

THE
LANGUAGES SPOKEN
BETWEEN THE
ASSAM VALLEY AND TIBET.

BY
STEN KONOW.

[From the "JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY," *January*, 1902.]

ART. VII.—*Note on the Languages spoken between the Assam Valley and Tibet.* By STEN KONOW, of the University of Christiania, Norway.

THE mountainous region between the Assam Valley and Tibet, from Bhutan in the west to the Brahmaputra in the east, is inhabited by a series of tribes which are all of Tibeto-Burman stock.

Beginning from the west, they are the Akas, the Daflās, the Abor-Miris, and the various Mishmi tribes, viz., Chulikatā, Digāru, and Mijū Mishmi.

Our chief sources for the knowledge of the dialects spoken by these tribes are as follows:—

- Hesselmeyer, C. H.**—*The Hill Tribes of the Northern Frontier of Assam.* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xxxvii, pt. 2, 1868, pp. 192 ff.
- Anderson, J. D.**—*A short Vocabulary of the Aka Language.* Shillong, 1896.
- Robinson, Wm.**—*Notes on the Dophlās and the Peculiarities of their Language.* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xx, 1852, pp. 126 ff.
- Hamilton, R. C.**—*An Outline Grammar of the Dafla Language as spoken by the Tribes immediately south of the Apa Tanang Country.* Shillong, 1900.
- Robinson, William.**—*Notes on the Languages spoken by the various tribes inhabiting the Valley of Asam and its mountain confines.* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xviii, pt. 1, 1849, pp. 183 ff.
- Needham, J. F.**—*Outline Grammar of the Shai'yung Miri Language as spoken by the Miris of that Clan residing in the Neighbourhood of Sadiya.* Shillong, 1886.
- Robinson, W.**—*Notes on the Languages spoken by the Mi-Shmis.* *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. xxiv, 1856, pp. 307 ff.
- Campbell, George.**—*Specimens of Languages of India.* Calcutta, 1874, pp. 239 ff.
- Needham, J. F.**—*A few Digârô (Tároan), (Mijû) (M'jû), and Tibetan words collected during a trip to Rima and back in December, 1885, and January, 1886.* [Shillong.]

The dialects in question may conveniently be classed together as the North Assam Group of Tibeto-Burman

languages, and in the remarks which follow I shall try to throw some light on their relation to each other and to connected forms of speech.

The dialects spoken by the Daffās and the Abor-Miris are closely related to each other, and their vocabulary, to some extent, agrees with that of Mishmi. Aka, on the other hand, has a different and very peculiar appearance. Strange and radical phonetical laws have been at work in that dialect, and it is, in most cases, very difficult to compare it with other Tibeto-Burman languages. The grammatical structure, however, is exactly the same as in the languages of the surrounding tribes, and there is also a considerable number of words which can be traced in other Tibeto-Burman languages. Thus, Aka *āū*, Daffā *ā-bo*, father; Aka *ā-nī*, Daffā *ān*, mother; Aka *āngā-sā*, Meithei *angang* and *ma-chā*, child; Aka *nyu*, Kuki-Chin *nai* and *nau*, younger brother or sister; Aka *lū*, Tibetan *blo*, Lushēi *lung*, mind; Aka *e-nyī*, Daffā *a-nyī*, eye; Aka *nūsù*, Tibetan *sna*, nose; Aka *khie*, Tibetan *mgo*, Burmese *khaung*, head; Aka *khe-chu*, Burmese *chham*, hair of head; Aka *mī*, Tibetan *me*, fire; Aka *χū*, Tibetan *chhu*, water; Aka *ju*, Singphō *jan*, sun; Aka *cchī*, Tibetan *ñi*, fish; Aka *tsāu*, Tibetan *za-ba*, Burmese *tsā*, eat; Aka *thū*, Tibetan *a-thung-ba*, Daffā *tū*, drink; Aka *ji*, Daffā *ji*, give; Aka *lāu*, Meithei *lāu*, take; and so forth.

