

A STUDY OF THE MORPHOLOGY OF VERBS AND NOUNS IN THE SINWAL DIALECT OF THE RAWANG LANGUAGE*

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The name "**Rawang**"¹ is a general term which refers to a body of people who speak approximately 70 dialects (probably some could be called closely related languages) and live in upper Kachin State, Myanmar (Burma). Formerly, the Rawangs were referred to as the **Nung**, **Kanung**, **Hkenung**, or **Ganung** by other tribes. The problem of nomenclature was discussed by Robert H. Morse (1962:15, 28) in his "Hierarchical levels of Rawang phonology". He finally arrived at the name "Ganung-Rawang" for the people and "Rawang" for the language. However, the term "Rawang" is understood by the Rawangs as referring both to them and to their language, and it has since been officially adopted.

Robert and Betty Morse (1966:200) divided the Rawang people into five branches by general names which tended to differentiate the groups on the basis of culture and social structure: **Ganung**, **Rawang**, **Longmi**, **Nung** and **Tangsar**. Stephen A. Morse (1989:239) made the same five-branch distinction but with some changes in the branch names: **Daru-Jerwang** (Ganung or **Ganong**), **Matwang** (Rawang), **Lungmi**, **Anung** (Nung), and **Tangsar**. This is only a general grouping and each major group comprises several subgroups. For instance, the Daru-Jerwang branch includes smaller subgroups such as **Maláng**, **Zewàng** (Jerwàng), **Tashø**, **Dazøwàng**, **Taláwang**, **Taluq**, **Akøpáy**, **Anàmpáy**, **Tarùng** (Drung/Dulong), etc. (Maniq 1992).

Robert and Betty Morse described the Rawang homeland in the following way:

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¹ Bold typeface is used to highlight Rawang names which appear for the first time in the text.

Their hereditary homeland includes all that combination of high mountains and low tropical jungle valleys just south of the Eastern Himalayas, which is bounded by the Kaolikung Range to the east and the Patkoi-Mishmi Range to the west (1966:195).

This area includes Putao, NogMung, Khawbude, Machanbaw, and Sumbrabum townships of Kachin State. Besides this area, many Rawangs are found also in Myitkyina, Kamaing, and Sawlaw townships of Kachin State.

In addition, Robert Morse (1965:38 footnotes) mentioned that the Rawangs are found also in the adjoining areas of the Nu (Salween) River Valley in Yunnan, China. The Rawangs in China are identified as the Drung (also as Dulong or Trung), a sub-group of the Daru-Jerwang branch, and Nu (also as Anung or Anu) nationalities. It is reported that the Drungs are living in the Drung river valley in Gongshan County, while the Nus live in Gongshan, Fugong, Bijiang, Lanping and Weixi counties in the Nu River valley (Shen and Lu 1989). Betty M. Morse (1975:33) has reported that a Rawang dialect speaking people, probably known only as Mishmis, are found in the adjoining areas of India. Theraphan (1985:6) listed the Rawang language among the minority languages of Thailand and mentioned that a few Rawangs are living in the Chiangmai and Chiangrai provinces of Thailand.

The total Rawang population is not yet known due to the lack of a thorough census. Robert H. Morse (1962:12) estimated that the number did not exceed 60,000. This figure still seems to hold true for the Rawang population in Myanmar. According to a former township government officer of Putao, the total in Myanmar is estimated to be 55,000 people. In China, the Drung population is estimated to be 4,680, and the Nu population 23,000 (Shen and Lu 1989). Thus, the entire tribe would number over 80,000 people.

Great snow-covered mountains, mountainous subtropical jungles, and dense rainfall have kept the Rawangs in almost total isolation, not only from other tribes, but even from their relatives in adjoining valleys (Robert Morse 1962:21). Nowadays, irregular flights between Putao and Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State, are the only means by which the Rawangs can reach the people outside their isolated terrain. The Rawangs are bounded on the east by the Lisu and Naxi, on the southeast by the Maru and Lashi, on the south by the Jinghpaw, on the southwest by the Khamti Shan, on the west by the Mishmi (known as Manloq by Rawangs), and on the north by the Tibetans (Stephen A. Morse 1989:238).

The Rawangs are gentle, peace-loving (Betty Morse 1975:28) and law-abiding people (Barnard 1934:117). They are traditionally swidden farmers. Many still use the slash and burn form of agriculture. The Rawangs in the low

valleys cultivate irrigated farms, which are relatively small. They grow rice as their main crop; citrus fruit, vegetables, and other crops are also grown.

