Watch Out for Number ONE:
Jingpho ṇāi ‘I’ and ṇāi ‘one’
(with some speculations about Jingpho number TWO)

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1. INNOVATIVE NATURE AND UNIQUENESS OF THE JINGPHO FORMS FOR ONE AND TWO

The Jingpho (Jg.) word ṇāi ‘one’ has always had a special place in my heart, since it was the very first form I ever elicited in a Tibeto-Burman (TB) language, in the summer of 1963, when working with LaRaw Maran. The next word to emerge in that elicitation session was of course ḍokhōŋ ‘two.’ Already these two forms led me to a couple of false assumptions: (a) that the prefix ḍo- was very common, especially with numerals; and (b) that the high-to-low falling tone, “51” (symbolized here as /ʌ/) was likewise. Both assumptions were of course premature. ḍo- occurs with no other numerals; and “51” turned out to be by far the rarest of the Jg. tones, occurring mostly as a sandhi variant of the low tone “31” though it does in fact occur with one other numeral, ḍo khū ‘nine.’

More importantly, the Jg. words for ONE and TWO are completely isolated from the comparative point of view, with no known cognates elsewhere in Sino-Tibetan (ST). See Table 1.

With respect to PTB, Jg. preserves the numeral prefixes fairly well. In FOUR, FIVE, and EIGHT, PTB *b- is reflected by Jg. mā-. Jg. SIX, SEVEN, NINE, and HUNDRED reflect PTB *d-, *s-, *d- or *s-, and *l-, respectively. The prefix of

1Several morphophonemic subclasses of these “51” words may be distinguished: (a) verbs in the low tone (31) regularly acquire “51” when preceded by the high-toned negative prefix, syllabic ni-: ḍū ‘have’ > ḍū ‘not have’; (b) low-tone verbs sometimes change to “51” when they are preceded by a nominalizing or causativizing prefix (e.g., the syllabic nasal, or shwa, or consonant plus shwa): tā ‘build a house’ > tā ‘a house’; thōi ‘be light’ > thōi ‘illumination’; tūm ‘be squandered (as time)’ > ṭūm ‘to squander (as time)’; (c) adverbial expressions derived by a prefix from 31 verbs sometimes acquire “51”: ni ‘be near’ > ni ni sā ‘nearly,’ tēm ‘be closely shut,’ tēm sā ‘soberly’; (d) kinship terms in the 31 tone become 51 when used vocatively: kawā ‘father’ > wā ‘O father!; hey, dad!’ (See Matisoff, 1974, pp. 159–160).

2In general the numerals ONE and TWO seem to have a special status in the world’s languages. Irregularities, allofamic variations, and suppletions are more readily tolerated here than with the higher numerals (e.g., English one X an X only; two X twain X between X twin; one <-> first; two <-> second).
THREE has been influenced by the ma- in FOUR and FIVE, so that THREE to FIVE show a “prefix run.”

Table 1. PTB and Jingpho Numerals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTO-TIBETO-BURMAN</th>
<th>JINGPHO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>*it; *k(y)at; g-t(y)ik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO</td>
<td>*g-nis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE</td>
<td>*g-sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR</td>
<td>*b-ləy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIVE</td>
<td>*l-ŋa ~ *b-ŋa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIX</td>
<td>*d-ruk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN</td>
<td>*s-nis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIGHT</td>
<td>*b-r-gyat ~ *b-g-ryat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NINE</td>
<td>*d-kəw ~ *s-kəw ~ *d-gaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEN</td>
<td>*gip; *ts(y)i(y) ~ *tsyay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWENTY</td>
<td>*m-kul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUNDRED</td>
<td>*r-gya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. VARIANT FORMS OF JINGPHO lanŋai ‘ONE’

(a) lanŋai

The standard citation form of this numeral has a lateral prefix, occurring in such collocations as maša lanŋai ‘one person,’ lanŋai mi ‘one,’6 lanŋai nai ‘some; a few; one now and then,’ lanŋai nai sa ‘only some; only a few,’ lanŋai thə? lanŋai ‘one by one,’ lanŋai phang lanŋai ‘one after another.’

