THE PRESENT STATE OF PST/PTB RECONSTRUCTION: 
CAN WE EVEN WRITE A FABLE IN 
PROTO-LOLO-BURMESE?*

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How much can we really recover from the past history of languages? What 
do we mean when we claim to have "reconstructed a proto-language"?

In sober moments, all historical linguists have to admit that a "proto-
language" is at best only a pale reflection of a real living language. Often all that 
can be salvaged is the proto-phonemic system, along with a collection of mostly 
unrelated individual lexical items. If we are lucky, and work in a family with 
anciently attested texts in several languages, we can also achieve some 
understanding of the proto-grammar, especially if the languages are rich in 
morphology. In these respects, Indo-Europeanists have been much better off 
than Sino-Tibetanists, to the point where the 19th century scholar August 
Schleicher once dared to compose a fable in Proto-Indo-European.\footnote{See Schleicher 1868. This text was "updated" more than a century later by W. Lehmann (1981).}

It would certainly be an act of aggravated chutzpah to undertake a similar 
enterprise for Proto-Sino-Tibetan, or even for Proto-Tibeto-Burman. But what 
about trying to compose a text in a younger proto-language, let us say the one 
for which the most detailed historical reconstruction has been accomplished, i.e.
Proto-Lolo-Burmese (PLB), spoken only about 2000 years ago?\footnote{Also known as Burmese-Lolo, Yi-Burmese, Burmese-Yipho, etc.}

Thinking this might be worth a try, I have chosen a Lahu fable recorded 
during my first fieldtrip to Chiangmai Province, Thailand, in 1965-66,\footnote{I believe this fable may ultimately be traced back to Aesop. It had undoubtedly been transmitted to my group of Lahu by Christian missionaries.} a 
simple text of nine sentences containing about 60 different words. As a first 
approximation, I have "translated" the text into PLB morpheme by morpheme, as if the proto-language had exactly the same word order, construction types, 
and repertory of particles as modern Black Lahu. Most of these morphemes 
have already been reconstructed at the PLB level; several others are here

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etymologized for the first time; only a few remain etymologically obscure at the moment.

The end result is a text with reliably reconstructed (even if largely unpronounceable) morphemes, but with a grammatical structure that might be more accurately termed "pre-Lahu" rather than PLB. In order to attempt a serious syntactic reconstruction, the grammars of modern Loloish and Burmish languages would have to be systematically compared with what is known about Old Burmese grammar, a project which seems vastly premature at the present stage of research. An especially serious problem is posed by the rich systems of grammatical particles or functors displayed by all LB languages: although these correspond well conceptually from language to language, it is relatively rare to find cognate etyma filling the same conceptual slots across languages. Functors have developed from root morphemes by "grammaticalization", but this process seems to have operated independently in each language, so that it is impossible to figure out which was the "original" morpheme used for each grammatical function.

This said, it is still instructive to reconstruct what we can -- even if all we come up with is a string of putative PLB lexical items arranged according to modern Black Lahu grammar.

This paper is organized as follows. First comes the verbatim modern Lahu text, with interlinear glosses and a form-class designation\(^4\) provided for each morpheme on its first occurrence (§1), followed by a free English translation (§2). Then the vocabulary of the text is roughly arranged by part of speech, and as far as possible each morpheme is etymologized at the PLB level (§3), with special attention paid to new etymologies and words which remain obscure. These reconstructed morphemes are then strung together in modern Lahu word order to create a running text (§4). Finally, we point out the phonological and grammatical puzzles that remain for anyone who might wish to travel further along this road (§§5-6).

\(^4\) A list of the abbreviations used for these form-classes is given at the end of the paper.
1.0 LAHU TEXT

dà-qhu  phè  pí  ve  gâ?-phu-qā  le  á-cè
boast  release  able  GEN  cock  and  hawk

The Boastful Cock and the Hawk

1. tê  p̤̀?  thâ,  kho  tê  kho  ʒ̂̃-qho  lo  gâ?  tê  mó
one  time  TEMP  coop  one  (coop)  inside  LOC  chicken  one  (flock)
Num  Clf  Puniv  N  Num  Clf  Nspat  Pn  N  Num  Clf

cò  ve  yò.
be  there  NOM  AFF
V  Puniv  Puf

2. gâ?  ɔ̄-ve  tê  mó  ʒ̂̃-qho  lo  ʒ̂̃-phu-qâ  nî  khe  cò
that  male  (bird, etc.)  two  (animal)
DET  N  Num  Clf

ve  yò.

