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REVIEW OF *A GRAMMAR OF LEPCHA* (*LANGUAGES OF THE GREATER HIMALAYAN REGION 5*) BY HELEEN PLAISIER

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A grammar of Lepcha
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Lepcha is spoken by an indeterminable number of speakers, primarily in Sikkim and adjacent portions of West Bengal in India. The 1991 Indian census identifies nearly 30,000 speakers but the Lepcha themselves estimate this number to be as high as 50,000. In addition, approximately 1,000 speakers are found in southwestern Bhutan (van Driem 2001). Until the present work by Plaisier, those interested in information regarding the Lepcha language have been primarily limited to referencing Colonel George Mainwaring's 1876 grammar (Mainwaring 1876) and thus Plaisier's grammar is a very valuable contribution to the field of Tibeto-Burman linguistics. This descriptive grammar is based on the author's fieldwork in Kalimpong and Sikkim between 1994 and 1998. Throughout the book, Plaisier offers comparisons with Mainwaring's work, describing where the contemporary findings deviate from what Mainwaring reported. The grammar is neatly laid out in a concise 144 pages. In addition to the grammar, this book also presents 68 pages of transcribed and translated texts and a 32 page Lepcha-English glossary. All Lepcha data appear in both the exquisite native Lepcha orthography as well as the standard Romanization.

Chapter One, a concise introduction, provides an overview of a number of topics. The origin of the name Lepcha (from Nepali *lāpce or lāpca* 'inarticulate speech') and the native ethnonym *rong* are discussed, as well as some ethnographic information. Aiding the author's description are 10 photographs of various Lepcha people in a variety of contexts. In this section Plaisier also describes the history of Lepcha language studies and the development of the language in Sikkim. Despite the mystique surrounding this language, there has been a handful of linguistic and anthropological studies since Mainwaring, as Plaisier points out. For several decades, the Lepcha themselves have been publishing periodicals, books, plays and poetry in their own language. A detailed discussion of the placement of Lepcha within Tibeto-Burman is omitted, with the

author acknowledging that the relationship of Lepcha with other Tibeto-Burman languages remains to be understood (see Bodman 1988).

The phonology and orthography are discussed in Chapter Two throughout five sections. Section 2.1 introduces eight vowel phonemes in Lepcha. Plaisier states that the contrast in Lepcha vowels involves four degrees of height contrast and three degrees of front-back contrast, but does not offer acoustic analyses of the vowels to support this. Unlike neighboring Tibeto-Burman languages such as Dzongkha (van Driem 1998), Lepcha does not contrast short versus long vowels or, apparently, contrast tone. The discussion on suprasegmentals is limited, however, and stress and intonation are addressed in one paragraph (see Sprigg 1966).

Section 2.2 describes the Lepcha consonants. A three-way contrast (voiceless, aspirated, voiced) is found amongst stops at five places of articulation (labial, dental, retroflex, palatal, velar) with a voiced palatal stop missing. Interestingly, Lepcha also contrasts a voiced and voiceless labio-dental fricative, though Plaisier writes that the contrast between /p^{h}/and /f/ appears to be fading, probably under the influence of Nepali which does not possess the latter. Plaisier points out that this is not the only likely influence from the Nepali language.

Amongst the topics discussed in Chapter Two is an interesting phonological alternation in Lepcha. As a sort of reverse rhinoglottophilia (see Matisoff (1975), Michailovsky (1975) and Sprigg (1987)), word-initial /ŋ/ in Lepcha is sometimes realized as [ɦ]. This sound change is also perhaps reminiscent of Dzongkha, which often has /h/ as a reflex for Written Tibetan <sn->. At times it seems the author could offer more argumentation. For example, the author lists <hl> and <hr> as consonant clusters but represents these as single segments /l̥/ and /r̥/ in the data. Neither /l̥/ nor /r̥/ is listed as a Lepcha phoneme (p. 22). She mentions the voiceless lateral is a realization of a phonological cluster (p. 29) but does not offer her justification for this claim. The discrepancy between <hr> and /r̥/ is not addressed.

Sections 2.3 and 2.4 discuss syllable structure and orthography, respectively. The former is a brief discussion illustrating over 20 complex onsets and a set of coda consonants which retain all the TB coda consonants reconstructed in Matisoff (2003) except -s. The beautiful orthography is explained and laid out over five pages, including a history of its development. The final section in this chapter is devoted to the Romanization and spelling of Lepcha and the chapter ends with a comparison of the Romanization used by Mainwaring (1876), Grünwedel (1898), Támsáng (1980) and that which is used throughout this book.