All the dialects in question agree in some points. The differences between them, on the other hand, are considerable, and they do not form a distinct linguistic group. They have been classed together because they are all intermediary between Tibetan and the Assam-Burmese languages of the Tibeto-Burman family, and because the tribes speaking them are found in the same locality. The group, therefore, is both a geographical and a linguistic one.

In order to understand the position of these dialects and their relation to other Tibeto-Burman languages it will be necessary to go into details. It is, however, difficult to do so, because our knowledge of them, and especially of Aka and Mishmi, is very limited. The remarks which follow are therefore given with every reserve. Their reliability

is dependent on the trustworthiness of our materials. They do not extend to the whole grammatical structure, because a comparison of the various dialects would, in many cases, be uncertain. I have confined myself to some remarks on the numerals, the personal pronouns, and a few grammatical features.

The first five numerals are :—

	Aka.	Daflā.	Miri.	Chulikatā.	Digāru.	Mijū.
One ...	<i>ā</i>	<i>akkiu</i>	<i>ā-kā, ā-tēr</i>	<i>e-khe</i>	<i>ē-khing</i>	<i>ko-mō.</i>
Two ...	<i>kshī</i>	<i>a-nyi</i>	<i>ā-nyī</i>	<i>kā-ni</i>	<i>kā-ying</i>	<i>kā-ning.</i>
Three...	<i>tzū</i>	<i>a-om</i>	<i>ā-ūm</i>	<i>kā-sh</i>	<i>kā-sāng</i>	<i>kā-sām.</i>
Four ...	<i>pfī-rī</i>	<i>a-pl(i)</i>	<i>ā-pī</i>	<i>kā-ppi</i>	<i>kā-pei</i>	<i>kam-brin.</i>
Five ...	<i>pom</i>	<i>ā-ng(ō)</i>	<i>ā-ngā</i>	<i>mā-ngā</i>	<i>mā-ngā</i>	<i>ka-tin.</i>

One.—The forms in Daflā, Chulikatā, and Digāru are practically identical. Aka *ā* corresponds to Miri *ā-kā*, Meithei *a-mā*, Kachin *ai-mā*, etc. Mijū *ko-mō* perhaps corresponds to the forms occurring in the other Mishmi dialects and Daflā. The final *mō* must be compared with *mā* in Meithei *a-mā*, Kachin *ai-mā*, etc.

Two.—Aka *kshī* is probably derived from *kñi*; compare Aka *chhī*, Tibetan *ñi*, fish. The prefix *k* is identical with Mishmi *kā*, and corresponds to Tibetan *g* in *gñis*, two. Daflā and Miri use a prefix *ā* like many Central and Eastern Nāgā dialects.

Three.—Mishmi, and probably also Aka, have a prefix *kā* corresponding to *g* in Tibetan *gsum*, three. Daflā and Miri prefix *ā*. Compare 'Two.'

Four.—All dialects apparently contain a numeral *li* or *ri* with a suffix *pa* or *p*, corresponding to *b* in Tibetan *bzi*, four; *fa* in Lepcha; *b* and *bi* in the Bodo languages; *ba* and *pa* in many Nāgā dialects, and *pa* in Kuki-Chin. To this *p*

Mishmi prefixes *kā* or *kam*. The numeral *li* or *ri* also occurs in Lepcha and most Assam-Burmese languages, while Tibetan has *zi*.

Five.—Mijū *ka-lin* seems to correspond to Tibetan *lga* with *ka* prefixed. Aka *pom* is probably derived from *pa-nga*. The prefix *pa* has already been mentioned with 'Four.' *Mā* in Chulikatā and Digāru *mā-ngā*, five, corresponds to the prefix *ma* in the numeral 'five' in Kachin, Meithei, Lhōtā, Miklai, Thukumi, and most Nāgā-Bodo dialects.

