Watch Out for Number ONE:
Jingpho ɲāi ‘I’ and ɬəŋāi ‘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 ɬəŋāi ‘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 ɭəkhōŋ ‘two.’ Already these two forms led me to a couple of false assumptions: (a) that the prefix ɬə- was very common, especially with numerals; and (b) that the high-to-low falling tone, “51” (symbolized here as /N/) was likewise. Both assumptions were of course premature. ɬə- occurs with no other numerals; 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, dʒəkhū ‘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 Table 1.

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 *l-, respectively. The prefix of

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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 ɬi-: ɬu ‘have’ > ɬi ɬu ‘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): tâ ‘build a house’ > ɭi-tâ ‘a house’; thōi ‘be light’ > ɭthōi ‘illumination’; tūm ‘be squandered (as time)’ > ɭstūm ‘to squander (as time)’; (c) adverbial expressions derived by a prefix from 31 verbs sometimes acquire “51”: ɬi ‘be near’ > ɬi ni ɬə ‘nearly,’ təm ‘be closely shut,’ ɬtəm ɬə ‘soberly’; (d) kinship terms in the 31 tone become 51 when used vocatively: kəwà ‘father’ > wə ‘O father!; hey, dad!’ (See Matisoff, 1974, pp. 159–160).

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 ≠ twin; one ↔️ first; two ↔️ second).
THREE has been influenced by the ma- in FOUR and FIVE, so that THREE to FIVE show a “prefix run.”

Table 1. *PTB and Jingpho Numerals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTO-TIBETO-BURMAN</th>
<th>JINGPHO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE *it; *k(y)at; g-t(y)ik</td>
<td>lan'ai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO *g-nis</td>
<td>lakh'n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE *g-sum</td>
<td>mase'm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR *b-loy</td>
<td>maei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIVE *l-na ~ *b-na</td>
<td>me'na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIX *d-ruk</td>
<td>kr'u?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN *s-nis</td>
<td>son't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIGHT *b-r-gyat ~ *b-g-ryat</td>
<td>metsat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NINE *d-kaw ~ *s-kaw ~ *d-gaw</td>
<td>dze'kh'u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEN *gip; *ts(y)i(y) ~ *tsay</td>
<td>si</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWENTY *m-kul</td>
<td>kh'un</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUNDRED *r-gya</td>
<td>le'ts'a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. VARIANT FORMS OF JINGPHO lan'ai ‘ONE’

(a) lan'ai

The standard citation form of this numeral has a lateral prefix, occurring in such collocations as ma'sa lan'ai ‘one person,’ lan'ai mi ‘one,’ 6 lan'ai na' ‘some; a few; one now and then,’ lan'ai na' sa ‘only some; only a few,’ lan'ai the? lan'ai ‘one by one,’ lan'ai phang lan'ai ‘one after another.’

Whence this lateral prefix, which occurs also with lakh'n ‘two’? A plausible source is the well-attested PTB etymon *lak7 ‘hand,’ which appears in reduced form

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3For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon in TB numeral systems see Matisoff (1995a, §§ 5.2–5.5).
4See Benedict (1972, pp. 93–95) and Matisoff (1995a, passim).
5Other roots for ONE reconstructed in Matisoff (1995a, sections 3.11–3.15) include: *ka/*ko; *d/tay × *d/tan; *tir × *tur, *sa, *k-IV(N), etc.
6For a discussion of this morpheme mi see §4, below.
7See Benedict (1972, #86 and note 102).
in many Jg. nouns relating to the limbs (hands or feet), e.g., lətäʔ ‘hand,’ ləkhrá ‘right hand,’ ləphän ‘palm,’ ləphüm ‘forearm,’ ləkhön ‘bracelet’ (note 51 tone; < khön ‘wear bracelets’), ləɡō ‘foot; leg,’ ləphūt ‘knee,’ ləthīn ‘heel,’ ləkhrūʔ ‘hoof,’ lənū ‘thumb; big toe’ (lit. “limb-mother”). The semantic connection would be via the practice of counting on the fingers.

Once this prefix was firmly established with this numeral, it was eligible for *trans-semanticization*, so that in several common time-expressions lə- has come to mean ONE all by itself: lənī ‘one day,’ lənäʔ ‘one night,’ lənīn ‘one year,’ ləphōt ‘one morning.’ The same morpheme is probably to be adduced in other quantified expressions like ləlām ‘a fathom,’ lətsä ‘one hundred,’ ləmùn ‘ten thousand (one myriad),’ ləmā, ləmā-ma, ləmā-mi ‘some; something; few.’ (In the Hkauri dialect of Jingpho, these expressions have ro- rather than lə-: raning ‘one year,’ rani ‘one day,’ ranaʔ ‘one night’).

(b) nāŋai

This variant with preglottalized initial is supplied by Maran (ca. 1973, p. 870), though it is spelled simply as “ŋaai” in Hanson (1906, p. 513). It appears in collocations like the following: nāŋai mī ‘one; a unit’ (e.g., mərāi nāŋai mī ‘one person’), nāi (mī) sā ‘only one,’ nāi nāi (note 31 tone in 2nd syllable) ‘someone [indef. pron.]’ (e.g., mošā nāi nāi dū sāi ‘Someone has come.’

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8This “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).

9Hanson (1906, p. 358) calls the prefix in these forms “a shortened form of lāŋgai ‘one.”’

10It 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).

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

12This Jingpho morpheme ‘only’ seems clearly cognate to a Kamarupan root *(t)sə ‘one’ (Matisoff 1995a: § 3.152 and note 75).
(c) āï

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 “?āï ‘one; same as lāŋgai’” (Hanson 1906, p. 55; tone from Maran), as in kōwā āï mī jō rīt ‘Give me a bamboo.’

(d) ŋ-ŋāï

Finally, Hanson (1906, p. 498) cites a variant with syllabic nasal prefix: “nn̂gai ‘one; same as lāŋgai.’” The tones are supplied by Maran (ca. 1973, p. 842): ŋ-ŋāï.

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: ŋāï šā ŋ-ŋāï ‘I am eating’ (Hanson, 1906, p. 498); ŋāï gō jōngmā rāï ŋ ŋāï ‘I am a student’ (Dai, 1983, p. 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 ŋāï

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 ŋāï ‘I; me.’ While virtually all TB languages that have inherited this etymon reflect the simple vowel *-a (PTB *ŋa: Benedict, 1972, #406), Benedict is obliged to set up a separate root *ŋai (#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:

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\(^{13}\)As random examples we may cite Lahu ā (< mā) ‘negative,’ ā (< tā) ‘durative particle,’ etc. See Matisoff (1973, p.38).

\(^{14}\)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 “nn̂gai.” Maran (ŋ-ŋāï) and Dai (n"ŋa)\(^{15}\) 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, set #182).

\(^{16}\)Though it must be admitted that the semantic increment provided by the “suffixed” elements is