Whence this lateral prefix, which occurs also with lakhoŋ ‘two’? A plausible source is the well-attested PTB etymon *lak7 ‘hand,’ which appears in reduced form

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3 For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon in TB numeral systems see Matisoff (1995a, §§ 5.2–5.5).
4 See Benedict (1972, pp. 93–95) and Matisoff (1995a, passim).
5 Other roots for ONE reconstructed in Matisoff (1995a, sections 3.11–3.15) include: *ka/*ko; *d/tay × *d/tan; *tir × *tur; *s; *k-IV(N), etc.
6 For a discussion of this morpheme mi see §4, below.
7 See Benedict (1972, #86 and note 102).
in many Jg. nouns relating to the limbs (hands or feet), e.g., lətə? ‘hand,’ ləkhrə ‘right hand,’ ləphən ‘palm,’ ləphəum ‘forearm,’ ləkhən ‘bracelet’ (note 51 tone; < khən ‘wear bracelets’), ləgə ‘foot; leg,’ ləphət ‘knee,’ ləθin ‘heal,’ ləkhrəʔ ‘hoof,’ lənə ‘thumb; big toe’ (lit. “limb-mother”). The semantic connection would be via the practice of counting on the fingers.\(^8\)

Once this prefix was firmly established with this numeral, it was eligible for trans-semanticization, so that in several common time-expressions lə- has come to mean ONE all by itself: lənə ‘one day,’ lənəʔ ‘one night,’ lənəŋ ‘one year,’ ləphət ‘one morning.’\(^9\) The same morpheme is probably to be adduced in other quantified expressions like lələm ‘a fathom,’ lətsə ‘one hundred,’\(^10\) ləmən ‘ten thousand (one myriad),’ ləmə, ləmə-ma, ləmə-mi ‘some; something; few.’ (In the Hkauri dialect of Jingpho, these expressions have rə- rather than lə-: rənəŋ ‘one year,’ rənə ‘one day,’ rənəʔ ‘one night’).

(b) ?ṃəi

This variant with preglottalized initial is supplied by Maran (ca. 1973, p. 870), though it is spelled simply as “ŋəi” in Hanson (1906, p. 513).\(^11\) It appears in collocations like the following: nəi mə ‘one; a unit’ (e.g., mərəi ?ṃəi mə ‘one person’), nəi (mə) sə ‘only one,’\(^12\) nəi nəi (note 31 tone in 2nd syllable) ‘someone [indef. pron.]’ (e.g., məsə ?ṃəi nəi də səi ‘Someone has come.’

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\(^8\)This “digital computational” practice is by no means confined to TB peoples (cf. English expressions like on the one hand, on the other hand). The PTB etymon for FIVE, the handlike numeral par excellence, is reconstructed with either of two prefixes, *b- or *l-. Perhaps Jingpho selected the non-lateral prefix here (mənə) because of analogical pressure from FOUR. See Matisoff (1995a, § 4.14).

\(^9\)Hanson (1906, p. 358) calls the prefix in these forms “a shortened form of ləŋəi ‘one.’”

\(^10\)It seems possible that the liquid prefix set up for the PTB form for HUNDRED (*r-gya) may itself derive ultimately from *lak ‘hand.’ Cf. the Hkauri forms with r- instead of l- (just below).

\(^11\)This form is lacking in Dai, Xu, Shau, & Nseng (1983), as are the variants with zero- and syllabic nasal initials cited in (c) and (d), below.

\(^12\)This Jingpho morpheme ‘only’ seems clearly cognate to a Kamarupan root *(t)sə ‘one’ (Matisoff 1995a: § 3.152 and note 75).
(c) āi

Complete loss of initial consonant is a common enough phenomenon with TB functors, including high frequency items like numerals and pronouns, so it is not too surprising to find a vowel-initialled variant “ʔāi ‘one; same as làŋgāi’” (Hanson 1906, p. 55; tone from Maran), as in kawā āi mī jò rīt ‘Give me a bamboo.’

(d) ŋ-ŋāi

Finally, Hanson (1906, p. 498) cites a variant with syllabic nasal prefix: “nngāi ‘one; same as làŋgāi.’” The tones are supplied by Maran (ca. 1973, p. 842): ŋ-ŋāi.

Here we approach the main point of this paper. This prenasalized variant of the numeral ONE is homophonous (except for tone) with the first person singular agreement marker, used in sentences like the following: ēā ēā ŋ-ŋāi ‘I am eating’ (Hanson, 1906, p. 498); ēā ɡō jōngmā rāi ŋ-ŋāi ‘I am a student’ (Dai, 1983, p. 624).

