On nationality and the recognition of Tibeto-Burman languages[1]

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1.   There are 56 nationalities in China, 55 of which are minority nationalities, speaking over 90 different languages. Most minorities speak their own languages, though a few, such as the Manchu and the Hui, generally speak Chinese. There are several reasons for the greater number of languages than nationalities.

First, a single nationality may use more than one language, for various reasons:
a   Sometimes, the people comprising the nationality have historically different backgrounds, and only became a single entity in consciousness and characteristics after a long period of living close to one another. Though willing to be recognized as a single nationality, the languages they speak are still distinct, as in the case of the Yao, who speak three different languages belonging to different branches and families. Other examples are the Yugur, who speak two languages belonging to different language families, and the Jingpo, who use two languages belonging to different branches of Tibeto-Burman.
b.   Some historically small, weak nationalities gradually merged into large nationalities due to long periods of political control or cultural influence by larger, stronger groups, the smaller nationalities losing all their unique characteristics other than language. Some of these people are not willing to be recognized as a separate nationality from the dominant one, as is the case with the Tibetans of western Sichuan who speak Jiarong (rGyarong), Ergong, Guiqiong, Zhaba, Muya, Shixing, and Namuyi, and with some of the Qiang and Pumi speakers of Sichuan who prefer to be considered as Tibetans.
c.   The names by which some nationalities are known are simply geographic designations. For example, the Tibetans refer to all the peoples living in China's Luoyu area near the eastern section of the Sino-Indian border as 'Luoba' people, even though they speak several different languages.

Another example is the minority nationalities of Taiwan, who are collectively known as the 'Gaoshan' ('High Mountain') people though they speak thirteen different languages (not including dead or dying languages).

d.   Because of military campaigns to distant places, or through simple migration, a nationality, or part of one, sometimes loses its original language. We find two situations with respect to this type of change. One type is where the nationality (or the relevant part) completely loses its original language and takes on a new one. This is true of a group of Mongolian soldiers left in Yunnan after the southern campaigns of Kubilai Khan. After the fall of the Yuan dynasty, they lived among the Yi and Naxi peoples. The language they use now, Gazhuo, is an independent language within the Yi branch of Tibeto-Burman, different from both Yi and Naxi. The historic reasons for this phenomenon require further study. Another type of change is the use of a new, mixed language, as is the case with the Ai-nu dialect of Xinjiang and the Wutun dialect of Qinghai, the former having characteristics of Persian and Uighur, and the latter having some characteristics of Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan, Tu, and Salar.

e.   When a nationality splits up, and the different parts have had no contact with each other for a long time, the languages they speak may follow different paths of development and eventually become separate languages. An example of this situation is the Nu people of Yunnan. The Nu people who live in the Lancang (=Mekong) River valley call themselves the Rouruo; the Nu people who live in the Nu (=Salween) River valley call themselves the Nusu; between them is the Biluoxue Mountain. According to historical records, since the Sui-Tang period (7th cen.) they have had no contact with each other; their languages have already diverged to the point that it would be difficult to say they are dialects of the same language.

Second, there are still some ethnic groups that have not yet been recognized as distinct nationalities, some of them using one language, some more than one. For example, the Deng people of Tibet use two different languages, referring to them as 'Kaman' ('Geman') and 'Taraon' ('Darang'), and have been seeking recognition as distinct nationalities. The Kemu people of Yunnan and the Baima people of the Sichuan-Gansu border area also have their own languages, and have been asking for recognition.

As should be apparent, the use of two or more languages by a single nationality in China is not a rare phenomenon. According to preliminary statistics, of the 55 minority nationalities in China, 15 (27.7%) use more than two languages. This shows that there is a close relationship between nationality and language, but that this relationship is not always one to one.

2.   Before the founding of the People's Republic, only a few scholars had done fieldwork on the minority languages, so the number of languages that

were known was small. In the early days of the People's Republic, the central government sent several investigative teams to the minority areas to determine the ethnic identities and the affiliations of the languages of the different minorities. As of 1954, when Luo Changpei and Fu Maoji published 'A survey of minority languages and writing systems in China' (Luo & Fu 1954), 48 different minority languages had been recognized. In 1956, the government sent seven teams, totalling more than 700 people, to do a general survey of the minority peoples. As of 1966, 60 languages had been recognized.

