

Proto-Tibeto-Burman *r in Tiddim Chin and Lushai

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1. Introductory. Tiddim Chin (TC) and Lushai (L), both of the Kuki-Chin-Naga (K-N) subgroup of Tibeto-Burman (TB), are similar enough phonologically that pairs of cognate words are often easy to find. It is not unusual for words to take exactly the same form (exclusive of tone) in both languages, eg: TC -vom, L vôm "black, dark," TC /maj, L mǎj "dream," TC /phow, L phów "dry". But the cognate-hunter's job is complicated by a number of discrepancies between the two phonological systems. Among them are the TC initial g-, not found in L (excepting a small number of recent loanwords), and the following L initials, all missing in TC: r-, f-, t(h)r-, t(h)l-, hr-, hl-, and a voiceless nasal series.

Benedict 1972 (STC) states, "Lushei lacks initial g-, but has maintained d- and b- in some roots."¹ It appears that the presence of g- in TC is not, as might be supposed, due to better preservation in that language of the *voiced initials. Rather, in a number of cognate sets, TC g- corresponds to L (and hence TB) r-. TC also has a velar stop q in word-final position; additionally, it will be seen that the mutation of *r in TC explains one other of the phonological discrepancies listed above, the missing t(h)r- in TC.

2. TC -k, L -r. Some TC final -k are simply equivalent to L -k:

TC	L	proto-TB, other
/baak ² "bat(animal)"	bǎak id.	STC #325 *ba:k
/maak "soon, brother-in-law"	mǎak-pa id.	STC #324 *ma:k
-tak "right, correct"	tǎk "real, true"	STC p.52 *tyak
-thak "hot (as chili)"	thǎk id.	STC #465 *m-sak
/ook "be caught"	ôok "catch, be caught"	
/naak "rib"	nǎak "side(of the body)"	
-sak "hard, rigid"	sǎk id.	
-vok "pig"	vǎk id.	STC # 43 *pwak
/vaak "walk"	vǎak "walk, go"	
/gaak "wait"	hǎak id.	
-zak "with full force"	zǎk intensive adverbial	

These undoubtedly derive from proto *-k. But contrast the following:

TC	L	proto-, other
-zaak "spread (as blanket)"	záar "spread, hang (cloth)"	STC p.138 *ya:r~*yar, Jg yan "unrolled, spread out," T g-yor-mo "sail"
-zuak "sell"	zuár id.	STC p.51 K-N *ywar, cf. Mikir dzor, Siyin yuak
\naak "nose"	hnàar id.	STC p.16 K-N *s-na:r, #101 *s-na
-thak "new"	thár id	STC p.147 *sar~*šar, cf. T gsar
-paak "flower(n.)"	páar id. (n. and vb.)	STC #1 *ba:r, cf. Siyin pak
-aak "fowl"	?áar id.	Siyin a~ak
\miik/šii "ant"	fāṅ-hmīir id.	
-daak "bell, gong"	dár id.	
/xaak "to close"	kháar id. (note that TC x- is the phonemic (and historical) equivalent of L <u>kh-</u>)	
-aak \sii "star"	?áar-sìi id.	
-hak "difficult"	hár id.	
_hak "wake up"	hàr? id.	
\haak "lead(metal)"	hàar "Pewter, solder"	
/kiik "again"	kīir "return"	
-laak "expose" }	lāar "bright, show"	
-lak "show" }		
/nuak "sulk"	núar id.	
-naak "source"	hnár ³ "headwaters"	
-phaak "leprous"	pháar "leprosy, mange"	
-taak "old"	tár id.	
/peek "flat"	pèer "flat, thin"	Siyin p'iak
-baai -bek "red-vented bulbul"	tlái-ber? id.	Haka ktlai-bizr (for first syllable, see section 4 below)

It is fairly clear that TC -k has two sources, *-k and *-r. Note also the indications that Siyin has a similar development of *-r in the roots "sell," "flower," "fowl," and "flat, thin". This was mentioned in Benedict 1941, "siyin -ak, probably -a', for final -r represents an unusual type of substitution."⁴ However, -ak and -a? are definitely distinctive in TC, eg. _hak "wake up" (above) versus _ha? "clear away, cleanse"; and I would suggest that TC (and probably also Siyin) -k = L -r represents, not a "substitution," but a regular sound change (this will be expanded upon below).

