

Morphological typology, North East India and Mainland Southeast Asia

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1. Overview of the talk

- A. Some areal-typological preliminaries: South Asia and Mainland Southeast Asia, Indosphere and Sinosphere, North East India
- B. The Tani languages: modern-day typology and reconstructed proto-typology
- C. Some comparisons: South Asia and Mainland Southeast Asia, especially Jingpho and Lahu

Conclusion: Although modern-day Tani languages have an “Indospheric” alignment, the morphological profile of Proto-Tani (or an earlier ancestor) is aligned with the “Sinospheric” Tibeto-Burman languages of Mainland Southeast Asia, especially Jingpho and Lahu.

- D. What might this mean?

2. Areal-typological preliminaries

2.1. Mainland Southeast Asia as a cultural and linguistic area

- Austroasiatic, Tai-Kadai, Tibeto-Burman, Hmong-Mien, Austronesian families
- isolating/analytical, tonal, iambic, monosyllabic-sesquisyllabic, SVO, no finiteness asymmetry (SVC), no agreement, no gender, no number, no case, no morphological TAM

- (1) *khǎw kô piin khîn paj kèp tɔɔ.*
3 SFOC climb ascend go collect continue
'So he went climbed on back up and continued picking pears.' (Standard Thai)

2.2. South Asia as a cultural and linguistic area

- Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman families
- agglutinating/fusional, non-tonal, trochaic, polysyllabic, SOV, finiteness asymmetry (PCPL and AUX), agreement, gender, number, case, morphological TAM

- (2) *vivek-ne kitaab par:h-nii chaah-ii*
Vivek-ERG book.F read-INF.F want-PFV.F.SG
'Vivek wanted to read the book.' (Hindi (Bhatt 2005: 760))

2.3. Indosphere and Sinosphere

Some language families or subgroups seem to straddle South and Mainland Southeast Asia (primarily, Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman). Their languages are sometimes said to fall within the “Indosphere” or “Sinosphere” accordingly. Depending on the author’s perspective, Indospheric/Sinospheric alignment might have linguistic dimensions, cultural dimensions, or both. In either case, the subtext is one of contact influence and areal convergence (Matisoff 1990; Bradley, LaPolla et al. 2003; Enfield 2005).

- (3) *lâ pôʔ chəʔ câ pə šē ve cê.*
 tiger jump bite eat finish ADVS NZR QUOT
 ‘The tiger jumped (out) and bit (into them) and ate (them) all up!’ Lahu, Sinospheric TB
 (Matisoff 1991:411)
- (4) *tā jiù jì-xù pá dào shù shàng qù zhǎi lí.*
 3 SFOC continue climb arrive tree top go pick pear
 ‘So he continued climbing up the tree to pick pears.’ Mandarin Chinese, Sinitic
- (5) *ʔih̄i ʔoó má-làa rì-gərə-làa ʔarúm=əm áa-rə-kú*
 wood vegetable search.for-NF do-ACNC-NF evening=ACC come-IRR-CMPL
 ‘After searching for firewood and vegetables (they’ll) return in the evening.’ Galo,
 Indospheric TB
- (6) *ta-i ula-i dza-i ula-i go-i pela-i bhab-e.*
 3-F emerge-NF go-NF emerge-NF go-NF throw-NF think-3.SUB
 ‘She goes ahead on out and thinks.’ Assamese, Eastern Indo-Aryan (Data from Joana Jansen, glossing adjusted by this author)

2.4. North East India at the intersection of East, South and Mainland Southeast Asia

North East India poses a conceptual challenge. Politically, it falls (not entirely unambiguously!) within South Asia. However, various North East Indian populations have greater or lesser ethnic, cultural and linguistic affinities with South, East and Mainland Southeast Asia. The history of most of the region is largely obscure.

Typologically, however, most North East Indian languages tend to exhibit Indospheric characteristics (Matisoff 1991: 485).

