

# BHUTAN'S ENDANGERED LANGUAGES DOCUMENTATION PROGRAMME UNDER THE DZONGKHA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: THE THREE RARE GEMS

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In 1989, the Dzongkha Advisory Committee and Dzongkha Division of the Royal Department of Education were replaced by a new autonomous government organ called the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC), initially under the chairmanship of His Excellency the former Minister of Finance Dorji Tshering. The Dzongkha Development Commission was dedicated to the advancement of the national language and the investigation and documentation of the kingdom's diverse linguistic heritage, covering both major regional languages and endangered minority languages. In 2003, a rationalisation of the many governmental commissions led to the Dzongkha Development Commission being reincorporated into the Ministry of Education and renamed the Dzongkha Development Authority (DDA). Major activities of the Dzongkha Development Authority include the description of Dzongkha, the codification of a Bhutanese orthographic standard in the traditional 'Ucen and Jôyi scripts, the graded promulgation of a phonological system of romanisation known as Roman Dzongkha, the integration and release of Dzongkha in the Microsoft Windows program, the compilation of English-Dzongkha dictionaries and the publication of an ethnolinguistic history of Bhutan.

In the past twelve years, the Dzongkha Development Commission has undertaken to document the three most endangered languages of the kingdom. These are Lhokpu, Black Mountain and Gongduk. These three languages also happen to be the most intriguing from the comparative and historical linguistic point of view. They each occupy key positions within the Tibeto-Burman language family, and they each have much to tell us about Bhutan's past and about the prehistory of the entire greater Himalayan region.

In the past few years, international attention has increasingly turned to the plight of mankind's vanishing linguistic heritage. New funding programmes have been started up such as the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) funded by the Rausing Foundation, the Endangered Languages Programme of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Endangered Languages Programme of

the Volkswagen Stiftung in Germany, and the Endangered Languages Programme of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Yet all of these initiatives have jumped on the now fashionable endangered languages bandwagon belatedly, and none of these programmes funds meaningful linguistic research in the Himalayas, though some have explicitly paid lip service to endangered language research in the Himalayas, e.g. NWO. The honour of funding an endangered languages documentation programme in the Himalayas currently falls exclusively to the Dzongkha Development Authority. Just as His Late Majesty King Jimi Dôji 'Wangchu was an *écologiste avant la lettre*, a conservationist head of state well ahead of his time, so too the Royal Government of Bhutan has been funding and actively pursuing the documentation of endangered languages for over twelve years.

### Three Gems in the Realm of the Thunder Dragon

Each language is a conceptual cosmos unto itself, and no world view inherent to a particular language can be said to be superior to that of another language. Therefore, each language is important as a conceptual universe unto itself and a valuable part of mankind's linguistic and intellectual heritage. The first Linguistic Survey of Bhutan identified nineteen different languages spoken by native speech communities within the borders of the kingdom. The precise number of languages actually depends on which criteria are used to distinguish between a language and a dialect. If the languages of Bumthang, Kheng and Kurtö happened to be spoken in Europe, they would certainly be treated generally as three distinct languages. However, some linguists might be inclined to treat the languages of Bumthang, Kheng and Kurtö as dialects of a single language. Yet many languages of Bhutan do not show such close genetic proximity to each other as these three languages of the Greater Bumthang group. So, it would be safest and most accurate to stick to the number nineteen.

The national language of Bhutan is Dzongkha, and its two sister languages are Dränjoke or Dränjobikha, spoken in Sikkim, and Cho-canga-ca-kha, spoken in part of the Kurichu valley. Dzongkha itself shows significant dialectal diversity, and some dialects are highly divergent, e.g. the dialect of Dzongkha spoken at Päsakha in the south and that spoken by the alpine yakherd communities of Laya and Lunana in the north. Tshangla or Shâchop, a Bodic tongue, is one of Bhutan's major regional languages, indigenous to southeastern Bhutan but heard throughout the kingdom. The East Bodish languages Bumthang, Kheng, Kurtöp, 'Nyenkha (also known as Henkha or Mangdebikha), Dzala and Dakpa are all major regional languages of the country. Dakpa, however, is

mostly spoken outside of Bhutan in Tawang district, an area which for historical and religious reasons is not part of Bhutan. Two East Bodish languages, Chali and Black Mountain, are only spoken by very small dwindling groups. In fact, it is moot whether or not Black Mountain is an East Bodish language at all.

The languages Brokpa, Brokkat, Lakha, and B'ökha or Tibetan are all minority languages of the Central Bodish group. Nepali or Lhotshamkha is a regional language of the Indo-European language family which predominates in the southern fringe of the kingdom. The languages Lhokpu, Gongduk and Lepcha are all highly distinct Tibeto-Burman languages spoken by very small speech communities. The Lepcha language community in Sikkim and Darjeeling District is far larger than the small enclave in Bhutan, but the Lhokpu, Black Mountain and Gongduk languages are entirely unique to Bhutan. The geographical distribution of the languages of Bhutan is shown on the map.

In terms of their intriguing lexical and grammatical features and the special positions which they appear to occupy within the Tibeto-Burman language family as a whole, Lhokpu, Black Mountain and Gongduk truly represent three gems. All three languages were investigated during the first Linguistic Survey of Bhutan conducted by the Dzongkha Development Commission in the years 1990-1991. At the conclusion of this initial investigation and the internal publication in Thimphu of the *Report on the First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan* in May 1991, the Dzongkha Development Commission promptly initiated the permanent Linguistic Survey of Bhutan, a research programme of the Royal Government of Bhutan for the documentation and preservation of all of the kingdom's linguistic diversity. Under the permanent Linguistic Survey of Bhutan, Lhokpu was again investigated by the Dzongkha Development Commission in 1992 and 2002, Black Mountain in 1992, 1993 and 2000, and Gongduk was again investigated in 1992 and 2001. The information presented here improves upon the data presented both in the *Report* and in the handbook of Himalayan languages (van Driem 2001). A more comprehensive and definitive statement on each of these three languages will be published in the form of the three grammars which have been commissioned by the Dzongkha Development Commission. The following account introduces the three ethnolinguistic gems of the kingdom.

### **The Lhokpu of Southwestern Bhutan**

The Lhokpu are a Tibeto-Burman group indigenous to the hills of southwestern Bhutan. They refer to themselves as *Lhokpu* and to their language *Lhokpu Tam*, *Lhoktam* 'Lhokpu language' or *Ngântam* 'language

of Man', whereby the root < tam > 'language' is evidently cognate with Chöke *tam* 'speech, conversation, tidings'. The word *ngân* means 'person'. In Dzongkha the Lhokpu are simply referred to as *Lhop* 'southerners', and their language as Lhobikha 'language of the southerners'. These terms are, of course, historically ambiguous because in other sources the same terms refer to the whole of Bhutan, which lies on the southern flank of the Great Himalayan range, and any or all of its inhabitants. The term *Lhop* is sometimes heard as *Lhup* when pronounced by Dzongkha speakers who live in the vicinity of the Lhokpu, and the Lhokpu themselves are fond of being referred to by the term *Lhop Drup* 'Southern Drukpa'. According to the Lhokpu lore, their forebears are the ones who invited zh'apdru Ngawa 'Namgä (1594-1651) to Bhutan in the XVIIth century, a tradition in which the Lhokpu take great pride. Yet it remains unclear whether or not the native term *Lhokpu* has an etymological relationship with the Bodish root *lho* 'south'.

A more well-known name for these people is the Nepali term *Doyä*, which is even sometimes used by Dzongkha speakers. This term evidently derives from the kinship term *do?ya* 'cross cousin'. The term *do?ya* is indigenous to Sanglung. The native term for *do?ya* in Loto Kucu is *dokcat*<sup>2n</sup>. Since the Lhokpu practise cross cousin marriage, this term used by a male speaker implies that the sisters of the person thus designated would be eligible marriage partners for the speaker. When used by a female speaker, the term *do?ya* implies that the person would himself be an eligible marriage partner for the speaker. The Lhokpu term *do?ya* may previously have been used as a term of address for any male of the speaker's own generation who happens not to be the speaker's cross cousin. The corresponding Limbu term *luNa?* is used in precisely this way in Limbuwan in eastern Nepal, as the friendliest and most polite and gentle way to address non-kin. However, the Limbu, unlike the Lhokpu, do not, or at least no longer, practise cross-cousin marriage. Notably, however, if the Lhokpu term *do?ya* was ever used as a term of address in this way, the practice has now been lost, for *do?ya* is currently used only as a term of reference, not as a term of address. The term is locally translated into Nepali as *solfi*. Finally, the Nepali term *Doyä* should not be confused with its homonym, an historical term once used in the Nepal Valley during the Malla period to designate invaders from the kingdom of Mithilä in the Terai.

The Lhokpu are settled in the hills of Samtsi District, to the north and northeast of Samtsi itself and to the west of Phüntsho'ling. There are roughly one thousand speakers in the two villages of Tâba and Dramte, situated in the hills several hours walking from Phüntsho'ling. Further west there are well over a thousand speakers in the four villages *Loto*

*Kucu*, [sanlun], [sataka] and [loto?k], which can be reached from Samtsi bazaar on foot in a day. When walking up from Samtsi, the present-day Lhokpu area begins just beyond Wibala. The pass Wibala is known in Dzongkha as Yabala, and in Nepali as Sängurī.

