ka	ke	ki	kai	‘go’
*tsa~*za	käsa	sa	sa	se	se	sai	‘child’

## Names of Tangsa Groups

(Note: My main Lochhang, Ngaimong and Maitai consultants are Presbyterian and use the Joglei orthography (*h* for glottal stop), and my main Cholim consultant, though not Christian, suggested the use of this same orthography. My Chamchang, Rera and Hakhun consultants are Baptists and use *q* for Glottal stop, although *oe* is used by my Hakhun consultant for mid back unrounded vowel rather than the Chamchang *ii*.

Own name:	General Name:	Cholim	Lochhang	Chamchang	Ngaimong	Maitai	Rera	Hakhun
<b>PANGWA</b>								
Cholim	Tonglum	Cholim cho <sup>1</sup> lim <sup>1</sup>	Tyanglam tjaŋ <sup>1</sup> lam <sup>2</sup>	Tülam tu <sup>2</sup> lam <sup>1</sup>	Tonglim	Tolam	Tolum	Tolum
Lochhang	Langching	Lachoeng la <sup>2</sup> c <sup>h</sup> ɲɿ <sup>1</sup>	Lochhang lo <sup>2</sup> c <sup>h</sup> aŋ <sup>3</sup>	Lichang li <sup>2</sup> caŋ <sup>1</sup>	Lengshing	Lashing	Lachi	Loeching
Chamchang	Kimsing			Chamchang tɕam <sup>1</sup> tɕaŋ <sup>1</sup>	Kimching	Tsimtsing	Chamching	Khimching
Ngaimong	Ngaimong	Ngimyö ŋi <sup>1</sup> mjo <sup>1</sup>	Ngaimwa ŋai <sup>2</sup> mwa <sup>2</sup>	Nyimü ji <sup>2</sup> mu <sup>2</sup>	Ngaimong	Ngaimo	Mimo	Ngimo
Maitai	Motai	Mjoechyoe mjɿ <sup>1</sup> c <sup>h</sup> jɿ <sup>1</sup> / mje <sup>1</sup> c <sup>h</sup> jɿ <sup>1</sup>	Mute mu <sup>1</sup> te <sup>3</sup>	Miti mi <sup>2</sup> ti <sup>2</sup>	Muitai	Maitai		Miti
Rera / Rüra	Ronrang			Ronrü ron <sup>2</sup> ru <sup>2</sup>	Ronreng	Ronra	Rera / Rüra	Ronra
	Sangkhe	Khaikhya k <sup>h</sup> ai <sup>2</sup> k <sup>h</sup> ja <sup>1</sup>	Suekue su <sup>1</sup> ku <sup>2</sup>	Shechü ʃe <sup>2</sup> tɕu <sup>2</sup>	Salkeng	Shikyeh	Shike	Soeke
Lakki	Lakkai	Lahkjoe la <sup>ʔ2</sup> kjɿ <sup>1</sup>	Lakkai lak <sup>1</sup> kai <sup>2</sup>	Laqki la <sup>ʔ</sup> ki <sup>2</sup>	Lakki	Lahki		
Mueshaung	Mossang	Myoqhang mjo <sup>1</sup> xaŋ <sup>1</sup>	Myangsa mjaŋ <sup>2</sup> sa <sup>2</sup>	Müsham mu <sup>2</sup> ʃam <sup>1</sup>	Mongsang	Mosang		Mosoe
Mungray	Morang				Mongreng	Mora	More	Mora
Hacheng	Hachheng			Hiqtsii hi <sup>ʔ</sup> tsɿ <sup>2</sup>	Hacheng	Hahtsa	Gaqsa	Haqcho
Khalak	Khalak	Khelak k <sup>h</sup> e <sup>1</sup> lak <sup>2</sup>	Khelak khəlak <sup>1</sup>	Khilak k <sup>h</sup> i <sup>1</sup> lak	Khalak	Khahlah		
Longri	Longri			Longrai loŋ <sup>1</sup> rai <sup>1</sup>	Lungrai	Longri		Longri
Shangwan	Sangwal			Shawe ʃa <sup>2</sup> βe <sup>2</sup>	Sangwa	Sangwe	Sangwe	Soewe
Joglei	Jogly			Joqlai ɕo <sup>ʔ</sup> lai <sup>2</sup>	Joklai	Johli	Yoqli	Johli
	Lungkhe			Longkhi loŋ <sup>1</sup> k <sup>h</sup> i <sup>3</sup>	Lungkhai			
	Haso	Gehtoet ge <sup>ʔ</sup> tɿt <sup>1</sup>						
	Dunghi				Dongngai	Dunggai		