(see again (5))

3. The Tani languages: Modern-day typology and a Proto-Tani reconstruction

3.1. About Tani

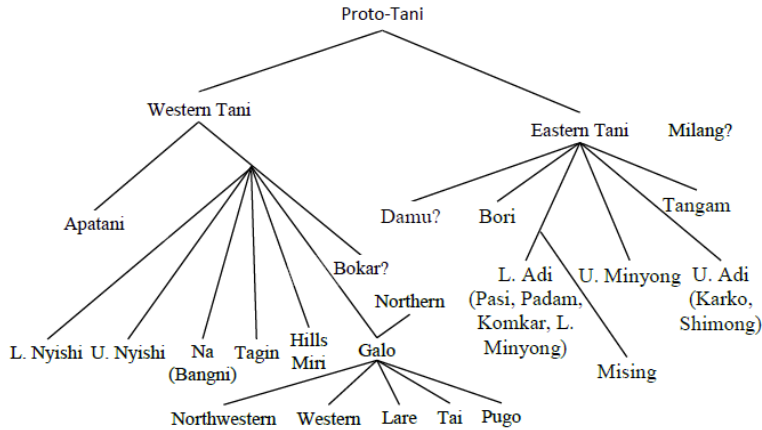


Figure 1 - Tani *Stammbaum* (after Sun 1993)

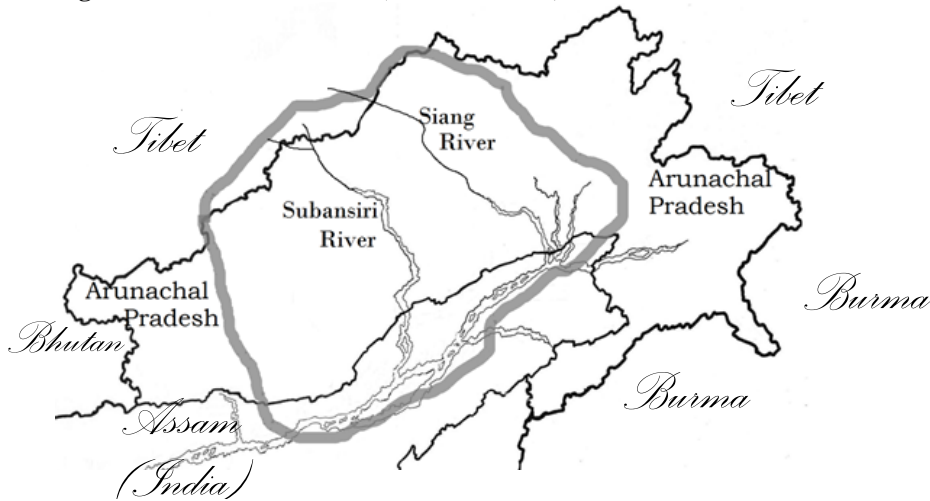


Figure 2 - Rough geographical location of the Tani languages

Tani languages constitute a “mini-spread zone” (Nichols 1992: 16-21, cf. Enfield 2005: 184): low structural diversity, shallow time-depth, socially dominant.

Broad typology of the modern languages:

Phonology: six or seven vowels, reduced consonant inventories (finals in West, onsets in East), disyllabic, non-tonal and tonal (2 lexical tones), trochaic stress

Morphology: agglutinating-to-polysynthetic, compounding, incorporating (?), no morphological case, no agreement, no gender, no number, many derivations, TAM inflections.

Syntax: SOV, topic-comment, ellipsis, accusative alignment, RELC are nominalizations, finite/non-finite asymmetry, complementation, SFP, postpositional case, relator nouns, classifiers.

3.2. Case, person, number and gender

3.2.1. Person-indexing (“agreement”)

No grammaticalized person-indexing features (“agreement”) in any Tani language.¹ No verb stem alternations available to support reconstruction of agreement).

- (7) *ŋó* *ʔacín* *dó-rá.* *nó* *ʔacín* *dó-rá.* *bì* *ʔacín* *dó-rá...*
 1.SG cooked.rice eat-IRR 2.SG cooked.rice eat-IRR 3.SG cooked.rice eat-IRR
 ‘I’ll eat. You’ll eat. S/he’ll eat...’ (Lare Galo, W. Tani)

- (8) *ŋo* *ʔama* *do-ye.* *no* *ʔama* *do-ye.* *bì* *ʔama* *do-ye...*
 1.SG cooked.rice eat-IRR 2.SG cooked.rice eat-IRR 3.SG cooked.rice eat-IRR
 ‘I’ll eat. You’ll eat. S/he’ll eat...’ (Upper Minyong, E. Tani)

Agreement is not reconstructed to Proto-Tani.

3.2.2. Relational marking

No morphological case on nouns in any Tani language. No noun stem alternations available to support reconstruction of case. Relational markers all phrasal (postpositions ~ enclitics).

