

A Note on Proto-Burmese-Lolo Prefixation

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In an early (1939) study of K[anburi] L[awa], the writer pointed out that this deviant BL language has initial l- for PBL *s-: le 'fruit' < *sey, lak 'tree' < *sik (cf. lan 'neck' < *lin), as well as for PBL *z-: lo- 'child' < *za (cf. no 'five' < *na), contrasting with d- for *s- in don 'three' < *sum (cf. yun 'house' < *yum, with *u maintained after *y-); also th- for *ts-: than 'elephant' < *tsan, as well as for *ś-: na-tha 'fish' = 'fish-flesh' (this compound often found in TB vocabulary lists under 'fish') < *śa. Note na- 'fish' < *nya and -tha 'flesh' < *śa, contrasting with no 'five' < *na and lo- 'child' < *za, exactly paralleling the development (STC: 54) shown by Lakher [Kuki-Naga] na 'fish' and sa 'flesh', contrasting with paŋo 'five' and so 'child'. An additional pair of forms, of unusual interest for the BL comparativist, was overlooked in that study: thi (Kwe Noi dial.) - li (Kwe Yai dial.) 'seven', from PBL *snis, the former apparently via *sti[s] (cf. Kanauri stis ~ tis, Arch./Anc. Chinese 七 ts'ieŋt < *tshit < *sthit), paralleling WB -hnats (with *-n- > -n- or -t-), the latter paralleling PL *si(t) (with *-n- > zero).¹ Note that this cluster (*sn-) is unique for PBL as well as for PTB (Benedict 1976); also that PBL final *-s can be reconstructed here and in *(s-)nis 'two' on the basis of the PL *-it x *-i proto-variation (cf. the roots cited in Matisoff 1972).

The same volume of STL (Shafer and Benedict 1939) contains a number of Southern Lolo tables, which include entries from four Tonkin (N. Vietnam) BL languages: White Lolo (WhL), Black Lolo (BlL), Khoanh, and Mư̄ng. These languages show some unusual features, including forms for 'four' which point to an earlier *mle (< *b-le), paralleling KL pli: WhL m̄ai, BlL ze, Khoanh vai,

Mường ndzi (contrast WhL and BIL le- 'wind' < *le). Of special interest here, however, are the reflexes (incomplete) of the PBL dental and palatal sibilants and obstruents which present a parallel to the KL reflexes:

	<u>PTB/PBL</u>	<u>KL</u>	<u>WhL</u>	<u>BIL</u>	<u>Khoanh</u>	<u>Mường</u>
fruit	* <u>sey</u>	le	si	si	si	-si
tree	* <u>sin</u> & * <u>sik</u>	lak	si-	si-	-	se
finger nail	* <u>(m-)syen</u>	-	-san	-san	-	-
three	* <u>g-sum</u>	don	don	duŋ	don	duŋ
kill	* <u>g-sât</u>	-	de	-	-	-
child	* <u>za</u>	lo-	-	-	-	-
fat, n.	* <u>tsil</u>	-	-si	-si	-tsi	-
fat, adj.	* <u>tsow</u>	-	-	-	-	tsu
elephant	/ <u>*tsaŋ</u>	thaŋ	tsaŋ	tsaŋ	tsɔ	-
ten	/ <u>*tsay</u>	se	di	di	tsi	coi
salt	* <u>tsa</u>	-	da	do	da	do
person	/ <u>*tsaŋ</u>	-	daŋ	da	do	don
eat	* <u>dza</u>	-	za	za	-	co
flesh	* <u>śa</u>	-tha	gha	hou	kha	hou
iron	* <u>sryam</u> & * <u>śam</u>	-	khəm	kue	khoe	-
goat	/ <u>*cit</u>	-	tsi	tsi	die	toi

The indicated reflexes for PTB/PBL *s- are as follows:

(as initial): KL l-, Tonkin group s-

(after prefixed *q-): KL d-, Tonkin group d- (perhaps ɗ- phonetically)

Support for this distinction is furnished by the PBL reconstructions attained by Matisoff (1972; and see also STC: fn. 259) through an analysis of the tonal system: *sin & *sik 'tree' (HIGH), as opposed to *C-sat 'kill' (LOW). Although the available material is scanty, it does appear that KL and the Tonkin group reflect an earlier initial *s- vs. stop prefix + *s- distinction, through secondary voicing of the *s- in the latter.² The Tonkin languages

also appear to show a parallel distinction in the reflexes of PTB/PBL *ts-, with some inconsistency in one root ('ten'), suggesting the reconstructions *tsi 'fat (n.)', *tsu 'fat (adj.)', and perhaps *tsaŋ 'elephant' (possibly a loan from Tai; cf. White Tai, Black Tai caan < PT *jaan, and note the 'irregular' rhyme reflex when compared with 'person', below), contrasting with *(C-)tsay 'ten', *C-tsa 'salt', and *C-tsaŋ 'person'. Similarly, for the remaining roots, the suggested reconstructions are *(C-)dza 'eat', *(C-)ša 'flesh', *šam 'iron', and *(C-)cit 'goat', the last to be compared with Matisoff's *V-cit. The reflexes for PBL *š- are noteworthy, and tend to support the suggestion by Bradley (1975) that these roots be reconstructed with initial *x-.

Notes

1. I.e., with 'prefix-preemption'. [JAM]
2. Ingenious as Benedict's explanation is for the double KL and Tonkin reflexes of *s-, on the basis of the six forms available (fruit, tree, fingernail, seven; three, kill) another interpretation of the conditioning factor is also possible: maybe *s > KL l-, Tonkin s- only before an original front vowel or palatal glide (fruit, tree, fingernail, seven), and otherwise *s- > KL, Tonkin d- (three, kill): [JAM]

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