After the third plenary of the eleventh congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978, the government established a program with respect to the minorities, and made investigation of the unknown minority languages an official part of that program. At the same time, many provinces and autonomous regions took up the work of distinguishing among the different ethnic minorities. This work often intersected with the task of distinguishing the minority languages. During this period, some new languages were discovered, though in some cases this did not lead to the ethnic group's being recognized as a separate nationality.

While doing fieldwork on the minority languages of the Yi Autonomous Prefecture of Liangshan, Sichuan in 1980, I came across a group of minority people who called themselves the 'Ersu'. After preliminary analysis, their language turned out to be unique; it was unlike any of the contiguous Yi languages, and unlike the neighboring Tibetan dialects as well. Responding to requests from the Ersu people, in the summer of 1981 the Sichuan People's Committee organized an investigation of their status. (They were still referred to by outsiders as the Xifan 'western barbarians.') It turned out that there was a division among the Ersu people themselves; some felt they were a unique minority, others felt they were Tibetans.

When I returned to that area to do fieldwork in late 1981, the Ersu people were very concerned about the outcome of the work on their language. Those who felt they were Tibetans took out the Tibetan texts they had at home to prove that they could read Tibetan and that what they spoke was Tibetan. Those who felt they were a unique minority emphasized that they could not understand spoken Tibetan and said that, aside from a few people who had gone to Tibetan temples and become monks, those people who had Tibetan texts in their homes had brought them back from Tibetan areas, and not only could not read the texts aloud, but also had no idea what they were about.

In this situation, people holding different views about their nationality each hoped the linguistic investigation would support their view. Speaking objectively, language is a characteristic of a nationality, so the determination of a group's linguistic identity is directly relevant to the determination of their ethnic identity; an important criterion for the establishment of an

independent nationality is whether that group has its own language or not. If the results of my investigation were to show that Ersu is an independent language, then this would support the view of those who want the Ersu to be seen as a separate nationality; if the results were to show that Ersu is a Tibetan dialect, then the view of those who think the Ersu are Tibetans would find strong support. Because of this, the linguist must not express a viewpoint without proper justification. S/he must carefully dig deep into the language to expose its basic characteristics, comparing its phonology, morphosyntax, and lexicon with those of related languages to determine the closeness of their relationship. Only such a process will determine scientifically whether or not one is dealing with an independent language.

Another example is the language of the Sherpa people, who live in the area straddling the border of the Tibetan Autonomous Area and Nepal. In the late 1970's, the Sherpa people asked to be recognized as a distinct nationality, just as the Sherpa people in Nepal had been treated as a separate nationality. They argued that they had difficulty understanding Tibetan. Actually, the language of the Sherpa and the Tibetan language are very close. Just from the list of several hundred commonly used words and the dozens of sentences which I recorded in 1979 we can see clearly the similarity between the two languages. Comparing Sherpa and the Lhasa dialect of Tibetan, we find that there are fewer differences among them than among the three major Tibetan dialects. From this we can conclude that Sherpa is closely related to the Ü-Tsang (dbu-gtsang) dialect of Tibetan, though of course Sherpa has its distinctive characteristics.

Another situation is when the name of the language and the name of the nationality are not the same. In China this is not unusual. For example, in Sichuan's Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Heishui County and Maowen Qiang Autonomous County are separated only by a stream of water. In 1956, when we were investigating the Qiang language, we found that the vast majority of the Tibetans of Heishui County used the Qiang language, and their religion, their architecture and many other aspects of their culture were the same as the Qiang, especially in the border area between the two counties. The people on both sides of the border intermarry and frequently interact, and there is very little difference between them in terms of language, economic life, etc., except for the fact that they see themselves as different nationalities and so have different autonyms. Here language recognition cannot change ethnic identity, since what determines ethnic identity is not simply language, but involves complex political, economic, and social factors, including the will of the people involved. A similar example is the fact that the majority of the Tibetans of the Muli Tibetan Autonomous County of Sichuan and the Pumi people of Ninglang Yi Autonomous County of Yunnan both use the Pumi language, and the fact that both the Nu people and the Dulong people of Gongshan Dulong-Nu

Autonomous County of the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan use the Dulong language.