Already this is rather persuasive phonological evidence for the connection between ONE and FIRST PERSON in Jingpho. The fact that the first person agreement marker and an alloform of the numeral ONE are virtual homophones makes it highly likely that the same etymon is involved.

3. THE JINGPHO FIRST PERSON ŋāi

Just as the Jg. numeral ONE is highly distinctive in the context of TB/ST as a whole, so is the Jingpho independent first person pronoun ŋāi ‘I; me.’ While virtually all TB languages that have inherited this etymon reflect the simple vowel *-a (PTB *ŋa: Benedict, 1972, #406), Benedict is obliged to set up a separate root *ŋai (#285) largely to accommodate this Jg. form.

I have recently become convinced that the ST/TB pronouns for all three persons have been suffixable by palatal and/or nasal elements at various times and places in the family, so that a palatal suffix is typical of the PST pronominal system in general:

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13As random examples we may cite Lahu ā (< mā) ‘negative,’ ā (< tā) ‘durative particle,’ etc. See Matisoff (1973, p.38).

14Jingpho is a “pronominalized” or “head-marking” language, using morphemes in the VP to specify the person and number of the subject of the clause. Hanson, who provides no tonal indications, writes both the numeral and the agreement marker as “nngāi.” Maran (Ă-ŋāi) and Dai (n’ ŋa) agree that the tones of the two syllables of the agreement marker are low and mid, in that order.

15See the discussion in Matisoff (1985, set #182).

16Though it must be admitted that the semantic increment provided by the “suffixal” elements is
The semantic connection between the number ONE and a FIRST person pronoun is too obvious to belabor, so we do not even need to cite the common egotistical slogan “Watch out for number one” (i.e., “Charity begins at home”; that is, one should take care of oneself before presuming to consider the interests of other people). We are all the centers of our own universes.

On the phonological side, there is a (very slight) problem. The Jg. independent first person pronoun ṇāi is mid tone, but the numeral is high-to-low falling tone, -ṇāi, which seems to bespeak an underlying low tone (cf. also the reduplicated form lōṇāi ṇāi, above 2a, where the reduplicate is in the low tone). But this should not cause undue distress. In the first place, it is by no means the case that all “51” syllables come from low tone, and in any case tonal variation is the norm in functionaries and other grammaticalized morphemes.

4. SURVIVAL IN JINGPHO OF A MORE GENERAL TB ROOT FOR ONE

Aside from lōṇāi, Jg. also preserves in certain contexts an etymon for ONE with rather more widespread affiliations elsewhere in TB, of the shape mī (ma in the Hkauri dialect). It is not used in counting, but functions something like an indefinite article, in post-nominal position, e.g., má mī ‘one/a meal,’ lāp mī ‘one rupee.’ Often it is used redundantly in expressions that already contain the trans-semanticized prefix la- (above 2a): lōṇāi mī one unit’ (X lanjai ma [Hkauri]), lōṇīŋ mī one year,’ lōphōt mī ‘one morning,’ lōtsā ma ‘100’ (Hkauri).


17No single root for ‘3rd person’ may be reconstructed for PTB or PST. As in other language families, ST/TB third person pronouns are related to demonstratives and deictic words like ‘other.’

18Cf. e.g., lākhôn ‘bracelet’ < khôn ‘wear bracelets’ (above §2a).

19Familiar examples include the three Lahu co-allofoms là (V) ‘come’ X la (Pv) ‘motion toward’ X là (Pv) ‘non-3rd person benefaction.’ See Matisoff (1973, pp. 319-330).

20See Hanson (1906, pp. 386, 394). Probable cognates (cited in Matisoff, 1995a, §3.156b, where the Jg. form is not mentioned) include Deng Geman ku’mu³³, Rengma me. Tiddim a-ma-sa ‘first,’ Lotha ma-tsa-nga ‘one,’ Meithei ama ‘one,’ ma-pan ‘nine’ (subtractive: “one from ten’). Since there are reflexes with both front and nonfront vowels, a good reconstruction might be *ma-y.
It seems more than coincidental that there is also a post-verbal particle of similar shape, in the low-stopped tone, mĩ?, which indicates a first person indirect object, e.g.:

shănthé νāi phè? tsūn mĩ? āi ‘They told me’
shĩ śi anthé phè? jō? mĩ? āï ‘He gave us’
nànthé νāi phè? jō? mĩ? ‘You (pl.) give to me’
ánthé phè? jō? mĩ? ‘Give to us’ (Hanson, 1906, pp. 394-5)

This seems to furnish one more bit of evidence to confirm the conceptual connection between ONE and the FIRST PERSON in Jingpho.

