

(DE)CLASSIFYING ARUNCHAL LANGUAGES: RECONSIDERING THE EVIDENCE



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ACRONYMS AND CONVENTIONS

#	quasi-reconstruction
*	regular reconstruction
AD	Anno Domini
BC	Before Christ
BP	Before present
C	consonant
C ₁	first consonant
IPA	International Phonetic Association
Kya	‘000 years ago
N	nasal
V	vowel

The preceding remarks will have shown there is considerable difference between the North Assam dialects...The home of the North Assam tribes may be considered a kind of backwater. The eddies of the various waves of Tibeto-Burman immigration have swept over it and left their stamp on its dialects.

Konow in Grierson (1909:572)

1. Introduction

Exactly what Sten Konow thought about the classification of the languages of 'North Assam', which largely corresponds to the modern-day state of Arunachal Pradesh, may never be clear. However, it is apparent that he did not consider the name to refer to a genetic grouping, but rather used it as a geographical term, lumping together extremely different languages for organisational purposes. Certainly, the phonology and morphology of Arunachali languages looks superficially like Tibeto-Burman, which explains their placing in the Linguistic Survey of India. Unfortunately, this is rather where matters have remained; Konow's geographical grouping is repeated in one form or another in successive overviews of the phylum without any compelling re-examination of the evidence (e.g. Shafer 1966-67; Van Driem 2001; Bradley 2002; Matisoff 2003; Thurgood & LaPolla 2003).

Repeating something does not make it true, no matter the eminence of the authors who engage in the repetition. Moreover, another factor comes into play, an intellectual tradition which seeks to include all languages in one phylum or another. Asia is generally considered to be the home of grand phyla, with only Kusunda and Nahali constituting exceptions (Blench 2008). As a result, evidence which would be considered not even remotely adequate in other regions of the world is accepted without question. Contact linguistics has transformed our understanding of the possibilities of language interaction in other regions of the world. In particular, the results of the meeting of Austronesian and Papuan languages have shown that languages may hybridise to such an extent that disentangling their genetic affiliation can remain disputed over long periods (cf. for example, the long-running debate over the Reefs/Santa Cruz languages in Blust 2009). These perceptions have so far to make much of an impact on the world of Sino-Tibetan scholarship. Take for example the following statement in Handel (2008: xx).

[Ruoruo example]

The implication is that by discerning a few words with likely Sino-Tibetan cognates a language can effectively be classified. This method, if it is one, will be discussed at more length in §3.

The purpose of this paper is to take issue with this approach through a re-examination of the problematic languages of Arunachal Pradesh. It proposes we should take seriously the underlying presumption probably implied in Konow's statement, that these languages may not be Sino-Tibetan but simply have been influenced by it; that they are language isolates. Moreover, it will suggest that even where languages probably are correctly classified as Sino-Tibetan, we can in part attribute their divergent characteristics to substrates or contact with language isolates now vanished or submerged.

2. Data sources

It needs to be admitted that much of the data for these languages does not meet modern standards of documentation. Apart from the recension of sources in Konow, Van Driem (2001) also reviews the earlier material. While some languages, like Aka (i.e. Hruso) drew the attention of various scholars, languages like Bugun or Meyor have remained totally unknown. Post (2007, 2009) has circulated a modern grammar and dictionary of Galo, a Tani language, but unfortunately this example remains isolated. Otherwise the main recent sources are the 'Language Guides' published by the Research Directorate of the Arunachal Pradesh government in Itanagar. These can be supplemented by a few related publications by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, which are in the same descriptive tradition. A relevant bibliography of these is included in the references. The function of these books is rather opaque; they are part phrase books, part ethnographic guide and part linguistic description. It is not easy to imagine why one would go to one of the most inaccessible mountainous regions of the world and want to say 'the elephant is the strongest of all animals' (Simon 1976; Hill Miri). The main problems with these publications are as follows;

- a) they tend to use only the five cardinal vowels
- b) vowel length is not marked
- c) tone is sometimes referred to, but almost never marked
- d) vowel nasalisation and final velar nasal are not consistently distinguished
- e) any of the more exotic IPA symbols are seemingly unknown to most of the authors, despite their importance for the phonology of many languages
- f) they tend to take a “outside-in” approach, eliciting sentences which may make sense in the author’s cultural context, rather than recording sentences or texts which reflect the real day-to-day concerns of native speakers

A source for some otherwise unknown languages is Abraham et al. (2005) which provides the data according to a wordlist arranged for lexicostatistic coding. This makes data extraction difficult, but for languages such as the elusive Koro (previously listed as a variety of Aka, but clearly not) this is essential. Unfortunately the wordlist omits key lexemes, in favour of useless items such as ‘cauliflower’ and ‘candle’. Fieldwork in November and December 2011 has made it possible to improve both the transcription and lexical database for many languages in Western Arunachal Pradesh as well as critically remapping many languages.

Despite the critical tone here, the wordlists in most sources are quite substantial and it is usually possible to isolate key morphemes and determine basic sentence structure from the grammar sketch. As a consequence, it is reasonable to say that we should have enough information to classify these languages, or possibly declassify them in the sense of excluding them provisionally from Sino-Tibetan.

3. Excursus on method

Sino-Tibetan has a curious status as a phylum, long identified by a small set of widespread common lexical items, it has rarely been subject to proof of its genetic unity. Indeed, the lack of morphology in many branches is problematic, since the similarity of some lexemes to those in other phyla, notably Daic [Tai-Kadai] and Hmong-Mien, has been responsible for a long history of discarded macrophyla proposals (for discussion of these see Van Driem 2008). Leaving aside Sino-Austronesian and Sino-Caucasian, the membership is assumed to be broadly as characterised in Bradley (2002). Recent years have seen the publication of low-level reconstructions (e.g. Sun 1993; Mortensen 2003; VanBik 2007; Wood 2008; Button 2009) which is useful, but a long way from the goal of demonstrating the unity of the phylum. Even a rather fundamental issue, the position of Sinitic, has yet to be resolved in any meaningful way.

There is no unambiguous method for determining the genetic affiliation of a language, but it can be said that the presence of a few lookalikes would not be considered proof in most regions of the world. Almost any area of the lexicon is subject to borrowing, and if it is the case that many of the inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh were largely foragers prior to the expansion of Sino-Tibetan (Blench & Post in press) then the borrowing of even basic items such as lower numerals cannot be excluded. The principle adopted here is that unless the list of cognates with Common Tibeto-Burman (CTB) is reasonably extensive, and there is some evidence of regular correspondences, there is no reason to consider a specific language other than an isolate with borrowings.¹

Even where membership of Sino-Tibetan is credible there can still be evidence for substrates of an unknown affiliation. For example, the Tani languages are usually considered to pass the test of membership in terms of numbers of cognates and at least some regularity of correspondences. Nonetheless, they incorporate significant amounts of divergent vocabulary whose source is unknown.² Indeed, the Milang language, which

¹ In essence, this approach shifts the “null hypothesis” from the present *de facto* of Tibeto-Burman affiliation, unless demonstrated otherwise, to one of *no* affiliation, unless demonstrated.