Own name:	General Name:	Cholim	Lochhang	Chamchang	Ngaimong	Maitai	Rera	Hakhun
<b>TIKHAK</b>								
Longchang	Longchang	Lungchha    luŋ <sup>2</sup> c <sup>h</sup> a <sup>2</sup>		Longchii    loŋ <sup>1</sup> tɕɿ <sup>2</sup>	Luncheng	Lungtsa	Longche	Longchan
Tikhak	Tikhak	Chyoekhyah    cɰɿ <sup>1</sup> khja <sup>2</sup>	Tekhyah    te <sup>1</sup> khja <sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>	Tikhüq    ti <sup>1</sup> k <sup>h</sup> u <sup>?</sup>	Taikheh	Tekhyah	Tikaq	Tikhak
Yongkuk	Yongkuk	Yokuh    ʒo <sup>1</sup> ku <sup>?</sup> <sup>1</sup>	Yangkok    yang <sup>2</sup> kok <sup>1</sup>	Jükhuk    ɕɰu <sup>2</sup> k <sup>h</sup> uk	Yongkauh	Jokuh	Yokuq	Yongkuk
Nokjah	Nokjah	Nukjyoeh    nuk <sup>1</sup> ʒɰɿ <sup>2</sup>			Nukjah	Nukjyeh		
Kato	Kato	Katoi    ka <sup>1</sup> toi <sup>1</sup>			Katui			
<b>OTHER</b>								
Moklum	Moklum	Mohlim    mo <sup>?</sup> lim <sup>1</sup>		Moqlam    mo <sup>?</sup> lam <sup>2</sup>	Moklum	Mohlam	Moqlum	Moqlum
Phong (Nukta)	Ponthai	Ponthai    pon <sup>2</sup> thai <sup>2</sup>		Ponthai    pon <sup>2</sup> t <sup>h</sup> ai <sup>2</sup>	Ponthai	Ponthai	Ponthai	Ponthai
Hawoi	Havi	Hawoi    ha <sup>1</sup> βoi <sup>2</sup>		Hiqwi    hi <sup>?</sup> βi <sup>3</sup>	Hawui		Gawi	
Hakhun	Hakhun			Hiqkhun    hi <sup>?</sup> k <sup>h</sup> un <sup>2</sup>	Hahkhin	Hahkhun	Gaqkun	Hakhun
Champang	Thamphang			Thampha    t <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup> p <sup>h</sup> a <sup>2</sup>	Thamphang	Thamphang		Thaphoe
Chamkok	Thamkok			Thamkoq    t <sup>h</sup> am <sup>2</sup> ko <sup>?</sup>	Thamkok	Thamkoh		(Thamkok)
Haihle	Halang				Hahleng	Hahlah		Lama
Bote	Bongtai				Bongtai	Botai		Buti

## 2.2 History of writing in Tangsa:

### 2.2.1 Roman-based orthographies for “common language” – particularly Bible Translation and Hymn Books

#### 2.2.1.1 Kimsing / Chamchang orthography

Table 3: Consonant Phonemes in Chamchang

	Bilabial	Dental / Alveolar	Palatal / affricate	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless unaspirated stops	p /p/	t /t/	ch /tʃ/	k /k/	q /ʔ/
Voiceless aspirated stops	ph /p <sup>h</sup> /	th /t <sup>h</sup> /	chh /tʃ <sup>h</sup> /	kh /k <sup>h</sup> /	
Voiced stops	b /b/	d /d/		g /g/	
Nasals	m /m/	n /n/	ny /ɲ/	ng /ŋ/	
Voiceless fricative		s /s/	sh /ʃ/		h /h/
Affricate		ts /ts/			
Semi vowel	w /β/		j /ʒ/		
Rhotic Approximant		r /ɹ/			
Lateral Approximant		l /l/			

