

A SHORT UPDATE ON RAWANG PHONOLOGY

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Rawang has been classified as a Tibeto-Burman language. It is often referred to as Nung or Nungish in the literature, and in different classifications of Sino-Tibetan and Tibeto-Burman, and is assigned to either the Kachin or separately to the Burmic (Assam-Burmese) branch of the Tibeto-Burman family (R. Morse, 1962:14). Nomenclature has long been a problem with the many tribes that inhabit the valleys and mountains of Southeast Asia and the Himalayan mountain ranges. This problem has been especially acute for the Rawang tribes and Robert Morse (1962, 1965) has made some extensive studies to clear up the confusion. The name Nung confuses the situation in that there actually is a Rawang tribe who call themselves Anung (also called Kwinpang, Kuhpang, Kwinsang, Fuch'yè, Nôphà; see R. Morse, 1962). According to Morse, the name Nung came from the Jinghpaws who "borrowed the Shan name for the Rawangs (Hkanung, meaning slave Nung), and confusing them with an actual tribe of Nung, called the Rawangs Nung as well. This (Jinghpaw) name for the Rawangs in turn had been picked up by the British administration and perpetuated in the literature, to the extent that their genuine, self-designated name of Rawang is practically unheard of." (R. Morse, 1962:15-16; Barnard, 1934:vii).

One can easily sympathize with the many linguists and anthropologists (Schmidt, 1926; Grierson, 1927; Barnard, 1934 (who was the first to use the name Nung in his study of Rawang); MacDougald, 1943; Shafer, 1955; and Voegelin and Voegelin, 1977) who have attempted to describe and classify the hundreds of languages and dialects of Sino-Tibetan. For example, even for as small a tribe as the Rawang (not more than 100,000 according to recent estimates), a partial count of the Rawang dialects has yielded a figure of over seventy-two, with an indication that there may be well over one hundred different dialects (S. Morse, 1976:2; R. and B. Morse, 1966:200). To give an example of how different these dialects can be, R. and B. Morse give a partial list of words meaning 'corn' (1966:200):

Matwàng:	ngaqłóng	Məyət:	ləngú
Waqdámkong:	hāməq	Məshəng:	shəngū
Kwinsàng:	həmuq	Jerwàng:	təmbōng
Aguq:	puqgi	Rəshəm:	ləgōng
Rəza:	waqri	T'rung:	məbō
Sərep:	dəchá	Waqkwe:	shəmūng, səmū
Kizi:	ləchá	Dəngraq:	əmbəq
Pangring:	ləngū		

According to R. and B. Morse:

"Approximately five main branches of Rawang may be distinguished, by general names which tend to be differentia of the variations of culture and social structure: Ganong, Nung, Tangsar(r), Rawang, and Longmi. These variations, which at one time were distinctive, are today becoming less and less evident as they now intermingle freely. Another set of names, subordinate to the above cultural names, seem to be differentiations for general locations or areas. Naturally these would tend to be the most divergent names in this set, and these names used to describe an ethnic group are not at all reliable. Subordinate to this and the cultural name, finally would be the dialect names, which are sometimes no more than a clan name, or a combination of clan names, or a lesser locality name - in any case describing the locale or clans speaking a particular dialect." (1966:200).

There has been recent speculation as to the legitimacy of including Nung and Tangsar as branches of the Rawang language. A brief glance at a word list should dispel any thoughts that Anung and Tangsar are not related Rawang languages (see forthcoming paper)².

Though the Rawang nation today occupies the mountains and valleys that serve as the watershed of three great rivers of north Burma, the Nam Tamai (N'mai), the Mali (Maliq), and the Chindwin, they have not always lived there. Robert and Betty Morse (1966) have unraveled ancient religious chants and traditions sufficiently to trace Rawang migration routes back to the Tibetan Plateau and beyond (R. and B. Morse, 1966; Lapal, 1975). As comparatively recent arrivals in northern Burma (compared to the other Burmese tribes), the Rawang were surrounded on the north by the Tibetans, on the east by the Lisu, Nung and Naxi, on the southeast by the Maru, Lashi, and Achang (who call themselves Ngoqchang), on the south by the Jinghpaw, on the southwest by the Khamti Shan, and on the west by the Mishmi. Except for the clans directly in contact with these other groups, there was actually very little intercourse with the outside world for the main body of Rawang people. A great aid to their comparative isolation was the fact that in the unending, universal search for a homeland of the future, the late-coming Rawang nation got stuck with the only parcel of real estate still unoccupied. This was the heart of the notorious "Hump," where the turbulent mountain streams, formidably high ranges, and dangerously infested jungles all combined to develop the Rawang into an unbelievably strong, virile race of people, thoroughly adapted to such rugged terrain. As the people scattered and settled, they tended to become increasingly isolated, so that their language soon developed into many varying dialects, some of them even becoming mutually unintelligible.