² Or as Sun (1993:173) once wrote, “beyond the most fundamental core vocabulary, the peculiarity of the Tani lexicon becomes painfully apparent, making it extremely difficult to track down reliable extra-Tani cognates of the PT roots proposed [here]. This means that exhaustively tracing the PT initial and rhyme distinctions back to plausible PTB sources is presently quite impossible.”

is usually considered Tani on the basis of a large number of cognates, may well either have a substrate of a quite different character or have borrowed intensively from such a language (Modi and Post in press; also see §7.).

The core data for this paper is the comparative wordlist given in the Appendix. It tabulates the lexemes for a variety of basic terms in Arunachali languages (excluding the regions bordering Burma) and aligns them with the most common Tibeto-Burman form quoted from Matisoff (2003). Apparent cognates with Common Tibeto-Burman are coded in yellow, while other more local cognate sets are assigned other colours. This provides a convenient rapid visual impression of both the correspondences with Sino-Tibetan and the relationships between individual languages.

4. Kamengic (Bugun-Mey)

Bugun and Mey [=Sherdukpen] are languages spoken in West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. The Bugun, also known as Khowa, numbered 800 in 1981, living in some ten villages, but current estimates put them at around 1700 speakers³. The Bugun language has been barely documented. The only published source is the orthographic Dondrup (1990) which should be used with care; some phonetically transcribed data appears in the Appendix to Abraham et al. (2005) and Madhumita Barbora of Tezpur University has recorded a wordlist and sample sentences as part of an unpublished study of the phonology. Data for this paper was recorded from Martin Glo in Tenga in January 2011.

The Mey, who live west of the Bugun, are in the valley of the Tengapani river south of Bomdila. The name Sherdukpen is a construct, from the settlements of Shergaon and 'Tukpen', the Monpa name for Rupa. The correct name for Sherdukpen is *Mey* and their language is *Mey nyuk*. The main published source is Dondrup (1988) which is based on the Shergaon dialect and is of variable reliability⁴. So far unrecorded is the dialect of Rupa, which is surprisingly different from Shergaon; field materials are given in Table 1⁵. Abraham et al. (2005) also include some material on Sartang, a language spoken in Nafra and Dirang circles in West Kameng District. The Sartang were previously called 'But Monpa', but there was been a consensus to change the name, although this is not yet officially accepted. Dondrup (2010) describes the 'Boot Monpa' language, his version of Sartang. There was a recorded population of 348 in 1981, but this was probably an underestimate. The Sartang live in four central villages and numerous associated hamlets, so there must be at least 2000 speakers.

Two more languages falling under the general rubric of 'Monpa' are Chug and Lish. The Chug are found only in Chug village, a few miles from Dirang, and had a population of 483 in 1971. The Lish live in the village of that name and in Gompatse, and there were 1567 people recorded in 1981. Dutta (2007) includes a brief comparative wordlist of Lish and Tawang Monpa in his monograph on Central Monpa, notes its differentiation from both, but makes no comment on its possible affiliation. Fresh field data collected in November 2011 make it clear that Chug, Lish and Gompatse all speak essentially the same language. Surprisingly, the Lish deny any connection with the Mey of Rupa and Shergaon.

The text of Abraham et al. (2005) treats Sartang, Chug and Lish as separate languages, and as a consequence they are assigned three-letter codes in the 2009 Ethnologue, and thus have probably gained ISO status. This is not supported by the comparative wordlist in Table 1, which shows that, allowing for variations in transcription, Chug and Lish are hardly even dialects of one another. Surprisingly, Rupa is quite distinct from the language of Shergaon. The Sartang forms given below are based on newly transcribed field data⁶.

³ Bugun may be the only language in this region to have contributed a loanword into English. The Bugun *liocichla* (*Liocichla bugunorum*) is an endemic bird species first described in 2006.

⁴ Fresh material on Mey of Shergaon was collected in Shergaon in November 2011 with help from Dr. Dorje Karma and the elders of Shergaon.

⁵ Roger Blench would like to thank Dr. Dorje Karma of the State Veterinary Service for both hospitality and extensive help with fieldwork on Mey of Rupa in January 2011.

⁶ Roger Blench would like to thank the Gaonbura of Rahung, xx, for recording a wordlist of Sartang on January 18th, 2011.

Table 1. Comparison of Mey cluster languages with Tawang Monpa and CTB

Gloss	CTB	Tawang	Chug	Lish	Sartang	Rupa	Shergaon
One	*g-t(y)ik	thi	hin	hin	han	han	han
Two	*g-ni-s	ne ⁱ	nif	nes	nif	nik	nit
Three	*g-sum	sum	om	ʔum	um	uŋ	uŋ
Four	*b-ləy	bli	psi	p ^h əhi	pʃi	bsi	phsi
Five	*b-ŋa	leŋa	k ^h a	k ^h a	k ^h u	k ^h u	k ^h u
Six	*d-ruk	gro	ʃyk	ʃ ^h uʔ	ʃy	kit	ʃuk
Seven	*s-nis	ŋis	his	ʃis	siʔ	sit	sit
Eight	*b-r-gyat	get	sargeʔ	sargeʔ	sardʒe	sardʒat	sargyat
Nine	*d-gəw	dūgu	ʃ ^h ik ^h u	ʃ ^h ik ^h u	t ^h ek ^h e	d ^h ik ^h i	t ^h ik ^h i
Ten	*gip	ʃi ^h	ʃan	ʃan	sou	sō	sō
Head	*d-bu-s	got	k ^h loʔ	k ^h oloʔ	k ^h ruʔ	k ^h ruk	k ^h ruk
Nose	*na, *naar	na ^h	heŋp ^h oŋ	hempoŋ	ap ^h uŋ	nəfuŋ	nup ^h uŋ
Eye	*mik	melon	k ^h um	k ^h umu	k ^h aʔby	kivi	khibi
Mouth	*mka	k ^h a	k ^h oʃu	hoʃok	ʃ ^h o	nəʃaw	niʃaw
Ear	*r-na	neləp	k ^h ut ^h uŋ	k ^h ut ^h uŋ	k ^h ət ^h yŋ	gt ^h iŋ	k ^h ut ^h uŋ
Tongue	*s-l(y)a	leḥ	lo ⁱ	lo ⁱ	le	lapon	laphō
Tooth	*swa	wah	hintuŋ	ʃiŋtuŋ	nit ^h iŋ	tokʃe	nuthuŋ
Arm	*g-lak	lah	hut	hu	ik	ik	ik
Leg	*kaŋ	lemi	la ⁱ	le ⁱ	le	la	la
Stomach	*grwat	kepa	hiliŋ	hiŋiŋ	fəriŋ	sliŋ	siriŋ
Bone	*rus	roʃba	ʃukuf	ʃukuf	skiʔ	skik	skit
Blood	*s-hywey	k ^h ra	ho ⁱ	ho ⁱ	he	ha	ha
Sun	*nəy	plaŋ	nami	nami	nimiʔ	nini	nini
Moon	*s-la	lei	atnamba	namba	namluʔ	namblu	namblu
Star	*s-kar	karma	karma	karma	ʃyɖʒy	zik	ʃuzuk
Man	*r-min	miḥ	pədəŋ	būɖūn	ɖiriŋ	ʃirin	ɖuhu
Woman	*mow	əmah	d ^h udma	esma	ɖy ^h my k ^h re	ɖimi	ɖimi
Dog	*k ^w əy	k ^h i	wat ^h i	wat ^h i	pet ^h e	bt ^h a	p ^h it ^h a
Pig	*pwak	p ^h a	ʃ ⁱ abaʔ	ʃaba	swaʔ	swok	swag
Tiger	*k-la	ʃən	lapʃa	p ^h uyam	p ^h uŋ	p ^h uŋ	phō
Water	*ti(y)	ʃi	k ^h u	k ^h a ^u	k ^h ow	k ^h o	k ^h o
Fire	*mey	meḥ	be ⁱ	be ⁱ	be	ba	ba
Tree	*siŋ, *sik	ʃyaŋ	ʃiŋ	hiŋ	hiŋ	siŋtiŋ	hiŋ t ^h uŋ
Leaf	*r-pak	paləp	ulaʔ	ulap	arap	alap	alap
Name	*miŋ	meŋ	biŋ	biŋ	aɖʒen		
Eat	*dzya	sasuḥ	ʃ ^h a	ʃa	he	ʃu ^h va, ku ^h va	ʃu ^h va, ku ^h va

