

Lolo-Burmese Rhymes

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Although numerous different rhymes can be found in Written Burmese, it is not clear that all of these can be reconstructed at the Lolo-Burmese level. Below evidence is given for the reconstruction of a specific set of rhymes with the core of the evidence coming from Written Burmese, Lahü, Lisu, Akha, Sani, and Nasu data, but a broader range of data is examined with respect to specific problems.

A large number of writers have tentatively reconstructed Lolo-Burmese rhymes,¹ but the rhymes have never been the specific focus of a study. This study provides that focus while it gives evidence for the reconstruction of a given set of rhymes. Open rhymes, nasal rhymes, and stopped rhymes will each be discussed in turn.

Frequently each rhyme has multiple reflexes in each of the related languages which depend upon the nature of the root initial consonant or consonant cluster, and even on the tone. Because of the large number of rhymes, only those rhymes which are controversial in some sense are supported in this paper with extensive evidence. When dealing with a rhyme like *-a where all previous investigators have set it up and where there is over a hundred excellent examples found in the literature, I see no reason to either comment or offer further evidence. Sufficient evidence can be readily found in a work such as Schafer's Introduction to Sino-Tibetan. In short, this study is a commentary on rhymes which does not replicate evidence found elsewhere.

The open rhymes. The following rhymes are reconstructable at the Lolo-Burmese level:

*-i	*-ay	*-u
*-ö		*-o
*-ay		*-ul
	*-a	

Sufficient comparative evidence exists to reconstruct all of the above rhymes with confidence.

1. The *-ö rhyme. The Written Burmese representation of this rhyme presents at least a minor problem of interpretation, but it appears as though an i were written over a u:

o	i
u	u

Wolfenden (1929) originally suggested on the basis of certain comparisons with modern Tibetan dialects that this diagraph symbolized a front rounded vowel, and the comparative evidence within Lolo-Burmese supports his early contention. Ahi, Akha, and Lisu all provide evidence for *-ö.

Corresponding to Written Burmese -ui, Akha and Ahi invariably have an -ö in certain modern dialects. Little variation exists in the correspondences between Written Burmese, Ahi, and Akha; with only a small number of exceptions, an -ui in Written Burmese corresponds to an -ö in Akha and Ahi. In fact, the *-ö rhyme is the sole source of the -ö reflex in Akha.

In Lisu, which in contrast to Ahi and Akha does not have a modern front unrounded vowel, an incredible number of different reflexes exist written in a number of different transcriptions: -i, -i, -ü, -o, -u, -i, -u, etc. Partial order exists among these reflexes; after modern Lisu bilabial or palatal root initial consonants an unrounded high vowel is found, while after a modern Lisu dental or velar root initial consonant a rounded back vowel occurs. The range and nature of the Lisu reflexes of *-ö indicate both a rounded and a front vowel component to the proto-rhyme. Since Lisu lacks a modern rounded front vowel, the language reacted in some instances by eliminating the rounding component and in other instances by eliminating the front component.

The final piece of evidence suggesting that this rhyme should be reconstructed as *-ö instead of *-aw or *-uw is, of course, the representation in Written Burmese. Writing -ö as an i over a u seems like a quite reasonable way to represent a vowel with both a rounded and a front component.

2. The *-ay rhyme. The correspondence is best represented by the set: Written Burmese -ai, Sani -æ. While this is not a heavily attested rhyme, it has clear and distinctive reflexes.²

3. The *-u and *-o rhymes. There is some question about whether we are dealing with one or two rhymes here. Schafer (1966-7) suggests *-o and -au (for Loloish), while Matisoff (1967) suggests *-u and *-aw,³ but even if both are set up at the proto-stage it is clear that they were at least in partial complementary distribution.

4. The *-ul rhyme. Nowhere in Lolo-Burmese is the final -l explicitly retained. Rhymes which extra-Lolo-Burmese evidence establishes as having had an -l final do, however, occur in Nasu in a 32 stopped tone. The unique tone and

rhyme correspondences do require that a separate *-ul rhyme be reconstructed.