The two Lhokpu speaking areas are separated by a ridge. They represent two distinct but closely related dialects of the same language. Tāba and Dramte lie a full day's walk from *Loto Kucu* in good weather. The inhabitants of Tāba and Dramte call the Lhokpu in the four western villages [gonke], with the plural suffix <-ke>, and the latter refer to the Lhokpu of Tāba and Dramte as 'easterners'. The villages *Loto Kucu* and Sanglung are referred to in Lhokpu by the clan names of their inhabitants, [binaca?t] and [guca?t] respectively. The villages [sataka] and [loto?k] are known only by their native Lhokpu clan toponyms. The Lhokpu names for the villages of Tāba and Dramte are [pake] and [humca?t] respectively.

The 'Ngalong are known to the Lhokpu as *Lhakké*, and Dzongkha is known as *Lhaktam*. Lhokpu is heard spoken regularly on Sundays at Samtsi, which is the bazaar day. The Rai and Limbu are called *Dran*, or *Dranké* in the plural. The Nepali language which the Rai and Limbu locally speak is called *Drantam*. Indian and Nepali brahmins and kōatriyas are referred to collectively as *Jadran*, whereas tribal and low-caste people from the plains are referred to as *Janggor*. The Lepchas are called *Mon* by the Lhokpu and their language is called *Montam*.

The oldest mention of the Lhokpu is by Bābu Kçønakānta Bos, alias 'Kishen Kant Bose', an Indian officer sent by the British to the Drū Desi or 'Devarājā' in 1815 to settle frontier disputes along the Bhutanese duars and foothills. Bos reported that 'the Dahya', i.e. *Doyä* lived 'in Chamoorchee' (1825: 13), also known as Cämurcī, the village on the plains just below the hills of Samtsi. The next mention of the Lhokpu is the following paragraph written by Charles John Morris:

In addition to the Nepalese there are also in this district a number of Lepchas, some of whom are Christians, and a very few people calling themselves Doaya. The Daoyas, of whom I saw only one or two, are of very Mongoloid appearance. Some of them speak Nepali, but their own language almost certainly belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group, as I found some words almost identical with those used in other languages of this group with which I am familiar. The Daoyas eat elephants, which they kill by means of poisoned arrows. They make their clothes from the fibre of nettles. They have apparently no caste restrictions and no organisation beyond that of the family, as in Tibet and Bhutan. They are said to intermarry to some extent with the Bhutanese. The Daoyas never burn their dead but place them in very shallow graves, which they cover

with large flat stones: offerings are made at the graveside from time to time. These people do not recognise the Brahmans in any way nor have they any priesthood of their own. I have been unable to find any mention of them in works of reference. They seemed somewhat similar to the Naga tribes of Assam, whence they may possibly have originally come. (1935: 210)

Most of Morris' statements can be corroborated on the basis of other sources and more detailed data which have been collected since. For example, according to Lhokpu tradition the Lhokpu ancestors used to hunt and eat *hmar* 'elephant'. Yet there have not been feral populations of elephant on the duars since the large-scale destruction of forest habitat in the 1830s and 1840s when vast swathes of jungle were cleared to establish the tea gardens.

The Lhokpu represent the aboriginal Dung population native to western Bhutan. The Dung population used to be traditionally administered by the Dung 'Nyêp of Paro, afterwards known as the Dung Ramjam. Presently, the Samtse district administration of the Royal Government of Bhutan is pledged to protect the interest of the native Bhutanese Lhokpu population. According to Bhutanese government records, Nepalese immigrants began to encroach upon Lhokpu lands as woodcutters during the first decade of the XXth century at the instigation of Sir John Claude White, political officer in the British Indian government. The revenue generated from the timber thus acquired was intended to defray the expenses of educating young Bhutanese in British India. The most elderly Lhokpu generation recalls the advent of the first Nepalese immigrants to the area. Their arrival was also noted by Charles John Morris, who noted that the settlers in Samtse district of southwestern Bhutan were in fact largely Tibeto-Burman peoples of eastern Nepal. Dorkha is largely populated by Rais; Denchukha on the other side of the river, by Limbus, both these being eastern Nepalese tribes. (1935: 210)

The Lhokpu language appears to be more closely related to the Eastern Kiranti languages of Nepal such as Lohorong or Limbu than it is to the Lepcha. Moreover, Lhokpu may be the substrate language for Dzongkha in western Bhutan, and the forthcoming grammar of Lhokpu will enable us to test this hypothesis. The highly divergent Dzongkha dialect spoken in Pâsakha east of Phüntsho'ling and similarly aberrant Dzongkha dialects in the south could represent Lhokpu groups which have been linguistically assimilated in relatively recent historical times. Lhokpu lacks a Kiranti-type verbal agreement system. The most striking and unusual morphological feature which Lhokpu shares with Dzongkha are two verbal morphemes. One of these is the Lhokpu progressive

auxiliary <-do>, which is evidently cognate with the Dzongkha progressive ending <-do>.

In 1993, the late Michael Vaillancourt Aris became quite excited when I told him about the progressive auxiliary *-do* in Lhokpu, and he showed great interest in the hypothesis which suggested itself to my mind at the time about a possible Lhokpu substrate influence in Dzongkha. Cultural features shared by the Lhokpu and certain Dzongkha language communities as well as the northern provenance of the 'Ngalong had already led Michael to believe that there could be a Lhokpu substrate in Dzongkha. From time to time, until his death in 1999, Michael would urge me from across the North Sea to complete my study of Lhokpu, but other duties and, more importantly, the fact that I had not yet had the opportunity to double-check all the data and to collect additional data prevented me from completing my study before Michael passed away.

The following example illustrates that the morphological parallelism between Lhokpu and Dzongkha in the flexional system of the verb extends beyond the progressive ending *-do*, and extends to an apparent Lhokpu cognate <-wa> of the Dzongkha epistemic verbal ending marking newly acquired knowledge *wä ~ bä*.

Lhokpu progressive	Dzongkha progressive
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<i>tun-do</i>	
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‘is drinking’	
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	<i>thung-do</i>
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<i>tun-dowa</i>	
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‘is drinking’	
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	<i>thung-dowä</i>
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Yet other than these two elements of verbal morphology, the Lhokpu auxiliaries or endings are quite distinct from the Dzongkha endings, and the overall verbal systems are different. A few other similarities can be found, such as the deontic auxiliary or auxiliary of exigency, which is *go* in both languages.

Whether the two endings in question, the progressive and the epistemic suffix, could be interpreted as evidence for a Lhokpu substrate in Dzongkha seems doubtful, however, because both Dzongkha morphemes appear to have a good Bodish pedigree. The Dzongkha progressive auxiliary *-do* would appear to derive from the full verb *dö ~ dä* ‘sit, stay’ (cf. Dzongkha *dö* ‘sit, stay’). Progressive forms are also formed on the basis of the grammaticalisation of this verb in other

dialects. For example, the Western Tibetan dialect spoken in Trewa and J'adur shows progressive forms such as in *kho droi däyö* 'he is going'.

Likewise, the Dzongkha ending of newly acquired knowledge also appears to have a good Bodish pedigree. The ending *wä ~ bä* means that the information expressed by the verbal predicate represents newly acquired knowledge. The use of this morpheme is attested as a copula in the Chumbi Valley, i.e. Dr'omo or J'umo. Sarat Chandra Das already observes that this ending is attested fulfilling a grammatical function which he describes 'as a pleonastic addition to verbs or verbal roots for the sake of emphasis or by custom' (1902: 892). Furthermore, the Dzongkha ending *-wä ~ bä* is an integral part of the Dzongkha verbal system, whereas the Lhokpu ending <-wa> appears to be limited to the progressive.

Although we cannot at this point exclude the possibility that this striking similarity between two otherwise rather dissimilar verbal systems in neighbouring languages is a regular morphological correspondence reflecting a shared inheritance, the fact that reflexes of *dö ~ dä* 'sit, stay' appear as auxiliaries of the progressive in some dialects of Western Tibetan, as pointed out above, seems to bolster to the case for the borrowing of the progressive ending <-do> by Lhokpu from an older precursor of modern Dzongkha. Nicolas Tournadre and Konchok Jiatso report that such reflexes also appear in the dialects of Central Tibet and Hor (2001: 81). However, there are no sound descriptions of the meanings of these auxiliaries in any Bodish language other than Dzongkha. The Tibetological literature merely provides sporadic examples with a liberal sprinkling of neologistic labels.

A more elaborate treatment and testing of the substrate hypothesis is included in the Lhokpu grammar, where lexical comparison are also undertaken. Suffice it to say that the phonological shape of many loan words indicates that the Lhokpu were influenced by a very old form of Dzongkha in the distant past, which suggests that the aboriginal Lhokpu already came into contact with the early 'Ngalongs during their southward expansion in ancient times.