Many facts point to the close relationship between language and ethnic identity, so that those doing "ethnic recognition" work have taken language recognition to be a very important criterion, such that a people who do not have a unique language would not be recognized as a new nationality. Yet, establishing the independence of a language does not mean that the ethnic identity of the people involved must be changed. This is the reality of the relationship between language recognition and ethnic recognition in China today.

3. Since this is the case, does that mean that once we have identified a cohesive ethnic group, we should consider all languages spoken by that nationality to be dialects of the same language? To answer this question we need to investigate the relationship between language recognition and social life; only then will we advance our understanding of the importance of language recognition. As mentioned above, some of the nationalities in China use languages that belong to different language families or branches, and which are often structurally quite different. How then are we to carry out language teaching?

In some areas no differentiation is made within a nationality, so all the people considered to belong to that nationality will be taught the same language in school. Because of this, students sometimes have to learn a language quite different from their own. This increases the burden on the students, making it more difficult to improve the quality of education, and adversely influencing the development of qualified personnel.

Let us take the Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture as an example. Among the 13 counties of this prefecture, 10 are inhabited by Tibetans. In six of these ten counties the Tibetans use the Tibetan language, while in the other four counties they use the rGyarong or Qiang languages. At present, Tibetan is used in all religious activities, and all the schools except those in the Qiang-speaking areas teach Tibetan. This situation is a great impediment to the development of qualified personnel in this area, and has become a matter of great concern to intellectuals of these nationalities. In 1985, Lin Xiangrong (a rGyarong speaking Tibetan) published an article in *Minzu Yuwen* arguing that the elementary schools in the rGyarong-speaking areas of Aba Prefecture and the Qiang-speaking areas of Heishui county should not establish Tibetan classes. He gave the following two reasons:

a. The results from the teaching of Tibetan in these districts have not been good, mainly because the native language of the students is different from Tibetan, and it is not possible for the students to learn Tibetan in just a short time. They commonly end up just

being able to pronounce the Tibetan letters, but cannot understand the meaning of the texts.

b. It increases the burden on the children: Tibetan and rGyarong are two different languages. Teaching Tibetan therefore means that the children are studying two languages different from their mother tongue (Chinese and Tibetan). This goes against the pedagogical principle of assigning reasonable amounts of work to the students, and necessarily results in a decrease in the quality of education and the wasting of 480 hours of the students' class time. (Lin 1985:48)

Lin also suggests that the question of which language to use in the classroom should be separated from the desire of the people to learn Tibetan in order to pass on their religious faith. Most of the Tibetans in the rGyarong area believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Their main goal in learning Tibetan is to be able to recite the Tibetan scriptures and pass on the faith. This desire of the people should be respected. Lin (1985:48) argues that "for the sake of future generations, we should select that language which best facilitates education, and that language is the native tongue of the students. This would be in accord with the Party's nationalities policy and it would be a manifestation of the best aspects of nationality education."

The question of the use of Tibetan in the classroom involves issues of ethnic and linguistic identity. From the point of view of ethnic identity, the rGyarong people consider themselves to be Tibetans, so not studying Tibetan seems unreasonable. In fact, some Chinese scholars feel that because rGyarong has a large amount of Tibetan loanwords, it should be considered a 'special dialect' of Tibetan. It would seem as if these scholars are protecting the interests of the rGyarong people. Yet in reality, because of this view, they are not working with actual facts of the languages, and confuse the distinction between language and dialect. Looking at this situation objectively, we can see that it has not been good for education in those areas.

