

The Proto-Burmese-Yipho nominalizing *-t suffix

Paul K. Benedict
Ormond Beach, Florida

The PTB nominalizing *-t suffix is well represented in Written Tibetan (WT) and northern Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages (Benedict 1972 [hereafter *STC*]:102), but is little in evidence in Burmese-Yipho (Burmese-Lolo). As a matter of fact, the only example in the literature has been Proto-Burmese-Yipho (PBY) *nat-²*nan² 'spirit/animistic deity' (Matisoff 1972 [hereafter *TSR*], #136), from PTB *na¹ 'ill/pain' (*STC* #80) via 'spirit of illness' (cf. WT na¹d 'illness').¹ It now appears, however, that Lahu itself has at least three other forms that reflect this nominalizing suffix:

Lahu vê? < *wat^H < *s-wat 'work; toil; a job' (archaic), showing the regular -e? < *-at shift (see Matisoff 1973:15); cf. PBY *va² 'work/labor': Lahu vâ, Lisu vâ, as cited in Thurgood 1977, to which can be added Bisu vâ 'do'. Matisoff 1988 (hereafter *DL*) cites vâ only in phrases involving 'tilling' and 'cultivation'² (cf. Rawang, below), and it is clear that both vê?

¹ PST *na[¹] can be reconstructed on the basis of the late-attested 瘡 na 'ill', cited in Benedict 1939. PST *-a was maintained in the 'vulgar' language (Vulgar Archaic Chinese: VAC) but shifted to -o in the standard language (AC), hence both the -a and -o of Karlgren 1957 (hereafter *GSR*) make good comparative sense. The inclusion of 難 nân 'difficult, be suffering' (*GSR* 152d) in that early article, along with 難 nâ 'ceremony to expel demons of illness' (*GSR* 152k), certainly sounded convincing, not only at the time to the editor of the *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, but also later to James Matisoff (see Matisoff 1978:110), but the reconstruction of the AC initial (AC ?d- > MC n-) proved to be faulty and the etymology of this pair of words to be entirely different (see Benedict 1976:185, which has ?t- for ?d-). A tone *B alloform (see text for the *A ~ *B variation) is indicated by the PBY suffixed -n form (*nan²) as well as on the Sinitic side by 怒 nuo/no:, 'anger, angry; violent, vigorous' (*GSR* 94a), with excellent Han parallels (Matisoff 1978: supra); cf. also Mikir -nô < *-na² 'bad' (suffix) and (without the tonal variation) Lushai ná < *na¹ 'ill; in pain'; also (separate entry) 'boisterous (wind); rough, strong (wind, love); scorching hot, fierce (fire); great or loud (sounds); severe (scolding); intense, very hard, mighty; to be with force or might; to be hit or wounded badly (animal); to be exposed (to wind)'; note also Jingpho ?əná < *B 'illness', an apparent loan from Burmese, perhaps from an unreported *na² that also underlies the *-n suffixed form: *nan². The prefixed *s- members of this family are also of interest here: Proto-Tamang *hna¹ < *s-na¹ 'sick' (with 'intensive' *s-); Proto-Karen *hna¹/b¹ '[harmer:] witch, demon'; also *hna² < *s-na² 'suffer'; Rawang (Nungish) səna (tone unreported) '(comp.) angry; annoy'; WT snad < *s-na-t 'hurt, harm, injure'.

² Actually *DL* (pp. 1322-3) treats vâ as a lively substitute for a large number of more specific action verbs (including 'work'), and suggests that it is a loanword from Shan wəŋ ~ mən

and *vâ* are marginal in the language. A BY-Nungish root **vā*^B can be set up on the basis of Rawang (Nungish) *vā* (tone unreported) 'do, make, build; till', with a possible connection to Bodo-Garo/Jingpho **vā* (-t) 'weave/plait': B-G **vāt* 'id.': Garo *vāt*, Dimasa ho; Jingpho *vā* 'weave (as a bamboo mat, wall, basket, etc.)'; *məvāt* 'basket' (poetic). DL points out that Lahu *vê*? may be an areal word (Lao *viək*, Vietnamese *việc*, et al.), but a 'native' (ST) etymology provides a solid basis for the high tone (<*s-).