The Lhokpu practise an indigenous religion in which native deities such as *Tenglha* 'God of the Heavens' and the local mountain deity *Jipdak* figure prominently. The name of the Lhokpu deity Jipdak evidently reflects Chöke *zhidak* 'master of the lands and localities', a term defined by Sarat Chandra Das quaintly as 'a local deity or rather monster, generally of the *Näga* class, who when offended sends diseases or other calamities upon a particular village or province or on an individual. He is required to be appeased by offerings when incensed' (1902: 1080). Jipdak

is associated with a holy place at the summit of a mountain just above Senden. Jipdak and the locality associated with him on this big mountain ridge are worshipped annually with an offering known as *canka tuma*, which consists of millet beer.

Jipdak is only regaled once every three years with the blood sacrifice of a pig. A chicken may be sacrificed to Jipdak in the intervening period if someone is struck down with an illness of calamity specifically attributed to Jipdak. The mountain ridge sacred to this deity is known as in Nepali, and also associated with *Trashi Tâgâ*, the eight auspicious signs of Mahâyana Buddhism. An *avatâr* or manifestation of Jipdak is known as Nehlha or Nehdak, loosely 'master of inhabited places'. A chicken is sacrificed to 'Nehdak whenever someone has been seriously afflicted with an illness or calamity. 'Nehdak is locally associated with a pond that used to be situated in Sanglung, but this body of water has since dried up. Nonetheless, 'Nehdak is still connected with this locality.

These ceremonies of worship in honour of Jipdak and 'Nehdak do not require a shaman. They are performed by the elders, and the younger people and children watch and gradually come to perform these rites of worship themselves. There is also a local deity known as Tso'hmen who inhabits a beautiful untouched natural place above a vegetable garden in Sanglung. Tso'hmen resides in rivers, streams and ponds and is identified with the type of serpent deity known in Nepali as a *Nâga*. Tso'hmen afflicts people with boils and itching wounds. Tso'hmen is worshipped in the month of *Caitra*, when offerings are made of white radish, banana, *pinðälu* *Calladium arumaciae*, and other vegetables. Another major deity worshipped by some Lhokpu is *Kendruma*, known in Dzongkha as *Khandrom* 'Angel'. *Kendruma* is described as a god who protects the home, yet does not reside in the house itself, but lives near the Dzong at Hâ.

The native Lhokpu male dress consists of a white garb made from nettle fabric known in Lhokpu as a [pogwi], which is crossed over the chest and knotted at the shoulders, then tied around the waist with a sash called a [pojin]. The Lhokpu garment is referred to as a *gaddä* in local Nepali. This Lhokpu native dress somewhat resembles that of the Lepchas of Sikkim. Michael Aris suggested that the inhabitants of the isolated village of Toktokha, just north of Gädu in Chukha district, are likewise direct descendants of the aboriginal Dung. Aris reported that the Toktop 'males wear a peculiar garment woven from nettles called a "pakhi" which crossed over the chest and knotted at the shoulders very much like the dress of the Lepchas' (1979: xviii). The 'pakhi' garment which Aris described is evidently the [pogwi] or native Lhokpu dress. The people of Toktokha and the surrounding villages form a tight-knit

community, which now, however, is linguistically assimilated. The people speak a local variety of Dzongkha. Aris's contention that the Toktop may be descendants of the Dung could very well be true. Indeed, it is possible that certain other communities in western Bhutan are of mixed Dung and 'Ngalong ancestry.

The Lhokpu are the only native Bhutanese who have not adopted Buddhism and who bury their dead. The dead are interred in squat, cylindrical stone sepulchres above the ground known as *rambu* or, more formally, as *lhiptek*. The real difference in meaning between *rambu* and *lhiptek*, however, is that the term *rambu* refers more to the stone structure itself, whereas *lhiptek* is more the grave or sepulchre as a final resting place. The term *tratrām* refers to the entire cemetery or graveyard site with or without a facultative wooden enclosure around it. The corpse is folded with the knees tucked up beneath the chin and the arms crossed, draped over the shins. The corpse is tightly wrapped in cloth, then wrapped in a layer of bamboo matting known in Nepali as a *māndro* and placed inside a square wooden casket. Both the bamboo matting and the casket are meticulously whitewashed with white clay on the inner and outer surfaces. The casket is then entombed in the stone sepulchre, which is built around the casket.

A funeral is conducted without the intercession of shaman or 'lama. Stones employed in the construction of a sepulchre may never be re-used to build a house. The Lhokpu do not believe in reincarnation but in a hereafter which they call *Simpū*. The Lhokpu tell me that they are aware that other people believe in reincarnation, but that the Lhokpu apparently do not reincarnate. They point out that at least nobody whom they have ever known has ever come back in a new incarnation. Some Lhokpu say that *Simpū* is probably an unpleasant place like the soil beneath our feet, but that they cannot vouch for it because nobody now alive has ever been to *Simpū*.

After marriage, the bridegroom becomes a member of his bride's parental household, quite contrary to the practice amongst most societies on the planet. However, this matrilocality system is far from unattested amongst the cultures of the world, and matrilocality also occurs amongst other Himalayan peoples, notably the Gongduk. A more elaborate treatment of this subject is included in the forthcoming Lhokpu grammar.

From Bhutanese sources, Lhokpu oral tradition and the living memory of elderly Lhokpu, facts can be reconstructed about Lhokpu history. Like all Bhutanese subjects, the Lhokpu were expected to pay tax in the form of labour or goods. During my visit to *Loto Kucu* in the Spring of 1992, an elderly Lhokpu gentleman, aged 68 years, told me that the Lhokpu area and surrounding lands used to be administered by the *Kujo*,

by whom they were sometimes called upon to perform [hulak], a tax imposed by the government in the form of forced labour known in Dzongkha as *ula*. The term is cognate with Tibetan *hu-lag*, which in mediaeval Tibet was a relay system for postal services, whence also the Nepali term *hulāk* which likewise signifies government service as a postal runner. The Lhokpu man, however, translated the Lhokpu term [hulak] and the Dzongkha term *ula* into Nepali as *sarkāri kām* 'government service', because the sense of service as runners in a postal relay system is unfamiliar to the Lhokpu. The term *Kujo* is the title by which the Lhokpu refer to the Paro Pön'lo, who until 1907 governed this part of Bhutan. The Lhokpu gentleman recounted that the *Kujo*, who ruled over the Lhokpu from Paro, was also referred to by the Nepali term *Mahārāj*. The Lhokpu term *Kujo* is evidently from the Dzongkha *kuzhu* 'your lordship', an honorific title by which a pön'lo was formerly addressed.

The original Lhokpu homeland extended across the Jaldakha river, including the area called Bara Tendu in Sipsu. The area where three rivers converge between Samtsi and Sipsu is known in Lhokpu as *Celo*, and in Nepali as *tin dobhāne* 'three confluences' or 'triple confluence'. The place *Celo* figures prominently in several Lhokpu songs. The three rivers are known in Lhokpu as the *Sihti*, the *Cunti* and the *Dronti*. The second syllables all unmistakably reflect the Tibeto-Burman etymon <-ti> 'water'. The river which flows into India south of *Celo* is locally known to the peoples living on the plains as the *Dam Drum* river, a name which actually reflects the Lhokpu names of the two largest tributaries, the *Dronti* and the *Damti*. The original Lhokpu toponym for the river known in Dzongkha as the *Mo Chu* and in Nepali as the *Tursä Kholä* is *Moti* [moti]. The Lhokpu have native toponyms for every local dale, cove, recess, stream, brook, hillock, coppice and ridge in the area.

Much has changed in Bhutan since the advent of motorable roads between 1962, when the first road to Paro was built, and 1979, when the road to Pemagatshel was built. It used to take seven days to walk on the old main road from Thimphu to Bumthang, and thence eight more days to reach Trashigang in the east. Until the 1960s there was neither Bhutanese administration nor a marketplace at the site of present-day Samtsi bazaar. In the 1990, elderly Lhokpu recounted that in the 1930s there were just two shanties inhabited by cowherds from Hâ in the wintertime between Sanglung and the site of present-day Samtsi. These two shanties were abandoned in the rainy season, but now a large and diffuse area is inhabited by Hâp cowherds whose cattle devour the shrubs and denude the forest. The site which was to become Samtsi bazaar was then inhabited by *Dran* or *Dranké*, as Rai and Limbu

immigrants from Nepal are known to the Lhokpu, and the settlement was known by the Nepali name of *Toribäri* 'rapeseed garden'.

However, in the days of the *Kujo* there were not yet any Nepalese settlers. The Lhokpu inhabited all the hill tracts of present-day Samtshi district until the advent of the *Kujo*. Present-day Dorokha used to be a major Lhokpu settlement known by the native name [dopuhcEn]. Dorokha itself is originally known in Lhokpu as [doga...], and the site in Dorokha where the residences of the dr'âshos and maṅḍal are presently located is originally known in Lhokpu as [dunkap]. The village of Pumṭä in Dorokha was originally the Lhokpu village of [gabi], a toponym which has now been rendered in Dzongkha as Gabji. Likewise, present-day Denchukha was originally the Lhokpu town of [donkim], which according to Lhokpu tradition was the ancient seat of the Lhokpu kings.