A similar example is found in the Tibetan areas where Pumi and Namuyi are spoken. In 1981 and 1982, I was doing fieldwork in the western part of Sichuan Province and found that the people there had bought Tibetan textbooks in Tibetan-speaking areas, brought them back and asked Tibetans to teach their children Tibetan. In some areas they even tried to use Tibetan in the anti-illiteracy campaign. Yet these areas lack the conditions and linguistic environment necessary for the use of Tibetan, so it is not hard to imagine the results of this effort.

At present there are more than a few cases in minority areas where the language chosen for education is based on the name of the nationality, and is at variance with the actual language spoken by that ethnic group. The language used by the Mongolians in Yunnan belongs to the Yi branch of

Tibeto-Burman, which is not at all related to the Mongolian language of the Altaic language family; yet several years ago a small number of Yunnan Mongolians spent a lot of time and effort trying to learn Mongolian, with very little effect. The Jingpo people in China use either the Jingpo language (of the Jingpo branch of Tibeto-Burman) or the Zaiwa language, which belongs to the Burmish branch of Tibeto-Burman. In the 1950's, because of problems with the recognition of Zaiwa as a legitimate language, the Zaiwa-speaking people stopped using the Zaiwa script. In the last several years the people have renewed the use of the Zaiwa script, but the cost of this interruption in the use of the written language was high.

It can be seen from this that proper recognition of the languages spoken by the minority nationalities of our country is of benefit to us in understanding the relationship between nationalities and the languages they use, in solving the problem of which script to use in education, in developing bilingual education and improving the quality of education in the minority areas, and in forming a correct nationalities language policy. It also will promote the development of our society and prevent us from making mistakes that will lead to the waste of money, manpower and materials.

Secondarily, proper recognition of the languages is of benefit to the development of linguistics. Our country has many nationalities and many languages, but exactly how many is still not clear. In the section on minority languages in the *China Encyclopedia* (1988), Fu Maoji estimated there are more than 80 minority languages, and in Fu 1984 he put the number at about 90. This is a question of our national demographic situation, and linguists have a responsibility to clarify the facts.

As is well known, there are particular historical reasons for the use of two or more languages by a nationality. Linguistic change proceeds more slowly than change in other characteristics of a nationality. Work in language recognition can help us solve some of the complex historical 'puzzles' in the relations between nationalities and give us clues to the historical evolution of certain nationalities. Because of this, scholars working on local history or the history of the relations between nationalities especially hope to obtain from language recognition work the kind of 'living' materials they cannot get from historical records.

Language recognition work can help linguists to improve their knowledge of linguistics and of individual languages, allow them to collect data for historical linguistic studies, and provide new problems and data for sociolinguistics. In 1976, while investigating the Deng language of the Indo-Tibet border region, we found a very interesting case of language contact. In the area of Chayu County from Xiachayu to the valley of Wanong, live Deng people who call themselves 'Kaman' ('Geman'). Two hundred years ago, the Tibetans entered this area and set up a combined rule of government and religion, and subsequently the original inhabitants of the area slowly became

Tibetanized. The Tibetans call these people the 'Za'. Today the Za people only use their own language at home; outside the home they use Tibetan. The language that they use at home is about 60% Tibetan loanwords, and the grammar is also basically Tibetan. Recent Kaman Deng immigrants into this area can only understand about 30% of the speech of the Za people. Two hundred years of language contact, because of political, economic, cultural, and religious dominance, caused one language to be heavily influenced by another and gradually lose its unique characteristics. In the recognition and comparison of this type of language we see how social factors play a crucial role in the process of language change in contact situations. Analyzing these factors gives us a better understanding of the relationship between language and social life.

4.   Fu Maoji recently pointed out that "In the future, we will continue to carry out investigations of the languages of the nationalities, and the emphasis will be on filling the gaps in our knowledge, doing more in-depth studies" (Fu 1988:557). Here the word 'gaps' has two levels of meaning. One refers to those languages for which we have only a small amount of material, so that more in-depth investigation is required. The other refers to determining the number and status of all the languages of China, especially those we know little or nothing about. Taking these to be the main points of emphasis of future work has real and theoretical significance.