3. gâ?-phu-qâ  tê  khe  lè  yô  tê  ni  le-le  kù  ve
TOPIC  ʒ̂̃p  day  every  crow/call  REL
Punf  Npron  Clf  Bn  V  Puniv

tê  yân  thâ,  kho  ʒ̂̃-qholo  wâ  tê?  kù  ve  cè.
(time)  above  only  climb  QUOT
Clf  Nspat  Puniv  V  Puf

4. yô  kù  ve  ʒ̂̃-khô  lè  chi  qhe  qô?  ve  yò:
word(s)  this  like  say
N  DET  Next  V

5. nà  qhô  lè  r̥  -ʂë  -mu  -ʂë-phâ  mā  cò.
above  great  high  AGT-NOM  NEG
Npron  Mpfx  Vadj  Mpfx  Vadj  Mpfx/Pv  Adv

6. qha-p̤̀-è  thà?  gâ  -ʂë-phâ  nà  yò, ̇  tê
all  ACC  win/beat  AGT-NOM  thus
Next  Pn  V  Mpfx/Pv  Pquot

ú  chi  qhe  kù  chë  ve  yò.
PROG⁵
Vv

⁵ This word means ‘to be in a place; stay; dwell’ as a main verb. See JAM 1991:415-8.
7. mà gâ ve gâ? te khe læ te ni le-le yö
   tô-khô chi thà? ga kâ ve thà? pa-to, tô-pî-tâ?
   words/speech get to hear CAUS thicket
   N vV vV Pn N

   lo tù ca vâ? tâ ve yö.
   go and hide DUR vV V Pv

8. te ni qhe gâ-phu-qâ chi yö kho ô-qhô lo qô?
   again/back
   vV

   tô? e le, qô? bû chê ve te yân thà,
   ABL/away SUSP cry (animal)
   Pv Punf V

   “nà qhô gâ -pâ mà cô”, te kù chê ve
   AGT-NOM

   ô-qhô lo, â-cè te khe là le, yö thà? chê?
   within/during hawk come bite
   N vV

   chê qay ve yö.
   lift away away
   V Vv

   khe qô? tô? là le, gâ? ô-ve te mô ô-qhô thà?
   emerge CIS? Pv

   qô? kwân tâ ve yö.
   rule V
II. FREE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

1. Once upon a time in a certain coop there was a flock of chickens.
2. Among this flock of chickens there were two cocks.
3. As for one of these cocks, every day when he would crow, he would always climb up on top of the coop to crow.
4. The words he would crow were like this:
5. "Above me there is no one greater and no one higher.
6. The one who beats everybody else is me!" This is how he would crow.
7. As for the cock who couldn’t compete, since he would hear these words day after day, he would always go and hide himself in a big thicket.
8. One day when the cock had climbed again onto the top of the coop, and was screeching as usual, "There is nobody who can beat me!", just as he was crowing, a hawk came and bit into him and lifted him up and away.
9. The other cock, the one who used to be hiding in the big thicket every day, came out again, and from then on he ruled over that flock of chickens.