Today Dorokha and Denchukha are inhabited by the descendants of Nepalese settlers. Before the advent of the Nepalese, only the Lhokpu dwelt in the hill tracts, and the Lhokpu settlements are said to have extended beyond present-day Sipsu. Near present-day Cyäfbäri or Cefmäri there once lay a village originally known in Lhokpu as [bojurpu<sup>2</sup>k] and later known by the Nepali name of *Meceṣär* 'Meche meadow'. Before the advent of Rai and Limbu settlers from Nepal only Meche inhabited the area beyond Cyäfbäri. All the dense jungles which once blanketed the Bhutanese duars, which begin just below the hills, were formerly inhabited by Meche, whereas the hills were inhabited exclusively by Lhokpu. Now the former Meche areas are inhabited by Bengalis. What we know about the dramatic changes in population, a process which was set in motion in the XIXth century, is corroborated by the many native toponyms known to the Lhokpu for sites throughout the area.

In 1990, a Lhokpu man of *Loto Kucu* by the name of Him Trashi, then aged eighty-two years, told me that the Rai and Limbu settlers from Nepal began to arrive in the uphill areas when he was a child and soon occupied swathes of territory which had previously been the exclusive domain of the Lhokpu. The elderly Lhokpu gentleman recounted that 'about twenty-eight years ago', a man named Dr'âsho Ka'lön, whom the Lhokpu took to be a representative of the Bhutanese Crown, came and levied cattle and taxes from all the Rai and Limbu settlers of the area and subsequently gave the same cattle and money to the Lhokpu, saying that the Lhokpu could no longer exercise their *kipaf* rights to the land. The Lepchas, Him Trashi reported, have resided in the area much longer, having settled their present villages when they came from Sikkim some two hundred years ago. Sikkim is known in Lhokpu as [moncaN] and known to the Lhokpu to be the homeland of the Lepchas. The Lepcha still

speaking Lepcha, whereas the Rai and Limbu now all speak Nepali. The 'Koch', locally known in Nepali as *Koci*, are known as *Garo* [g'ro] in Lhokpu, and the Meche as [mece]. The Garo and Meche used to be known for their distinct style of dress.

Him Trashi recounted that the Lhokpu were once far more numerous than they are today. This changed some time before the advent of the Nepalese settlers, 'in the time of the grandparents of our grandparents', when an epidemic broke out which wiped out nearly the entire Lhokpu population. This disease was known in Lhokpu as *lêyam* [le...jam] and in Nepali as *mäsi rog* 'dysentery'. The symptoms were a burning fever and bloody diarrhoea. In the area around *Loto Kucu* only twelve households survived, and the children of these households, now all grandparents, recount how a few Lhokpu girls afflicted with the illness stumbled into *Loto Kucu* as the last survivors to have fled from Lhokpu settlements which had been wiped out by the disease in the lower lying hills. These girls and young women succumbed from their illness after they arrived in *Loto Kucu*. The large influx of Nepalese settlers is said to have followed this epidemic, and in their wake the incidence was to increase of yet another disease which was characterised by *rhihka* [rihkA] 'fever'. According to some, this disease may have been malaria. Probably these diseases were the microbial harbingers that heralded the influx into the region of immigrant populations who were the hosts to a larger pool of pathogens which at this time infiltrated the Lhokpu area.

Him Trashi also recounted that the site of the new Bhutanese government school at Sengden was originally known by the Lhokpu name Sengteng. The etymology of the toponym is known. There used to be a large *Sensin* or katus tree at the site. This huge tree was felled by the earthquake of 1953, leaving only a shattered stump. The place acquired the name *Senten* 'katus stump'. In 1992 attempts to render the place name into Dzongkha led to the orthography Sengteng. This has since been replaced by the spelling Sengden, a pronunciation which corresponds to the *Dran* or 'Nepali' name for the location, viz. [senden]. The second syllable of the 'Nepali' name may have been interpreted to be the Limbu suffix <-den> 'place at which', whereas the first element could have been identified by the Nepali settlers with any of several verb roots in various Rai languages or, alternatively, as a form of the Tibeto-Burman root for 'wood, tree', which is *sen* in some languages, e.g. Black Mountain.

Another Lhokpu man shared with me an interesting theory which he entertained on the basis of the Lhokpu word for 'automobile' and the historical recollections of the epidemic. The Lhokpu have their own word for 'automobile' or 'motorised vehicle', whereas surrounding language

communities have either borrowed the Nepali word *gāḍi* or the English word *truck*. He reasoned therefore that it was conceivable that the Lhokpu had once had a technologically advanced civilisation but had fallen into a state of decay as a cause of the epidemic. The man surprised me when he told me that the Lhokpu word for ‘motorised vehicle’ was *lori*. Then it was my turn to surprise him by telling him about the English word *lorry*. The Lhokpu man was highly pleased to find out about this word because it enabled him to conclude that the Lhokpu term was a loan word. Yet we both mused about why it would be that in this region the Lhokpu had uniquely adopted a different loan word. One reason appears to be that until relatively recently the Lhokpu communities led a comparatively isolated existence, and their contacts with other peoples appear to have been just about as rare as their early contacts were with the British.

Since the days of Kṣṇakānta Bos, the Lhokpu language is mentioned only sporadically in the literature. The Lhokpu language appears twice in Olschak’s listing under the two separate headings of Tāba-Dramdring-bi-kha ‘the language of Tāba-Dramding’ and as Dungdepai-kha, which Olschak qualifies as ‘an archaic language in the south’ (1979: 25). I too recorded the orthography Dramding in my handbook of Himalayan languages (2001: 800), but this is just one of various spellings that has been in use for the Lhokpu village known to its inhabitants as *Dramte*. The Lhokpu are both linguistically and ethnically quite distinct from the Toto who live in nearby Tṣoṭopārā on the Bhutanese duars. Tṣoṭopārā now falls administratively within Mādārihāt subdivision of Jalpāiguḍi district in West Bengal. Recently, Jagar Dorji of Bumthang, formerly director of the National Institute of Education at Samtse, visited the Lhokpu area of Loto Kucu and wrote two instalments in *Kuensel*, the national weekly of Bhutan. Both newspaper articles draw on information from earlier sources but also contain valuable new information on the Lhokpu (2001a, 2001b). A more complete account, combining the contents of the two newspaper articles was published in the proceedings of a conference held in Thimphu that year (2001c).

### **Black Mountain**

The Black Mountains are a southern spur of the Himalayas, which runs from north to south over a distance of some 200 km, separating western from central Bhutan. The range was so called by the British because of its dense forest cover and its formidable and precipitous, dark escarpments. The Black Mountains are home to many species which are endangered or extinct elsewhere, such as the *thāral* or serow, *Capricornus*

*sumatraensis*, and the *dhanex* or great pied hornbill, *Buceros bicornis*. Not only is this a magnificently ornate bird to behold, but the rustle of its feathers against the air sounds serene as it swooshes by majestically overhead. The rare golden langur as well as the white variety of the larger Hanumän langur make their home in the Black Mountains. In the Black Mountains resides a small aboriginal Mönpa group speaking an archaic East Bodish language which I call simply 'Black Mountain'.

An alternative would be to call these people *Mönpa* or *Monpa*, but the use of the name 'Monpa' is both confusing and not very informative as well as laden with derogatory historical overtones. As we saw in the previous section, the Lepcha of Sikkim and southwestern Bhutan are called [mon] by the Lhokpu. Yet the Lepchas are not the only other people to be designated as 'Mon'. The Bumthangpas of central Bhutan are referred to as [monpa] by the Brokpa of Dur, who live just to the north. The speakers of Dakpa in Tawang and adjacent parts of Bhutan and western Arunachal Pradesh are also called 'Monpa'. In fact, the Dakpa are called 'Northern Monpa' to be precise in order to distinguish them from the 'Southern Monpa' of Kalaktang and the 'Central Monpa' of Dirang, both of which are communities in western Arunachal Pradesh which speak Tshangla or Shächop. There is an additional group in western Arunachal Pradesh called the 'Rongnampa Monpa', who speak neither Dakpa nor Tshangla. There is yet another 'Monpa' community in north-central Arunachal Pradesh, which is a Tshangla language community in the Yangsang Chu valley of Siang District. These 'Monpa' live around Ge'ling near where the Dihang or 'Siang' flows into Siang district from the north, as well as in the Mechukha valley of West Siang. There are over 40,000 people who identify themselves as Mönpa and identify their language as Mönke living in the area around Lekpo in Tsho'na county in Tibet, just north of Tawang and to the northeast of Bhutan's Trashi'yangtse district. These people speak a dialect of the language known in Bhutan as Dzala. Further east in the area of Tongju north of Nyingthri and in parts of Metok county in Tibet, there are Tshangla speech communities, and these people likewise identify themselves as 'Mönpa' and their language as 'Mönke'. Even more speech communities in southeastern Tibet and in the Chinese province of Sichuän identify themselves as 'Monpa' or are so designated by others.