Yet, a major problem in language recognition work is the question of standards. That is, how do we determine whether two segments of the same nationality speak two different languages, or two dialects of the same language? Wang Jun states:

Indeed, as for distinguishing between languages and dialects, it would be difficult to say we have a unified standard, but we can't arbitrarily call two or more types of speech 'dialects' of the same language (simply because the people speaking them are the same nationality). There must be a certain number of lexical items that the two forms of speech have in common, particularly a certain percentage of basic vocabulary items (these might include phonetic systems that differ greatly, as long as regular correspondences can be found), and the basic grammatical structure should be roughly the same. That is, determining two forms of speech to be the same language should involve regularity of quality and quantity . . . We cannot say that once we have determined the identity of the nationality we should attempt by any means to 'prove' that the different forms of speech the people of that nationality use are one language. Faced with objective phenomena, we cannot choose subjective explanations; we must

consider each question on the basis of the actual situation in our country. (1981:5)

From this it seems that Wang Jun puts emphasis on structure in distinguishing language from dialect, but opinions on this point vary. For example Hu Ming-yang feels that

Language and dialect are not concepts of structural linguistics, but belong to sociolinguistics. What we call 'language' and what we call 'dialect' do not always differ in structure; sometimes they differ only in social status. Because of this, when determining if what one is dealing with are two or more languages, or simply dialects of the same language, one must first consider the socio-political factors, though of course one should also take the structure of the language into consideration. In most situations the outcome of the two investigations will be the same, though in some situations the two outcomes will be different. (1981:3)

In determining the status of a language, just what standard are we to use? In view of the present situation in China, giving priority to socio-political factors definitely will not work. But to only emphasize structure and ignore socio-political factors can also easily lead to mistakes. In practice we should dialectically combine the two.

From many years experience doing language recognition work in China, I would like to propose the following principles to act as reference standards:

a. Language is a characteristic of a nationality, but it is not the only one. In determining the nationality of a people, language is one factor to take into consideration, but determining that what is spoken is an independent language does not necessarily mean that that group of people is an independent nationality. You must take other factors into account, particularly the wishes of the people themselves. Just the same, even if a nationality loses its native language and adopts the language of another nationality, under certain historical conditions it can still be considered a separate nationality, as is the case with the Hui and the Manchu peoples. To put it simply, we admit that nationality and language are closely related, but we definitely do not equate the two. Under this principle, it is possible both for a nationality to be divided into groups speaking two or more different languages, and for a nationality to lose its language but retain its ethnic identity.

b. For a people to be recognized as an independent nationality, all that is needed is for that nationality to use its own language; even if that language seems very close to some other nationality's language, it generally would not

be considered just a dialect of that other language, but would be considered an independent language. For example, the language of the Buyi people is relatively close to that of the Zhuang people, yet in the 1950's it was determined that the Buyi were a separate nationality, so we do not consider Buyi to be just a dialect of Zhuang. Another example is the Cuona Menba (Monba) people of Tibet. They speak a language relatively similar to Tibetan, but the differences between Menba and Tibetan are greater than those among the three major Tibetan dialects, so we do not consider Menba to be a dialect of Tibetan.

c. In situations where a certain nationality uses more than two languages and one of those languages is the same or very similar to that used by another nationality, we use the name of that other language rather than the name of the nationality we are dealing with. An example is the Tibetans of Heishui County of the Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, about 40,000 of whom speak a language which is the same as that of the Qiang people of Maowen Qiang Autonomous County. We do not call the language used by these Tibetans 'Tibetan'; we call it 'Qiang'. Another example is the Tibetans of Muli Tibetan Autonomous County and Yanyuan County in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan. They use a language that is the same as that of the Pumi people of Yunnan, and so we call their language 'Pumi'. Following the same principle, we call the language used by the Nu people of Gongshan Dulong-Nu Autonomous County 'Dulong', and we call the language used by the Miao people of the Li-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hainan Island 'Yao'.

d. In China, within the different language stocks, families, branches and languages we find great disparity in the extent of the differences between dialects. For example, the differences within the Altaic stock are smaller than those in Sino-Tibetan, the differences between Yi dialects are much greater than those between the different languages within the Mongolic and Manchu-Tungusic families. The different families within one stock will also vary greatly in this regard. The differences within the Zhuang-Dong family of Sino-Tibetan are smaller than those within the Tibeto-Burman family. Because of this, in doing language recognition work, it is not possible, and it is not necessary, to establish one standard for all languages on the basis of the structure of the languages. Our standards should be relative to the facts of the individual stocks, families, or branches.