Chapter Three is a seven page outline of parts of speech, comprising of five sections on the following topics: derivational affixes, gender-specific endings, compounding, reduplication, and causative verbs. In the introduction to this chapter it is stated that nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, numerals, postpositions, suffixes, conjunctions and particles are distinguished. The syntactic distinction between these classes is discussed in brief; nouns, pronouns, adjectives and numerals may be pluralized and take certain suffixes and postpositions. Verbs

take auxiliary verbs and suffixes, while particles are said to mark nouns, verbs and sentences.

In Section 3.1 Plaisier describes a handful of derivational morphemes. Comparative Tibeto-Burmanists might be interested in the discussion of [ʔa-] which changes verbs to nouns, reminiscent of the Burmese nominalizing *a-* and perhaps Karbi /ka-/ (Konnerth 2008) and Angami /kə̀-/ (Herring 1991). The remaining sections examine gender-specific endings, compounding, reduplication and causative verbs, the latter of which is primarily the illustration of a closed class of verbs which encode causation via palatalization of the initial (Benedict 1943).

Nominal morphology is illustrated in Chapter Four. Plaisier begins by distinguishing between 'genuine' or 'true' case endings and postpositions. Some readers may not be familiar with her use of the word 'case', which she uses in an older sense to refer to a morphologically marked category, rather than a syntactic category. Thus, the two 'true' case markers are *-re* 'the' and *-m*, which marks dative case.

The category of number is discussed in Section 4.1. Plaisier describes in lucid detail the interesting differences between the two Lepcha plurals *-sang* and *-pang*. In general, *-sang* is applied primarily to human referents while *-pang* is used for non-humans. These pluralizing morphemes are not obligatory and do not occur in a syntactic context in which plurality is unambiguous, such as when a noun occurs with a numeral. The plural *-sang* may also be used with proper names to convey the sense of 'and the like'. Plaisier touches on the historical source of the plural suffixes by commenting that *-sang* has a meaning of 'whole, entire' on its own while *-pang* has a meaning of 'thing, things'. She does not look outside Lepcha for comparison but it may of interest to note that a possible cognate occurs also in East Bodish languages; /poŋ/ is a numeral denoting '400' in Dzala and /-poŋ/ is one of two plural morphemes in Kurtöp.

Section 4.2 describes the definite and indefinite article, the latter being one of the two 'true' case markers. Plaisier argues that *-re* is a true suffix in that it and the word it joins form one prosodic unit. The word *kat* 'one' fulfills some of the same functions of the English indefinite article, such as making the singularity of a given referent explicit. An extensive inventory of Lepcha pronouns is offered in Section 4.3. One set of singular, dual and plural pronouns are found for first, second and third person and a separate set is used for first, second and third person oblique referents. The demonstrative pronouns are a large collection of forms that will likely be of interest to comparative Tibeto-Burmanists. Most forms consist of a prefix and a deictic morpheme. Some examples are *ʔátháng* 'this up there', used for any point higher than the deictic center and *ʔácún* 'this down here, this down below, this lower down' and *mebá* 'there below' and *tába* 'there above'. There are close to forty of such forms, excluding the interrogative, relative and indefinite pronouns, which are also discussed in this chapter.

The next five sections of Chapter Four describe the Lepcha case suffixes, including an ablative *nun* ~ *nu*, lative *-lom* (from PTB *lam 'road, direction'),

genitive *-sá*, comitative *-sá*, locative *-ká* and dative *-m*. Other suffixes are also introduced in these sections, such as *-ren* 'since' and *-kon* 'side'. The use of each of these suffixes is explained in clear detail, including an interesting discussion regarding the difference between the dative *-m* and the locative *-ká*. The dative encodes a more affected referent while the locative encodes direction more generally, which the author illustrates with a handful of well-chosen examples. Plaisier speculates about the relationship between Lepcha *-ka* with Dzongkha locative *-khâ* but other possible cognates could be found further in Kurtöp *-ko* ~ *-go* or Tshangla locative/dative *-ga* (Andvik to appear). With the exception of a brief discussion in Section 5.13 (see below), I was unable to find any argumentation regarding grammatical relations in Lepcha.

It is not clear whether adjectives, discussed in Section 4.9, constitute their own class, but interestingly, many have been formed with the [ʔa-] prefix, such as *ʔáhyur* 'red', and *ʔáhyâng* 'cold' and some with the dative *-m*, such as *ʔásum* 'spicy'. The comparative construction is discussed in Section 4.10 and numerals are given four pages of space in Section 4.11, illustrating a native vigesimal system and a recently introduced decimal system, amongst other topics of interest. The final section in Chapter Four is devoted to telling time, ranging from reading a clock to names for the 12 Lepcha years.