The ubiquitous ethnonym 'Monpa' is therefore applied to many different peoples and language communities in Sikkim, Bhutan, southeastern Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh in India and Sichuän in China. Depending on whom we have in mind, Monpas may speak either Lepcha, Bumthang, Dzala, Shächop, Dakpa, Black Mountain, Tibetan or some other language. Since there are so many different language

communities called 'Monpa' or 'Mönpa', I use the term 'Black Mountain' in English to designate the Mönpas who inhabit the Black Mountains of central Bhutan, and so to distinguish this unique language community from all the other ethnolinguistic groups in the eastern Himalayan region which identify themselves as 'Monpa' or are so designated by others. Fortunately, the term *Monpa* or *Mönpa* has lost much of its pejorative connotation in the modern context, but the derogatory flavour is still quite palpable to the Black Mountain speech community, particularly to the members of the elder generation. Both the residual disparaging associations of the term and the fact that the term does not refer exclusively to members of the Black Mountain language community are strong arguments in favour of using the designation 'Black Mountain' for the language in English discourse.

However, the term 'Monpa' should not be eschewed altogether. In fact, the people in question are Mönpas, and the Black Mountain language community is called *Mönpa* [m{npa] in Dzongkha, whilst speakers of the Kheng and 'Nyenkha languages refer to these people as [monpa], without apophony of the vowel. Their language is known as *Mönkha* or *Mönbi kha* in Dzongkha and as [monkŌa] in Kheng and 'Nyenkha. Yet the Mönpas of Rukha village prefer to call the language *Olekha* 'the 'Ole language' after their clan name *Ole*. Strictly speaking, it is correct only to refer to the Black Mountain dialect spoken in Rukha and Riti as '*Olekha*. The other Black Mountain dialects are not '*Olekha* because their speakers are not 'Ole and do not accept the term '*Olekha* for the language that they speak.

It appears that Black Mountain is an East Bodish language because its core lexicon is largely East Bodish. This would make the major languages spoken in central and northeastern Bhutan and Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh the closest linguistic relatives of Black Mountain. However, this would also make Black Mountain the only East Bodish language to preserve the Tibeto-Burman biactantial verbal agreement system. In other particulars, Black Mountain is at times strongly reminiscent of Kiranti languages. For example, Black Mountain 'I sit, remain' vs. Bahing *gu bona* 'I sit, remain'. This suggests the hypothesis that the grammatical heart of the language might be Kiranti-like or para-Kiranti and that the language has largely been relexified by East Bodish.

Perhaps more likely, however, in view of Bhutanese geography and history is that Black Mountain is the most original of the East Bodish languages, being the one which has undergone the least influence from Central and South Bodish forms of speech, such as Tibetan and Dzongkha. In that case, the lack of verbal agreement morphology for person and number in, for example, languages of the Bumthang group in

central Bhutan, let alone a biactantial system of indexing actants as preserved in Black Mountain, might represent a grammatical parallel for the strong Central and South Bodish lexical influence which is very much in evidence in the languages of the Bumthang group.

There are three dialects of the Black Mountain language, i.e. an 'Ole dialect spoken in Riti and Rukha, a Southern dialect spoken in Cungseng and Berte, and a Northern dialect spoken in the villages of Wangling, Jangbi and Phumzur. It would be geographically more precise to describe the 'Ole dialect as a western or southwestern dialect, and the other two as southeastern and northeastern respectively, but there is much to be said for a simplified nomenclature. There are significant lexical and grammatical differences between these three dialects, but all three dialects are none the less largely mutually intelligible. In all seven Mönpa villages of the Black Mountains, there is an estimated total of about 86 Mönpa households with an estimated total ethnic Mönpa population of about 500 individuals.

The Mönpa are Buddhists, but their actual religion is Bon. The officials at ceremonies involving the supernatural are the *bönpo* and the *bönmo*, the male and the female shaman respectively. The Mönpa have also retained and incorporated native animist religious practices. The 'Ole of Rukha still avoid eating goat's meat or mutton, thus observing the very same dietetic taboo as many Rai peoples of eastern Nepal. Other Mönpas have abandoned these dietetic taboos. Amongst the Mönpa, marriage with cross cousins is preferred above marriage with strangers or distant relatives. Marriage with parallel cousins, whereby the sex of the connecting relatives is the same, is considered incestuous. The highest peak of the Black Mountains, Mount Jöd'ushingphu, is a sacred mountain. The mountain, called Jowa DurshiN or DurshiN in the Black Mountain language, is sacred to Lama Mani Nakpo or Mahäkäl.

There are two 'Ole settlements, an older settlement at Rukha on the western slopes of the Black Mountains and a newer settlement at Riti on the eastern slopes. In Rukha, the younger and middle-aged generations have become linguistically assimilated to their Dzongkha speaking 'Ngalop neighbours. With the sole exception of Berte, where the language is essentially dead, language retention is lowest in Rukha. None the less, Rukha was the only Black Mountain settlement which I had visited prior to the year 2000, so that all my earlier work on the language was conducted in Rukha. When I first visited Rukha in March 1992 and May 1993, there were seven remaining fluent speakers of the Black Mountain language there. My most recent visit Rukha took place in August 2000. Even though the data collected at other Black Mountain villages have now become more important, the delightful discovery of Black Mountain

biactantial conjugational morphology first happened at Rukha back in 1992.

There are thirteen households in Rukha, but today only four elderly 'Oles still have a command of the Black Mountain language. The elderly Monpa lament the loss of their language, and point out that they themselves were the generation that first started to speak Dzongkha to the children. When a language dies, is it poetic justice that the generation which first chose to raise their children in another language, thus sealing the fate of their ancestral tongue, should be the very ones who end up lamenting the loss of their native language and culture? The present site of the Mönpa settlement of Rukha is three generations old. The Mönpa used to lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle, practising slash-and-burn agriculture known in Bhutan as *tsêri*. The Mönpa of Rukha showed the author the two previous sites of settlement on the slopes of nearby mountains where the 'Ole once dwelt before the clan adopted a sedentary agriculturalist existence at the site of the present village.

The village of Rukha lies three days walking to the south from Phobjikha, or one day's walk to the east uphill after crossing the Pünatsangchu about 40 km south of 'Wangdi Phodr'a, as the crow flies, at the confluence of the the Hangrachu flows into the Pünatsangchu. This confluence is one of the many places in the Himalayas where, especially in the rainy season, a turquoise-green river mixes, swirls and twines into a golden-brown muddy river. The Hangrachu, by which name the river is known around the confluence, descends from the Black Mountains in the east down to the Pünatsangchu. Upstream around the villages of Thâphu, Lâwa and Lamga, the same river bears the name Nyiruchu. These three hamlets along the northern shores of the Nyiruchu are 'Nyenkha speaking.

In fact, local lore has it that the Nyiruchu formed the old language boundary between the Mönpa and 'Nyenkha speaking areas. The 'Nyenkha area extends along the western slopes of the Black Mountains from these three villages north through Ada as far as the village of Phobjikha. Dzongkha speaking 'Ngalop settlements have made inroads into the 'Nyenkha and the Monpa language areas. For example, on the tortuous road from Thâphu, Lâwa and Lamga to 'Ada there is a Ngalop village known as Nangzhina. The villages of 'Ada and Rukha are often mentioned in one breath, and the settlements of the area are referred to collectively as 'Ada-Rukha, but 'Ada is in fact a 'Nyenkha speaking settlement, and Rukha is the only village on the western slopes of the Black Mountains where the Black Mountain language is still spoken. Michael Aris listed the otherwise unattested spellings and for Rukha and 'Ada respectively (1979: 229).

There is a second 'Ole settlement of seven households, known as Riti. Riti is known to the Nepalese speaking Bhutanese who live to the south as Dhansirī. Riti consists of two parts, *Jemha* and *Lungtânbi*. *Jemha* consists of two very large households between the Gvafkholä and its tributary the Rofkholä. *Jemha* is considered to be Dhansirī proper. The name *Jemha* reportedly means something like 'silt deposit', which makes sense because the soil on which *Jemha* stands is evidently soil which has been carried down by the two rivers at whose confluence the village stands. *Lungtânbi* consists of six households located just across the Rofkholä, several minutes walk from *Jemha*.

In the Black Mountain language, the name *Lungtânbi* means a place where people have settled 'in great expectation' or 'in great hope'. *Lungtânbi* is known in Nepali as *Rofpäni*, The Gvafkholä is known in the Black Mountain language as *co· Omma*, and the Rofkholä is known in Black Mountain as the *ronme*. The nearest settlements are *Dhodre* and *Setighar*, both inhabited by Nepalese Bhutanese of ethnic Magar extraction. Riti is sometimes inaccurately known to *Khengpas* as *Bäügang*, which is not another name for Riti, but the name of a holy shrine which is about two hours walking uphill from *Jemha* and sacred to *Guru Rinpoche*.

*Bäügang* should not be confused with *Bhürgäü*, the name of a Nepali village near *Mädale*, halfway between the Gurung settlement of *Simkharka* and the Gvaf Primary School, nor should Riti be confused with *Rati*, a site further uphill where the entrance is located to a defunct mine jointly operated in the 1970s and 1980s by the Royal Government of Bhutan and the Geological Survey of India. Riti can be reached in two days from *Sure*. It is also possible, though more time-consuming to reach Riti from the confluence of the *Mangdechu* and the *Khilichu*, located about 10 km north of *Zh'ämgang*, after crossing the *Mangde* river by ropeway.

