

ON THE STATUS OF THE SOUTHERN CHIN SUBGROUP^{*}

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1. INTRODUCTION.

In this paper I propose a new subgrouping for Kuki-Chin languages based on both phonological and morphosyntactic considerations. The fundamental claim of the new subgrouping proposal is that Kuki-Chin languages mostly fit into two subgroups: *Central* (the traditional Central Chin, and probably also Old Kuki, but possibly not including Maraa) and *Peripheral* (including traditional Southern and Northern Chin, and probably not including Khumi). While our present state of knowledge regarding all but perhaps the Central Chin languages is too incomplete to allow proof of this hypothesis beyond the shadow of a doubt, the goal of this paper is to provide a framework in which subgrouping relations in Kuki-Chin may be better delineated as further information becomes available.

In what follows, I first discuss the traditional subgrouping scheme posited for the family. Then, I attempt to show that the traditional Southern Chin languages and the traditional Northern Chin languages share phonological innovations (the treatment of **r*) and conservative morphosyntactic traits, as well as possible morphosyntactic innovations. The position of Khumi, regarded by most as a Southern Chin language, remains somewhat unclear; as of yet, there is certainly no morphosyntactic evidence that would definitively argue for its inclusion in either the Central or the Peripheral subgroups, but one interpretation of the phonological evidence is that it belongs to the Peripheral group, (though it is no more closely related to the former southern than to the northern languages on such an account). By the end, it will be clear that there is little evidence which would argue for a Southern Chin subgroup as it is traditionally conceived.

2. THE LANGUAGES AND THE TRADITIONAL SUBGROUPING SCHEME.

Kuki-Chin languages are traditionally subgrouped as in 1.

^{*} This is an abbreviated form of a longer manuscript, which for reasons of space had to be shortened. The full, and (in terms of layout) somewhat more user-friendly version of the paper will be found via <http://www.eva.mpg.de/~peterson/index.html> sometime in the near future. I would like to express my gratitude to Ken Vanbik, Lorenz Löffler, and John Ohala for helpful discussion and comments on the issues considered here. Research on Khumi and Hyow in Bangladesh was supported by a Fulbright Fellowship

from October 1999 to April 2000. Abbreviations for language names are L (Lai), Mz (Mizo), Td (Tiddim), Th (Thadou), Hy (Hyow), Md (Mindat), BKh (Bangladesh Khumi), Kha (Khami), Khl (Khlumi).

The Southern Chin languages, however, are not clearly related to each other to such a degree. We know very little about most of these languages, and further data may

possibly fuller study of it would lead to a reclassification of it as non-Central Chin. As we will see below, Maraa is somewhat divergent from the Central languages, and these appear to have a Central Chin origin, and have spread into the Northern languages. diffusion: e.g. the shift of initial *y- > z- and a widespread ergative case clitic; both of Northern and Central groups would appear to share some features which have spread by often have an innovative causative derivation and cognate negative markers. The Central Chin languages have a unique treatment of *r and *Cr- and *Cl- clusters, and an innovative instrumental case clitic argue for their close relationship to each other. Northern Chin languages, the developments of *r and *Cr- and *Cl- clusters, as well as relatively coherent groups with clear phonological and morphosyntactic innovations. In Similarly, the Northern Chin languages and the Central Chin languages both form contact.

attempt to gauge to what extent the apparent similarity with Central Chin may be due to Chin languages. The LSI makes both of these points quite clear, though it does not should be grouped together, and they are probably most closely related to the Central From the evidence which is available (primarily the LSI), the Old Kuki languages subgrouping, but which, however, does not discuss supporting evidence for it.

exception is Bradley's 1997 classification scheme, which proposes a very different granted by many others (e.g. Stern 1962, Hartmann-So 1988, Matisoff forthcoming). An large-scale Tibeto-Burman comparison (Shafer 1974 and Benedict 1972), and is taken for 1903). It has more or less been assumed by just about everyone who has worked on This subgrouping stems essentially from the Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson/Konow

- Southern Chin: Khumi/Khami, Sho/Hyow, Chinbok, Mindat, Sandoway (others)
- Central Chin: Lai, Bawm, Laizo, Mizo (Lushai), Maraa (Lakher)
- Northern Chin: Tiddim, Thadou, Sizang, Teizang, Raité, Paité
- Old Kuki: Rangkhoh, Hallam, Purum, Hmar, Anāl, Kom, Lamgang (others)

(1) Traditional Kuki-Chin subgrouping

eventually lead us to place some of them in a different group altogether, but a consideration of the data we do have leads to the observation that there are two types of traditional Southern Chin language: Khumi-like languages (Khumi/Khami) and Hyow-like languages (all the rest).

3. PHONOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR A CENTER/PERIPHERY SUBGROUPING.

Solnit 1979 observed that there are essentially two treatments of Tibeto-Burman **r* in Kuki-Chin languages, and concluded that there must have been both uvular and alveolar realizations of the phoneme at the level of Proto-Kuki-Chin; he also noted that there is evidence external to Kuki-Chin for such an assumption, such that this variation may be reconstructible back to the PTB level.¹ Solnit's study did not make use of much southern Chin data, although it noted that Chinbok has a treatment of initial **r* similar to that of more northerly languages like Tiddim. It turns out that while an alveolar *r* occurring initially and finally is usual in the inventories of Central and Old Kuki languages, it does not occur as an initial or final sound in both northern *and* southern Chin languages (excluding Khumi, where the words with initial *r* do not have easily identifiable cognates in the other languages).

To reiterate Solnit's major point, in northern Chin, the reflex of PTB initial **r* is *g*. Some Lai (representing Central Chin), Tiddim, and Thadou (representing northern Chin) forms which show the development of initial **r* include enemy: L *ra:l*, Td *ga:l*, Th *gal*; country: L *ram*, Td *gam*, Th *gəm* 'wild land'; bamboo: L *rua*, Td *gua*, Th *gu*; bone: L *ru?*, Td and Th *gu?*; snake L *rul*, Td and Th *gul*.² We know the proto-forms of these had **r*- in them from comparison with other Tibeto-Burman languages, e.g. bone **rus* > Tibetan *rus-pa*, Jingpo *nrut* (STC 6).

Next, some forms from the same languages to illustrate what happened to final **r* include nose: L *na:r*, Td *na:k*; sell: L *zuar*, Td *zuak*, Th *zu?-məng*; difficult: L *har*, Td

¹ This is not the only conclusion that may be drawn from this variation, however. The change *r* > *y* seems to be quite widely attested, and several instances of an uvular treatment of **r* alongside alveolar treatments of it may simply be due to parallel development. So another possible interpretation of the variation seen in Tibeto-Burman as a whole is that the sound originally had an alveolar treatment, but there have been independent developments of uvular/velar pronunciations of it.

² These languages all have phonemic tone distinctions, which I usually do not include here as they are for the most part still poorly described. In any event, they are not crucial to the argument as far as I can tell.

My own analysis of tone in Hyow and Bangladesh Khumi is still somewhat provisional, but I can provide tonal information with varying degrees of precision for anyone who is interested.³ It must be admitted, however, that Jordan's description of this grapheme's phonetic value is somewhat ambiguous: "always like the hard English 'g', as in 'gang', 'go', 'gun'; it can be pronounced like 'r' in some places, or like French 'j' in others." (1969, grammar 4). Presumably he is describing geographically based variation here.⁴ Löffler 1959 actually posits an intermediate stage for forms like these in which they had a final *k, e.g. *par > (pak) > pa 'flower' (263). His reasons for doing so are not made explicit, and actually I do not think

In most cases, final *r is lost in Hyow, Mindat, and other southern Chin (this is almost always the case after a and u).⁴ This loss of *r must have occurred when these instances

joʔiŋ, Matu Xel; cord: Daai yʔ, Chimpon jʔ ǵɣʔ
 yʔ, Chinpon ajuʔ, Matu nXʔ; hail: Daai yeyʔ, Ngmũn yʔ, Mkaang yaʔyʔ, Chinpon
 best illustrations of this include bone: Daai yʔ, Nghmoye juʔ, Ngmũn yʔ, Mkaang
 reflexes, though the data from these languages is quite sparse (So-Hartmann 1988); the
 In other southern Chin cognates, we find both velar fricatives and palatal glides as
 L ruak, Mid gɔk; bone: L ruʔ, Mid guʔ; cord: L hrui, Mid gui.³

following: enemy: L ra:l, Mid ga; bamboo: L rua, Mid gɔ; hail: L rial, Mid gäwi; corpse:
 importantly, all of the relevant forms in Mindat have an initial g reflex, as seen in the
 through a series of changes which involved an intermediate uvular/velar stage. Most
 Hyow both in terms of structure and lexicon), shows that this weakening probably went
 But a consideration of other southern Chin languages (clearly quite closely related to

Hy yɬ; hail: L rial; Hy yelpɛley.
 Lai: bone: L ruʔ, Hy yʔ; cord: L hrui, Hy yʔ; bamboo: L rua; Hy yʔ; corpse: L ruak,
 weakened beyond recognition, as shown by the following forms with cognates again from
 In the case of initial *r, in Hyow, it is difficult to see a similarity because initial *r is
 least the early stages of them, also occurred in the most southerly Chin languages.

There are indications that developments of *r like the ones seen in northern Chin, or at
 supported etymologies along these lines.

bar, Jingpo pan, Burmese pan (STC 1); some of the others also have reasonably
 shows that these ended with *r, e.g. flower *ba:r > Tiberian 'bar-ba, Mikir pra, Dhimai
 Td pa:k, Th paʔ 'bloom'; iron: L thi:r, Th thiʔ. Again, Kuki-Chin-external comparison
 hak; return: L ki:r, Td ki:k 'be reversed'; close: L kha:r, Td xa:k, Th xaʔ; flower: L pa:r,