Lahu *chê*? 'food; rice (archaic and poetic)', from PBY **C-tsāt* (see TSR: 23, Table); cf. PBY **dza*² 'eat', **dza*¹ 'food; rice'. The widespread TB root here is **dza*^B ~ **dzya*^B 'eat' (STC #66) → '[food:] cooked rice' (DL cites Newari *ja*, Wancho *tza*) ~ 'grain, any edible foodstuff' (Limbu *ca*). The tonal variation, apparently limited in this root to BY, fits a general pattern earlier noted for TB (see Benedict 1980) that involves a 'stative/intransitive' verb = Tone *A vs. 'transitive' verb = Tone *B opposition, as exemplified in WB *nām* 'smell (intr.)/sunk' (< Tone *A) vs. *nām* 'smell (trans.)/sniff' (< Tone *B).³ An additional complication here is created by the fact that TB also exhibits variation in voicing of root-initial consonants: voiced = 'intrans./stative' vs. unvoiced = 'trans./causative' (STC: 124ff), which apparently led to analogical unvoicing of the initial of this (transitive) root for 'eat' in the Tamang group: **tša*^B 'eat' & **tsha*^B '(cause to eat:) graze (cattle trans.)'; cf. also P-Karen *(a-) *tsha*^B 'food/fodder'. Limbu (Kiranti group) shows the 'causative' *-t suffix (STC: 101): *ca* 'eat, ca:t 'feed'. The nominalizing role of this suffix appears both in Jingpho and Konyak, however, as well as here in Lahu:

Jingpho: *sá* 'eat'; *šàt* 'food; rice; deer'

Konyak: *hā* 'eat'; *hei* < **hat* 'food'⁴

PBY: **dza*² 'eat' ~ **dza*¹ 'food; rice'; **C-tsāt* (Lahu only) 'food; rice'.

Neither Matisoff (in DL) nor, earlier, Bradley (1979) suggests any relationship between PBY **dza*² 'eat' and *dza*¹ 'food; rice' in connection with Lahu *chê*?; Matisoff states that this is 'probably the same etymon as

'strike, beat, pound' (it is sometimes pronounced *vân*, with a nasalized vowel, in Lahu). It is, of course, possible that consonation has occurred between two unrelated morphemes, one Tal and one TB. [Ed.]

³ Another example of such tonal alternation is WB *əwān* 'pour out, spill' (<Tone *A) / *əwān* 'pour upon' (<Tone *B), with the latter directly cognate to Lahu *šē* 'sow, broadcast'. This etymon also displays variation of final -n and -t, with the stop-final alloform reflected by Lahu *šē*? (<**sat*) 'spill; pour out', while both are attested in Chinese: 散 OC **sán* / 撒 OC **sāt*. See DL:1199, [Ed.]

⁴ For the Konyak phonology, see French 1983, which includes the erroneous reconstruction of a secondary root for 'eat' (Yogli *sei* < **sia* < **dzya*), as confirmed by the author of that invaluable work (W. French, p.c.).

chè? 'bite into' (DL:537). The latter is from PBY *C-tsat 'bite down on' (TSR #24), as represented by Akha tseh^L 'clamp with teeth', et al., the suggested etymology appearing far less likely than that indicated above.⁵ Jingpho sàt shows a twofold extension, from 'food' to 'animal food' (deer) as well as to 'vegetable food' (rice), hence one might be tempted to include here also PBY *tsat 'deer, sambar', especially since the root is not otherwise represented in Lahu. It does have representation in Written Burmese (WB) (tshat), however, and is specialized semantically, showing a good fit with WT gtsod ~ btsod 'Tibetan antelope', from PTB *(-)tsot (STC #344), hence cannot be viewed as playing any role here; also Lahu chè? 'food' could hardly be assumed to derive from 'deer'!

PBY *b(y)et 'vulva' (TSR #5); Bradley (1979) also cites WB cok (pat), yielding *bat as a doublet form.⁶ The underlying root here is *(s-)ba(-t) > *(s-)bet 'hide/hidden' (*a > /e/ before *-t); WT sbed-pa, pf. sbas, fut. and common secondary form sba (West T sba-, pf. sbas) 'hide, conceal'; sba-ba 'something shameful/hidden:| privy parts, pudenda'; sbed-ma 'concealed female:| veiled woman'; also be-snabs < *bed-snabs (/ds/ > /s/ is a regular Tibetan shift) 'thick slime or mucus [snabs], e.g. the mucus flowing at childbirth from the vagina [be-]'; Mikir ɪŋbò < *m-ba^A 'hidden/lost:| lose, get lost'.⁷