3. TC initial g-. TC g- corresponds to L r- in the following roots:

TC	L		proto-, other
-gu? "bone"	rù?	id.	STC #6 *g-rus, cf. Siyin a-nu, Karen xwi, Ch 骨 kwət (GSR #486)
-gua "rain"	rua?	id.	STC #443 *r-wa (-ŋ), cf. Siyin nua, Digaro kəra, Ch 雨 giwo (GSR #100)
-gua "bamboo"	ruá	id.	STC #44 *g-p(w)a, cf. Siyin nua, Jg k wa, Angami Naga kera, Rengma khega (STC cites the L as rua < *r-wa)
-gaal "enemy, war"	ráal	id.	STC p.71 *(g-)ra:l, cf. T hgran "vie", ral-gri "sword" (gri "knife"), also Thado ʔál, Siyin gal (STC cites the TC form as ga:l < *ra:l, the only mention in that work of this development)
-guk "six"	rùk	id.	STC #411 *d-ruk, cf. Jg kru, B khrauk (instances of "replacement of *d- by k- before root-initial *r" ⁵), also Matisoff 1972: Lolo-Burmese *C-krok
-gam "forest, land"	rám	id.	Ao arem "forest," Liangmai charam "land," Mikir ram "jungle" cf. also Ch 林 gliem (GSR #655)
-gan "livestock"	rán	id.	
guu/ guuk ⁶ "be stolen"	ruu/ruuk	id.	STC P.144 K-N *m-ru:k, Haka ruk Lakher p ru; STC #33 *r-kaw, Jg legu
-gaai "conceive"	rái "conceive, pregnant"		cf. Mzieme nlaigailak "pregnant"
\gaal "beyond, on the other side"	ràal "from a distance, on the opposite bank".		
/gaau "evil influence"	rǎu "evil spirit (causing stiff necks)"		
-gual "companion, friend"	rúal "even, level, same age"		
/gam "dry"	hrəm	id.	
-gil "abdomen"	ríil "entrails"		cf. Angami ra, Ao tarü- Lotha erru, Sangtam ghu "intestines" Thado a-gil, Siyin gil "stomach"
-ge? "castration"	tíl rək "castrate" (tíl "testicle", rək "cut a notch")		
-guul "snake"	rúul	id.	STC #447 *b-ru:l, but cf. Gyarung khorei

ga? "bear fruit"	rā? "(bear) fruit" (n. and vb.)	STC p.17 *(b-)ras, T hbras "rice", also cf. Puirōn takra "fruit"
-sa-gi "seven"	sā-rī id.	cf. Puiron sari, Meluri teru, Ntenyi tughu, Manipuri taret, Nocte ingit (aparently un- related to TB *s-nis)

Although L lacks reflexes of the following two roots, the TC initial seems to have some connections with *r-:

gag "father's sister's husband" cf. STC #205 *ryaŋ, amended to *žraŋ, T žaŋ "uncle", B ahrag "master, lord". It is unclear what relation Benedict intends this to have with his K-N root *traŋ, set up on the basis of Haka (k-)traŋ, Chawte raŋ~oraŋ, Laiyo raŋ, Thado gag, Siyin gaŋ. Finally, note that Siyin has g- for TC g-, L r- in the above roots "bone", "rain", "bamboo", "enemy, war", and "abdomen".

gip "lac, cf. STC #347 *krep, B khrip "lac(insect)", Jg krep~ǵə krep "bug", Rawang rap "lac insect", rip "flying ant".

In explaining the equation of TC g- with L r-, we must first decide whether to attribute the TC initial to a simple change *r- > g-, or to the influence of a velar prefix or prefixes.

There is certainly evidence for a velar prefix in some of the above roots. Benedict reconstructs such prefixes in "bone", "bamboo", "enemy, war", and allows for replacement of the dental prefix in "six" by a velar. Velar prefixes may also be indicated by the Digaro form for "rain" and the Gyarung for "snake". But to explain all TC g- as the result of a prefix is untenable, simple because I have been unable to make any other equation than TC g- = L r- between these two phonemes. TC g- has no equivalent in L other than r-, and L r- corresponds to nothing in TC except g-. To explain this in terms of prefixes would require making the unlikely statement that every word with initial *r- acquired a velar prefix in proto-TC. Undoubtedly some words with *r- did have velar prefixes; what is unsatisfactory is calling on such prefixes as the cause of the TC sound change. I would suggest that in TC the distinction between *r- and *k-r- is neutralized. Evidently neither *k- nor any other prefix had an effect on initial *r- in TC (other TC initials remain to be investigated).

Positing a simple sound-change TB *r > TC g will also explain the final-position equation TC -k = L -r: *r became a velar stop in TC, voiced initially but necessarily voiceless finally (TC, like other TB languages, has no voicing contrast in final stops). As in the case of the initial-position correspondence, there is no need to reconstruct velar affixes to account for the TC velar (whether there were in fact such affixes in proto-TC is another matter). The simplest explanation of the facts assembled thus far is that all TB *r, root-initial and final, > TC g, which has the allophone -k finally.