III. VOCABULARY

(A) Nominals

Common nouns

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Lahu</th>
<th>PLB</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dâ-qhu</td>
<td>*nda1-kwa1</td>
<td>NEW</td>
<td>‘bragging; foolishness’</td>
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/This word (also pronounced dâ-qho) seems cognate to or borrowed from the Chinese compound 夸大 (Mand. kuâdà) ‘exaggerate, overstate’, with the order of syllables reversed. The morpheme 夸 is reconstructed as OC k‘wâ in GSR #43a. Lahu -u is the regular reflex of earlier *-wa (cf. ‘cattle’ PLB *nwa2 > Lh. nû; ‘handspan’ PLB *twa1 > Lh. thu; ‘tooth’ PLB *swa2 > Lh. -šu ‘toothlike part of tools’)./^8/

| kho | *kram1 | DL 373 | ‘coop; fenced-off enclosure; garden’ |

/This morpheme also functions as a classifier; see below./

| gâ? | *k-rakH | TSR #184 | ‘chicken; fowl’ |

| ə-qho | *ʔхи-kәw1 | NEW | ‘inside part’ (spatial); ‘while, during’ (temporal) |

/Cf. Maru a31khuk31 (the development *-w > Maru -uk is regular)./8

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8 The second syllable of WB wa-krwâ ‘boast’ also resembles Lahu -qu, though the initial and tonal correspondences are wrong: WB krwâ < PLB *grwa2; Lh. qhu < PLB *kwa1.
δ-mō  
  cf. mō (Clf)  ‘group’

δ-phu-qā  *ʔāŋ-puʔ-ʔga²  
  DL 235, 895  ‘male (of certain birds and animals)’

/phu is perhaps a loan < Tai (cf. Si. phūu, tua-phūu); the last syllable (which occurs in several other animal names) prob. derives from the verb qā ‘mute, dumb; stupid’ (cf. WB ṭā)./

gāʔ-phu-qā *k-rakʰ-puʔ-ʔga²  
  ‘cock; rooster’

δ-qhō  *ʔāŋ-kaw² (?)  NEW ✓  ‘top part; part above; part over’

/The Lahu rhyme -o is also consistent with the reconstruction *ʔāŋ-kam²; but for the moment *-aw seems preferable, since it is parallel to the reconstructions of several other Lahu demonstrative and locative morphemes in *-aw. Cf. the determiner ō ve, below. /

(δ-)khō  *(ʔāŋ-)-kraŋ²  NEW ✓  ‘word; noise; sound; speech; voice; language’

/Although there is a similar Tai etymon represented by Shan khō (DL 380), this now seems to be a genuine TB root. Cf. Zhangzhung glang ~ klang (JAM 2001: #30)./ 

δ-šē-phā  *ʔāŋ-sin²-pa²  NEW ✓  ‘body; owner’

/Cf. DL 1215; see ‘Particles’ below. /

f-šē-mu-šē-phā  *ʔoy²-sin²-mraŋ³-sin²-pa²  
  ‘a great personage’
  (‘one who is great and high’)

/This is an “extended elaborate expression”; see parts below. /

tō-khō  *dan²-kraŋ²  DL 653  ‘words; speech’

δ-pf-tāʔ  *ʔāŋ-ʔbey²-ʔtakʰ  NEW ✓  ‘thicket’

/This noun is derived from the verb pf-tāʔ ‘be messy, disordered, cluttered’ (DL 870); more support is necessary for this etymology. /

á-čē  *ʔāk-dz(y)wan¹  DL 84  ‘hawk; kite; bird of prey’

Pronouns

yō  *zaŋ²  DL 1290  ‘3rd person’

ŋā  *ŋa¹  DL 424  ‘1st person’

Numerals

tē  *dan² / *day²  DL 625;  ‘one; a, an’

/See also JAM 1995a; 1995b, §3.14./
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\[(\text{ni} \quad \text{TSR \#160}) \quad \text{‘two’}\]

**Classifiers**

\[(\text{psh} \quad \text{TSR \#60}) \quad \text{‘for times’}\]

\[(\text{kho} \quad \text{DL 373}) \quad \text{‘for coops’}\]

\[(\text{mō} \quad \text{LOAN < Tai DL 1011}) \quad \text{‘for groups, flocks’}\]

\[/\text{PTai *hmuu} > \text{Si. mū, Shan muu}; \text{cf. Li Fang Kuei 1977 (HCT):75-6.}/\]

\[(\text{khe} \quad \text{DL 376}) \quad \text{‘for animals’}\]

\[/\text{Same morpheme as khe (N) ‘string, rope’; cf. Si. chyak ‘rope; classifier for domesticated elephants’}/\]

\[(\text{ni} \quad \text{DL 758}) \quad \text{‘for days’}\]

\[(\text{yā(n)} \quad \text{LOAN < Tai DL 1260}) \quad \text{‘for times, occasions’}\]

\[/\text{PTai *jaam ‘a watch in the night’ > Si. jaam, Lao fiaam, Shan jam; cf. Li 1977:178-9.}/\]

