

Bisyllabicity in the languages of North East India
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Many languages in North East India, either Tai or Mon-Khmer or Tibeto-Burmese (and sometimes even Assamese!) have nouns in two syllables. For instance, in many local Tibeto-Burmese languages, whether Naga, or Arunachali, Kuki, or down in the valleys, nouns for birds have two syllables, the first of which means “bird”; many nouns for big animals have two syllables, the first of which means “quadruped”, etc. Very often this first syllable cannot stand isolated, but appears only as a kind of prefix. Now, this phenomenon is not so strange (thinking of specifiers in Chinese for instance), except when one realizes that it occurs in Tibeto-Burmese as well as in Tai. In Tai languages, the head noun typically comes first and complementizers or adjective-like things come after; but in compounded nouns, it is not the case: names for tortoises usually come with “tortoise” first and the details just after – which (very strangely) mimicks what happens in Tibeto-Burmese where the “gender” also comes first and the “species” after, exactly like in Linnean classification. This super-pattern appears to be widespread throughout the area, not only in North East India but in South East Asia as well.

This has many consequences, not only – in a very rough way – on the pattern of noun phrase syntax (which comes first: determiner or determined?), but far more interestingly on the relative position of predicates – and still more interestingly on the ‘Greenbergian’ relationship between word order within NP and outside. The workshop organizer intends to give examples in different languages in North East India, to provide a rationale for them, and to stimulate research among younger colleagues and students on this remarkable topic – for which our North East Indian area seems to be so rich and suggestive.

Recommended (but certainly not compulsory!) readings:

- JACQUESSON François (2004). Galõ et angami (Tibéto-birman). In P. Arnaud (ed.) *Le nom composé*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 115-129.
- JACQUESSON François (2000). “Deux territoires d’histoire linguistique: Le Brahmapoutre et l’Iénisséï.” *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 95 (1): 343-388.
- JACQUESSON François (1998). “L’évolution et la stratification du lexique: Contribution à une théorie de l’évolution linguistique.” *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 93 (1): 77-136.