While doing fieldwork in recent years, whenever I have happened upon a new language which needed to be recognized as independent, the following were particularly important considerations:

a. Do the people using this language have a unique name? For example, of the two languages used by the Deng people, the autonym (the name the people use themselves) of one is *Geman* ('Kaman'), the autonym of

the other is *Darang* ('Taraon'). The Nu people use three different languages, one called *Nusu*, one called *Rouruo*, and the third called *Anong*. Aside from this it is important to pay attention to the meaning and etymology of the autonyms to see if they are related. For example, the people who use the Ersu language have three autonyms: *Ersu*, *Tosu*, and *Lizu*. All three of these mean 'White People', have the same etymology, and correspond regularly, so they are simply different dialect pronunciations for the same autonym.

b. Aside from having different autonyms, do the people using this language have any other unique characteristics? What are the social and historical factors that led to the linguistic differences? It is necessary to analyze how much and for how long these factors have influenced the development of the language, and what the direction of that development has been.

c. Are the geographic borders of the language clear? Generally speaking, aside from dialect islands (or language islands), the borders of languages are clear while those of dialects are not. That is, if you compare the most representative locations of the different dialects of a language you will find clear differences, but in areas where the two dialects overlap the distinction between the dialects will not be that clear. The geographic boundaries will be jigsaw-like or fuzzy, and the characteristics of the two dialects will vary somewhat from their respective standards.

d. Does the nationality in question feel that the surrounding forms of speech are the same language or different languages? Generally if they feel they are the same then they are dialects, if they feel they are different, then they are languages. This sounds very imprecise, as sometimes dialects of the same language are not mutually comprehensible. But this has nothing to do with mutual comprehensibility; it is simply a question of whether another form of speech is or is not regarded as the same language. When people speaking different dialects of the same language get together, it frequently happens that they will not understand each other for a time, but after a while they find that their two forms of speech have more in common than not. The people within a nationality are very sensitive to this feeling of identity. In the summer of 1981, I held two roundtable discussions at the Party School in the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan. Those who participated in the discussions were Tibetan cadres of every administrative level. Though they had never studied linguistics, they were very clear about what was a language and what was a dialect. They refer to the Kham dialect of Tibetan as the 'official language' and refer to the Amdo dialect as 'herder's talk', though they feel these are both Tibetan. On the other hand, they feel Guiqiong, Muya, Ergong, Zhaba, and rGyarong are independent languages completely different from Tibetan. After the meeting I did detailed investigations, analyses and comparisons of the

structures of these languages, and the result of my investigations was the same as that of the roundtable discussions.

e. It is necessary to analyze and compare the structures of neighboring languages of the same stock, family and branch to determine the differences among them. From these differences we can establish the levels of classification which allow us to determine whether the form of speech under investigation is an independent language or not. As a practical test, we look at the form of speech in the context of its own family and branch and, taking the language with the greatest differences among its dialects as a standard, we try to determine whether this particular form of speech exceeds this standard in differing from others in terms of structure and basic vocabulary. If so, then that form of speech can be considered an independent language.

For example, in doing lexical comparisons in Tibeto-Burman, we usually select 2000 commonly used basic vocabulary items for comparison, ignoring obvious loans. The result is as follows:

(1) Among different branches within the same family, cognates are generally in the 10-20% range. That is, out of the 2000 lexical items, we usually can find 200-400 items that are cognate.

(2) Among different languages within the same branch, cognates are generally in the 15-30% range. That is, we can generally find 300-600 items that are cognate.

(3) Among different dialects of the same language, cognates are generally in the 50-80% range. A few languages have dialects that differ greatly in this regard, having less than 50% cognate lexical items, and there are even some having less than 40%.