The Ethnologue (2009) says the following; ‘The Lish, But, and Chug dialects [of Monpa] differ from the others, resembling Aka, Miji, and Sherdukpen languages’. Accordingly it classifies these languages with Eastern Kiranti [!]. Even accepting this dubious classification of Monpa, which looks distinctly Bodish, the concept of specific languages ‘resembling’ such a mixed grab-bag is unlikely. It can be clearly stated that faulty methodology and the confusion of ethnic and clan classifications have allowed the manufacture of non-existent languages. Shergaon, Rupa, Sartang, Chug and Lish form a single close dialect complex which has no discernible relation to Kiranti or Monpa.

On the broader question of whether Bugun and the Mey cluster are related to one another, Van Driem (2001:473) refers to unpublished and unavailable work by Roland Ruttger suggesting this and names the resultant grouping ‘Kho-Bwa’. Table 2 shows some cognates apparent from the short wordlist in the appendix and a more in-depth search would be likely to uncover great numbers. Where there is a plausible, if not certain relationship with CTB, I have marked this in the second column. Bugun people are often able to speak Sherdukpen as a language of intercommunication. It is conceivable this might account for some similarities but is unlikely to have resulted in this type of replacement of basic lexicon.

Table 2. Bugun-Mey cognates

Gloss	CTB	Bugun	Shergaon
Two	+	ɲeŋ	ɲit
Three	+	im	uŋ
Five		kua	k ^h u
Nine	+	dige	t ^h ik ^h i
Ten		suŋwa	sō
Head		k ^h ruk	k ^h ruk
Nose		ep ^h uŋ	nup ^h uŋ
Mouth		ɟyam	niɟaw
Ear		ek ^h ɔ̃	k ^h ut ^h uŋ
Leg		loe	la
Child		ani	nunu
Pig	+	wak	swag
Water		k ^h o	k ^h o
Fire		boe	ba
Tree	+	hiŋmua	hiŋ t ^h uŋ
Leaf		arap	alap
Eat	+	ɟ ^h a	ɟ ^h uwa, kuwa

On the broader question of whether Bugun and the Sherdukpen complex are Sino-Tibetan, neither language shows many cognates with CTB and some of those are doubtful or possible loans, such as ‘pig’ and ‘iron’. The extremely low number of Tibeto-Burman cognates could just as easily be explained by borrowings as by genetic affiliation. Bugun-Sherdukpen is probably a small isolated phylum, awaiting further investigation. It is tentatively dubbed *Kamengic*, after the main river passing through the area, pending a more suitable reference name.

5. Puroik [=Sulung]

The Puroik language is spoken by a few thousand people in the inaccessible regions of East Kameng District and adjacent parts of Tibet. The ethnography of the Puroik is described in Stonor (1952) and Deuri (1982). Their basic subsistence system appears to be hunting and gathering with a significant dependence on the sago palm, rather as in Melanesia. All forms of agriculture appear to be recent innovations. However, the Puroik have fallen into a serf-like relationship with the Tani-speaking Nyishi, for whom they collect cane and labour on farms. Puroik were being officially liberated from slavery as late as 2001 (see appended documents in Remsangphuia 2008:102-102).

There are four major sources on the Puroik language, Tayeng (1990), Li (2004), Remsangphuia (2008) and Soja (2009). Although listed both as Tani and possibly Austroasiatic in the Ethnologue (2009), there is no evidence for this. Concerning the classification of Puroik, a footnote to Sun (1993: fn. 14) says;

‘Sulung is a newly discovered distinct Tibeto-Burman language showing remarkable similarities to Bugun, another obscure Tibeto-Burman language spoken to the west of the Sulung country.’

This is a considerable exaggeration, and later, reviewing the Chinese source, Sun (1992) assumes that Puroik is Sino-Tibetan, he is pessimistic about finding the evidence for cognates. The apparent evidence for Tibeto-Burman cognates may be a consequence of borrowing from Tibetic languages, since this is much less evident from the linguistic material collected in Arunachal Pradesh. Matisoff (2009) as an appendix to a paper on the persistence of Tibeto-Burman roots, compares Puroik materials from Li (2004) with his CTB roots and claims numerous cognates. Many of these require the eye of faith but it is notable that there are more than are evident in southern forms which often have quite different lexemes. Since the Tibetan Puroik apparently also speak Tibetan as a second language, this should make us suspicious at the least.

Interestingly, Puroik does have some similarities with Kamengic. Deuri (1982:1) quotes a tradition linking them with the ‘Khowas’, i.e. Bugun, whose country they are reputed to have left. Table 3 shows a preliminary table of lexical similarities, including Mey cognates;

Table 3. Puroik-Kamengic common lexemes

Gloss	Bugun	Puroik	Mey
Seven	milye	lye	sit
Eight	m̥la	la	sargyat
Leg	loe	lae	la
Stomach	lui	loye buk	siriŋ
Man	bp ^h ua	ap ^h u	d̥zuhu
Woman	bimi	am ^w i	d̥zimi

They do show a marked pattern, with Puroik lacking the prefixes seemingly exhibited by Bugun in specific semantic fields (numbers, persons).

The past of the Puroik as foragers, the distinctiveness of their language, and the low incidence of CTB roots suggests that it may best be considered a language isolate. However, there is clearly some past relationship with Bugun, which may be the result of contact. Alternatively, Puroik may possibly be related to Kamengic at a higher level.