The higher numerals, twenty, thirty, etc., are formed by prefixing 'two,' 'three,' and so on to the numeral 'ten' in Aka and Mishmi, while Daflā and Miri suffix the multiplier after the pattern 'tens-two,' 'tens-three,' etc. Tibetan, Kachin, Burmese, Mikir, and other dialects agree with Aka and Mishmi, while Lepcha, the Kuki-Chin, and most Nāgā languages form their higher numerals in the same way as Daflā and Miri.

Generic prefixes are used with numerals in the Bodo languages, some Nāgā dialects such as Mikir and Empēō, and the Kuki-Chin group. They are also used in Daflā and Miri. Compare the generic suffixes in Burmese. Mishmi, and probably also Aka, agree with Tibetan where the numerals are used without such qualifying affixes.

The preceding remarks will have shown that the numerals in Aka and Mishmi are more closely connected with those usual in Tibetan than the forms occurring in Daflā and Miri. These latter dialects in important points agree with the Bodo, Nāgā, and Kuki-Chin languages. All dialects in question agree with the Assam-Burmese languages in the form of the numeral 'four.'

I now turn to the personal pronoun *I*. Aka, Daflā, Miri, and Chulikatā have forms which are identical with or derived from Tibetan and Burmese *nga*. The Digāru pronoun *hā*, I, is probably derived from the same form. Compare Meithei *ai* and Khoirāo *hai*. It is probable that the forms beginning with *h* are due to an aspiration of the initial *ng*, corresponding to the aspirated pronunciation of soft consonants in Eastern Tibet. A strong aspiration might

well supersede the rest of the consonant in the pronunciation. A similar interchange between *ng* and *h* occurs in dialects of Khami. Mijū *kī* corresponds to *kei* in the Kuki-Chin languages. It is probably derived from *nga*, *ngha*; compare Kachin *ngai*. This derivation is based on the supposition that an aspirated *ng* might become *gh* and, farther, *k*. Compare the aspirated soft consonants in Eastern Tibet, which can scarcely be distinguished from the corresponding hard sounds. In the same way we find Angāmi *ko* corresponding to Āo *ngo*, fish.

Thou.—Daflā, Miri, and Mishmi have the forms *nā* and *nyā*, corresponding to Angāmi *no* and similar forms in many Assam-Burmese languages. Aka *bā* seems to correspond to *bā* in Sir George Campbell's Hati Garya.

The personal pronouns of the third person differ in most dialects. All forms are originally demonstrative pronouns, and corresponding ones are found in the neighbouring languages. Thus, Miri and Daflā *bui* corresponds to *bī*, *bē*, and similar forms in Bodo, *po* in Angāmi, etc.; Aka *ī* and *ē*, and Digāru *ē* to *a*, that, in Tibetan and other connected forms of speech; Daflā *ma* to *mā* in the Kuki-Chin dialects; Digāru *he* to *hē*, this, in Lu-hēi and connected languages; and Mijū *we* to Garo *uē*, Arung *wi*, he, etc.

We shall now proceed to make some remarks on the formation and inflection of words.

A vocalic prefix which occurs in various forms such as *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*, is apparently used in all dialects, perhaps with the exception of Mijū. It is not, like the Burmese prefix *a*, used to form nouns of action from verbs, but is very common before nouns, and also before adjectives, apparently without adding anything to the meaning. It is probably identical with the prefix *a* in Nāgā and Kuki-Chin languages, in Lepcha, and in Tibetan words such as 'a-*pha*, father; 'a-*ma*, mother. In Aka it is identical in form with the personal pronoun of the third person, and it is perhaps originally a pronominal prefix.

Daflā, Miri, and Mishmi also use a prefix *ka* before adjectives, as do also the Bodo, Nāgā, and Kachin languages.

Gender is distinguished in the same way as in all connected languages by using separate words or adding suffixes. Many of the suffixes of gender are identical with those occurring in neighbouring dialects. Thus, the usual male suffix is *pa* or *pō*, corresponding to Tibetan *pa* and *po* and similar forms in most Tibeto-Burman languages. The forms *wa* and *wai* in Mishmi correspond to Kachin *wā* and the pronunciation of *ba* as *wa* after vowels in Tibetan.