5. SOME SPECULATIONS ON JINGPHO ṼAKHŌŋ TWO

Perhaps at this point I should leave well enough alone. Yet it is tempting to try to explain Jingpho ṼAKHŌŋ ‘two’ along similar lines: if ONE is derivable from a first person pronoun, could TWO possibly be derived from a morpheme with second person reference? This might seem implausible prima facie, unless we assume that the morpheme in question had the force of a first person inclusive plural, i.e., “you and I; the two of us; both of us.” If the lateral prefix lɔ- had truly become “trans-semtaticized” to mean ONE all by itself (above 2b), then perhaps the innovative numeral TWO could originally have meant something like “one [plus] you.”

At any rate, before trying to establish an etymology for -kõŋ, we should note certain striking parallels in the historical and synchronic behavior of the Jingpho morphemes for ONE and TWO:

(a) Just as a historically older form for ONE (mĩ ≠ ma) survives in certain set expressions (see §4, above), so does there survive in composition a Jg. morpheme nĩ ‘two,’ an unmistakable reflex of the most widespread TB etymon for TWO, *g-ni-s/k, as in: nĩ nĩŋ ‘two years,’ nĩ nā? ‘two nights,’ nĩ nĩ ‘two days,’ nĩ phòt ‘two mornings,’ nĩ tsā ‘200.’ In post-nominal position this same morpheme has been further grammaticalized into a sort of plural or collective suffix: ṽwōrā nĩ ‘those over there,’ ṽwī nĩ ‘the dogs,’ ṽrangk mā ‘the people of Mankang’ (Maran, ca. 1973, p. 817).

(b) Just as the innovative form for ONE occurs synchronically with other onsets than the lateral prefix, so does the parallel innovative form for TWO occur with the syllabic nasal prefix (nĩ-kõŋ), or with no prefix at all (kõŋ; note mid tone, Maran,

21Contra Benedict (1972, P. 16, n. 60), this open midtoned form does not descend from the *nīk allofam (that underlies, e.g., WB hnač), but rather from *nī (like, e.g., Lahu nī).
ca. 1973, p. 1262). The prenasalized allopham is explicitly cross-referenced to “archaic lanhkawng” by Maran (p. 847), though he does not give this latter form as a head entry, nor does he indicate its tone in the cross-reference. See Table 2.

Where then can we find a plausible morpheme of 2nd person reference to underlie Jg. -khọŋ? The most likely candidate I have found is not exactly a personal pronoun, but rather an etymon whose semantic center of gravity lies in the notion of master; lord; authority.22 I would like to reconstruct this putative new root as *k(w)añ

Of the modern Burmese reflex of Written Burmese (WB) sêkhañ ‘master; lord’ Judson (1893, p. 977) remarks, “this term is often applied in a most indiscriminate manner, and has lost its original value; it has now become the equivalent of the English Mister.”23 Compounded from this same root is the polite pronoun khañ-byâ ‘you,’ defined by Judson as “sir, or madam; a term of appellation used by men to persons rather superior, whether men or women; a very polite term if used by a superior to an inferior” (p. 259).24, 25

Table 2. Variational Allofamy of ONE and TWO Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ło-</th>
<th>ń-</th>
<th>lanh-</th>
<th>∅-</th>
<th>#v-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>lğâi</td>
<td>n̓-ń̓ai</td>
<td>?ńai</td>
<td>?ái</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st PERSON</td>
<td>ń̓-ń̓ai</td>
<td></td>
<td>n̓ai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO</td>
<td>ləkhọŋ</td>
<td>n̓-khọŋ</td>
<td>lanhkawng</td>
<td>khọŋ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite a certain semantic overlap, this morpheme seems unrelated to WB sêkhañ ‘business; affair’ (cf. sêkhañ thâ ‘treat with deference; regard as weighty’); this latter word is under the heavy tone (< PLB *Tone 2), and seems rather to be derived from

22 There is surely no need to cite examples of words for ‘lord’ or ‘lady’ being downgraded into polite second person pronouns in the world’s languages: Est-ce que monsieur/madame désirerait déguster un petit apéritif? ‘Would milord/milady care to try a little preprandial libation?’

