

DGI: a rare donor language

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The writer recently (Benedict 1987) called attention to an early source of loans to Miao-Yao for numerals ("four" through "ten") and a few other items, notably "sun" and "moon". His (unstated) view at the time was that this 'donor' language (DMY: Donor to Miao Yao), from Tibeto-Burman (TB) to Austro-Tai (AT), was one of a kind, without later replication if one excludes isolated loanwords, e.g., Proto-Tibeto-Burman (PTB) *s-toŋ "1,000"; cf. (Kadai family) Laqua təŋ, Lati (comp.) tuŋ "id.". He had overlooked, however, the fact that the Duoluo branch of Gelao has clearly borrowed its numerals for "six" through "ten" as well as its basic mineral terms from Burmese-Yipho (BY), apparently from more than one 'donor' (DGI: Donor to Gelao) source. The following table cites the available forms (tone marks omitted) from a Duoluo dialect recorded in North Vietnam by Bonifacy in 1905 (cited in Benedict 1975 as 'S. Gl.') and three recently recorded dialects from Chinese sources: Huangniu (Moji) (HN), Dingyinshao (DYS) and Liuzhi (LZ), along with representative BY forms from Lisu (Fraser):

	<i>Lisu</i>	<i>S.Gl.</i>	<i>HN</i>	<i>DYS</i>	<i>LZ</i>
six	chɔ	cö	chiau	chau	chɿ
seven	śɿ	zi	hai	-	-
eight	hĩ	śiə	he	-	he
nine	kü	ku	kəu	kəu	-
ten	tshi	tsü	tshai	tshi	tshei
gold	śɿ	śü	-	-	si
silver	phu	clu	phləu	-	phlɿ
copper	ji	giə	-	-	gei
iron	hɔ	yɔ	-	-	?zaŋ

The (limited) available S. Gl. material shows initial ś- only in the above loans, with the corresponding t' - only in t'ia "monkey", perhaps only a look-alike of Lisu cya-mye "id." (-mye < PTB *myok); also initial pl- in several forms but with *phl- and *bl- both unrepresented; all four Duoluo dialects appear to lack medial *-r-. Final stops are exceedingly rare in all four dialects (only two -k forms in S. Gl.) while final nasals are limited to -n and -ŋ. HN has tone /31/ as a characteristic "numeral" tone for "six"

through "nine"; cf. WB *sum*: "three", *le*: "four", *ŋa*: "five" (all < PTB Tone *2), with numerous parallels elsewhere in TB.

The above array of forms presents some intriguing questions for BYists. They appear to make up a neat 'package', as if borrowed under specific circumstances from a given BY source by a given early form of Gelao (PGI or later), with subsequent differentiation, e.g., **tshay* "ten" (cf. Written Burmese **?a-tshay*) > HN *tshai*, LZ *tshei*, etc. The forms in general look Yiish rather than Burmish, yet the initial *phl-* in "silver" directly mirrors the cluster in PBY **plu¹* [*phlu¹*] "white/silver" > WB *phru*, Tavoyan *phlu~phyu*, Pyen *plu*, with the S. Gl. *cl-* paralleling N. Yiish *t(h)l-* forms. Distinct sources appear to be required, however, at least in the case of "iron", with PBY **śam¹* yielding S. Gl. *yɔ* (-ɔ < *-am is a common BY shift) as well as LZ *?zaŋ*, apparently from **?zam¹* < **?a-sam¹*, with secondary intervocalic voicing (the prefix indicated here might well supply a valuable clue as to the source).

The fact of the borrowing is evident enough but the general scenario is badly in need of clarification. Why this particular 'packaging', rather different from that in the case of DMY (see above) or the early TB loans to Lai, a Mon-Khmer language spoken in Guangxi (see Benedict 1990)? Why did Gelao borrow from the (relatively) lowly BY rather than from Chinese or even Tai, both much higher on the socio-cultural scale? The Gelao homeland is the province of Guizhou, with later extension into North Vietnam, and the borrowing(s) must be assigned to this general region, which is extremely marginal as regards Chinese. At the time of the loans, say the 19th century or perhaps much earlier (note the 1905 Bonifacy recording), Guizhou was an even more isolated region, with the excellent possibility that the BY-speaking populations there were in a position to exercise hegemony over the one group (Gelao) that stood below them in the 'pecking order' of the time (see Benedict 1975:441). One can hardly hope for local history (Chinese gazettes, etc.) to supply any answers here but perhaps BY specialists will in time be able to do so as more Gelao material becomes available along with improved analysis of BY.

Curiously enough, Pudi (Aou group of Gelao) apparently has borrowed only the numeral for "eight" (*?e*), along with that for "100" (*hε*), the latter matching the Lisu form. The loan for "100" is understandable in view of its status as a higher numeral, but why "eight"—could it have been a ritually significant number?

Other northern Kadai languages do not show these borrowings, apart from "silver", for which both Pubiao and Laji (=Lati) have /p h i o/. apparently from a different BY source. For Laqua, closely related to Pubiao, Bonifacy (1905) cites p t o, which appears to be a manuscript error for *p i o (contra Benedict 1975:424).

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