Watch out for number ONE: Jingpho ṭāi 'I' and Ḍaŋāi '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 ḍaŋāi '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 ḍaṅkū ḋoохран 'two'. Already these two forms led me to a couple of false assumptions: (a) that the prefix ḍa- 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. ḍa- 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" — though it does in fact occur with one other numeral, ḍzakhū '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). See Figure 1.

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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 ḍi-: ḍū 'have' > ḍi-lū '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): ḍa 'build a house' > ḍi-ta 'a house'; ḍhōi 'be light' > ḍhōi 'illumination'; ḍūm 'be squandered (as time)' > ḍvūm 'to squander (as time)'; (c) adverbial expressions derived by a prefix from 31 verbs sometimes acquire "51": (i) 'be near' > ḍā ni ḍā 'nearby'; ḍēm 'be closely shut', ḍēm ḍā 'soberly'; (d) kinship terms in the 31 tone become 51 when used vocatively: ḍāwa 'father' > ḍāwa '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, allophonic variations, and suppletions are more readily tolerated here than with the higher numerals (e.g. English one ≈ an ≈ only; two ≈ twain ≈ between ≈ twin; one <-> first; two <-> second).
Figure 1. PTB and Jingpho numerals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTO-TIBETO-BURMAN</th>
<th>JINGPHO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>*it: *k(y)at; *g-t(y)ik$^4$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO</td>
<td>*g-ni-s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE</td>
<td>*g-sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR</td>
<td>*b-ləy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIVE</td>
<td>*l-ŋə ~ *b-ŋə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIX</td>
<td>*d-ruk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN</td>
<td>*s-nis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIGHT</td>
<td>*b-r-gyat ~ *b-g-ryat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NINE</td>
<td>*d-kəw ~ *s-kəw ~ *d-gaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEN</td>
<td>*gip; *(ts)y(i)(y) ~ *tsay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWENTY</td>
<td>*m-kul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUNDRED</td>
<td>*r-gya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. Varlant forms of Jingpho lənəi 'ONE'

(a) lənəi

The standard citation form of this numeral has a lateral prefix, occurring in such collocations as məsə lənəi 'one person', lənəi mə 'one'.$^6$ lənəi nəi 'some; a few; one now and then', lənəi nəi šə 'only some; only a few', lənəi tʰəʔ lənəi 'one by one'. lənəi phəŋ lənəi 'one after another'.

Whence this lateral prefix, which occurs also with ləkkhôn 'two'? A plausible source is the well-attested PTB etymon *lək$^7$ 'hand', which appears in

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$^4$ Other roots for ONE reconstructed in Matisoff 1995a (sections 3.11-3.15) include: *kə/*ko; *d/tyə/*d/tn; *tir/*tur; *ʔa; *k-tv(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 mə, see 84, below.
$^7$ See STC #86 and note 102.
reduced form in many Jg. nouns relating to the limbs (hands or feet), e.g. *lətâ? ‘hand’; ləkhrâ ‘righthand’; ləphən ‘palm’; ləphəμ ‘forearm’; ləkhən ‘bracelet’ (note 51 tone: < khôn ‘wear bracelets’), ləgô ‘foot; leg’, ləphət ‘knee’, ləθhîn ‘heel’, ləkhrû ‘hoof’, lənû ‘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-sematicization, so that in several common time-expressions lə- has come to mean ONE all by itself: lənî ‘one day’, lənâ? ‘one night’, lənîn ‘one year’, ləphət ‘one morning’.9 The same morpheme is probably to be adduced in other quantified expressions like ləlâm ‘a fathom’, lətsâ ‘one hundred’10, ləmûn ‘ten thousand (one myrtrad)’, lənå₃, ləmå-ma, ləmå-mi ‘some; something; few’. (In the Hkauri dialect of Jingpho, these expressions have rə- rather than lə-: ranî ‘one year’, rani ‘one day’, rana? ‘one night’).

(b) ʔənî

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: ʔənî mî ‘one; a unit’ (e.g. mərâi ʔənî mî ‘one person’), ʔənî (mî) sâ ‘only one’12, ʔənî nî (note 31 tone in 2nd syllable) ‘someone [indef. pron.]’ (e.g. məsâ ʔənî nî dù sâi ‘Someone has come’).

(c) ʔəi

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-initialised variant “ʔəi ‘one; same as lângâi’ (Hanson, p. 55; tone from Maran), as in kəwä ʔəi mî jəl rît ‘Give me a bamboo.’

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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 *t-. Perhaps Jingpho selected the non-lateral prefix here (məŋə) 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 lângâi ‘one’.”

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

11 This form is lacking in Dal 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 *(l)sa ‘one’ (Matisoff 1995a:§ 3.152 and note 75).

13 As random examples we may cite Lahu à (< mə) ‘negative’, à (< tə) ‘durative particle”, etc. See Matisoff 1973:38.
Finally, Hanson (498) cites a variant with syllabic nasal prefix: "ngtain
'one; same as lāngai." The tones are supplied by Maran (842): ñ-ñāi.

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, used in sentences like the following: ñāi
šā h-ñāi 'I am eating' (Hanson 498); ñāi gō jōngmā rāi īñāi '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 allofam of the numeral ONE are virtual homophones
makes it highly likely that the same etymon is involved.

3. The Jingpho first person pronoun ñāi

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 ñāi 'I; me'.
While virtually all TB languages that have inherited this etymon reflect the
simple vowel *a (PTB *ñā: STC #406), STC is obliged to set up a separate root
*ñāi (#285) largely to accommodate this Jg. form.\footnote{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 "ngai". Maran (ñ-ñāi) and
Dai (ññāi) agree that the tones of the two syllables of the agreement marker are low and mid,
in that order.}

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,\footnote{See the discussion in Matisoff 1985 "GSTC" (set #182).} so that a palatal suffix is typical of the PST
pronominal system in general:

\footnote{Though it must be admitted that the semantic increment provided by the "suffixal"
elements is unclear and inconsistent across languages. See Matisoff 1994, 83.3: "Open,
palatally-suffixed, and nasal-suffixed pronouns". For a more detailed and general study of
ST/TB palatal suffixes, see Matisoff 1995b, passim.}