It is of interest to note that Daflā and Miri repeat the names of animals, or the last syllable of them, before the suffixes of gender. The same principle also prevails in Kachin.

The genitive is formed by prefixing the governed to the governing noun. Aka often repeats the governed noun by means of a possessive pronoun prefixed to the governing one. The same principle largely prevails in the Kuki-Chin languages. Daflā and Miri possess a genitive suffix *ka*, corresponding to Tibetan *kyi*, Meithei *gi*, etc. The same dialects form their locative by adding a suffix *lá*, which is identical with the Tibetan dative suffix *la*.

The suffix of the comparative in Daflā and Miri is *yā*, which corresponds to *yō* and *zō* in many Kuki-Chin dialects.

With regard to the inflection of verbs, it is of importance to note that all dialects, perhaps with the exception of Mījū, use the same verb substantive in the formation of a periphrastic present. The various forms of this verb all correspond to Tibetan *a-dug-pa*, which is used in the same way.

Miri, and to some extent also Daflā, agree with Mikir in the formation of the future, the suffixes *ye* and *pü* in Miri corresponding to Mikir *jī* and *pō*. Compare also the suffixes of the infinitive of purpose *ye* in Angāmi and *phü* in Burmese, etc. Miri, and apparently also Digāru, often use different suffixes in the negative future, as is also the case in Angāmi. The suffix of the negative future in Miri is *gē*, which is used with a simple future sense in Digāru, while Mījū *yū* probably corresponds to Miri *yē*. This latter suffix is perhaps also connected with *nye* in Aka. Compare the

suffix *nhià* which forms a future of doubt in Angāmi, and the future suffix *nyi* in Semā, etc.

The suffixes of the conjunctive participle are *na* and *la* or similar forms in Aka, Daflā, and Miri. No instances are available for Mishmi. Compare Tibetan *na* and *la* and similar forms in many other connected languages. Compare also the Tibetan case suffixes *la* and *na*.

The formation of causatives is only known in Daflā and Miri, where the verb 'to do,' *ma* and *mō*, respectively, is suffixed to the principal verb. Compare the prefixed *ma*, *man*, etc., in the Old Kuki dialects. The causative in Aka is probably formed in the same way as in Tibetan. Thus, in *shü*, to kill, from *dzü*, to die, we find the causative formed after the pattern intransitive *g*, transitive *kh*.

The negative particle is *mā* or *māng* in all dialects with the exception of Digāru, where it is *im*. This *im* is, however, probably derived from the same original. The negative is prefixed to the verb in Aka and Mijū, but suffixed in Daflā, Miri, and Digāru. There are no instances available in Chulikatā. Aka and Mijū agree with Tibetan, Kachin, Burmese, Central Nāgā, etc., while the suffixed negative is found in Kuki-Chin, Western Nāgā, Nāgā-Bodo, Nāgā-Kuki, and Bodo. The negative particle *mā* is identical with Tibetan and Burmese *ma*. The forms *māng* in Miri and *im* in Digāru may perhaps contain this *ma* prefixed to some verb substantive. Compare Tibetan *med-pa*, for *mi-yod-pa*, not-to-be. The suffixed negative is perhaps derived from a compound verb of this kind. It is, however, also possible that the position of the negative in the Tibeto-Burman languages was originally freer than it is now.

We may note that the usual tense suffixes are often dropped in the negative mood, as is also the case in Burmese and other connected languages.

It will be seen from the preceding remarks that all the dialects in question have several points of analogy with other Tibeto-Burman languages.

They agree with Tibetan in the use of the same verb substantive in order to form a periphrastic present.

A prefix *a*, *e*, *i*, etc., is used in the same way as the corresponding prefix *a* in Tibetan and most of the Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam, while the peculiar use of the prefix *a* in Kachin and Burmese seems to be foreign to them.

The conjunctive participle is formed by means of the same suffixes as in Tibetan and the languages of Assam.