This root is extraordinary on three different accounts:

1. It provides 'hard' phonological evidence for the *a > /e/ shift before dental finals at a very early level.

2. Additional evidence for the BY *b(y)et ~ *bat doublet comes from a most curious source, viz. apparent loans to Kam-Sui, in the Kadal family: Mulam (Mulao) pɛ⁶ < *bɛ^C 'vulva'; Sui pat⁷ < *pat 'id.'. Two different donor sources (D) must be postulated, one to Sui (DS) that shows unvoicing of the initial along with maintenance of the *-at rime, i.e. a language such as Phunoi, and the other to Mulam (DM) that shows retention of the initial voicing along with loss of the final *-t, i.e. a language such as Akha (a-beh 'vulva'). Both Phunoi and Akha are Southern Yipho (S. Loloish) languages, with DS and DM likely members of the same subgrouping, at the present time somewhat to the south of the main body of KS speakers. There is a clear history of earlier movements towards the south of these Southern

⁵ Luquan (Nasoid group) has initial ts' or 'deer' as opposed to ts' for 'bite down', suggesting PBY *tɔy- for the latter.

⁶ See now Bauer (1991) for an exhaustive study of this etymology. [Ed.]

⁷ Cf. also WT 'ba-bo 'hole, cave, cavern', perhaps < 'hidden place'; also Dumi (Kiranti Group) bha 'anus' (S. van Driem, p.c.).

Loloish languages, however; hence the apparent borrowing would appear to be likely enough.⁸

3. The root is also well represented in Chinese, hence must be set up at the Proto-Sino-Tibetan level; cf. 遁 pwo/puo '[hide oneself:] escape' (GSR #102d'), from *pa^h < *sba^h (regular shift) < *s-ba^h (tonal agreement with Mikir); also Proto-Chinese (not in GSR) 展 *piet 'vulva'; Hakka piet⁷, Kienyang (Min) pie⁷, from *sbiet < *s-bat (regular shifts; see Benedict 1988). This means that the underlying culture trait-complex, an ultra-Victorian view of sex as 'shameful' (but note the Latin *pudenda*), must also be assigned to the Proto-Sino-Tibetan (PST)-speaker level. In my 'Forays into Karen linguistic history' (Benedict 1979), I noted (footnote 32) that Chinese 'seems long ago to have entered into a diabolical conspiracy to conceal basic terms in the "genital" category', and elsewhere I have pointed out that the early 's-orgy' indulged in by that language was very likely the only orgy of any sort that the culture would have permitted itself. The evidence now provided by this etymon shows beyond any doubt that the ancestral Han came by their inhibited sexuality in the most natural of all manners, through inheritance from their Sino-Tibetan forbears. It is indeed curious that only Tibetan itself and the BY languages appear to reflect this early feature, with the possible exception of Jingpho, in the phrase: mət sat šəbat 'foul, filthy, disgusting, nasty'. One must allow, however, for the fact that Western missionaries and occasionally others have entered into the conspiracy to keep their works free of offending terms, at times displaying a bit of sexist bias to boot, e.g. Judson saw fit to include *penis* in his English-Burmese dictionary (7th edition, 1911), but nary a *vagina* or *vulva*.

As a final note, the very existence of this 'nice' term at the PST level suggests that a 'dirty' word had been replaced, that a *vulva* or *vagina* overlay a *cunt*. In the case of Chinese, it was clearly a matter of a *sbiet overlaying a *tiet-~*tiēt (see footnote 8), the latter representing the basic PST *tey^B root for this body part.

⁸ Parallel loans in East/SE Asia, of far earlier date, involve Chinese: 脬 (OC *tiet ~ *tiēt) to Sino-Japanese, Yao, and Hlai (see Benedict 1991); and Tai (Proto-Tai *hi^h) to Cantonese. In the case of these two Kam-Sui terms, the Proto-Austro-Tai *pati 'vulva' root (see Benedict 1975: Glossary) does offer a competing 'native' (AT) etymology for *pat (via *qa- prefixation) though scarcely for *be^C (the final is a problem). It should also be noted that both Sui and Mulam have alternative 'vulva' terms with KS/Kadal etymologies, supporting the view that both *pat and *be^C are loans.

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