6. Hruso

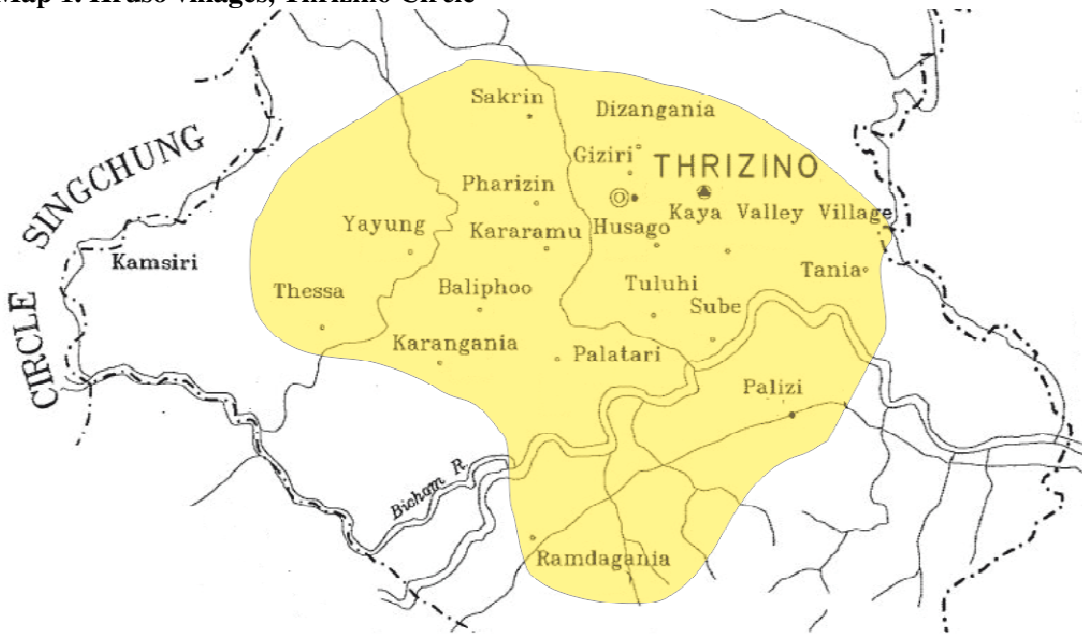
The Hruso [roso] (=Aka) language is spoken in Thrizino Circle, West Kameng and had 2947 speakers in the 1981 census. Map 1 shows the main Hruso villages identified in November 2011. Kamsiri village is also identified as Hruso but is actually inhabited by Puroik who have come under Hruso influence. Aka may be a term of Assamese origin, while Hruso appears to be an autonym and should thus be preferred. Ethnically, Hruso has been grouped with the Koro Aka of East Kameng, but linguistically with Miji (Shafer 1947). The divergent nature of Hruso has long been noted (e.g. in Grierson 1909) as has its complex fricative phonology. The only published argument concerning its affiliation to Tibeto-Burman is Shafer (1947) which is problematic because of its confusion between what Shafer calls ‘Hruso A’ and ‘Hruso B’. Hruso A is clearly Miji and Hruso B Hruso proper. Koro Aka is quite unrelated to either of these, as the Appendix Table shows; its affiliation is dealt with in §8. Recent published data is confined to Simon (1993) but new fieldwork in November 2011 has comprehensively improved the database and transcription of Hruso⁷. Sun (1993) mentions a language called Ləvai (=Bangru) spoken on the Tibetan border, which might be related to Hruso⁸. If so, these two languages would constitute Hrusish. However, recent fieldwork shows that there is also a previously undocumented Miji community in Sarli circle on the Tibetan border, and it seems more likely these can be identified with the elusive Bangru (cf. Map 4). Of all the languages considered here, Hruso has the fewest roots that can plausibly be related to Sino-Tibetan, and it is more credible to treat these as regional borrowing than evidence for genetic affiliation. Shafer’s arguments are fairly weak, and the relatively few similarities are just as plausibly borrowings⁹.

⁷ Roger Blench would like to thank Serwa and xx for being an enthusiastic and patient informants for Hruso

⁸ Anderson (2010) also mentions Ləvai, but this may only be a rehearsal of Sun’s statement.

⁹ However, there is a strong perception of ethnic unity between Hruso and Miji, to the extent that a joint dictionary project has been locally mooted, a chimæric project for two languages with approximately 5% common lexicon.

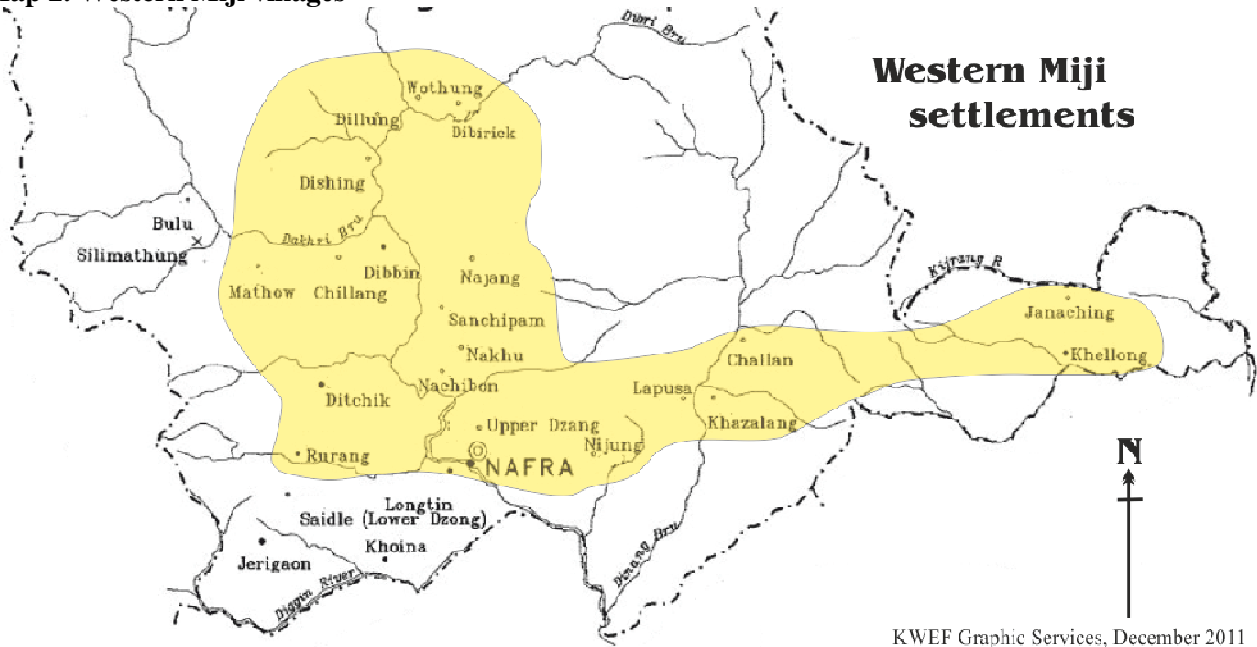
Map 1. Hruso villages, Thrizino Circle



7. Miji

The Miji language (also Sajolang, Dimai [=Dhimmai], not to be confused with Dhimal in Nepal) is one of the earliest Arunachalese languages to be recorded by an outsider (Hodgson 1847). Simon (n.d.) suggests that it is spoken in some thirteen villages around Nafra in West Kameng and the population was 3549 in the 1971 census. However, this is erroneous; there are three subgroups of Miji in distinct geographic areas, as shown in Map 2, Map 4 and Map 3.

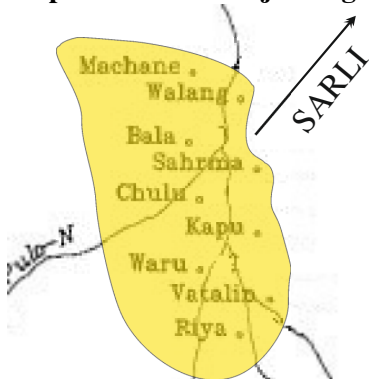
Map 2. Western Miji villages



As suggested above, the Northern Miji may be the same as the Bangru. No data on Northern Miji has yet been collected, but a dialect comparison of Eastern and Western Miji undertaken in November 2011 shows significant lexical and phonological differences¹⁰.