- (9) *ŋo* *ʔakii=əm* *tu-to.*
 1.SG dog=ACC kick-PFV
 ‘I kicked the dog.’ (Upper Minyong, E. Tani) [N POS]_{NP}

- (10) *ŋó* *ʔikii=əm* *tú-tó.*
 1.SG dog=ACC kick-PFV
 ‘I kicked the dog.’ (Lare Galo, W. Tani)

- (11) *ŋo* *ʔakii* *dor-ji=əm* *tu-to.*
 1.SG dog CLF:ANIMAL-two=ACC kick-PFV
 ‘I kicked the dog.’ (Upper Minyong, E. Tani) [N CLF-NUM POS]_{NP}

- (12) *ŋó* *ʔikii* *dór-ji=əm* *tú-tó.*
 1.SG dog CLF:ANIMAL-two=ACC kick-PFV
 ‘I kicked the dog.’ (Lare Galo, W. Tani)

¹ Many (not all) Tani languages have so-called “conjunct/disjunct” or “egophoric” tense/aspect marking, which is sometimes described as a type of “person-marking” system (Bickel 2000). Post (Post 2011a; in press) has shown that egophoricity is not a person-marking system, but is instead a (semantic) index of experiential knowledge. It is possible, and likely, that some sort of egophoric marking will reconstruct as a feature of the Proto-Tani tense/aspectual system (§3.5), but this does not bear on the reconstruction of agreement.

Morphological case *is* found on Tani pronouns. However, (a) forms are identical to NP postpositions, and (b) dual and plural - seemingly reconstructable to nouns - intervene.

- (13) *ŋo-m, ŋo-ji-m, ŋo-lu-m* < **ŋo mi, *ŋo ji mi, *ŋo luŋ mi*
 1-ACC 1-DL-ACC 1-PL-ACC 1 ACC 1 two ACC 1 group ACC
 [Upper Minyong First singular, dual and plural pronouns and PR reconstructions.]

Form	Value
* <i>lo</i>	LOC
* <i>pa</i> ~ * <i>pə</i>	DAT
* <i>ka</i> ~ * <i>kə</i>	GEN
* <i>mi</i>	ACC ~ NAGT

Table 1 - Proto-Tani relational markers

Morphological case is not reconstructed to Proto-Tani. Postpositional relational markers are reconstructed to Proto-Tani.

3.2.3. Number and gender

No grammaticalized number or gender found in any modern Tani languages.

Forms sometimes reported in the literature as “gendered” nouns are in fact compounds:

	‘mother; female’	‘father; male’	‘dog’	‘bitch’	‘male dog’
Galo	[?] <i>anə</i>	[?] <i>abó</i>	[?] <i>ikii</i>	<i>kiinə</i>	<i>kiibò</i>
Minyong	[?] <i>anə</i>	[?] <i>abo</i> ²	[?] <i>əki</i>	<i>kiinə</i>	<i>kiibo</i>

Table 2 - “Gendered” compound nouns in Galo and Minyong

Forms sometimes reported in the literature as “plural” markers are in fact quantifying nouns:

- (14) *riba gaddə...*
ribàa gadə ə
 CLAN group TOP
 ‘The Riba...’ (*/?‘The group of Riba...’) (Lare Galo)

- (15) *hīg gâd^a hīgì...*
hīgì gadə hīgì
 SPRX.IND group SPRX.IND
 ‘This group here...’ (Lare Galo)

Grammaticalized number and gender are not reconstructed to Proto-Tani.

² In Minyong, this form refers to a male (father) animal only. Human fathers require the kin term [?]*abu*. Galo has a different alternation [?]*apó* ‘male animal’, [?]*abó* ‘father (human or animal)’

3.3. Basic word structures

ROOT and WORD levels are clearly distinct in modern Tani languages. ROOTS are bound (not meaningfully pronounceable in isolation. WORDS are free (meaningfully pronounceable in isolation).

- (16) **ηók kii*
 ηó-kə kii-
 1.SG-GEN guts
- (17) **ηóo ín.*
 ηóo ín-
 1.SG walk/go
- (18) *ηók ʔakii*
 ηó-kə ʔa-kii
 1.SG-GEN PFX-guts
 PFX-ROOT
 ‘my belly’ (compare (14))
- (19) *ηóo ʔindùu.*
 ηóo ʔín-dùu
 1.SG walk/go-IPFV
 ROOT-SFX
 ‘I’m going.’ (compare (15))

The great majority of modern Tani lexemes are disyllabic and morphologically complex. Internal structures among N/ADJ are [PFX-ROOT], [ROOT-ROOT].