Table 4: Vowels Phonemes in Chamchang

i /i/		ü /ʉ/	u /u/
e /e/	(ii /ə/)	ii /ɻ/	o /o/
	a /a/		

#### 2.2.1.2 Mossang orthography

Table 5: Consonant Phonemes in Mossang

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal / affricate	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless unaspirated stops	p /p/	th /t̪/	t /t/	j /tʃ/	k /k/	q /ʔ/
Voiceless aspirated stops	ph /p <sup>h</sup> /	htt /t̪ <sup>h</sup> /	ht /t <sup>h</sup> /	ch /tʃ <sup>h</sup> /	kh /k <sup>h</sup> /	
Voiced stops	b /b/		d /d/		g /g/	
Nasals	m /m/		n /n/	ny /ɲ/	ng /ŋ/	
Voiceless fricative		f /f/	s /s/	sh /ʃ/	x /x/	h /h/
Voiced fricative			z /z/		gh /ɣ/	
Affricate			ts /ts/			
Semi vowel	w /w/			y /j/		
Rhotic Approximant			r /ɹ/			
Lateral Approximant			l /l/			

Table 6: Vowels Phonemes in Mossang

i /i/		ue /ʉ/	u /u/
e /e/	v /ə/	ui /ɻ/	o /o/
	a /a/		aw /ɔ/

1	thuic nyenz	-z	low (falling)
2	thuic hvlz	-x	mid (level)
3	thuic tsanz	-c	high (falling)
	thuic htaq	-q	glottal (and final stops, -k, -t and -p)

When comparing the Chamchang and Mossang orthographies, we get examples like those in (2), where the Chamchang tone marked forms are shown in brackets.

2)	Mossang	Chamchang	Gloss
	maungz	ma (max)	‘dream’
	maungx	ma	‘corpse’
	yaungx	ja	‘knife’
	wvrz	wa (wax)	‘fire’
	shalx	rashe	‘sun’

### 2.2.1.3 Joglei orthography

The Joglei system is less complex than the Mossang or Kimsing/Chamchang, having no tone marking. However Joglei does have a long-short distinction for the low vowel and the marking of this is complex. Phonemically we show the short vowel as schwa /ə/ and the long vowel as /a/. In the Joglei script, the short vowel is written differently, according to its linguistic environment:

- 1) With following /i/, where it is written <ei> as hei /həi<sup>H</sup>/ ‘blood’ (distinct from hai /hai<sup>L</sup>/ ‘throw away’)
- 2) With following /u/, where it is written <ou>, as anyou /ə-ŋəu<sup>L</sup>/ ‘mother’ and anyou /əŋəu<sup>M</sup>/ ‘sharp’; as distinct from kau /kau<sup>M</sup>/ ‘that side’
- 3) When followed by a final nasal, it is written with final -h, as rangh /rəŋ<sup>M</sup>/ ‘sky’, distinct from arang /əraŋ<sup>L</sup>/ ‘bone’
- 4) As a syllable preceding some nouns, it is written <a> as arang /əraŋ<sup>L</sup>/ ‘bone’. The present Joglei orthography does not mark this with a special symbol
- 5) When followed by l there appears to be no distinction between /a/ and /ə/, all words having the shorter, closed ə and being written with /a/ as aqhal /əxəl<sup>H</sup>/ ‘good’.

Comparing the three varieties, here is the word for ‘good’

3)	Mossang	Chamchang	Joglei	Gloss
	hvlz	hea (heaf)	qhal	‘good’

### 2.2.1.4 Use of the three scripts

## 2.2.2 Orthographies intended for subtribe use, rather than general use

### 2.2.2.1 Ngaimong Orthography (1960s)

### 2.2.2.2 Hakhun Orthography

## 2.2.3 More informal scripts

## 2.2.4 Non-Roman scripts

### 2.2.4.1 Lakhum Mossang

### 2.2.4.2 Rang Fraa Lipi

## 3 Prospects for the future

### 3.1 The Kimsing / Chamchang / Shanke script

### 3.2 Mossang

## 4 Conclusions