The numeral 'four' agrees with the forms used in the Assam-Burmese languages.

The prefixes are apparently, to a great extent, full syllables, as is the case in the Assam-Burmese languages. Our materials are not, however, sufficient for entering into this question.

All these points seem to show that the North Assam dialects are intermediary between Tibetan and Burmese, or, more correctly, between Tibetan and the Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam.

Their position would be easier to define if we had sufficient information regarding the existence of tones. We know that several tones exist in Daflā, Miri, and Mishmi, and the same is probably the case in Aka. This fact seems to show that they are more closely connected with Tibetan than with Burmese. The same conclusion must be derived from the fact that initial soft consonants occur to a considerable extent, while they are changed to hard sounds in Burmese.

All the dialects in question differ to a great extent in vocabulary. This is especially the case with Aka, while the Mishmi dialects in many points agree with Miri and Daflā, as will be seen from the comparison of a few words:—

arrow . . .	Digāru <i>m-pū</i> ; Daflā <i>ō-pū</i> .
blood . . .	Mijū <i>ui</i> ; Daflā <i>ūi</i> .
brother . . .	Digāru <i>nā-pū</i> ; Daflā <i>a-bū</i> .
dark . . .	Digāru <i>kā-nō-ā</i> ; Daflā <i>kān</i> .
die . . .	Digāru <i>sī</i> ; Daflā and Miri <i>sī</i> .
dog . . .	Digāru <i>n-kwī</i> ; Daflā <i>ī-kī</i> ; Miri <i>ē-kī</i> .
dream . . .	Digāru <i>ḡāmō</i> ; Daflā <i>yūmrā</i> .

drink . . .	Digāru <i>tūm</i> ; Daflā <i>tū</i> ; Miri <i>tūng</i> .
eat . . .	Digāru <i>dhā</i> ; Daflā <i>da</i> ; Miri <i>dā</i> .
feather . . .	Digāru <i>am</i> ; Daflā <i>am</i> .
flower . . .	Digāru <i>tā-pā</i> ; Daflā <i>oppū</i> .
hair . . .	Digāru <i>dhong</i> ; Daflā <i>dūm</i> .
horn . . .	Digāru <i>rō</i> ; Daflā <i>a-rū</i> .
mother . . .	Digāru <i>nā-mā</i> ; Daflā <i>ā-mā</i> .
name . . .	Digāru <i>a-mung</i> ; Daflā <i>a-min</i> .
pig . . .	Digāru <i>ba-li</i> ; Daflā <i>illyi</i> .
slave . . .	Digāru <i>m-po</i> ; Daflā <i>pā</i> .
snake . . .	Digāru <i>tābō</i> ; Daflā <i>tab</i> ; Miri <i>tābui</i> .
tail . . .	Digāru <i>la-ming</i> ; Daflā <i>ā-mī</i> .
tree . . .	Digāru <i>mā-sāng</i> ; Daflā <i>san</i> .
water . . .	Digāru <i>mā-chī</i> ; Daflā <i>ishi</i> .

Such instances might easily be multiplied. They show that there are a considerable amount of common words in Mishmi and Daflā-Miri. These dialects also agree in the use of the prefix *ka* with adjectives, in the personal pronoun of the second person, and other points. Digāru also agrees with Daflā and Miri in the use of a suffixed negative, while Mijū, like Aka, prefixes the negative to the verb.

The Mishmi dialects cannot, however, be classed as closely related to Daflā and Miri. They sometimes also agree with Aka as against the central dialects.

Thus, they use a prefix *ka* in the numerals 'two' and 'three,' as is also the case in Aka and Tibetan. They form the higher numerals as in Tibetan, Kachin, Burmese, etc., after the pattern 'three-tens,' and they do not use generic prefixes before numerals.