Some clans living near other tribes which were more dominant due to prior claims and better holdings seem to have been slowly

absorbed, whether due to a chattel-type slavery, or to intermarriage and re-identification. Such has become the fate of clans such as the Bishit, the Talong, the Taloq, and the Abør, and other clans who entered the Mishmi orbit. It would be extremely interesting to compare dialect differences between modern speakers of Rawang (Konglang) living on the Putao plains of north Burma with the dialect spoken in a group of villages over in northeast India. During the India-Burma Border Commission's excursions in isolated areas of the Walong subdivision of the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh on the Indo-Burma border, several Rawang members of the Burmese side of the Border Commission found that there was a very high degree of mutual intelligibility between their speech and that of these supposedly Mishmi villages. Further investigation revealed the fact that these "Mishmi" villagers were descendants of people who had migrated into the Mishmi area in ancient times, from the Rawang tribe. There are also the now-extinct Bangsarr, Longgwing, N'tit, and Nokmung tribes, who lived and worked with the Khamti Shan of Putao over 900 years ago (R. and B. Morse, 1966:27). Even today, due to the independence movement in Kachin State, many of the Rawang clans in the Hkranghku and Mashang areas that have been isolated from their own people due to war, are said to be in the process of being absorbed into the Tuleng or northern Jinghpaw, in the area known as the Triangle, east of Sumprabum in Kachin State.

1.0 A Brief Survey of the Rawang Phonemic System

Rawang is said to have more agglutinating than isolating tendencies and though the syllable most often occurs as the minimal word unit, it is also found occurring as a component element in the structure of "syllable clusters" (see R. Morse, 1962:62). The minimal syllable has a nucleus plus a tone, and the maximal syllable may have an initial consonant or consonant cluster. Vowels are observed to occur only in the nucleus class. Every sequence of vowels, each with its own inherent tone, represents a sequence of minimal syllables. A lengthened vowel or diphthong has only one inherent tone.

Though syllabic consonants have not been observed in previous analyses of Rawang it seems quite possible that the negative prefix /*ma-*/ may be analyzed as a syllabic nasal when used in certain contexts. Jinghpaw, a neighboring language, has a whole series of syllabic nasals that are vocalized homorganically before the appropriate stop (Hanson, 1917:3, 5) and it may be that some of the dialects of Rawang that are near the Jinghpaw have similar usages of syllabic nasals (N'tit - an extinct Rawang tribe?). The following examples illustrate the use of the Rawang negative prefix /*ma-*/ described by R. Morse (1966:361) as "an optional adverbial second order prefix of the verb," which also "occurs in adverbial tagmemes without tagmemic postpositions as /*ma-*/ 'without, un-' prefixed to verbs in infinitive form, with several patterns."

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) | ngà mèdī shaq | 'without my going' |
| 2) | ngà mèdōng nōng nā | 'if I don't go' |
| 3) | nà mèdī ninā | 'if you don't go' |
| 4) | ngà nà:əl shaq | 'without my being' |
| 5) | nōngmaq wēyōng nà:li | 'we don't live there' |
| 5a) | nōngmaq wēyōng m-à:li | 'we don't live there' |
| 6) | ngà wēyōng mè-əl | 'I don't live there' |
| 6a) | ngà wēyōng m-əl | 'I don't live there' |

The negative in example 3 is phonetically determined and may be described as /mə + è/ -> /mè/, a deletion-assimilation rule where /è/ is a second-person marker that always occurs before the main verb. In examples 5 - 6a we show two different forms of the negative prefix, in which 5a and 6a show it as syllabic nasals. Thus Rawang may be developing syllabic nasals via vowel contraction processes.

1.1 Initial Consonants

Stops: Voiceless aspirated	p	t	(ts)	ch	k
Voiced (sometimes prenasalized)	b	d	dz	j	g
Fricatives (voiceless)			s	sh	h
Nasals	m	n			ng
Liquids		l	r		
Glides	w			y	

Examples:

pā	tā	(tsā)	chā	kā
'side'	'be obedient'	'bird'	'show off'	'chicken'
bā	dā	dzā	jā	gā
'step over'	'be amazed'	'be sick'	'to fall'	'to write'
		sā	shā	hā
		'to wait'	'animal'	'basket'
mā	nā			ngā
'to hide'	'to feed'			'fish'
	lā	rā		
	'to drop'	'to confer'		
wā			yā	
'say'			'cliff bee'	