**Determiners**

\[(\text{ō ve} \quad \text{NEW \checkmark}) \quad \text{‘that’}\]

\[/\text{Cf. ‘Pal. suff.’ (pp. 82-4), contra Benedict 1983.}/\]

\[(\text{le-le} \quad \text{DL 1373-4}) \quad \text{‘each; every’ (always after tē + Clf)}\]

\[/\text{Probably ≠ le ‘substance-question particle’; see ‘Pal. suff.’ #21.}/\]

\[(\text{chi} \quad \text{NEW \checkmark}) \quad \text{‘this’}\]

\[/\text{See DL 520ff. Many cognates are to be found in ZMYYC #981, including: Xide tsh1\textsuperscript{44}, Dafang tsha, Mile ti\textsuperscript{33}, Naxi Lijiang tshu\textsuperscript{33}, Naxi Yongning tsh1\textsuperscript{33}, Hani Dazhai ci\textsuperscript{35}, Jinuo ci\textsuperscript{33}, Laiwa xji\textsuperscript{51}, Langsu tf\textsuperscript{51}; an extra-LB cognate is Bokar Adi ci:}/\]

\[(\text{qhe} \quad \text{‘Pal.suff.’#23 ‘like, as; topicalizer’}\]

\[/\text{Possibly related via metathesis are Bola (Burmish) tfh\textsuperscript{55}khja\textsuperscript{31} ‘like this’, th\textsuperscript{55}khja\textsuperscript{31} ‘like that’, perhaps < \text{*kya}; cf. Dai and Huang 1992 (‘TBL’): #’s 946, 952.}/\]

\[(\text{qha-pò-è} \quad \text{NEW \checkmark}) \quad \text{‘all; completely; everything, everybody’}\]

\[/\text{< pò ‘finish, be complete’ (see Verbs, below).}/\]

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\[9 \text{For the purposes of this paper, I am grouping together under the rubric of ‘Determiner’ morphemes which are analyzed more precisely in JAM 1973/1982.}\]
(B) Verbs (including adjectival verbs)

phē  *pyín² *prín¹ NEW  release; send forth
/Cf. WB phyăn̂ ‘with irregular, violent starts of heat’, phraăn̂ ‘untie, unloose, unfold’; this is a distinct root from *prøy¹ ‘untie’ > WB phre, Lahu phř./

ći  *džáŋ¹ DL 492-4 be there; have
/Not only is this etymon well-attested in Loloish, but it is now established for TB as a whole./

țā?  *ṭak⁵ TSR #98 climb up; go up; ascend

kù  *graw¹ (?) LOAN? cf. DL 337 ‘call out; cry out’
/The reconstruction of this etymon presents several problems. It must first of all be distinguished from a similar PLB root *kaw¹ ‘call, summon’ > WB khaw, Lahu qho (DL 293). Lahu kù has a front velar, which reflects a cluster with *r-, making the comparison with WB kraw ‘shout, call out’ attractive (< *graw¹), though the usual Lahu reflex of *-aw is -o, not -u. It is possible that the Lahu form is a loan from Tai (cf. Si. kṳu ‘halloo, shout, call out, esp. when hunting’./

r  *ṭey² NEW  be big; be great

mu  *mraŋ³ DL 991 be high

pò  *bun¹ (?) DL 872; GSTC #164 finish; come to an end
/This word also presents complicated etymological problems, since several different but resemblant roots must be considered. There is evidence for a final nasal, e.g. Phuoni pòn, Bisu pìn (cited by Bradley 1979, who reconstructs both *bran (#749) and *ban (#793). Several other nasal-final forms are offered in TBL #1702: Zaiwa pán⁵⁵, Langsu (Maru) pɔɔ⁴¹, Bola pɛ⁴³, Leqi pān. GSTC #164 reconstructs *bwày on the basis of WB pwāi ‘be past the season (as of fruit)’, Jingpo bōi ‘be finished’, etc. Still other WB forms (prf ‘be done’, pri ‘perfective particle’) point rather to PLB *bri¹²./