Minyong	Galo	Proto-Tani	Gloss	Structure
<i>ʔanə</i>	<i>ʔanə</i>	*ʔa-nə	‘mother; mature female’	PFX-ROOT
<i>bottə</i>	<i>ʔattə</i>	*ʔa-tə	‘big’	PFX-ROOT
<i>ʔəki</i>	<i>ʔikii</i>	*ʔa-k(w)i	‘dog’	PFX-ROOT
<i>tabi</i>	<i>tabə</i>	*ta-bi	‘snake’	PFX-ROOT
<i>himyo</i>	<i>hojò</i>	*εa-myó	‘tiger’	PFX-ROOT
<i>myotə</i>	<i>notə</i>	*myó-tə	‘tiger (alt.)’ < ‘big tiger’	ROOT-ROOT
<i>myonə</i>	<i>jonə</i>	*myó-nə	‘tigress’ (< ‘female tiger’)	ROOT-ROOT
<i>kinə</i>	<i>kiinə</i>	*k(w)ii-nə	‘bitch’ (< ‘female dog’)	ROOT-ROOT
<i>bitə</i>	<i>bitə</i>	*bi-tə	‘king cobra’ (< ‘big snake’)	ROOT-ROOT

Table 3 - Some Tani N/ADJ word structures

Classification is a pervasive feature of Tani word formation (Figure 3). Classificatory “word families” can be very large (Table 4):

The ubiquity, transparency and and regularity of morphological compounds in Tani languages suggests an earlier productivity.

Productive compounding and prefixation of simplex monosyllables is reconstructed to Proto-Tani.³

3.4. From modern morphology to proto-syntax

An idea of how productive prefixation and compounding might have looked at an earlier stage comes from *classifier expressions*. The modern syntactic composition using peripheral numerals - which have no root forms - resembles the morphological composition using core numerals. Presumably, this mirrors an earlier syntactic formation.

(23) *ʔikū ʔadór kân gò*
 ʔikū ʔadór kanè go
 dog CLF:ANIMAL seven IND
 N CLF NUM ART
 ‘seven dogs’ (Lare Galo)

(24) *ʔikū dôry gò*
 ʔikū dór-ɲi go (< *ʔa-k(w)ì *dor *ɲi *ko)
 dog CLF:ANIMAL-TWO IND PFX-dog CLF:ANIMAL two IND
 N CLFR-NUMR ART
 ‘two dogs’ (Lare Galo)

Similar phenomena occur at the right edge of an NP. Tani languages all display a hybrid (and cross-linguistically rare-seeming) word type with both referential and relational functions: a *demonstrative postposition*. These clearly come from earlier sequences of demonstrative and posposition, i.e. from morphological fusions of earlier syntactic formations. In Eastern Tani languages, we can easily tease them apart, such that they could in principle be viewed as phonologically fused (perhaps the postpositions are enclitics) but syntactically distinct. In Western Tani languages, this is impossible due to a series of irregular phonological innovations. Overall, however, it is abundantly clear that proto-sequences of monosyllabic syntactic words have fused into disyllabic grammatical words; so clear that it is almost irrelevant whether we reconstruct syntactic compositionality to the Proto-Tani stage or to an earlier ancestor.

³ NB: comparative evidence does not provide a strong motivation for reconstructing WORD status to monosyllabic roots at the Proto-Tani stage, since (a) a great number of compositions are shared across branches (cf. Table 3) - suggesting that the composition itself should reconstruct - and (b) we lack clear evidence from any single modern Tani language that lexical roots may pattern as syntactic units in unmarked phrase types. One might assume that lexical roots *must* at some stage (Pre-Proto-Tani?) reconstruct to lexical words. However, there is no clear empirical evidence at present.

(25) *ʔər^hk t̄à kekkáa, mootùm loí?*
 ʔərək t̄à kéK-káa mootùm lo =(ə)î
 [pig DST.UP]_S [flee-PF]_{PRED} [jungle LOC]_{OBL=TAG}
 ‘That pig up there ran away, into the jungle, right?’ (Lare Galo)

(26) *t̄ol hottâm cìn, ɲunù...kaapáa beetù.*
 tolo hot̄ə=əm cìn ɲunù káa-pàa-bée=tú
 DST.UP.LOC elephant=TOP.ACC ADD 1.PL look-ATTN-EPF=EMPH(<Asm)
 ‘We also saw the elephant up there.’ (Lare Galo)