Rawangs name their children according to birth order, using different names for male and female. The terms and their pronunciations differ from clan to clan or from family to family. The following is an example of the names.

Birth Order	Male	Female
First	Pung	Nang
Second	Dø, Tin	Nen, Nyen, Ney
Third	Ken, Kwen, or Jong	Chang, Hko
Fourth	Søn, Ko, Dó	Nøn, Tsin, Ti
Fifth	Zeng, Min, Nøn	Kùr
Sixth	Pi or Guq	Gin, Gong
Seventh	Yung, Kaq	Tam
...
Last	Yin, Tinaq	Yin, Tinaq

Table 1. Rawang names according to birth order.

The Rawang kinship system seems originally to have been, in Schusky's term, of the Iroquois type, in which cross cousins are referred to by the same term (Schusky 1972). Though the northern Rawang groups do have the Iroquois system, the middle and southern Rawang kinship systems exhibit some characteristics of the Omaha type. This might be a result of the influence of the Jinghpaws whose kinship system is of the Omaha type, and who are located just to the south of the Rawangs. The Rawang kinship relationship is based on patrilineal descent. Their social structure units are family, clan and affinal kin groups. Rawang marriage is exogamous. The giving of the bride goes in one direction only, i.e., if clan A takes brides from clan B, then clan B cannot take brides from clan A. Exchanging brides between two clans is prohibited. The Rawang people practice monogamy and marriages last throughout their lifetimes.

Rawangs used to be animists but almost all the Rawangs in Myanmar today are Christians. In Rawang mythology, there are several **Pángs** (spirits). Above these is **Gamøpè**, the Creator. Barnard (1934:114) wrote that there is no account of hell or heaven, but there is a flood story involving a pair of humans being saved. But according to my language helper, Rawangs traditionally believed that when a person dies, he goes, according to the Creator's will, either to a place where the evil spirits can torture him or to the

Creator's place where he can have peace. All people who die accidentally are believed to be tortured by the evil spirits. When a young child dies, the Rawangs believe that the Creator has taken the child back to his residence. The Creator propitiation ceremony includes a traditional dance called **Azølà̃m**, in which many people may participate. The shaman and his assistants lead the dance and the host family, their clan members, their relatives, and other guests follow after, dancing around the altar poles. Later, a bovine which is tied to the poles is speared as a sacrifice.

Being animists, the Rawangs handed down their myths as well as tribal history and migration accounts through a very strict oral literature, called **Mangròng**, a kind of chant or ballad (Morse and Morse 1966:202-203). Such speech forms, whether shaman chants or ballads, contain a more accurate chronology of tribal history and migration than the usual history and genealogies handed down by ordinary speech forms. The contents are set in rigid and unchangeable sequence, exact correctness being of utmost importance, so that later generations cannot change the facts. Otherwise disaster might result from the spirits losing the way. Extracted from such accounts, Rawang history starts with stories and legends of creation and a flood. The patriarchs of the Rawangs descended from the high mountain **Sangban-kwinzu Sòng** 'people migrating projection peak'. The places where they settled were chronologically as follows: **Tongzøng Adám** 'alkali flats', **Shazèng Adám** 'animal multiplying plain', **Sangzèng Adám** 'people multiplying plain', **Sangwál Adám** 'race dividing plain', **Móngkøm-wayàng** 'united ingathering plain,' **Anam Adám** 'sun flats', and **Showá Adám** 'in-common flat'. From this point on there seem to be a few differences in the accounts of the different branches. But there follows an account which tells of a salt source where the salt is taken up as coarse sand.

A tentative identification of these locations are given by Betty Morse (1975):

... it does seem that certain areas of northern Tibet and inner Asia fit the description of places mentioned in the chants. We find alkali licks and watered marshy areas on maps of this area. There are vast animal grazing grasslands ... and it is now known that the centres of ancient peoples ... are located in Northeast Tibet and Northwest China.

Her hypothesis suggests that the origin of the Rawangs might be from Western Tibet. This still needs confirmation, however.

Then accounts of three rivers are found. They are **Timashewang** 'Red water river' (Salween), **Tinaqwang** 'Black water river' (Mekong), and **Timongwang** 'White water river' (Yangtze). Rawangs claim that they are the