

**Watch out for number ONE:
Jingpho ṇâi 'I' and ləṇâi 'one'
(with some speculations about Jingpho number TWO)**

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1. *Innovative nature and uniqueness of the Jingpho forms for ONE and TWO*

The Jingpho (Jg.) word ləṇâi 'one' has always had a special place in my heart, since it was the very first form I ever elicited in a Tibeto-Burman (TB) language, in the summer of 1963, when working with LaRaw Maran. The next word to emerge in that elicitation session was of course ləkhôn 'two'. Already these two forms led me to a couple of false assumptions: (a) that the prefix lə- was very common, especially with numerals; and (b) that the high-to-low falling tone, "51" (symbolized here as /[^]/) was likewise. Both assumptions were of course premature. lə- occurs with no other numerals, except HUNDRED, where it seems to mean ONE; and "51" turned out to be by far the rarest of the Jg. tones, occurring mostly as a sandhi variant of the low tone "31"¹ -- though it does in fact occur with one other numeral, d̥zəkhû 'nine'.

More importantly, the Jg. words for ONE and TWO are completely isolated from the comparative point of view, with no known cognates elsewhere in Sino-Tibetan (ST).² See Figure 1.

¹ Several morphophonemic subclasses of these "51" words may be distinguished: (a) verbs in the low tone (31) regularly acquire "51" when preceded by the high-toned negative prefix, syllabic f̥-: lù 'have' > f̥-lù 'not have'; (b) low-tone verbs sometimes change to "51" when they are preceded by a nominalizing or causativizing prefix (e.g. the syllabic nasal, or shwa, or consonant plus shwa): tà 'build a house' > f̥-tà 'a house'; thòi 'be light' > ɔ̃thòi 'illumination'; tùm 'be squandered (as time)' > ɔ̃tùm 'to squander (as time)'; (c) adverbial expressions derived by a prefix from 31 verbs sometimes acquire "51": nì 'be near' > ɔ̃nì nì ɔ̃ 'nearly', tèm 'be closely shut', ɔ̃tēm ɔ̃ 'soberly'; (d) kinship terms in the 31 tone become 51 when used vocatively: kəwà 'father' > wà 'O father!; hey, dad!'. See Matisoff 1974:159-60.

² In general the numerals ONE and TWO seem to have a special status in the world's languages. Irregularities, allofamic variations, and suppletions are more readily tolerated here than with the higher numerals (e.g. English *one* ≠ *an* ≠ *only*; *two* ≠ *twain* ≠ *between* ≠ *twinn*; *one* <-> *first*; *two* <-> *second*).

Figure 1. PTB and Jingpho numerals³

	PROTO-TIBETO-BURMAN	JINGPHO
ONE	*it; *k(y)at; *g-t(y)ik ⁴	lən̄ai
TWO	*g-ni-s	ləkhôn
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THREE	*g-sum	məsūm
FOUR	*b-ləy	məlī
FIVE	*l-ŋa ~ *b-ŋa	məŋā
SIX	*d-ruk	krúʔ
SEVEN	*s-nis	sən̄it
EIGHT	*b-r-gyat ~ *b-g-ryat	mətsát
NINE	*d-kəw ~ *s-kəw ~ *d-gaw	džəkhú
TEN	*gip; *ts(y)i(y) ~ *tsyay	ši
TWENTY	*m-kul	khūn
HUNDRED	*r-gya	lətsā

With respect to PTB, Jg. preserves the numeral prefixes fairly well. In FOUR, FIVE, and EIGHT, PTB *b- is reflected by Jg. mə-. Jg. SIX, SEVEN, NINE, and HUNDRED reflect PTB *d-, *s-, *d- or *s-, and *r-, respectively. The prefix of THREE has been influenced by the mə- in FOUR and FIVE, so that 3-5 show a "prefix run".⁵

2. Variant forms of Jingpho lən̄ai 'ONE'

(a) lən̄ai

The standard citation form of this numeral has a lateral prefix, occurring in such collocations as məsā lən̄ai 'one person', lən̄ai mī 'one',⁶ lən̄ai n̄ai 'some; a few; one now and then', lən̄ai n̄ai s̄a 'only some; only a few', lən̄ai thēʔ lən̄ai 'one by one', lən̄ai phāŋ lən̄ai 'one after another'.

Whence this lateral prefix, which occurs also with ləkhôn 'two'? A plausible source is the well-attested PTB etymon *lak⁷ 'hand', which appears in

³ See Benedict 1972:93-5, and Matisoff 1995a, *passim*.

⁴ Other roots for ONE reconstructed in Matisoff 1995a (sections 3.11-3.15) include: *ka/*ko; *d/tay ✕ *d/tan; *tir ✕ *tur; *a; *k-IV(N), etc.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon in TB numeral systems see Matisoff 1995a, §§ 5.2-5.5.

⁶ For a discussion of this morpheme mī, see §4, below.