Minyong	Galo	Value	Form. 1	Value	Form. 2	Value
<i>t̄alo</i>	<i>tolò</i>	‘DST.UP.LOC’	*t̄ə	‘DST.UP’	*lo	‘LOC’
<i>b̄alo</i>	<i>bolò</i>	‘DST.DOWN.LOC’	*b̄ə	‘DST.DOWN’	*lo	‘LOC’
<i>ʔ̄alo</i>	<i>alò</i>	‘DST.SLEV.LOC’	*ʔ̄a ~ *ʔ̄ə	‘DST.SLEV’	*lo	‘LOC’
<i>holo</i>	<i>holò</i>	‘SPRX.LOC’	*ɛo	‘SPRX.LOC’	*lo	‘LOC’
<i>həʔ̄ə</i>	<i>həmb̄ə</i>	‘SPRX.SEMB’	*ɛə	‘SPRX.SEMB’	*pa ~ *pə	‘DAT’

Table 5 – Tani demonstrative postpositions and their internal composition (selection)

Similar observations have already been made regarding pronouns (Table 6):

		SG	DL	PL
1	Galo	<i>ɲó</i>	<i>ɲunì</i>	<i>ɲunù</i>
	Minyong	<i>ɲo</i>	<i>ɲo-ɲi</i>	<i>ɲo-lu</i>
	Proto-Tani	*ɲo	*ɲo ɲi	*ɲo luɲ
	Proto-gloss	‘I’	‘I two’	‘I group’
2	Galo	<i>nó</i>	<i>nunì</i>	<i>nunù</i>
	Minyong	<i>no</i>	<i>no-ɲi</i>	<i>no-lu</i>
	Proto-Tani	*no	*no ɲi	*no luɲ
	Proto-gloss	‘you’	‘you two’	‘you group’

Table 6 - Proto-compositionality of Tani pronouns

A few vestiges of the proto-syntax in this case remain in some modern languages:

(27) *tagêe là catûu ɲì zírò caanè.*
 tàgéé là càtúñ ɲì zírò càa-nè.
 NAME and NAME pair(<two) PLACE ascend-PFV(<NZR+ANTR)
 ‘Tage and Catu both went up to Ziro.’ (Tajang Apatani)

Most complex morphological structures in modern Tani languages reconstruct to earlier syntactic compositions involving monosyllabic words.

3.5. Propensity predicates

Propensity predicates are single words with the internal structure [BODY_PART-PROPENSITY_TERM].

Term	Gloss	Formative 1	Formative 2
<i>dumcì</i>	‘aching, of head’	<i>dúm-</i> ‘head’	<i>cì-</i> ‘be in pain’
<i>nigrám</i>	‘lazy-eyed’	<i>ník-</i> ‘eye’	<i>rám-</i> ‘look askance’
<i>iikúm</i>	‘numb-toothed’	<i>íi-</i> ‘tooth’	<i>kúm-</i> ‘drunk; senseless’
<i>gomzùp</i>	‘closed-mouthed’	<i>góm-</i> ‘mouth (NW); speech’	<i>zùp-</i> ‘closed’
<i>pumzàp</i>	‘flat-nosed’	<i>púm-</i> ‘nose’	<i>zàp-</i> ‘flat’
<i>lapèe</i>	‘cramped, of legs’	<i>lè-</i> ‘leg/foot’	<i>pèe-</i> ‘tired; cramped’

Table 7 – Propensity predicates in Lare Galo

- (28) *ηό dùmcⁱ dùu.*
 ηό dumcì-dùu
 [1SG]_S [ache.head-IPFV]_{PRED}
 ‘I have a headache.’ (Lare Galo)
- (29) **ηók dùmcⁱ dùu.*
 ηό-kà dumcì-dùu
 1SG-GEN ache.head-IPFV
- (30) **ηο *dum *ki *duη.*
 1SG head ache exist
 ‘I have a headache.’ (Proto-Tani)

If this reconstruction is correct, it looks very much like an *external possession* construction, like we find in Chinese (Chappell 1999). In a Chinese external possession construction, the possessor is expressed as “second subject” of an “unaccusative” verb whose “primary subject” is inalienably-possessed.

- (31) *wǒ xīn hán.*
 1SG heart cold
 POSR POSD PRED
 ‘I felt discouraged.’ (Mandarin Chinese)

The same construction exists in modern Galo at the word level, and even makes use of propensity predicates!

- (32) *ηό ?akíə gookàa.*
 ηό ?akíi=ə gòo-káa.
 1SG belly=TOP swell-PF
 POSR POSD PRED
 ‘My belly swelled.’ (Lare Galo)

- (33) *ηό dumpóo dûmcⁱ dùu.*
 ηό dumpóo dumcì-dùu.
 1SG head ache.head-IPFV
 POSR POSD PRED
 ‘I have a headache (in my head).’ (Lare Galo)

An external possession construction involving simplex monosyllables of the form [N N PRED] most likely reconstructs, if not to the Proto-Tani stage, then to an earlier ancestor.