23 The prefixal minor syllable so- may be a reduction of the morpheme su ‘person.’

24 The second syllable is from bhurâ, pronounced phaya (pharâ in Arakanese dialect) ‘a god; object of worship, lord; master; a pagoda; sir’ (Judson, 1893, p. 728).

25 Another, phonologically unrelated TB etymon seems to reflect this same semantic association between MASTER and SECOND PERSON PRONOUN, a root we may set up as *s-raŋ on the basis of WB ahrâŋ ‘owner; proprietor; master; lord’ and a group of Tamangic forms reflecting Proto-TGTM *raŋ: Sahu (Tamang)  הישראלית ‘self’; Tukche (Thakali) ‘id.’; Taglung (Tamang) ‘you (polite)’; Risiangku (Tamang) ‘soi-même (réfléchi); employé comme pronom de la deuxième personne respectueux’ (Mazaudon 1994, #837 [3.183.53]).
the verb khan ‘master; lord’ is allofamically related to a form with medial -w-, WB (ʔo)khwan ‘business, affair; commission, permission; right, reason’ (Judson, 1893, p. 23; Bernot, 1980, III, p. 159). The creaky tone here is no problem; to a large extent it is a secondary sandhi tone that roots under either of the principal tones (< PLB *1 or *2) may acquire by derivation.

To this group of WB forms I would like to compare Jingpho khān ‘rule; exercise authority; govern’ (Hanson, 1906, p. 294), and its derivative akhān ‘permission, commission’ (p. 8). While it is certainly possible that these could be early loans from Burmese, the basic Jg. morpheme is a verb, while the Burmese forms seem to be underlyingly nominal.

At this point we can bring in Jg. ləkhoŋ ‘two.’ Its -o- vocalism corresponds regularly to WB -wa- (< *-wa-). If all these forms do belong in the same word-family, both Jingpho and Burmese would directly reflect both the allofams with and without medial -w-, i.e., the rhymes -aŋ & -waŋ:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{WB} & \quad \text{akhan} \quad \text{akhan-byā} \\
\text{Jg.} & \quad \text{khān} \quad \text{ləkhoŋ}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{WB} & \quad \text{?-waŋ} \\
\text{Jg.} & \quad \text{?-aŋ}
\end{align*}
\]

While we are at it, we might compare these forms to a phonosemantically similar Chinese etymon:

OC kwán (Matisoff, 1985, set #157a) > Mand. guān ‘official’s residence; office, public charge; official, officer; function, to function’

OC kwán (Matisoff, 1985, set #157h) > Mand. guān ‘take care of; manage’

The problem with this comparison is of course the Chinese final -n versus the TB -ŋ, but perhaps that can be explained away as due to dissimilation of the feature [+ grave] shared by the three proto-segments */k-, -w-, -ŋ/. The semantic development in Chinese seems to have been a metonymic shift from official residence to official occupying the residence, so the locational meaning might well have been the original one in PST.

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26 In Chinese terms, I am claiming that ʔo-khwan is a “hekou doublet” of khān.

27 This comparison was not made in Matisoff (1974). This word, transcribed as khāŋ55, is glossed in Dai (1983, p. 232) as (1) ‘govern’ guān-liè & (2) ‘drive (car)’ ka-t (tē); jiāshī.

28 Cf. e.g., WB lwat ‘be free, loose’/Jg. lôt.

29 This is quite similar to our metonymic expressions like “the White House denied the report...”
To all this it might be objected that while it seems natural in the socially stratified Burmese cultural context for a word meaning ‘lord’ to develop into a second person pronoun, it appears unlikely that this would happen in the more egalitarian Jingpho society, and even more farfetched that such a pronoun could then develop into a numeral. Yet stranger things have surely happened in semantic history.

REFERENCES


or “the Quai d’Orsay was very upset by today’s developments...,” etc.

30 The hierarchical nature of traditional Burmese society is reflected in the modern first person polite pronouns, which contain the morpheme kywan ‘slave’: (kywan-to ‘I (male speaker),’ kywan-má ‘I (female).’