The Mishmi dialects also, in some points, agree with Kachin. Thus, the numeral 'five' takes a prefix *ma* as in Kachin, Meithei, and some Nāgā dialects, and the usual prefixes *m* and *n* in Mishmi and Kachin are probably identical. There is also some connection between them in vocabulary. Thus, we find Digāru *nā-pū*, Kachin *phū*, brother; Mijū *bāng*, Kachin *m'ba*, cloth; Mijū and Kachin *manchu*, cow; Mijū and Kachin *shā*, eat; Mijū *mī*, Kachin

mī, eye; *Mījū sāt*, Kachin *sat*, kill; *Mījū sū-lūp*, Kachin *lap*, leaf; *Mījū* and Kachin *kāp*, shoot; *Mījū laung*, Kachin *n'lūng*, stone; *Mījū phāt*, Kachin *m'phat*, vomit; *Mījū m'bong*, Kachin *m'būng*, wind; etc.

The proportion of common words does not, however, appear to be great.

The central dialects, *Miri* and *Daflā*, agree with several of the neighbouring forms of speech. The reduplication of the nouns before the suffixes of gender is also common in *Kachin*. The prefixes before the first numerals are the same as those used in some Central and Eastern *Nāgā* dialects. The formation of the higher numerals is the same as in the *Kuki-Chin* and most *Nāgā* languages. Generic prefixes with numerals are used in the same way as in the *Bodo*, some *Nāgā*, and the *Kuki-Chin* languages. Compare the generic suffixes in *Burmese*. The comparative suffix is the same as that occurring in some *Kuki-Chin* languages. Some tense suffixes are common to *Miri-Daflā* and *Mikir*, and so forth.

The result of the above may be summed up as follows:—

The dialects in question occupy an intermediate position between *Tibetan* and the *Tibeto-Burman* languages of *Assam*. They agree with *Tibetan* in important points, but differ in others in the same way as the connected languages of *Assam* and *Burma*.

We can only account for this relationship by the supposition that the tribes in question were gradually driven into their present homes from a locality where the different branches of the *Tibeto-Burman* family were in mutual contact. This points to the country about the headwaters of the *Irawaddy* and *Chindwin* rivers as the locality from which the *North Assam* tribes crossed the *Brahmaputra* and wandered westward to their present habitat.

The dialects under consideration cannot be considered as one distinct group, and we must therefore conclude that the immigration into the mountains between the *Assam* valley and *Tibet* extended over a considerable period, the various tribes having crossed the *Brahmaputra* at different times.

The mountainous region which is their home may be considered as a backwater that was gradually filled up from the great Tibeto-Burman current which, in the course of time, split up and flowed into Tibet and Further India.

The Akas are probably the first immigrants, and have lived isolated in their mountains for a considerable time. This would account for the strange appearance of their vocabulary, and also for the many points of analogy with Tibetan.

The Miris and Daflās must have had intercourse with the tribes now known as Kachin, Kuki-Chin, Nāgā, and Bodo, before they reached their present homes. The Mishmis have more affinity to Tibetan, but are also akin to the Kachins. The Western Mishmis, the Digārus, and Chulikātās have also been influenced by their western neighbours, the Miris and Daflās, and perhaps also by the Tibeto-Burman tribes of Assam.

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY
OF
GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND.

22, *Albemarle Street, Piccadilly, W.*



Special Notice.

THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY publishes Quarterly an *Illustrated Journal*, containing Original Articles on the Languages, the Archæology, the History, the Beliefs, or the Customs of the East.

A Special Article in the Journal gives each Quarter an account, as complete as possible up to date, of all scholarly work being done throughout the world in these branches of inquiry.

The Annual Subscription to the Society is THREE GUINEAS a Year for Resident, and THIRTY SHILLINGS a Year for Non-Resident, Members.

Each Member who has paid his Subscription for the current year receives the Journal post free, has the use of the Library at the Society's rooms, and admission to the meetings of the Society. Three-guinea subscribers may also borrow books.

Libraries and Non-Members may obtain the Journal post free by a Subscription of **Thirty Shillings** a year if paid in advance direct to the Secretary. The Price of each Part separately is **Twelve Shillings**.