¹⁰ Thanks to Dorje Sanchuju and xx for recording their language for me in Nafra in November 2011 and to Mr. S. Gurung the District Assistant Commissioner, who kindly facilitated our work.

Map 4. Northern Miji villages



Its classification together with Aka seems to be ethnographic rather than linguistic and to arise from the confused argument in Shafer (1947) which treats them as ‘dialects’. Some comparisons in Shafer (1947) suggest that Miji shares common lexical items with Bodo-Garo, and rather less to wider Tibeto-Burman languages. Table 4 presents some proposals for

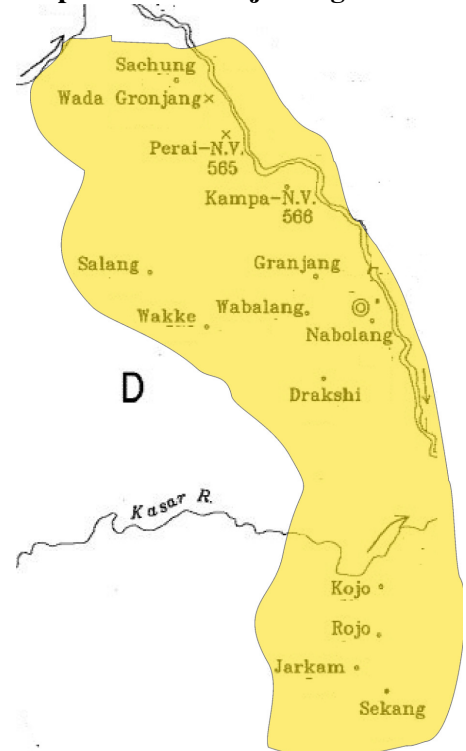
such items, based on recent sources;

Table 4. Lexemes shared between Miji and Bodo-Garo

Gloss	Miji	Garo
two	gni	gini
three	gə ^h ən	git tam
four	bli	bri
die	fī	fī (Deuri)
goat	p ^h rin	prun (Kokborok)
snake	nibiw	zi-buw (Boro)

Sources: Simon (n.d.), Burling (n.d.), Jacquesson (n.d.)

Map 3. Eastern Miji villages



The evidence for Aka and Miji having a distinctive relationship seems to be based on a very few similarities, for example the words for ‘sun’, ‘eight’ and ‘nine’, which appear to be exclusively shared. The great majority of basic vocabulary appears to be quite different. The conclusion must be that there is no Hrusish group, only Hruso itself, which is a language isolate. Both Koro and Miji are better situated elsewhere.

8. Siangic [Koro-Milang]

Koro is the language classified together with Hruso spoken in East Kameng District. Although claims were made for its ‘discovery’ in 2010, presumably as a consequence of financing by National Geographic, a grammar sketch of this language appears in Grewal (1997) and lexical data can be extracted from Abraham et al. (2005). Further lexical data was collected in December 2011¹¹. A brief comparison with Hruso quickly shows that the two have virtually nothing in common, as was also stated by Anderson (2010). However, strikingly, Koro does share a number of lexemes with Milang, a language far to the east in Siang District usually identified as Tani (Sun 1993:§3). Milang is characterised by both divergent lexicon and highly irregular correspondences with the rest of Tani (Modi 2008, Post and Modi in press). The hypothesis here is that Milang was either a non-Tani language that came under heavy and repeated Tani influence, or that it is a fundamentally Tani language which nevertheless retains a significant substrate from a non-Tani population. Milang is spoken a considerable distance from Koro, so shared lexicon is almost certainly not the result of contact. The proposal, to set out in detail in Post & Blench (2011), suggests there was once a chain of languages, tentatively named Siangic, stretching between West Kameng and the Siang river, whose presence can be detected both in Koro, in the substrate lexicon of Milang and in irregularities in other Tani languages now spoken in the intervening area. More radically, it may be that the restructuring of an original Tibeto-Burman language through contact with Siangic is responsible for the synchronic grammatical features of present-day Tani languages.

¹¹ Roger Blench would like to thank xx and yy for taking time to record a sample of Koro in Yangse village in November 2011.

9. Mishmi and Miju

The Mishmi consist of two closely related languages, Idu (Luoba in Chinese sources) and Taraon (=Digaru). This group has sometimes been known as Digarish, or alternatively grouped together with Miju as Midzuish, a denomination which may go back to Shafer (1955). The columns for Idu and Taraon in the Appendix Table should provide adequate confirmation that these languages are closely related. This group might be titled the Mishmic languages. However, whether Miju should be classified in the same group is much more debatable. The major feature it seems to share with Mishmi is the k- prefix on lower numerals, which is more extended in Miju than Mishmi. Otherwise, Miju seems to have nothing in common with Mishmi, except where they share a CTB root. Miju does have more Tibeto-Burman roots than some of the other languages considered here, so it is provisionally classified as an isolate within Sino-Tibetan.

10. Chaos over ‘Monpa’

One variety of Monpa is spoken in Tawang, the capital of Tawang District in northwestern Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India. Tawang is a major monastery in northern Arunachal Pradesh (Lama 1999) and Norbu (2008) is an anthropological description of the Tawang people. The first data on this language was published by Hodgson (1853) and is analysed in Shafer (1954) under the name ‘Dwags’. The only extended material on this language is Wangchu (2002) which follows the standard formula for this type of guide and consists mainly of ‘useful’ vocabulary and phrases. Hyslop and Tshering (2010) [henceforth H & T] present a much more linguistically sophisticated field report of ‘Dakpa’¹², based on material collected in the village of Lhou-Dung, some 20 km. southeast of Tawang. A wordlist of Tawang Monpa was recorded in Tawang in December 2011 through the kind offices of Dr. Micha Taiju, from Mr. xx. Mr. xx is from the village of Rho, Thingbu Circle, on the very eastern edge of where the language is spoken. Additional cultural vocabulary was recorded from the information slips attached to objects in the Museum at Tawang Monastery, through the kind offices of the curator.