gā  *k-ra² DL 1116 win; overcome; beat someone out

ché  *səy² DL 542 live, dwell, stay; progressive auxiliary
/ʃ jë ‘stop, cease, come to rest’ < *N-dzay² (see DL 574, GSTC #156); there is an attractive comparison with Chinese: 在 OC *dzəg (GSR 943i), Mand.

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10 (Loloish) Lisu jaw⁴, Phuoni cā, Bisu tšā, Akha jó, Mpi tco³ [Bradley 1979:610]; also Yi Xide dzɔʊ³⁵, Naxi Lijiān dzy³⁵, Caigue Hani tsg⁴³, Jinuo tʃa³¹, etc. [ZMYYC #735]; (Baic) Dali tsu³¹, Jianchuān tsu³¹, Bijiang dʒi³³ (Qiangic) Ergong ntcho, Muya ndʒe³⁵, Guiqiong jë³⁵, Ersu dʒo³⁵, Shixing dʒa³³, etc. < PTB *N-džan.
zài. Bradley (1979:#598A) reconstructs *cyə² × *jya², on the basis of Lisu tya¹, Phunoi ca./

**gā**  *ra³*  DL 1113  ‘get, obtain; manage to V; must V; be able to V’¹¹

qò?  *ʔkapH*  NEW ✓  ‘say’

/Confirmatory evidence needed./

**kā**  *gra²*  DL 324  ‘hear’

ca  *ʔgya¹ × *ʔra¹*  NEW ✓  ‘look for, seek; go and V’

/ca seems to be cognate to WB hra ‘search; look for’, though the initial correspondence is unusual (see DL p. 432). The WB form is from PLB *ʔra¹*, while the Lahu could be from *ʔgya¹*. Either proto-variation could be posited, or else an unusual cluster could be invoked ad hoc, e.g. *ʔgrya¹./

và?  *wakL*  TSR #178  ‘hide’ (v.i.)

/× ŋa ‘hide’ (v.t.) < PLB *ʔwak/%

qò?  *gokL*  TSR#2; DL 255-9  ‘crooked, bent; return, go back’

**bù**  *mbu¹*  NEW ✓  ‘make a loud noise (esp. of animals); crow, bellow, moo, neigh...’

/Many Loloish cognates are to be found in ZMYYC #784, including: Dafang mbu¹³¹, Nanhua bu³³, Mile pu³³, Mojiang bu³⁵, Lisu bu³³./

**là**  *la¹*  GSTC #185;  ‘come’

/× *lay; see “Pal. suff.” #5./

chèʔ  *C-tsärL*  TSR #24; DL 537  ‘bite into’

chí  *kyi²*  DL 526  ‘lift up; raise’

tòʔ  *ʔtwakH*  TSR #102  ‘emerge; come out; go out’

qay  *ʔga-y¹*  DL 260  ‘go’; (as auxiliary) ‘motion away from’

/This verb has a fused palatal suffix; × gā ‘arrive, reach’ < *m-ga¹; see “Pal. suff.” #4./

kwān  LOAN  DL 360  ‘rule over; control’

¹¹ This word means ‘get; obtain’ as a main verb, and ‘able to V’ as a post-head versatile verb (in a manner very similar to the syntax and semantics of Thai dāj). In this text it is functioning as a pre-head versatile verb. See JAM 1991:418-22, where similar grammaticalizations in other languages are discussed.
/Prob. ult. < Chinese 管 ‘be in charge’, OC *kwân (GSR #157h), Mand. guân). The tone is 53 in Yunnanese Mandarin, practically identical to the contour of Lahu tone /~/.