Chapter Five, dedicated to verbal morphology, outlines a system without elaborate conjugational morphology and no indexing of participants in the verb. However, the verb *bi* ~ *bo* 'give' is unique in this regard. The choice of *bi* versus *bo* is dictated not by the presence or absence of an auxiliary (see reference to Section 5.1 below), but by the recipient of the verb. The stem *bo* occurs exclusively with a first or second person recipient while *bi* occurs with third person recipients. This vestige of biactantial verbal agreement will certainly catch the attention of comparativists interested in the reconstruction of verbal agreement to Proto-Tibeto-Burman.

Beginning with the verb stem in Section 5.1, Plaisier explains how many Lepcha vowel-final verb stems exhibit a final consonant in the inflected stem when preceding auxiliary verbs and speculates on the historical development of this allomorphy. Plaisier introduces verbs of permission, ability, opportunity and exigency in Section 5.2. Seven verbs are discussed in this section. Section 5.3 presents an interesting description of the verbs 'to be' in Lepcha, of which two are found: *go* and *nyi*. The latter has grammaticalized into a progressive marker in the variety of Lepcha spoken in Sikkim, and its possible relationship with Kurtöp *ni* 'sit', Hayu progressive *ni* (Michailovsky 1988), Meithei copula *ni* (Chelliah 1997) and the Darma equational auxiliary *ni* (Willis 2007), amongst others, could also be noted. Also of interest for comparativists will be Plaisier's discussion of *ma*, the assertive particle, which she speculates derives from an earlier Tibeto-Burman verb 'to be'. She mentions its apparent cognates in the Hayu assertive particle *-m* and the *m-* initial copula found in many Kiranti languages but she could also mention the Tamang existential copula *mu* (Poudel 2006), the Caodeng

RGyalrong sentence final particle *mu* (Sun 2003), and the Black Mountain future morpheme *-m* (van Driem 1995), amongst others.

Section 5.4 illustrates Lepcha negation, which generally involves both a prefix *ma-* and suffix *-ne* ~ *-n*. Section 5.5 describes what Plaisier refers to as the 'gerund' and 'participle', two forms which express simultaneity and chronological ordering of actions, respectively. Chapter Five continues in this manner, with each section illustrating form and semantic function of various verbal suffixes, including an infinitive, the aorist form of the verb, the progressive, the 'non-preterite tense' and a 'factive marker'. Section 5.11, devoted to the Aktionsart auxiliaries, is slightly more expanded. In this section she discusses four auxiliaries and their source as main verbs: the perfective, the resultative, the exhaustive and the completive. The final two sections in this chapter are related to the use of case-marking suffixes with verbs. The use of the locative in this context is described first, followed by an interesting discussion of the ablative. Plaisier describes the use of the ablative as a sort of ergative, in that it tends to occur on the agent participant in transitive clauses, but its presence does not appear to be obligatory. As Plaisier points out, this is similar to the distribution of the ergative in Dzongkha (van Driem 1998) and countless other Tibeto-Burman languages (see, for example, Saxena to appear). One potential source of confusion is that throughout this chapter Plaisier refers to 'auxiliary', 'modal' and 'main' verbs without offering a definition of each, thus perhaps leading the reader to be confused regarding the syntactic (though not semantic) role of a given form.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, presents Lepcha clause-final particles, coordination and subordination. Most of the particles are quickly illustrated in each section, with various uses of the inferential particle explained in more depth. Although Plaisier does not say it, it seems the 'inferential particle', 'certainty particle', 'discovery particle' and 'reported speech particle' are encoding what appears to be a rich system of evidentiality. Coordination and subordination are given one section each, and the final section in Chapter Six is devoted to the nominalizer *-bu*, discussed also in Section 5.10.

Following this 144-page description of the grammar, Plaisier includes six fully transcribed, annotated and translated Lepcha texts, in the native orthography and Romanization. Following the texts is a 32-page Lepcha-English glossary.

Plaiser's grammar will indeed be welcome and useful to Tibeto-Burmanists, especially comparativists. It may be less useful to typologists or others who hope for more thorough syntactic description and analysis. As mentioned in the above, many topics are covered cursorily and readers may find themselves looking for a definition of terminology and wishing for more information. Syntax, for example, seems to be entirely omitted from the grammatical description. The reader will also notice that Plaisier often reports on the written language, instead of or in addition to the spoken language. Throughout the book Plaisier makes reference to Mainwaring's grammar, noting where the contemporary language deviates from his account, as well as occasionally speculating about etymologies, including borrowings, and possible relationships of forms within Tibeto-Burman. Certainly,

as the first and only truly accessible description of Lepcha, this book will be of great value to comparativists who wish for an interesting, coherent and concise account of this language.

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