SQUIBS AND ETYMOLOGIES

Editors' Note: Many distinguished linguistics journals (e.g. IJAL, JAOS, Linguistic Inquiry) have long had features entitled "Brief Communications" or "Squibs" -- a section of each issue devoted to mini-articles ranging in length from a paragraph to a few pages, each dealing with a particular small but interesting point of phonology, grammar, or etymology.

With this issue, LTBA is inaugurating its own "Squibs and Etymologies" section. Contributions are solicited on any aspect of Tibeto-Burman or Southeast Asian linguistics. These "cameos" may present a single etymology, a detailed point of syntax or semantics, an interesting phonological fact -- anything that falls into the category of the "petit fait vrai."

The vast sand-castle of Truth must be built up grain by grain, before the tide comes in.

A new Lahu simplex/causative pair: "study/train"

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Much attention has been paid in recent work on TB linguistics to synchronically observable consonantal and tonal alternations that reflect an earlier morphological process of causativization (or transitivization). Many TB languages preserve at least a few pairs of verbs that bear an "allofamic" phonological relationship to each other [Matisoff 1975b], as well as the semantic relationship of stative vs. causative, or intransitive vs. transitive. In most cases the causative members of the pairs can be shown to derive from forms with the Proto Tibeto-Burman (PTB) sibilant prefix *s- [Wolfenden 1929, pp. 46-7; Benedict 1972, pp. 105-6], which became a glottal prefix *?- in Proto Lolo-Burmese (PLB) [Matisoff 1968, 1970, 1972]. The stative or non-causative members of the pairs frequently reflect the old PTB nasal prefix *m- or *n- [Wolfenden 1929, pp. 26-30; Benedict 1972, pp. 117-21; Matisoff 1972, pp. 48-53].

On three occasions over the past six years I have presented a list of 13 "fossilized" simplex/causative verb-pairs in Lahu that followed regular consonantal and tonal alternational patterns [Matisoff 1970 (pp. 16-17); 1973 (p. 33); 1975a (section 1.23)]. I thought that was all there were -- but you never know! Working on the letters C- and J- in the "forthcoming" Lahu Dictionary last week, I found another pair, Number 14. Here it is:
jọ 'to study, practice, drill oneself' / cọ 'to train someone; cause someone to practice an activity'

The simplex verb jọ frequently occurs as a "post-head versatile verb" [Matisoff 1973, pp. 220 ff.], with the meaning 'practice (e.g.  ayında mọ? jọ ve 'practice blowing the jewsharp', V_h V_v)

Lăhū-khọ yọ jọ ve 'practice speaking Lahu'). The causative verb cọ takes an animate causee (optionally followed by the "de-effica-
ing" noun-particle  השנה [Matisoff 1975a]): sā-giạ-phị cọ ve 'train a hunting-dog', yā-pa  השנה;  השנה mọ? cọ ve 'train the boy to blow the jewsharp.'

Tonologically, the pair jọ/cọ exemplifies the "Class I" type of tonal alternation, where the simplex verb is low-falling tone /*/, and the causative verb is mid-tone (unmarked). This alternation reflects PLB proto-tone *I. Parallel examples are dọ 'drink'/ tọ 'give to drink'; dẹ 'come to rest'/ tọ 'put down'; mọ 'see'/ mọ 'show,' etc.

The voicing of the initial in the simplex verb is the regular Lahu reflex of the stativizing nasal prefix *N-, as I have shown [cf. my footnote 123 in Benedict 1972, p. 38; also Matisoff 1972 (pp. 15-16); 1973 (p. 2)]. Parallel examples include dọ/tọ and dẹ/tọ (just mentioned), as well as dọ 'dig' / tọ 'bury' (showing "Class II" tonal alternation between high-falling /*/ and very-
low */-/* tones); and vọ 'wear' / fọ 'dress someone', vọ 'hide oneself' / fọ 'hide something' (exhibiting "Class III" tonal al-
ternation between low-checked /*-/* and high-rising */-/* tones).

Not all Lahu simplex/causative pairs have a contrastively voiced simplex, however. When the root began with a nasal or liquid there is no voicing contrast, since modern Lahu has only the lateral l- and a single series of plain (non-contrastively voiced) nasals: e.g. mọ 'see' / mọ 'show'; nọ 'wake up' / nọ 'awaken someone'; lọ 'lick' / lọ 'cause to lick.' But sometime even when the initial consonant is "contrastively voiceable" in modern Lahu the simplex remains voiceless: cạ 'eat' / cạ 'feed'; tọ 'be burning' / tọ 'set on fire.' The nasal stativizing pre-
fix was evidently optional in pre-Lahu verb – pairs. (This "inconsistent" behavior is typical of TB prefixes, whether one likes it or not!)

What of cognates of jọ/cọ in other languages? A search of the Burmese dictionaries immediately turns up a related form, Written Burmese (WB) mọ 'kyan' (creaky tone). This verb functions both causatively (or transitively) and non-causatively (or intransitively) in Burmese, as indicated by Judson's gloss (p. 206): 'to do, perform, practice; to be habituated to; to teach, train, break in, as an ox or buffalo.' (There is also a derived
noun หมอ 'a deed, a habit acquired by practice' [Judson, p. 7].

The WB/Lahu rhyme-correspondence -an/-ɔ is entirely regular, reflecting PLB *-an (e.g. WB naŋ / Lh. ɲɔ 'you' < PLB *naŋ₁; WB than / Lh. thɔ 'pine, fir' < PLB *tan₂, etc.). Lahu palatal affricates /c ch j/ are the regular reflexes of PLB *velars plus -y- [Matisoff 1969].

We therefore set up the proto-Loloish forms underlying Lahu jɔ and cɔ as *N-kyan₁ and *?-kyan₁, respectively. The WB form kyan' derives from an unprefixed prototype *kyan. Burmese developed creaky-tone under somewhat mysterious circumstances (now being investigated by Thurgood, forthcoming), in many etyma which correspond to Loloish proto-tone *1, as in this case. It is likely that creaky tone was exploited sporadically as an alternative device for causativizing verbs in earlier stages of Burmese. (A more frequent device was the PTB *sibilant > PLB *glottal prefix, which led to aspiration of the initial consonant of the causative member in modern Burmese [see the list in Okell 1969, Vol. 1, pp. 205-8].) If this is what happened here, the creakiness could then have been generalized into non-causative or intransitive contexts as well, so that the contrast was lost, and a single creaky form had to fill both semantic roles.

We may thus symbolize this PLB etymon as follows:

Prefixes Root Tones
*N-  kyan  1 < 3

where "3" stands for creaky tone, which for some purposes it is convenient to set up as a third PLB proto-tone ["Tone *3"]. even though it is obviously secondary compared to proto-tones *1 and *2.

References


--------------------- 1972. The Loloish Tonal Split Revisited. Research Monograph No. 7, Center for South and Southeast
Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley. 88 pp.


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