Whereas *Rukha* is situated in the traditional 'Ole area, the settlement at Riti was established by four brothers during the reign of the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan, king 'Ugä 'Wangchu (*imperabat* 1907-1926). These four 'Ole brothers from the *Rukha* area fled after they had been conscripted for forced labour as tea porters. They were made to carry tea and goods between the tea gardens near *Dewathang* (*Devängiri*) and *Dumsakha* to the market at *Wangdi Phodr'a*. When the outbreak of an epidemic added to their woes, they fled into the Black Mountains to settle at Riti. When the ancestors of the *Mönpa* at Riti fled from *Rukha*, they fled in earnest, for Riti is reportedly a good five days' journey on foot from *Rukha*. During this time, when the 'Ole passed through *Tsirang* on their way from *Rukha* to the site where Riti now stands, there were still

no Nepalese settled in Tsirang yet. At this time, there was only jungle in Tsirang according to the tales which have been passed down from generation to generation at Riti. Early British reports corroborate that this stretch of hills was largely uninhabited at the time.

Kçøṃakänta Bos, who had been sent to Bhutan by David Scott in 1815 to gain intelligence for the British, mentioned that the 'Ole Mönpa inhabited Tsirang (1825: 13), which suggests that they moved to their present more northerly habitat after the colonisation of the southern hills of Bhutan by Nepalese settlers. It is conceivable that some 'Ole groups became absorbed and assimilated by the Nepali settlers. Nepalese migration to Bhutan proper did not begin till quite late. Malaria and the despicable *d'âbjam* or *pipsä* fly make the jungle-clad hills of the Black Mountains and the lower hills of Bhutan inhospitable. The altitudes of lower hills combine the disadvantages of the plains with the disadvantages of mountainous terrain, without the advantages of either. Evidently, the Mönpas represent the only East Bodish group that ventured into these largely uninhabited tracts, and their numbers appear never to have been very great.

The Riti dialect of the Monpa language is basically the same as that of Rukha with only minor lexical differences, and the inhabitants of Riti are likewise of the 'Ole clan and so refer to their language as '*Olekha* 'language of the 'Ole clan' or simply as *Ondat lu* 'our language'. In sharp contrast to the 'Ole settlement at Rukha, the 'Ole clan at Riti have excellent language retention. Both the 'Ole settlement at Rukha and Riti preserve the original Mönpa style of housing on low stilts, which resembles that of semi-nomadic groups in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, the curious architecture of Lohorong houses at Päfmä in eastern Nepal, the houses of the Lhokpu or Ôyö in Samtse district, the Khengpas in lower Kheng and the Shâchop village of Rikhe in Samdru Jongkha district. Architecturally this style of dwelling contrasts sharply with both the Bhutanese Drukpa-style house and the Nepali-style house, and they clearly represent the remnant of an older building style.

The Southern and Northern dialects are both spoken on the eastern slopes of the Black Mountains. The Southern dialect is spoken in the fourteen Mönpa households of Cungseng and used to be spoken in Berte. Cungseng used to be located in Krong Geo, which is now increasingly being pronounced in the Dzongkha fashion as Trong, so that until 1993 Cungseng was administratively part of Zh'ängang district. Since a reshuffling of the borders of administrative divisions in 1993, however, Cungseng has been located in Sarbang district, whilst Berte, one full day's walk across the mountains to the north is still located in Zh'ängang district. Cungseng lies at a two day's walk from Riti. The inhabitants of

Berte are ethnically Mönpa, but the language has been lost. Only the very elderly people of the village whom I consulted had a vague recollection of the language. The elderly people also call the village Berte [bert1e], though outsiders and by consequence some young people refer to the village as Berti or even as Berdi. The Kheng influence on the vocabulary in Cunseng is significant, whereas in Berte everyone has already abandoned the Black Mountain language in favour of Kheng.

Berte can be reached in several hours on foot from Tingtingbi, the checkpost on the motorway between Zh'ängang and Gelephu. The people of Berte were moved down to the present village site about twenty years ago from a more remote place higher up after financial and logistic intervention of the Japanese aid agency. The present site of the village used to be one of the *pam* or daytime grazing sites for livestock, whence shepherds or cowherds would withdraw back up to the old village at night. This traditional practice was well-informed because people did not use to get malaria. Since the village was moved to the present site, most villagers have suffered from malaria at least once. Many have died from the disease. There are nine Mönpa households in the village of Berte.

In Cungseng itself, language retention is fairly good, though the language is now being lost. Mixed marriages with Khengpas have led to most families abandoning the language and raising their children in Kheng, although the middle-aged and elderly generation still speak the language. Cungseng is several hours walk uphill across the river from Sure, which is to say south of the high ridge south of Zh'ängang and therefore closer to the plains. Cungseng is located just uphill from the Nepali village of Cyäkpai. The people of Cungseng and Cyäkpai are on close and friendly terms, and the people of Cungseng also have a working knowledge of Nepali. Although the villages are adjacent, the difference in clothing, architecture, food and culture could not be greater. The transition is an abrupt one. The Mönpa of Cungseng are culturally Bhutanese, and their southern Bhutanese neighbours are Nepali. The linguistic assimilation in Cungseng is a recent phenomenon. For example, Temba of Cungseng tells that his parents spoke neither Nepali nor Dzongkha.

The highest degree of Black Mountain language retention is to be found in the Northern dialect area. This area comprises the three Mönpa villages – from north to south – of Wang'ling, with thirteen households, Jangbi, with seven households, and Phumzur, with thirteen households. All three are high up on the ridge overlooking the Mangdechu from the west in Langthi Geo in Trongsa District, south of Trongsa. Separating this area from Riti, Cungseng and Berte in the south is the area known

as 'Napbji and Korphu, where mostly Kheng and some 'Nyenkha is spoken. Black Mountain preserves East Bodish conjugational morphology and more completely reflects the old Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system. These points of divergence suggest that the linguistic forebears of the 'Ole Mönpa may have been the old vanguard of the ancient East Bodish peoples that separated from the remaining East Bodish groups at an early period and, in their southerly habitat, lived the longest beyond the range of Tibetan cultural influence. Like Dakpa, Black Mountain appears to constitute a distinct group within East Bodish. In Table 1, the Black Mountain personal pronouns are juxtaposed to those of Dzongkha, Lhokpu and Gongduk for comparison.

Black Mountain verbal agreement paradigms are diagrammed below. In each cell in the tables, the endings of the future form of the verb is listed above the non-future endings. Agreement endings of negative future and negative plain forms are the same as those of the affirmative forms. Negation is indexed by the negative prefix <mâ->, which has the form <man-> before verb stems with initial /y/.

Other East Bodish languages, which have not retained any conjugational morphology, are spoken by population groups whose ancestors were involved in the early spread of Buddhism in central Bhutan in the VIIIth and IXth centuries. The spread of the Greater Bumthang language into Bumthang and the Kheng and Kurtöp areas may have been contemporaneous with the introduction of Buddhism into these areas. Black Mountain, on the other hand, is spoken by a people who until recent historical times – at least on the western slopes of the Black Mountains – led a semi-nomadic existence, inhabiting a village site for a few generations before moving on to clear land elsewhere. Only now are the Western Black Mountain Mönpa gradually adopting traditional Bhutanese architecture, and many houses are still built in the style of temporary dwellings. The ancestors of Black Mountain speakers appear to have lived largely beyond the bounds of traditional, mainstream Bhutanese culture and, until recent times, to have remained relatively unstirred by many of the developments which led to the formation of this culture.

Recent investigations have shown that the conjugational morphology of all Black Mountain dialects distinguishes between dual and plural in the verbal agreement paradigm. Some modification is therefore necessary of the morphological analysis of the Black Mountain verbal agreement system which I first presented in Ōsaka (van Driem 1994, 1995). The remainder of this section will deal with the morphological analysis of the biactantial agreement system of the Black Mountain verb. Readers with little interest in verbal morphology can

safely skip to the next section. A more comprehensive account of Black Mountain conjugational morphology, including the many morphophonological regularities, is provided in the Black Mountain grammar.

The morpheme <-na> (1sAS) indexes first singular agent or subject and occurs in intransitive verb forms with a first singular subject and in future transitive 1s→2/3 forms. The suffix <-na> occurs in the person and number slot, suffixal slot sf1. The morpheme <-na> has the allomorph <-na> after verb stem final /t/ and /n/ and <-ma> after final /p/ or /m/. In the Northern dialect, there is a morpheme <-ga> (1sA/nFUT), which indexes a first person singular agent in non-future time. The *portemanteau* morpheme <-sân> (ns→1) indexes the transitive relationship between a non-singular agent and a first person patient and occurs in 2d→1, 2p→1, 3d→1 and 3p→1 forms in suffixal slot sf1, preceding the dual agent suffix <-nhä> (dA). The suffix <-nhä> (dA) indexes the involvement of a non-first person dual agent.