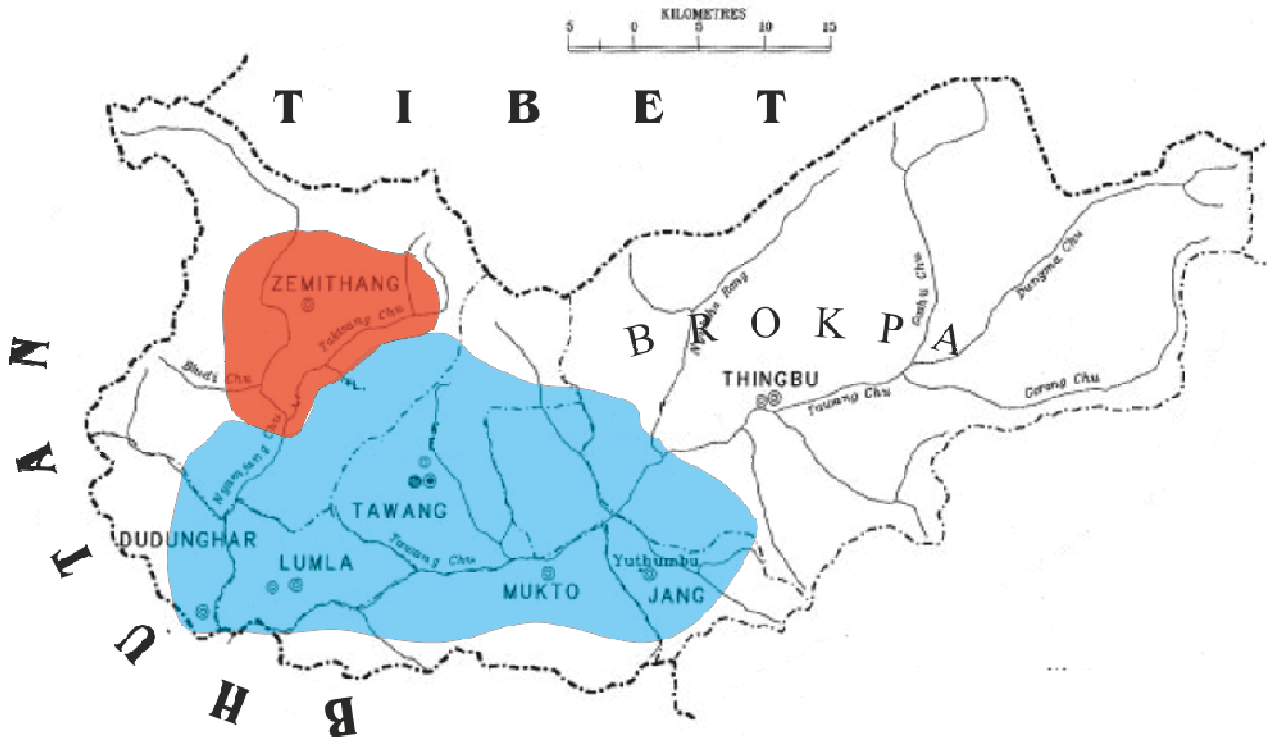
It appears that Monpa of Tawang resembles the Cuona (mTsho-sna) Monpa spoken in southeastern Tibet (Mama commune, Motuo), first reported in Sun et al. (1980) and then described by Nishida (1988). According to Van Driem (2007) the nearest relative of Dakpa is Dzala. Hyslop and Tshering (2010) discuss the further links to languages west of Tawang, including Chali, Bumthang and Mangde, which are said to constitute East Bodish.

Dasgupta (2007) reports the village of Jang, some 40 km southeast of Tawang speaking a distinctive variety of Monpa, but Jang is simply a dialect of Tawang with some slight lexical and phonological variation. The same appears to hold true for Lumla, but it may be the case that the language varies from village to village rather than having sharp dialect boundaries. However, the situation is different for Zemithang; all Tawang speakers report not being able to understand this language at all. It is assumed to still be part of East Bodish, but since no data is available, its present status is unclear. Map 5 shows the approximate extension of Tawang Monpa and Zemithang. The language of Mago-Thingbu is also not understood by Monpa speakers in Tawang, but is not considered to be Brokeh, so this may well be a type of Tibetan. However, this awaits further investigation.

Because of the prestige of Tawang monastery, the exonym ‘Monpa’ is taken as a high-status marker, hence many groups apply the term to themselves, despite speaking quite distinct languages. However, in Tawang itself, Monpa is severely threatened by the spread of Hindi as a daily language of intercommunication. Speakers in nearby villages such as Lhou are more likely to be able to produce an unmixed version of the language. However, Tibetan is the prestige language for Tawang speakers and public notices in Tawang are written in Tibetan. There has been no attempt to write Tawang in Tibetan script, to my knowledge.

¹² This name appears to be the Bhutanese term (Van Driem 2007), but I was unable to persuade my informants to recognise it.

Map 5. Tawang Monpa and Jang



An additional mystery is the ‘Memba’ recorded in Grewal (1997). As Dutta (2006) points out this is strongly at variance with the Memba recorded in other sources, although evidently Tibeto-Burman. Without further confirmation that this is a genuine speech form it is hard to know what to make of this information. However, it is flagged here in case it turns out that this is yet another unknown language.

11. What type of language is Meyor?

8. Where does Meyor [Zakhring] fit in?

The Meyor language, also known as Zakhring, is spoken in Lohit District, Walong and Kibithoo circles, Arunachal Pradesh (Landi 2005). In 2001 there were some 376 speakers scattered in fifteen villages. The approximate locations of these villages are shown in Map 6. The only published source on the language is Landi (2005) although

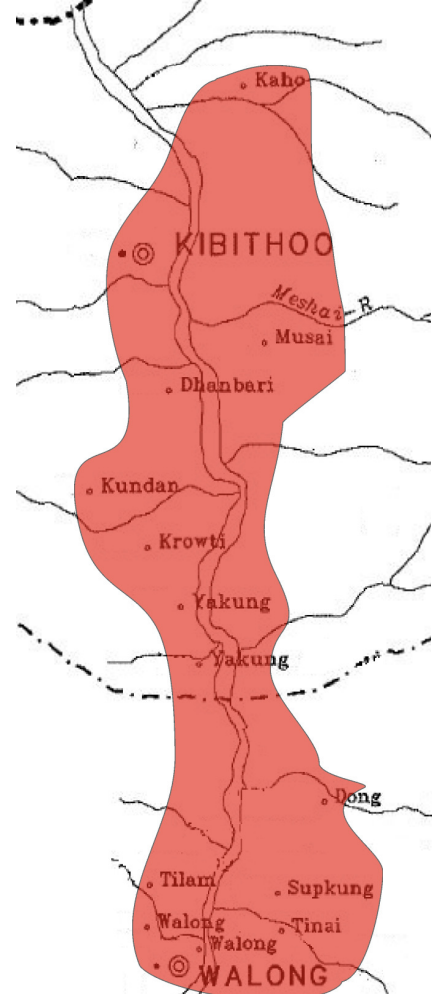
Jacquesson (2001) includes some data on pronouns. Meyor is most closely related to the Bodish languages spoken in Arunachal Pradesh, such as Memba and Monpa (represented in the Appendix Table by the Tawang dialect). These languages have a relatively high proportion of Tibeto-Burman roots, preserved in a constellation very close to the hypothetical proto-form. However, as Landi (2005: 164 ff.) notes, there are some surprising

similarities to Miju. Landi conflates similarities due to common CTB inheritance with genuine shared cognates, but nonetheless some useful observations can be extracted from his tables. Table 5 shows a sample of lexical items where Miju and Meyor appear to share a common root.

Table 5. Miju-Meyor common roots

Gloss	Meyor	Miju
arrow	lowat	roowat
ask	want	wat
bear	ʃam	ʃim
beer	si	si
bird	awa	oowa
blood	awi	iwi
claw	ʃan	ʃan
comb	sipiŋ	sipin
granary	keetam	katam
hair	sam	syam
honey	ʃam	ʃanti
lock	dimik	dzimik
melt	yulo	yu
mouse	aʃi	si
meat	ʃin	ʃin

Map 6. Meyor speaking villages



Landi also compares Meyor to Turung (Singpho), a Jingpho language spoken in this region, but his comparisons are all either only doubtfully cognate or are CTB and thus not convincing as evidence. Meyor looks as if it is underlyingly a Bodish-type language, and related to Memba and Tawang Monpa, but that at some point in its history has interacted with Miju and has borrowed some of its lexicon. There may well also be grammatical and morphological evidence for this process.