3.6. Predicate structure

The modern-day Tani predicate can be expansive, with as many as seven or eight morphological formatives, plus “incorporated nominals” and (in some languages) a final copula predicator somewhat like Jingpho “sentence-final words” (without agreement).

- (34) *kironbi oηosogaptiladuηai*
 kiron=bi oηo-soo-gap-ti-la=duη-ai
 NAME=3.SG fish-pull-STUCK-PERS-NF=COP.IPFV-ANTR
 ‘Kiron had been catching fish.’ (Pagro Mising)

However, the basic structure of a Tani final (= finite, non-subordinated) predicate divides neatly into three position classes: a bound root, an obligatory inflection, and one or more “optional” derivations.

$$[[\underline{\text{ROOT}} - (\text{PDER}_{1\dots n})]_{\text{STEM}} - \text{PINFL}_{1-2}]_{\text{WORD}}$$

Figure 4 – Structure of a Galo final predicate (somewhat simplified, PDER = predicate derivation, PINFL = predicate inflection)

3.6.1. Predicate derivations

Predicate derivations are:

- a) morphologically bound
- b) prosodically dependent
- c) optional (non-inflectional)
- d) predicate stem-expanding
- e) semantically rich/complex
- f) highly productive
- g) often homophonous with lexical roots (usually but not always, verb roots)
- h) often translated by independent lexemes in other languages

- (35) *bujhə̀...kirkí ə̀m...ləkkôk paalà...*
 bujɨ=ə kirkí=ə̀m lək-**kók-pàa-là(a)**
 3.DL=TOP window(<Asm)=ACC slide-**OPEN-ATTN-NF**
kaabôk bîhⁱ tò.
 káa-**bók-bì-hí-tó**
 look-**DOWN/SOUTH-DCOL-REFL-PFV**
 ‘They two **got** the window to slide **open** and looked **down as a pair.**’ (Lare Galo)

Verb root		Predicate derivation
<i>ʔín-</i> ‘go’		<i>-mèn</i> ‘PLAYFULLY’
<i>dám-</i> ‘beat’		<i>-càa</i> ‘UPWARD/TO NORTH’
<i>jùp-</i> ‘sleep’		<i>-báə</i> ‘CONTINUOUSLY’
<i>hí-</i> ‘die’		<i>-hí</i> ‘AUTONOMOUS/REFLEXIVE’

Table 8 – Productivity of predicate derivations (Galo)

Function	Galo	Thai	Gloss
Manner	<i>ʔín-mèn</i>	<i>dəən lèn</i>	‘stroll (walk <u>as play</u>)’
Result	<i>dó-ŋám</i>	<i>kin (hâj) môt</i>	‘eat <u>all up</u> ’
Direction	<i>gá-càa</i>	<i>piin khîn</i>	‘climb <u>up</u> ’
Valence increase	<i>mèn-zí</i>	<i>bòk hâj</i>	‘tell <u>to/for</u> someone’
Aspect/aktionsart	<i>ʔín-báə</i>	<i>dəən jùu</i>	‘(be) walk(ing) <u>continuously</u> ’
Modality	<i>dó-làa</i>	<i>kin dâj</i>	‘ <u>can</u> eat’

Table 9 - Functional subclassification of Galo predicate derivations, compared with Thai serial verbs

Again assuming that modern-day bound roots reconstruct at some stage to lexemes, it is reasonable to suppose that the origin of Tani predicate structure is in verb serialization.

Verb serialization is reconstructed, if not to the Proto-Tani stage, then to an earlier ancestor.

3.6.2. Predicate inflections

All final (= finite, non-subordinated) Tani predicates obligatorily terminate with a predicate inflection: a negator *-ma(ŋ)*, a TAM marker, or both, in that order.

- (36) *ŋó ʔimmáa rá!*
 ŋó ʔín-**máa-rǎ**
 1.SG go-**NEG-IRR**
 ROOT[-NEG-TAM]_{INFL}
 ‘I’m not going to go!’ (Lare Galo)

All core Tani predicate inflections transparently reconstruct to verb roots, which still occur in the modern languages. In most cases this appears to have come about via an existential or copula use, which is still available in some languages.

Syntax: SOV, topic-comment, verb serialization, sentence-final copulas, preposed negation, sentence-final particles, external possession, classifiers, postpositional relational markers, predicate structure *V_{1...n} NEG=AUX.