(C) Particles

le *يلة1 ?? DL 1386-8 ‘and; conjunctive particle’

/Cf. the similar Siamese word le?, this is the same etymon as the suspensive particle (below)./  

thè *ta212 DL 673 ‘temporal’

lo *lam3 DL 1377 ‘locative’\(^\text{13}\)

ve *way3 [Etym] GSTC; [Gmr] JAM 1972b ‘general nominalizer; subordinator’

mâ *ma2 DL 968 ‘negative’

yô *yam1 NEW ✓ ‘declarative; affirmative’; (as interjection) ‘yes’

/Sometimes pronounced yà-ò in slangy speech (originally a Yellow Lahu form);\(^\text{14}\) perhaps cognate with Geman and Darang Deng am3 ‘copular’ (ZMYYC #733)./  

lè *lya1 NEW ✓ ‘topicalizer’

tû *？dik1 TSF #49; DL 604 ‘only’

/* tê ‘one’/

tê *day1 DL 646-7 ‘quotation ender’

/Prob. Æ tê (V) ‘be true’; similar to Si. thêe ‘real, genuine’, but more likely cognate to WB tai ‘very; intensifier’./

cê *džay2 GSTC #104 ‘quotative’

sê-phâ *sin2-pa2 NEW ✓ ‘agentive nominalizer; one who V’s’

/See ‘body; owner’ (N), above; Æ WB sañ ‘owner, proprietor < PLB Tone *1. Undoubtedly cognate is Lai Chin sin ‘possessive particle’.\(^\text{15}\) An excellent Chinese comparandum is 身 ‘body, person’ OC shēn (GSR 386a-c), Mand. shēn./

\(^{12}\) An alloform with PLB Tone *1 is reflected by Lisu (Fraser) htá4.  
\(^{14}\) Amusingly this is homophonous with the Icelandic word for ‘yes’, written jó but pronounced [jau].  
\(^{15}\) Data from Kenneth VanBik.
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*pā*  *?ba2*  NEW ✓  ‘agentive nominalizer’
/Cf. DL 811./

*thà?*  *C-tak1*  TSR #42  ‘upper part, top surface’ (N); accusative, particle’ (Pn)
/Cf. JAM 1991:388-9./

**pa-to**  *ban3-?don1*  LOAN  ‘because; due to the fact that’
/The first syllable is sometimes written with a final -n in missionary orthography (“pantaw”), suggesting it is a loanword. See DL 804./

*tā*  *?da2*  DL 596-7  ‘durative’
/Grammaticalized from the full verb tā ‘place; put; set down’./

*le*  *?iya1*  ??  DL 1386-7  ‘suspensive’
/Occurs after verbs in non-final clauses; same etymon as the homophonous conjunctive particle that occurs between nouns (see above)./ 

*e*  *?ay3*  GSTC #128  ‘motion away from; transitive motion’
/Cf. also DL 118; “Pal. suff.” #1 (pp. 45-6)./

*la*  *?la1* or *?la3*  NEW ✓  ‘motion toward; cisative motion’
/Cf. DL 1343./

The above etymologies certainly differ among themselves in quality, ranging from the certain, to the merely probable, to the quite speculative. Still it seems safe to say that large numbers of modern Lahu words -- perhaps the majority of the core lexicon -- can be provided with reasonably good PLB etymologies.

The real difficulty in writing a fable in PLB goes far beyond the etymologies of individual words.
IV. MORPHEME BY MORPHEME TRANSLATION INTO PROTO-LOLO-BURMESE

nda\(^1\)-kwa\(^1\) priŋ\(^2\) C-prek\(^L\) way\(^3\) kərak\(^H\)-pu\(^w\)-?ga\(^2\) ?lyə\(^1\) ?ăk-dzy\(^y\)wan\(^1\)

1. dan\(^2\) ?pok\(^H\) ta\(^2\), kram\(^1\) dan\(^2\) kram\(^1\) ūŋ-kan\(^1\) lam\(^3\) kərak\(^H\) dan\(^2\) tmu\(^2\) džan\(^1\) way\(^3\) yam\(^1\).