12. Synthesis

The emerging synthesis is quite strikingly at variance with the received classifications. The usual explanation for the low incidence of CTB vocabulary is erosion, the gradual loss of lexemes over time. But of course, it is not simply a matter of loss, it is a matter of *replacement*. What is striking here is that the presumably innovative forms - the diachronically *secondary* forms, according to the received view - are both (a) far greater in number than the attested CTB forms and (b) not (or not obviously) relatable to any other known language. The implications of this linguistic model for proto-historical reconstruction are extreme, and should be made plain: we are asked to believe that individual Tibeto-Burman language groups repeatedly encountered populations which so overwhelmed them that they adopted forms from these mystery languages on such a scale that the overwhelming majority of their lexicons were wholly replaced - and that these mystery languages subsequently died out, leaving only the previously marginal genetically Tibeto-Burman languages to reflect their past existence in the form of an overwhelmingly massive substrate. Why precisely this model is more persuasive than one in which it is rather a suite of non-Tibeto-Burman languages which, coming into contact with different Tibeto-Burman languages at various points in their

history, adopted a handful of Tibeto-Burman forms, remains to be demonstrated. The model adopted here, we feel, is more in tune with modern contact linguistics, assuming borrowing unless inheritance is demonstrated. Table 6 synthesises the new proposals presented here, omitting a detailed listing of Tani and Naga languages;

Table 6, New proposed classification of Arunachalese languages

Phylum	Branch	Language	ISO	Also
Sino-Tibetan	Jingpho	Turung	sgp	Singpho
Sino-Tibetan	East Bodish	Memba	mmc	
		Meyor	zkr	Zakhring including Senge, Jang
		Monpa of Tawang		
		Monpa of Zemithang		
		Brokeh		
		Monpa of Dirang, Murshing and Kalaktang	tsj	Sharchop, Tshangla
Sino-Tibetan	Tani	Numerous		Adi, Galo etc.
Sino-Tibetan	Tangsa	Numerous		Lunchang, Jugli, Moklum, Changlang, Wancho, Nocte
Siangic	Milang-Koro	Milang		Mala, Holon, Dalbən
		Koro		Koro Aka
Kamengic		Bugun	bgg	Howa
		Mey of Shergaon	sdp	Sherdukpen
		Mey of Rupa	sdp	Sherdukpen
		Sartang	onp	But Monpa
		Lish	bqh	forms a close dialect cluster with Chug
		Chug	cvg	forms a close dialect cluster with Lish
Mishmic		Idu	clk	Idu Mishmi
		Digaru	mhu	Taraon
Isolate		Miji	sjl	Sajalong, Dhimmai. Bangru ? northern dialect
Isolate		Puroik	suv	Sulung (pejor.)
Isolate		Miju	mxj	
Isolate	Hrusish	Hruso	hru	Aka

This represents a fairly radical departure from the conventional view of these languages. In another way, this is far from surprising. Arunachal Pradesh is highly dissected, remote and inaccessible and was bypassed by major East-West trade routes. That language isolates should have persisted here long after they were assimilated elsewhere in SE Asia, is quite credible. The challenge for the future will either be to build on these hypotheses or disprove them on the basis of improved evidence.

13. Conclusions

The impetus behind this paper is the re-examination of the evidence for a Tibeto-Burman affiliation proposed for the languages of Arunachal Pradesh, in the light of the practice of repeating the work of previous scholars without an evaluation of the actual data. The conclusion is that a number of languages or clusters could well be isolates, and that the Tibeto-Burman roots they do evince may well be borrowings. Obviously, each topic requires a full-length paper, and these will be undertaken in due course, especially if better-transcribed data becomes available. Meanwhile, provisionally we may well consider Konow's summary quoted in the epigraph to be a useful image. Arunachal Pradesh consists of a chain of isolated languages, which have been on the southern edge of the core Tibeto-Burman area. A plethora of different contact situations have allowed both lexical borrowing and sometimes striking grammatical and

phonological restructuring. But perhaps it would be useful to begin considering this region as more similar to the Amazon or NE Asia than Tibet.

In view of this, Arunachal Pradesh should be treated as a major priority on a global scale. Languages such as Basque and Burushaski have attracted high levels of scholarly interest over many decades precisely because of their status as language isolates. Those in Arunachal Pradesh have been completely bypassed. Moreover, although these languages are presently still spoken, their populations are small and pressure to switch to Hindi, promoted in both the media and via the school system, is growing. Probably by no coincidence, Arunachal Pradesh is also a major centre for biodiversity, something which attracts worldwide attention and resources. It is suggested that the little-known languages of Arunachal Pradesh should be given similar priority due to their uniqueness and endangered status.

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Appendix: Comparative wordlist for Arunachal Pradesh