The morpheme <-ya> (1) in the 'Ole dialect marks the involvement of a first person actant in all forms in which first person actant is not indicated by another morpheme, viz. by the first singular agent/subject suffix <-na>, the non-future first person singular agent morpheme <-ga> (1sA/nFUT) or by the ns□1 *portemanteau* morpheme <-sân>. In the Northern dialect, however, the suffix <-wa> (1) co-occurs with the ns□1 *portemanteau* <-sâN> in the non-future. The suffix <-ya> or <-wa> occurs in intransitive verb forms with a first plural subject and in transitive 1ns→2/3, 2s→1 and 3s□1 forms. First person involvement, indexed by any one of the four morphemes <-na> (1sAS), <-ga> (1sA/nFUT), <-sân> (ns→1) and <-ya> or <-wa> (1), is obligatorily marked in the Black Mountain verb.

The morpheme <-nak> (n1p) in the 'Ole dialect or <-na/> in the Northern dialect (n1p) indexes plural number of a non-first person agent or subject and occurs in intransitive forms with a non-first person plural subject and in transitive 2p□3 and 3p□2/3 forms in suffixal slot sf1, preceding the morpheme <-ka ~ -ki> (n1AS). The suffix <-nak> is cognate with the suffix <-nak> in the plural personal pronouns. The suffix <-nak> does not occur in 2p→1 and 3p→1 verb forms where non-singular number of agent is indexed by the *portemanteau* morpheme <-sân> (ns→1).

The morpheme <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ki ~ -gi ~ -ta ~ -ti> (n1AS) indexes a non-first person agent or subject. The basic form of the morpheme in the Northern dialect is <-ga ~ -gi> (n1AS), and the pattern of allomorphy is likewise different than in 'Ole. In the 'Ole dialect, the morpheme occurs in intransitive forms with a non-first person subject and in transitive

2→3, 3→2/3, 2p→1 and 3p→1 forms. In the 'Ole dialect, the suffix has the allomorphs <-ki ~ -gi ~ -ti> before the future tense suffix <-m>, the allomorphs <-ga ~ -gi> following a vowel, and the allomorphs <-ta ~ -ti> after stem final /t/. In the 'Ole dialect, the non-first person agent/subject morpheme does not occur in 2s→1 and 3s→1 forms, which are formally indistinct from 1p→2/3 forms and intransitive first plural forms. Occurrence of the first person morpheme <-ya> in suffixal slot sf3 in the 'Ole dialect precludes the occurrence of the non-first person agent/subject suffix. The vowel /a/ in the non-first person agent/subject morpheme <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ki ~ -gi ~ -ta ~ -ti> (n1AS) becomes /e/ in yes-no questions.

The Black Mountain future tense in <-m> expresses some future event, whether it be a potential future, a factual or scheduled future event or a present future of immediate realisation. In the Northern dialect, the future tense morpheme has a zero allomorph in 2p/3p→1s and 1s→2/3 forms. There is a Black Mountain evidential suffix <-go>, which is similar in meaning to the Dzongkha ending <-bä ~ -wä> and expresses a recently acquired insight, or a deduced or recently observed phenomenon. The evidential does not occur in the future tense and is not attested in forms with a first person agent or subject. The full form of the evidential suffix <-go> occurs after the ending <-ya> in 3s→1 forms, e.g. *ho/me-se kö-Na baheya-go* (he-ERGATIVE I-PATIENT give-PROGRESSIVE-1 EVIDENTIAL) 'he is giving it to me'. In other forms, the evidential fuses with the non-first person agent/subject suffix <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ta> to give the ending <-ko ~ -go ~ -to>.

Other Black Mountain person and number agreement markers are found in the imperative and in the perfect gerund. A morpheme <-sân> marks 2→1 imperative forms and is evidently related to the suffix <-sân> (ns→1), which indexes transitive relationships between a plural agent and a first person patient in indicative forms. The non-first person plural morpheme <-nak> (n1p) marks 2p→3 imperative forms and renders them distinct from 2s→3 imperatives. All imperative forms take the imperative suffix <-lo> and, in the negative, the negative prefix <mâ->.

The Black Mountain perfect gerund translates into Dzongkha as the past participle in <-di> and into Nepali as the gerund in <-era>. The gerund expresses an action or event preceding the situation denoted by the main verb or an activity adverbially modifying the situation denoted by the main verb. The Black Mountain gerund has the form <-ga> (GER/1s) when the subject or agent is a first person singular actant, and the form <-sa> (GER) when the subject or agent is not a first person singular actant, e.g. *Kö-löse hô-ga ba-Na* (I-ERGATIVE wash-GER/1s give-1sAS) 'Having washed it, I gave it [to him]'. *Dirik kö-Na hô-sa ba-sân-N-ga*

(today I-PATIENT wash-GER give-p→1-n1AS) ‘Today, having washed it, they gave it to me’, *Kö shä-ga gö-Na-m. IN yä shä-sa mâ-gö-ge?* (I wander-GER/1s go-1sAS-FUT. you too wander-GER NEG-go-n1AS/Q) ‘I am going a-wandering. Aren’t you going a-wandering too?’ The use of the perfect gerund in this last example parallels the use of the gerund *shädi* ‘a-wandering’ in Dzongkha. The corresponding Nepali form would not be used in the same way because the Black Mountain, Dzongkha and Nepali gerunds are close but not equivalent in meaning.

When the verbal agreement morphemes of the western dialect of Black Mountain are viewed in the comparative context, it is clear that the Black Mountain first person singular agent/subject suffix <-na> (1sAS) is cognate with the first person singular ending \*<-n ~ -na> (1s) of the reconstructed model of Proto-Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement (cf. van Driem 1993, 1997, 1999). The velar initial of the distinct Black Mountain first person singular gerund <-ga> (GER/1s), as opposed to the general gerund ending <-sa> (GER), may also represent the reflex of the interaction of some older segment with the Proto-Tibeto-Burman first person singular morpheme \*<-n ~ -na> (1s). The Black Mountain ns→1 *portemanteau* <-sân> appears both to reflect the first person singular proto-morpheme \*<-n ~ -na> (1s) and to embody some reflex /s/ of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman dual morpheme \*<-si> (d), reanalysed, as it indeed so often is, as a marker of non-singular meaning.

This Black Mountain *portemanteau* morpheme may in its entirety be cognate with the Hayu preterite first person singular patient/subject morpheme <-suŋ> (1sPS/PT), which, to our present state of knowledge, may or may not be compatible with an etymological relationship with the Proto-Tibeto-Burman dual morpheme \*<-si>. The Black Mountain first person ending <-ya> (1) appears to be a reflex of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman first and second person plural marker \*<-i> (1p/2p), widely reflected both in Kiranti languages and in Tibeto-Burman conjugations outside of the Himalayan region. Whereas the first person singular and the dual proto-morphemes, \*<-ŋ ~ -ŋa> (1s) and \*<-si> (d), occupy anterior positions in the suffixal chain of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman verb, the first and second person plural proto-morpheme \*<-i> (1p/2p) is located at the end of the suffixal chain. This ancient element order is reflected in the relative position of the Black Mountain agreement markers.

The Black Mountain non-first person plural suffix <-nak> or <-na/> (n1p) does not seem to have any obvious cognate in the flexional systems of other Tibeto-Burman verbs. The fact that this suffix also occurs in Black Mountain pronouns suggests that the morpheme, and the incorporation of this suffix into the Black Mountain conjugation, may have been a

recent or local development. Black Mountain has preserved no reflex of either the Proto-Kiranti non-preterite tense suffix \*<-k> or the Proto-Tibeto-Burman preterite tense suffix \*<-tɛ>. The Black Mountain future morpheme <-m> appears to be a reflex of the same ancient copula which underlies the Hayu assertive marker and nominalising suffix <-mi> (<-m> after vowels), the Dumi nominalising and imperfective aspect suffix <-m> and the Newar relativiser <-mho>, suffixed to verbs which are used adnominally to singular animate referents. A modern full reflex of this ancient copula is the Dumi fourth conjugation copula <-mo|/-mi/-mu-> used with animate referents.

The effects of analogical processes are more likely to have made themselves felt in richly inflecting Tibeto-Burman languages than in languages of the isolating Lolo-Burmese type which lack comparable morphological patterns. Yet the East Bodish evidence lends support to the hypothesis that the tongue ancestral to the modern Bodish languages possessed a verbal agreement system, reflected in Black Mountain and cognate with other Tibeto-Burman conjugational systems. The implication for the historical status of verbal agreement in Tibeto-Burman is that common conjugational morphology existed at the Tibeto-Burman level, or that a common morphosyntactic system expressing verbal agreement was operative at the Tibeto-Burman level which led to the genesis of the observed modern verbal agreement systems.