2. kərak\(^H\) ?aw\(^2\)-way\(^3\) dan\(^2\) tmu ūŋ-kan\(^1\) lam\(^3\), ūŋ-pu\(^1\)-?ga\(^2\) ni\(^2\) kriŋ\(^1\) džan\(^1\) way\(^3\) yam\(^1\).

3. kərak\(^H\)-pu\(^1\)-?ga\(^2\) dan\(^2\) kriŋ\(^1\) lya\(^1\), zaŋ\(^2\) dan\(^2\) ūŋy\(^1\) lay\(^3\)-lay\(^3\) graw\(^1\) way\(^3\) dan\(^2\) yam\(^1\) ta\(^2\), kram\(^1\) ūŋ-kaw\(^2\) lam\(^3\) ?dík\(^L\) ?tak\(^H\) graw\(^1\) way\(^3\) džəy\(^2\).

4. zaŋ\(^2\) graw\(^1\) way\(^3\) ūŋ-kraŋ\(^2\) lya\(^1\), tsi\(^1\) ka-y\(^1\) ?kap\(^H\) way\(^3\) yam\(^1\):

5. "ŋa\(^1\) kaw\(^2\) lya\(^1\), ūŋy\(^2\)-sin\(^2\)-mraŋ\(^3\)-sin\(^2\)-pa\(^2\) ma\(^2\) džan\(^1\).

6. ka\(^1\)-bun\(^1\)-?ay\(^3\) C-tak\(^L\) ra\(^2\) sin\(^2\)-pa\(^2\) ŋa\(^1\) yam\(^1\)," day\(^1\) ?dík\(^L\) tsi\(^1\) ka-y\(^1\) graw\(^1\) tsay\(^2\) way\(^3\) yam\(^1\).

7. ma\(^2\) ra\(^2\) way\(^3\) kərak\(^H\) dan\(^2\) kriŋ\(^1\) lya\(^1\), dan\(^2\) ūŋy\(^1\) lay\(^3\)-lay\(^3\) zaŋ\(^2\) dan\(^2\)-kraŋ\(^2\) tsi\(^1\) C-tak\(^L\) ra\(^3\) gra\(^2\) way\(^3\) C-tak\(^L\) ban\(^3\)-?don\(^1\), ūŋ-?

8. ma\(^2\) ra\(^2\) way\(^3\) kərak\(^H\)-pu\(^1\)-?ga\(^2\) tsi\(^1\) zaŋ\(^2\) kram\(^1\) ūŋ - kaw\(^2\) lam\(^3\) gok\(^L\) ?tak\(^H\) ?ay\(^3\) ?lyə\(^1\), gok\(^L\) mbu\(^1\) tsay\(^2\) way\(^3\) dan\(^2\) yam\(^2\) ta\(^2\), "ŋa\(^1\) kaw\(^2\) ra\(^2\) ?ba\(^2\) ma\(^2\) džan\(^1\)," day\(^1\) graw\(^1\) tsay\(^2\) way\(^3\) ūŋ - kaŋ\(^1\) lam\(^3\), ?ăk-dzy\(^y\)wan\(^1\) dan\(^2\) kriŋ\(^1\) la\(^1\) ?lyə\(^1\), zaŋ\(^2\) C-tak\(^L\) C-tsat\(^L\) kyi\(^2\) ka\(^1\)-?ay way\(^3\) yam\(^1\).
9. dan² təŋ³ lay³-lay³ ʔəŋ⁴-ʔəŋ⁴-ʔəŋ⁴ lam³ wak¹ tsay² way³ kərak²
dan² krəŋ¹ gok¹ -twak² ʔə¹ ʔlya¹, kərak² ʔaw²-way³ dan² ʔmu
ʔəŋ-kaw² C-tak¹ gok¹ gwan² ʔda² way³ yam¹.

V. PHONETIC PUZZLES

If we try to read the above text aloud, we are immediately faced with severe problems. How can we be sure we our pronouncing the etyma with a good Proto-Lolo-Burmese accent?