4. Some comparisons

4.1. Mainland Southeast Asian areal typology

Enfield's (2005: 186-190) set of characteristically MSEA features, with a few more added:

Phonology

1. large (9) simple vowel systems (smaller in north)
2. diphthongs
3. initial/rhyme phonotactics (constraints on permissible final segments, fewer finals in north)
4. monosyllabic to sesquisyllabic (vowel neutralization in sesquisyllable)
5. tone ~ register (phonation type) gives lexical contrasts (more in north)
6. iambic stress (if any) (Donegan and Stampe 1983)

Morphology

7. isolating/analytical
 - a. one morpheme per word
 - b. few or no derivations
 - c. phrase is relevant "unit of meaning" at clause level
8. no morphological case
9. no person-indexing ("agreement")
10. no grammaticalized tense-marking
11. no grammaticalized number
12. no grammaticalized gender
13. aspect given verbally
14. relator nouns (nouns with adposition-like functions)
15. lack of explicit nominalizing/subordinating morphology

Lexicon

16. elaboration (rhyming, alliteration...)
17. ideophones
18. "pronouns" with many register distinctions
19. prevalence of compounding
20. numeral classifier system
21. appositional noun phrase structure (most noun phrase operators come from lexical nouns)
22. possession expressed with existential in Topic-Comment (Comrie 2007: 40)
23. adjectives like verbs (Comrie 2007: 41)

Syntax

24. variable word order
 - a. topic-comment
 - b. argument ellipsis
25. preference for VO
26. sentence-final particles
27. external possession constructions (e.g. 'you heart cold') (MWP)
28. serial verb constructions (MWP)

4.2. Typological drift in Tani

Feature	S. Asia	Modern Tani	Proto-Tani	MSEA
Simple vowels	?	6-7	7	7-9
Order	SOV	SOV	SOV	SVO
Diphthongs	no	no	no	yes
Semantic PRO	no	no	no	yes
NZR/SUB	yes	yes	no?	no
Adj like V	no	no	yes?	yes
SVC	no	no	yes	yes
Phonotactics	balanced	balanced	onset-rhyme	onset-rhyme
Syllabism	poly	poly	mono	mono
Basic profile	agglutinating	agglutinating	isolating	isolating
TAM	yes	yes	no	no
Aspect verbal	no	no	yes	yes
Tone/register	no	mixed	yes (few)	yes (many)
Morph. case	yes	no	no	no
Agreement	yes	no	no	no
Number	yes	no	no	no
Gender	yes	no	no	no
Elaboration	no	yes	yes	yes
Ideophones	no	yes	yes	yes
Classifiers	no	yes	yes	yes
Topic-comment	no	yes	yes	yes
SFP	no	yes	yes	yes
External Poss.	no	yes	yes	yes
Appositional N	no	yes	yes	yes
Relator nouns	?	yes	yes	yes
Compounding	?	yes	yes	yes
Possession Exis.	yes	yes	yes	yes

Table 11 - Enfield's (2005) set of characteristically Mainland Southeast Asian typological features, with corresponding values for Modern Tani languages, reconstructed Proto-Tani, and (an admittedly sketchy) South Asia loosely based on Masica (1976: 187-90)

4.3. Lahu and Jingpho

(40) *lâ pô? chè? câ pà šē ve cê.*
 tiger jump bite eat finish ADVS NZR QUOT
 'The tiger jumped (out) and bit (into them) and ate (them) all up!' Lahu, Sinospheric TB
 (Matisoff 1991:411)

(41) *ŋai³³ lai³¹ka³³ thi ŋa³¹ ŋ³¹ŋai³³*
 1SG book read be.doing 1SG.SUB.DECL
 'I am reading.' (Dai and Diehl 2003: 408)

4.4. Interim conclusion

If the present reconstruction of the typological profile of Proto-Tani is tenable, it suggests a typological alignment with the Mainland Southeast Asian region rather than with South Asia. In particular, Proto-Tani aligns with the more isolating Tibeto-Burman languages of Mainland Southeast Asia such as Jingpho and Lahu.

5. What might it mean?

5.1. Was there a contact corridor?

Enfield (2005: 182) explicitly links areal feature-sharing in MSEA to “social contact among hundreds of speech communities speaking languages from at least five major language families. The result has been extensive diffusion of linguistic structure leading to massive structural convergence among the languages”.

If we simply look at a language map, a contact corridor seems plausible - why not? - the geographical distances appear small, and there is plenty of evidence of language contact on a small scale along the way.

But when we consider topography, it seems unlikely. East/West contact is very rare in this region, because the mountain spurs present obstacles which, while not insurmountable in an absolute sense, reduce direct population contacts to a trickle. So, any Tani participation in a greater MSEA contact area would have to have been highly indirect, probably via plains-based populations (who would either have been Bodo-Garo, Austroasiatic, or Indo-Aryan-speaking, depending on the time-depth).