⁷ See STC #86 and note 102.

reduced form in many Jg. nouns relating to the limbs (hands or feet), e.g. *lɔ́táʔ* 'hand', *lɔ́khrá* 'righthand', *lɔ́phàn*, 'palm', *lɔ́phùm* 'forearm', *lɔ́khôn* 'bracelet' (note 51 tone; < *khôn* 'wear bracelets'), *lɔ́gō* 'foot; leg', *lɔ́phùt* 'knee', *lɔ́thìn* 'heel', *lɔ́khrùʔ* 'hoof', *lɔ́nū* 'thumb; big toe' (lit. "limb-mother"). The semantic connection would be via the practice of counting on the fingers.⁸

Once this prefix was firmly established with this numeral, it was eligible for trans-semanticization, so that in several common time-expressions *lɔ́-* has come to mean ONE all by itself: *lɔ́nī* 'one day', *lɔ́náʔ* 'one night', *lɔ́nīn* 'one year', *lɔ́phòt* 'one morning'.⁹ The same morpheme is probably to be adduced in other quantified expressions like *lɔ́lām* 'a fathom', *lɔ́tsā* 'one hundred'¹⁰, *lɔ́mùn* 'ten thousand (one myriad)', *lɔ́mā*, *lɔ́ma-ma*, *lɔ́ma-mi* 'some; something; few'. (In the Hkauri dialect of Jingpho, these expressions have *rɔ́-* rather than *lɔ́-*: *raning* 'one year', *rani* 'one day', *ranaʔ* 'one night').

(b) ʔŋâi

This variant with preglottalized initial is supplied by Maran (870), though it is spelled simply as "ngai" in Hanson (513).¹¹ It appears in collocations like the following: ʔŋâi mī 'one; a unit' (e.g. *mərâi ʔŋâi mī* 'one person'), ʔŋâi (mī) šâ 'only one'¹², ʔŋâi ŋâi (note 31 tone in 2nd syllable) 'someone [indef. pron.]' (e.g. *məšâ ʔŋâi ŋâi dù sâi* 'Someone has come').

(c) âi

Complete loss of initial consonant is a common enough phenomenon with TB functors, including high frequency items like numerals and pronouns,¹³ so it is not too surprising to find a vowel-initialled variant "âi 'one; same as *lǎngai*'" (Hanson, p. 55; tone from Maran), as in *kəwá âi mī jòʔ rít* 'Give me a bamboo.'

⁸ This "digital computational" practice is by no means confined to TB peoples (cf. English expressions like *on the one hand*, *on the other hand*). The PTB etymon for FIVE, the handlike numeral *par* excellence, is reconstructed with either of two prefixes, *b- or *l-. Perhaps Jingpho selected the non-lateral prefix here (*məŋā*) because of analogical pressure from FOUR. See Matisoff 1995a, § 4.14.

⁹ Hanson (p. 358) calls the prefix in these forms "a shortened form of *lǎngai* 'one'".

¹⁰ It seems possible that the liquid prefix set up for the PTB form for HUNDRED (*r-gya) may itself derive ultimately from *lak 'hand'. Cf. the Hkauri forms with r- instead of l- (just below).

¹¹ This form is lacking in Dai et al 1983, as are the variants with zero- and syllabic nasal initials cited in (c) and (d), below.

¹² This Jingpho morpheme 'only' seems clearly cognate to a Kamarupan root *(t)sa 'one' (Matisoff 1995a:§ 3.152 and note 75).

¹³ As random examples we may cite Lahu â (< mā) 'negative', ā (< tā) 'durative particle', etc. See Matisoff 1973:38.

(d) *ń-ńai*

Finally, Hanson (498) cites a variant with syllabic nasal prefix: "nngai 'one; same as *lǎngai*." The tones are supplied by Maran (842): *ń-ńai*.

Here we approach the main point of this paper. This prenasalized variant of the numeral ONE is homophonous (except for tone) with the **first person** singular agreement marker,¹⁴ used in sentences like the following: *ńai sǎ ń-ńai* 'I am eating' (Hanson 498); *ńai gò jòngmà rái ńai* 'I am a student' (Dai 624).

Already this is rather persuasive phonological evidence for the connection between ONE and FIRST PERSON in Jingpho. The fact that the first person agreement marker and an alloform of the numeral ONE are virtual homophones makes it highly likely that the same etymon is involved.

3. *The Jingpho first person pronoun ńai*

Just as the Jg. numeral ONE is highly distinctive in the context of TB/ST as a whole, so is the Jingpho independent first person pronoun *ńai* 'I; me'. While virtually all TB languages that have inherited this etymon reflect the simple vowel *-a (PTB **ɲa*: STC #406), STC is obliged to set up a separate root **ɲai* (#285) largely to accommodate this Jg. form.¹⁵

I have recently become convinced that the ST/TB pronouns for all three persons have been suffixable by palatal and/or nasal elements at various times and places in the family,¹⁶ so that a palatal suffix is typical of the PST pronominal system in general:

¹⁴ Jingpho is a "pronominalized" or "head-marking" language, using morphemes in the VP to specify the person and number of the subject of the clause. Hanson, who provides no tonal indications, writes both the numeral and the agreement marker as "nngai". Maran (*ń-ńai*) and Dai (*n³¹ńai³³*) agree that the tones of the two syllables of the agreement marker are low and mid, in that order.

¹⁵ See the discussion in Matisoff 1985 "GSTC" (set #182).

¹⁶ Though it must be admitted that the semantic increment provided by the "suffixal" elements is unclear and inconsistent across languages. See Matisoff 1994, §3.3: "Open, palatally-suffixal, and nasal-suffixal pronouns". For a more detailed and general study of ST/TB palatal suffixes, see Matisoff 1995b, *passim*.