The nasal rhymes. The nasal rhymes which can be reconstructed at the Lolo-Burmese level are:

*-iŋ	*-im	*-uŋ	(*-u.ŋ)	*-um
	(*-i.n)		(*-un)	
		*-aŋ		*-am
		*-an		

1. The *-in rhyme. Both Schafer (1966-7) and Benedict (1972) note that TB *-in and TB *-iŋ merge into Lolo-Burmese *-iŋ. The evidence is clear, straightforward, and abundant. Note that this rhyme should not be confused with the Written Burmese rhyme written -in which is discussed below.

2. The *-i.n rhyme. Unquestionably a marginal rhyme at least in the numerical sense, this rhyme is suspect. Only the single word *ki.nl 'weigh' (WB khyin, Lahu chɿ, Lisu (Fraser) htsye⁴, and Akha tse^v) reconstructs regularly at the Lolo-Burmese level. Having a single example is not helped by the fact that the word means 'weigh'. Benedict (1972) sets up the correspondence of TB *-in > Written Burmese -aŋ and TB *-i.n > Written Burmese -in largely on the basis of the correspondences of this word and various parallels (see discussion of *-it rhyme below). While Written Burmese forms like bhɿn 'opium' and min 'fish' are borrowings, other -in forms like mɿn-ma 'woman' have a suffixal -n, a collectivizer, at the end which does not correspond to the -n on -in rhymes. All the evidence is not in, but at this point the *-i.n rhyme is marginal at best in Lolo-Burmese.

3. The *-un rhyme. Like the *-i.n rhyme above, the *-un rhyme does not reconstruct well on the Lolo-Burmese level despite the reputed sets offered by Schafer (1966-7, page 358 and 387) and despite the fact that a -un rhyme is found in Written Burmese.⁴ Irregularities exist with the tones or initial correspondences of most potential cognates.

4. The *-u.ŋ rhyme. Despite the existence of a large number of Written Burmese forms with a -uiŋ rhyme, I have not been able to assemble any likely looking sets of cognates. (see discussion of the *-u.k rhyme for a similar problem).

The stopped rhymes. The following stopped rhymes can be reconstructed at the Lolo-Burmese level:

*-ik	*-it	*-i.t	*-uk	*-ut	(*-u.k)
	*-ip			*-up	
			*-ok	*-ök	
	*-ak	*-at			
	*-ap				

Most of the work is based heavily in this section on correspondences originally noted in Matisoff (1972), The Loloish Tonal Split Revisited. What follows below is largely a number of small changes.

1. The *-it and the *-i.t rhymes. I have reconstructed the following correspondence as length differences because of the correspondence between Written Burmese rit 'reap' and Lushai riit 'reap' following the suggestion of both Benedict (1972) and Matisoff (1972), but there is no claim that the difference was manifested as length at the Lolo-Burmese stage.

<u>Tibeto-Burman</u>	<u>Written Burmese</u>	<u>Akha</u>
*-it	-ac	-eh
*-i.t	-it	-i, -ui, -eu

(The reconstructed length difference has a parallel in the nasal rhymes where TB *-in goes to WB -aŋ while TB *-i.n goes to WB -in, but as indicated in the discussion of *-i.n above, clear sets for the reconstruction of *-i.n have not been found).

2. The *-u.k rhyme. Like the *-u.ŋ rhyme discussed above, I have not found any solid cognates for this rhyme. A number of forms almost work, but at the present this rhyme cannot be reconstructed at the Lolo-Burmese level.

It is quite clear, however, that neither the *-u.ŋ nor the *-u.k rhymes can be completely dismissed. Benedict (1972) presents some extra-Loloish comparisons with Lushai which suggest vowel length considerations:

<u>Tibeto-Burman</u>	<u>Written Burmese</u>	<u>Lushai</u>
*tšuk	tsauk ^I	tšhuk 'steep (353)'
*s-nuŋ	hnāuŋ	hnuŋ 'the back (354)'
*m-yuŋ	lak-khyāuŋ	zuŋ 'finger (355)'
but,		