In this way we establish a standard for distinguishing between languages and dialects within Tibeto-Burman, by using percentages of cognate lexical items. With this standard, the dividing line between language and dialect is a percentage of cognate items more than 30% and less than 50%. A form of speech falling within this range could be either an independent language or a dialect of another language; other factors would have to be taken into account to decide which it is.

Yet there are people who feel this type of comparison is arbitrary. They maintain that since there are differences in terms of the person doing the investigation, the selection of the items to be compared, and in levels of awareness of loans in the language, the results of the comparison cannot be very accurate. It goes without saying that anyone doing lexical comparisons must be very familiar with the phonetic development of each language in order to be able to recognize cognate forms on the basis of regular correspondences, even though they may differ greatly in their phonetic shape. In doing the comparisons, we need as much as possible to adhere to our standard, keeping the content and number of items compared the same,

and minimizing the influence of human factors. Only in this way will the results of the comparison have scientific value.

The most difficult problem in doing comparative work is distinguishing between cognates and loanwords. Generally what is required for distinguishing cognates in doing genetic classification is different from what is required for distinguishing cognates in doing language recognition work, but in terms of eliminating loanwords they are the same. For example, the main reason it is hard to distinguish clearly between rGyarong and Tibetan is that rGyarong has borrowed a large proportion of its vocabulary from Tibetan. Actually, these loanwords are relatively easy to spot, as they are mostly cultural or religious terms, their phonetic structure is more like that of Tibetan than rGyarong, and their ability to participate in compounding is limited. We also find that geography also matters, in that the areas that border on Tibetan areas have more Tibetan loanwords, while those bordering the Han areas have fewer Tibetan loanwords. In terms of word class, most of the loanwords are nouns; there are relatively few loanwords that are verbs, adjectives, pronouns, or numerals. If we exclude all of these loanwords, then the percentage of cognates between Tibetan and rGyarong cannot possibly exceed 20%, much lower than the 70% or more of cognates we find among Tibetan dialects.

Grammar is also a relatively important consideration in doing language recognition work. Within Tibeto-Burman, languages often differ greatly in terms of grammar: some languages differ in word order, some in word classes, some in whether or not they show evidence of particular grammatical categories, and some in terms of the particular form that morphological coding takes, such as having a rich morphological system or not, having grammatically significant prefixes or suffixes, or just suffixes and no prefixes. In terms of the form the marking of a particular grammatical category takes, we find differences in the expression of grammatical categories, or in the type or use of particles, or in the grammatical meaning expressed by a particular form. These are all commonly found among the languages and dialects of Tibeto-Burman.

The extent of the differences in grammar reflect different layers of historical development. These layers cannot be used in the same way as the types and percentages of lexical items to distinguish branch, language and dialect; yet from our comparative analysis of the grammar of Tibeto-Burman languages, we have been able to establish a rough-and-ready yardstick to use in assessing the extent of grammatical difference among different branches, different languages, and different dialects. Generally speaking, when we compare two forms of speech and find great differences in word order, in word classes, in marking a major grammatical category or not, or in the type of marking of a grammatical category, then we will consider these two forms of speech to be languages belonging to two different branches. When we

find two forms of speech with great differences in the marking of grammatical meaning, in marking a minor grammatical category or not, or in the type or use of particles, then we will consider these two forms of speech to be different languages within the same branch. Furthermore, whether the particles, affixes, and measure words are cognate or not is also an important criterion in determining whether two forms of speech are independent languages or dialects of the same language. In most cases, if the grammatical forms are cognate, then the two forms of speech are considered dialects of the same language; if they are not cognate, then the two forms of speech are considered different languages.

Still taking rGyarong as an example, some people say it is a dialect of Tibetan, but the word order of rGyarong is different from that of Tibetan; the major grammatical categories in each language are different; the phonetic forms marking grammatical categories are very different, with rGyarong using a large number of prefixes, suffixes and infixes to mark the various grammatical categories; and the type and use of grammatical particles are very different. In sum, rGyarong is clearly different from Tibetan lexically and grammatically, so much so that not only are the differences greater than those among the Tibetan dialects, they are also greater than among the other languages of the Bodish (Tibetan) branch of Tibeto-Burman. According to the comparative data, we not only do not consider rGyarong to be a dialect of Tibetan, we have even placed it in a different branch of the family (the Qiangic branch).