### **A Curious Gem Along the Kurichu**

The Gongduk language is spoken by a dwindling population in a remote enclave along the Kurichu in east-central Bhutan. This previously undocumented language in a remote portion of Monggar district was first investigated during the first Linguistic Survey of Bhutan conducted by the Dzongkha Development Commission in 1991. The language of the Gongduk has become known in Dzongkha as Gongdubikha. The language is spoken in Gongduk

geo, for which the spelling is also attested in 'Ucen orthography. Gongduk is located within the Kheng speaking area of Monggar district, west of the Kurichu. The indigenous pronunciation of the name of the enclave is Gongduk, and the people call themselves Gongdukpa and their language Gongdukpa 'Ang 'the Gongduk language' or Gongdukse 'Ang 'the language of Gongduk'. The villages of Gongduk include Daksa,, Damkhar, Pangthang, Pam, Yangbâri, B'ala, locally pronounced Bangbalâ, Miden, Pikari and Dengkale.

Gongduk is located in an inaccessible mountainous region just west of the Kurichu. Gongduk can be reached on foot from Jepzh'ing, from which it is three days journey to the south. It is also about a two days'

journey up from the Mānas river in the plains. This accounts for the fact that the Gongduk have remained largely unknown outside of the Gongduk area itself and its immediate environs. Amongst those who even knew it existed, Gongduk was generally believed to be no more than a local variety of Kheng, which is an impression created either deliberately or unwittingly by its speakers. Nothing substantive was known about the language prior to the spring of 1991.

There are currently just over a thousand speakers of the Gongduk language. According to one legend Gongduk was once long ago a small independent kingdom. The Gongdukpa themselves report that they are of aboriginal Dung lineage, or Dungjüt, and that their ancestors were semi-nomadic hunters. The Gongduk language is one of the two languages in Bhutan which has retained complex conjugations which appear to reflect the ancient Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system. The Gongduk numeral system has been heavily influenced by Tshangla, and its lexicon has undergone influence from Kheng as well.

On the basis of various grammatical and lexical traits the language has tentatively been classified as an independent subgroup in its own right within the Tibeto-Burman language family. Gongduk shows no apparent close affinity to any of the other languages of Bhutan or, for that matter, to any of the languages of Arunachal Pradesh or Nepal. When the Tshangla and Dzongkha loans are eliminated from consideration, the underlying substrate of Gongduk may in fact not even be Tibeto-Burman at all, although the verbal conjugation, which is part of the grammatical core of the language, evidently reflects the older Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system. Perhaps the language has a close relative elsewhere in Tibeto-Burman that is geographically distant so that it has been left out of consideration until now.

Gongduk has quite a number of words which do not appear to be typically Tibeto-Burman in shape, e.g. *danli* 'water', *tah* 'meat', *din* 'wood, firewood', *vn* 'tooth', *um* 'face'. Then again, there are many words which are recognisably Tibeto-Burman, e.g. *rukij* 'bone', *koŋ* 'tree' (cf. Lepcha *kuf*), *nyi* 'sun', *duniŋ* 'last year', *niŋniŋ* 'next year', *mi/* 'eye'. Then there are other words which suggest fascinating etymological implications, such as *don* 'pig' and *wini/* 'blood'. Gongduk *dOn* 'pig' does not reflect the ubiquitous Tibeto-Burman root \**pwak* 'pig', but appears to offer the only known cognate for Chinese *tún* 'young pig', and it appears that this shared isogloss uniquely connects Gongduk to Old Chinese within the Tibeto-Burman language family. Gongduk *wini/* 'blood' suggests a relationship with Tibeto-Burman \**s-hwij* ~ \**s-hywey* 'blood' as much as with Kusunda *uyu* 'blood', but it is more intriguing to

consider a relationship with Proto-North-Caucasian \*hwe?nv 'blood' (Nikolaev and Starostin 1994: 496).

The Gongduk third person pronoun gon appears to be cognate with the Bumthang deictic pronoun gon 'he, she, the other one', comparable in meaning to Dzongkha zhenmi. Yet the Gongduk first person pronouns za 'I' and zin 'we' are highly unusual, and they too may offer unexpected support for the grand Sino-Caucasian theory. Gongduk za 'I' calls to mind the Proto-North-Caucasian first person singular pronoun, the declension of which comprises the casus rectus form \*zö(-n) 'I', ergative \*/ez(V), genitive \*/iz(V) and the oblique stem \*zä- (Nikolaev and Starostin 1994: 1084-1085). Likewise, the Gongduk pronoun zin 'we' calls to mind the Proto-North-Caucasian first person plural pronoun, the declension of which includes the casus rectus form \*zö(-n) 'we', genitive \*/iz?(V), and the oblique stem \*zä- (Nikolaev and Starostin 1994: 1089).

Nikolaev and Starostin could not reconstruct an ergative form for this Proto-North-Caucasian pronoun because the Nakh languages, which usually preserve an archaic ergative pronominal stem, have lost this pronoun. However, at this early stage such resemblances are merely suggestive, and systematic comparison and reconstruction can now be undertaken on the basis of the data in the grammar and lexicon of the Gongduk language produced by the Dzongkha Development Commission.

Gongduk verbal agreement morphology follows the archaic Tibeto-Burman pattern. The conjugation of the verb <mal- ~ mit-> 'see' in Table 6 illustrates the verbal agreement pattern of a Gongduk transitive verb. The different inflected forms given within each cell of the table are the non-preterite, negative non-preterite, preterite and negative preterite forms, respectively.

## Epilogue

Language endangerment is not limited to these three gems of Bhutan. The process is an old one, but in our lifetime the process has taken on global proportions. Languages can die because entire speech communities become linguistically assimilated to a demographically or socio-economically larger language community. Languages can also gradually lose domain of usage to another more influential language.

In the Netherlands, the national language Dutch has been the language of science for centuries. In the XVIIIth century, the many letters by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, detailing his microscopic observations included in the proceedings of the Royal Society in London, were written in Dutch. Today, swept up by a spirit of anglophone globalisation, universities in the Netherlands are being urged to provide courses in

English, at least at the Master's level. Until recently, such a suggestion would have been dismissed as laughable. Alongside a legacy of Latin learning, the language of science and higher learning in the Low Countries has since the Renaissance been Dutch. Now, however, the idea of providing scientific instruction in English is a serious recommendation which has been put forward by the concerned ministry of the Dutch government.

Similarly, zh'apdru Ngawa 'Namgä promulgated the Chathrim in the XVIIth century in Chöke, and the law of the land was interpreted in the living language spoken inside the dzongs, Dzongkha. However, judicial texts written in English are highly influential in shaping Bhutan's modern legal system. On one hand, all young lawyers are required to study Dzongkha as part of the national legal course, and the Dzongkha version of any act is the one adhered to in any dispute on the letter of the law. The High Court has stimulated research on the Kanjur and Tenjur and other Buddhist texts to develop a legal vocabulary which is simultaneously in concert with Bhutanese conceptions and accommodates modern legal concepts. Court documentation is prepared on a daily basis in Dzongkha and, in the southern belt, also in Nepali. Therefore, it is not entirely accurate when Alessandro Simoni claims that the use of Dzongkha in the legal system 'symbolic'. It is therefore probably not entirely correct to state that:

...the function of the translation of all statutes into Dzongkha, and the theoretical predominance of the Dzongkha version, is not likely to be that of substituting English, or of competing with it for the position of general medium of legal discourse, once the process of standardisation is completed. The overall impression is instead that a sort of 'division of labour' between the two languages has been established, one where English is the tool required for operating the legal machinery borrowed from the West to govern economic development. (2002: 290-291)

The influence of legal texts in English is fundamental, but these are not only translated but also reinterpreted in the process. In fact, government and jurisprudence comprise one of the realms in which Dzongkha is increasingly gaining precedence over English or at least staunchly holding ground. However, in many other domains the role of English is increasing in Bhutan with more rapidity, widespread currency and greater proficiency than in any other Asian country with the possible exception of the city state Singapore.

Another parallel development seen to affect Dzongkha, as it does many other national languages, is the loss of dialectal diversity. The dialectal diversity of Dzongkha is diminishing as a standard dialect,

heavily fortified with Chöke, gains widespread currency through the educational system, increased mobility and modern media of communication. In the process, some archaic dialectal forms are replaced or forgotten and so lost forever. At the same time, genuine native Dzongkha forms are replaced by borrowed Chöke forms which are more literary and so felt to be more formal or 'more correct'.

Therefore, the linguistic irony of forward looking countries like Bhutan and the Netherlands in an increasingly globalised world is that many domains of usage of both Dzongkha and Dutch are under threat within the very countries where these tongues serve as the national language. When a language loses ground by ceding a domain of use to a foreign language, this choice, whether made by expediency or by necessity, is a first step in the direction of language loss. Several challenges facing Dzongkha at the present juncture vis-à-vis English have been identified by Lungtaen Gyatso (this volume) and Gopilal Acharya and Samten Wangchuk (2003). Just as Lhokpu, Black Mountain and Gongduk are threatened by Dzongkha, Kheng and Nepali, so too Dzongkha, Dutch and every other language on the planet are currently under threat by the preeminent role fulfilled today by English. Measures such as the introduction of a consistent phonological romanisation such as Roman Dzongkha (cf. van Driem 1992, 1998) can help a language like Dzongkha to compete in the arena of globalisation, but a creative and dynamic spirit born out of a love for the native language must be the driving force.

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