Gloss	CTB	Koro	Mey	Bugun	Puroik	Hruso	Miji	Milang	Taraon	Idu	Miju	Dirang	Tawang	Memba	Meyor	Nah	PT
One	*g-(y)ik	e-ce	han	dʒio	hwi	ǎ	uŋ	a-kan	khiŋ	khege	kume	tʰur	tʰi	ʃik	ʃak	akin	kon ² ~
Two	*g-ni-s	ki-ne	nit	ŋeŋ	ŋi	ksi	gni	nə	kaiŋ	kapi	kinin	nitsiŋ	ne ¹	ŋi	ni	aŋi	ŋi ²
Three	*g-sum	kala	uŋ	im	heik	ðǎ	g ^t əŋ	ham	kasəŋ	kasə	ksam	sam	sum	sum	som	aum	fum ¹
Four	*b-ləy	ko-ple	phsi	vi	rei, wai	pǐ	bli	pə	kapray	kapri	kambran	bʃi	bli	ʃi ^h	dʒee	appi	pri ¹
Five	*b-ŋa	plē	k ^h u	kua	u	pom	buŋu	pa-ŋu	maŋa	maŋa	klin	ŋa	leŋa	ŋe	ŋa	aŋŋo	ŋo ¹
Six	*d-ruk	su-fi	ʃuk	rab	reik	ʒē	rē	sa-ap	tahro	tahro	katam	k ^h uŋ	gro	du	trok	akke	krə(ŋ) ¹
Seven	*s-nis	rō	sit	milye	lye	mɾə	mya	ra-ŋal	wē	iwi	nin	zum	ŋis	din	dun	kani	ka-nə ¹
Eight	*b-r-gyat	rā-la	sargyat	mīa	la	skzə	sige	ra-jəŋ	limm	ilu	grin	yen	get	gey	zat	pini	pri ¹ -ŋi ²
Nine	*d-gəw	gī-je ~	tʰik ^h i	dige	donge	stʰə	stʰəŋ	ka-ŋəm	kiŋəŋ	khiji	natmo	gu	dūgu	gu	kyowa	kV-naŋ	cam ¹ ~
Ten	*gip	fā-la ~	sō	suŋwa	ʃuat	ɾə	lin	haŋ-tak	aloŋ	huwu	kyapmo	se	ʃiŋ	ʃu thum	ʃu	əriŋ	~
Head	*d-bu-s	zu-pra		k ^h ruk	?	ek ^h yē	ūw, gū (E)	dum-po	kru pom	?	ku	faŋəŋ	got	go	aku		kon ² ~
Nose	*na, *naar	ke-pe	nup ^h uŋ	ep ^h uŋ	pok	us ^h ǎ	ŋi	ŋokun ~	haŋagam	enambo	mnuŋ	na uŋ	naŋ	nogun	na ^h	na ^h iŋ	ŋi ²
Eye	*mik	ŋi-ram	khibi	meyak	kak	əŋi	mre?	a-mik	blom	elombra	mik	rniŋ	meləŋ	mi	mik	nik	
Mouth	*mka	sapu	niʃaw	ʃyam	sæk	unzū	mugǎ		threndom	ekobe	ʃū	nowaŋ	k ^h a	k ^h a ^h	ʃiŋpay	gam	
Ear	*r-na	rā	k ^h ut ^h uŋ	ek ^h ǎ	?	ufū	mzə?	ra-ŋu	kruna	akonna	iŋ	ney	nelāp	namdʒo	ʃiŋ	ŋirun	
Tongue	*s-l(y)a	ta:lej	laphō	rhi	ruyi	əzlbɾa	dʒaksi	si-dal	theləŋna	elina	blay	le	leŋ	ʃoli	bro	ryu	
Tooth	*swa	fi	nuthuŋ	siŋen	kotuwaŋ	utu	t ^h u	sip-pa	lyā	tambro	sey	fa	waŋ	sow	ʃu	hiŋjuŋ	
Arm	*g-lak	lā	ik	wat	gəit	opɔɔ	p ^h aŋ	a-lak	aprih	akho	rawk	garaŋ	laŋ	lak	arak	lak	
Leg	*kaŋ	ni-bi	la	loe	lae	əʃi	lay? E.	a-byaa	grō	aŋgesa	pla	bi	lemi	k ^h aŋ	tepro	ləpa	
Stomach	*grwat	gay	siriŋ	lui	loye	əvəkhū	mɾō		yaŋ kawē	yapu	dak	p ^h oloŋ	kepa	dogo	p ^h uko	kipo	
Bone	*rus	nira	skit	ezeŋ	aɟzay	əxəbe	mriəŋ		reb buŋ	rombo	rak	k ^h aŋ	roʃba	rugo	ʃereek	alo	
Blood	*s-hywey	evi	ha	afoe	huʃ	ə	ʒay		haarrweig	iyu	iwii	ʒi	k ^h ra	tha	awi	oyik	
Sun	*nəy	me-ne	nini	hanayaŋ	kiri	drū	dʒo	məə-	riŋ	iŋi	amik	ŋam	plaŋ	ŋim	mik	doni	
Moon	*s-la	a-la	namblu	habia	ambu	hubye	θū, lu	poo-lu ^h	hallo	ela	lay	laŋi	lei	dager	lo dowa	polu	
Star	*s-kar	dogre	ʃuzuk	satyoŋ	pəɟzeik	litsi	dotsuŋ	ta-kar	kadiŋ	andikru	ŋalci	karma	karma	karem	karma	taker	
Man	*r-min	mur	dʒuhu	bphua	ap ^h u	nəna	ŋih, nuvu	ma-lu	me	imu	coŋ	soŋa	miŋ	k ^h yog	giŋoŋ	ŋi	
Woman	*mow	msn	dʒimi	bimi	amwi	mim	nəmɾay	ma-mi	miyā	yaku	kamay	ŋiza	āmah	nedʒa	mainaŋ	ŋimə	
Child	*za/*tsa	ŋwa ale	nunu	ani	aɟzuaŋ	sa	amay		a	a	?	za	tukto	neŋe	hemi		
Old man	*bəw		dʒiman	friəŋ	amayin	muk ^h rǎ	vu khyraŋ		mowaa	micipra	kanaŋ	ata	im, seŋ	gidʒoŋ	ŋilo		
Dog	*k ^w əy	eki-le	p ^h it ^h a	ʃhey	kayu	ʃlu	ʃaʒi ^h		kuak	iku	kui	k ^h u	k ^h i	k ^h i	kwi	əki	
Pig	*pwak	lele	swag	wak	mədoŋ	vo	ʒo	ayek	belleig	ili	lii	p ^h akpa	p ^h a	p ^h a	lik	ərik	
Tiger	*k-la	caaru	phō	mutʃua	ŋerəy	ʃɟi	tiŋraŋ	paa-ti ^h	tamya	amra	topəw	goŋtak	ʃēn	ta ^h	ziktetha	abiŋ	
Water	*ti(y)	si	k ^h o	k ^h o	kua	k ^h u	vu	a-si	macey	maci	tii	ri	ʃi	ʃ ^h u	ati	ifi	
Fire	*mey	mi-la	ba	boe	bawe	mi	mai ^h	a-mi	naamiŋ	amruhu	mai	mi	meŋ	me ^h	mi	əmə	
Stone	*r-luŋ		liŋ	lbaw		kun						luŋ	gor				
Tree	*siŋ, *sik	lā(-aj)	hiŋ	hiŋmua	ʃə(mua)	ʃō	ou	haŋ-sa	masaŋ	asimbo	saŋ	ʃiŋ	ʃyaŋ	ʃiŋ	duŋpu	seŋnə	
Leaf	*r-pak	nino	alap	arap	məʃfay	ʃere	leh		na	na	lap	ʃawa	palāp	lemah	alap	nane	
Name	*miŋ	niraŋ		ebeŋ		aŋiŋi	minh		amaŋ		amaŋ		meŋ		meŋ	?	

Declassifying Arunachalese languages. Roger Blench & Mark Post. Main text

Gloss	CTB	Koro	Mey	Bugun	Puroik	Hruso	Miji	Milang	Taraon	Idu	Miju	Dirang	Tawang	Memba	Meyor	Nah	PT
Eat	*dzya	to	ʃuwa,	ʃʰa	ʃina	tsa	tsu ^h	tu	tha	ha	ʃa	za	sasuḥ	sale	ʃoem	də	
Culture																	
Mithun	none	sù	smu	syá	ʃa	fu	ʃu	a-sù	aʃya	sa	cal	menʃa		bamin	piiyee	se	
Iron	*syal		sē	yuṅ		si	sen	arəm	say	si	tanɣli	perr	lʰe	ʃa ^h	ʃak	tagi	?
Dao	*sta	kasa	handu	mudua	ʃfe	vetsi	vaitsen	ayok	tara	eyetʃe	sut	ʃfowaṅ	k ^h yop	papʃa	kunak	oriyuk	(a)-
Banana	none	gerdʒi	n/a	tsyum	kapak	ruloṅ	rudhaṅ		paidʒ dʒey	aɟibru	hambyooṅ	leysi	lam rep		sanjuṅ	kupak	
Arum,	*grwa		n/a	dʒawk	ʃuwa	t ^h rɔ	?	aaṅ	sam	sona	gal	bozoṅ	blu	solum		əṅi	
Millet	none		gicam	ʃo	tamayi	k ^h sə	?		haabra	yamba	muuṅ	koṅpu	kowp	temi	turo	tami	
Paddy	*ma(y)	k ^h i	nise	nisi	amaṅ	olgi	an		ke	ke	ha, maṅ	ra		deyso	sipu	am	
Rice	*ma(y)	k ^h i	nudob	nyiṅ	ambiṅ	ð	an		ke	ke	haku	k ^h u	dep	dey	andek	am	
Cooked		mam			amaṅ	zara	an tsavo			kiri	syat	toʃ ^h aṅ			mam	aʃiṅ	