The total system of a language comprises its vocabulary, phonology, and grammar. Of course there will be times when the development of the different components of this system will be uneven, but when we are determining the status of a form of speech as a language or a dialect, we have to take the entire system into account. In this way the recognition of most languages will be unproblematic. Those few whose characteristics are not clear will require more investigation; it would not be good for us to jump to hasty conclusions. For example, to determine the status of the three languages used by the Nu people, I worked from 1960 on, constantly collecting data, making three fieldtrips to the Nu areas, and doing a great deal of analysis and comparison before I was able to come to even a preliminary conclusion.

In recognizing a new language in China, we need to use different criteria according to the stock, family, or branch to which the language belongs. We need to base our work on the facts of the language and the extent, type and form of the differences among the languages and dialects of that family. Only in this way will our results conform to reality.

In setting standards for language recognition work, we can achieve correct results only by starting out from the reality of the situation in China, not from some general theory. This might be seen as establishing a type of

sociolinguistics with Chinese characteristics. Here I have simply presented the problems in hopes of stimulating further discussion that will promote the progress of language recognition work and evaluate the preliminary results so far attained.

APPENDIX

The Languages of China and their Genetic Relationships

1. Sino-Tibetan
A. Chinese
B. Zhuang-Dong (Kam-Tai)
  a. Zhuang-Dai branch: Zhuang, Dai, Buyi, Lingao
  b. Dong-Sui branch: Dong, Sui, Maonan, Lajia (Lakkia), Mulam, Yanghuang, Mo, Jin
  c. Li (Hlai) branch: Li, Cun
  d. Ge-Yang branch: Gelao, Pubiao, Buyang, Laji, Yerong
C. Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien)
  a. Miao branch: Miao, Bunu, She
  b. Yao branch: Mian
D. Tibeto-Burman
  a. Tibetan branch: Tibetan, Cuona Menba, Cangluo Menba, Baima
  b. Yi branch: Yi, Lisu, Hani, Lahu, Naxi, Jinuo, Bai, Tujia, Rouruo, Nusu, Gazhuo, Mbisu, Sangkong, Me'ang
  c. Qiang branch: Qiang, Pumi, rGyarong (Jiarong), Ersu, Muya, Ergong, Guiqiong, Zhaba, Namuyi, Shixing, Queyu dialect
  d. Jingpo branch: Jingpo, Derung (Trung), Keman, Darang, Yidu, Bokar (Bengni), Sulong, Anong
  e. Burmese branch: Achang, Zaiwa

2. Altaic
A. Turkish
  a. Western Xiong branch: Uighur, Kazak, Uzbek, Salar, Tatar
  b. Eastern Xiong branch: Kirgiz, Western Yugur, Tuwa, Tu'erke
B. Mongolic branch: Mongolian, Daur, Dong Xiang, Bao'an, Tu, Eastern Yugur
C. Manchurian-Tungusic
  a. Manchurian branch: Manchurian, Xibe, Hezhen
  b. Tungusic branch: Oroqen, Ewenki
D. Undetermined: Korean

3. ***Austronesian***
    A.   The Austronesian languages of Taiwan
        a.   Paiwanic branch: Paiwan, Ameisi, Bunan, Rukai, Binan, Shao, Sasite
        b.   Atayalic branch: Atayal, Saide
        c.   Tsouic branch: Tsou, Sha'alua, Kanakanavu
        d.   Amei branch: Amei
        e.   Zhan branch: Huihui

4. ***Austroasiatic***
    A.   Mon-Khmer
        Wa-De'ang branch: Wa, Blang, De'ang Kemu, Kongge, Lailai

5. ***Indo-European***
    A. Slavic
        Eastern Slavic branch: Russian
    B. Iranian
        Pamir branch: Tajik

6. ***Undetermined***
    Gin, Ainu, Wutun, Mang, Laoman, Ke'erkezi

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