5.2. Were there (North-)Westward migrations?

Material culture makes this seem plausible. Northerly Tani groups are notoriously unequipped for cold-climate lifestyles - houses lack any sort of insulation, there is practically no manufacture of warm clothing, and agricultural techniques require frequent heavy rains. House construction is raised bamboo-and-wood, domestic animals are pigs, dogs and chickens, and animism prevails - not a hint of Buddhism or Hinduism. Obviously, then, Tani cultures relate to MSEA, not to Tibet or India.

But we can't place Tani languages in Northern Burma on a linguistic basis, at least not so far as anyone can see (see below).

5.3. Is this evidence of shared ancestry with MSEAsian TB languages?

Shared ancestry in an overall sense is not in doubt. However, there is no clear evidence in favour of a Proto-Tani-LoloBurmese or Proto-Tani-BodoKonyakJingpho subgroup. More lexicon seems to be shared (for what reasons we don't know) among Tani and Kiranti, Bodic or rGyalrongic languages than with Burma-area TB. However, these are simply impressions; a systematic study has not been conducted.

5.4. Is this creole typology?

The Tani languages seem to constitute a “spread zone” in the sense of Nichols (1992), suggesting a recent expansion in the area. Under the circumstances, one can presume language contact and language shift were part of this process.

Burling and DeLancey, following MacWhorter among others, have suggested that creolization is not only likely but virtually necessary in such cases. Burling has further argued that creolization in part accounts for the typological profile exhibited by Jingpho, and DeLancey has suggested that the same might be said for Lolo-Burmese and (in earlier history) for Bodo-Garo. In particular, DeLancey suggests that creolization might in part explain the loss of agreement patterns he reconstructs to PTB, in Lolo-Burmese, Singpho, Bodo-Garo and - we might presume - also Tani.

Some questions remain - why do creole typologies persist for so long in MSEA and other regions, while they seem to develop in different directions in North East India? I have previously suggested that prosody plays a role in this process, but for now I'll leave the question open.

6. Conclusion

The creole hypothesis seems the most likely. The Tani languages have clearly spread recently - and would almost certainly have spread “over” pre-existing populations who would have learned early Tani language(s) imperfectly. We can also note certain “peculiarities” both within Tani languages and between Tani and other Tibeto-Burman subgroups, which are suggestive of pre-Tani substrates. For example, in Apatani and Milang, a number of phonological correspondences resist analysis in an otherwise highly homogeneous subgroup; these could reflect the irregularities associated with multiple strata. And, a large number of vocabulary items which are rare or unattested elsewhere in TB are found in Tani languages, with Apatani and Milang seemingly possessing more than the average. There is every chance that such forms reflect non-TB substrates.

Some questions remain. For example, if MSEA typology is simply creole typology, why does it persist for millennia in MSEA (at least), while it develops quickly in other directions in, for example, Tani and Bodo-Garo?⁴

⁴ Following Donegan and Stampe (1983; 2004) , I've suggested elsewhere that this question may be answerable in prosodic terms (Post 2011b).

7. Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	F	feminine		inflection
ACNC	additive	GEN	genitive	POS	postposition
	concessive	IND	individuated	POSD	possessed
ADD	additive	INF	infinitive	POSR	possessor
ADVS	adverbializer	INFL	inflection	PRED	predicate
ANT	anterior	IPFV	imperfective	REFL	reflexive
ART	article	IRR	irrealis	RELC	relative clause
Asm	Assamese	LOC	locative	QUOT	quotative
ATTN	attainment	N	noun	S	intransitive
AUX	auxiliary	NAGT	non-agentive		subject
CLF	classifier	NEG	negative	SFOC	sequential focus
CLFR	classifier root	NF	non-final	SFP	sentence-final
CMPL	completive	NP	noun phrase		particle
COP	copula	NUMR	numeral root	SFX	suffix
COS	change-of-state	NZR	nominalizer	SG	singular
DAT	dative	OBL	oblique	SPRX	speaker-
DCOL	dual collective	PCPL	participle		proximate
DECL	declarative	PDER	predicate	STAT	stative
DL	dual		derivation	SUB	subject
DST	distal	PERS	persistant	TAM	tense, aspect,
EMPH	emphatic	PF	perfect		modality
EPF	experiential	PFV	perfective	TOP	topic
	perfect	PFX	prefix		
ERG	ergative	PINFL	predicate		

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