While the basic tonal categories of PLB are clear, the phonetics of the prototones must forever remain obscure. Whether the two basic tones in nonstopped syllables differed more saliently in pitch or phonation type cannot now be determined, though several scholars have speculated that Tone *1 had clear or modal phonation, while Tone *2 was characterized by breathy voice. As far as relative pitch goes, the modern languages are not much help, since they are about equally divided as to whether the reflexes of *1 are higher or lower than those of *2. Tone *3, while it must be reconstructed at the PLB level, is much rarer lexically than *1 or *2, occurs on many functors, and participates in numerous morphological alternations, leading all observers to conclude that it is historically younger. It seems to have been associated particularly with glottalization or “creaky” phonation. In stopped syllables a two-way tonal opposition must be reconstructed for Proto- Loloish, HIGH vs. LOW, which we may interpret as basically a pitch difference.17

Another puzzle is the exact nature of the phonetic difference between the PLB *preglottalized voiced (e.g. *ʔb-) vs. *preglottalized voiceless (e.g. *ʔp-) obstruents that must be set up for tonal reasons. Perhaps the *voiced series was imploded (but against this interpretation is the fact that it includes a palatal and a velar member as well as a labial and a dental). The *voiceless series may well have been pronounced sesquisyllabically, with a schwa after the glottal element.

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16 Since this appears to be a Chinese loanword, we should substitute the native phrase jō-mō phēʔ, lit. “be a master”, reconstructible as *ndzəw²-məŋ² C-prek¹. The morpheme jō- < *ndzəw² ‘lord, master’ has many cognates, including WB cūi, Nasu dz¹3²mo³³, Luquan nts’y³³ and Xixia *ndzu (see DL 578). The 2nd syllable -mō means ‘old, senior’ (cf. WB măñ ‘ruler, official’; DL 1031).

17 See JAM 1972, passim (TSR). This pitch difference was evidently redundant at the PLB stage (it is not manifested in Written Burmese), but for phonetic verisimilitude in our reconstructed text we have marked stopped syllables as either HIGH (⟨⟩) or LOW (⟨⟩).
VI. MORPHOSYNTACTIC ASSUMPTIONS

We have been assuming that the word order of PLB was identical to that of modern Lahu. This is certainly a debatable proposition, but perhaps we can be fairly confident that the core of LB syntax was Lahu-like in the following respects:

- PLB must have had verb-final clause structure, with concomitant use of postpositions rather than prepositions.

- The order of the pre-verbal NP’s in the PLB clause must have been relatively free.

- The order of the morphemes in quantified NP’s was probably Nqh + Num + Clf, with the quantified head coming first, followed by the Numeral plus Classifier.

- PLB relative clauses were externally headed, and must usually have preceded the head-noun they modified.

- Grammaticalization of root nouns and verbs to postpositions must already have been well underway at the PLB stage.

- The bleaching of full verbs to auxiliaries (“versatile verbs”) had probably already begun, so that “verb concatenation” (largely unmediated by particles) must have been the most frequent strategy for creating complex verbal notions.

- Several semantically differentiated clause-nominalizers (agentive, locative, temporal) must already have been in use, with the most general one (like Lahu ve) frequently serving to nominalize or “reify” whole sentences.

- On the negative side, there is absolutely no evidence that PLB manifested “verb pronominalization”, i.e. affixal agreement marking of subject and/or object in the VP, as e.g. in the Kiranti group of E. Nepal.18

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18 On the other hand, PLB may well have had auxiliary verbs or particles in the VP that indirectly marked the “direction of benefaction” of the verbal event, like Lahu là ‘non-3rd person beneficiary’ (< là ‘come’) and pf ‘3rd person beneficiary’ (< pf ‘give’). See JAM 1973/1982 (GL), pp. 324-330.
• On the morphophonemic plane, the large number of functors (determiners and particles) that are reconstructible with PLB Tone *3, *preglottalized initials, and/or final *palatal semivowel suggests that these phonological features were exploited at an early date for abstract grammatical duty.\textsuperscript{19}

In order to validate and nuance all these impressions, there will be no substitute for serious comparative grammatical studies of the modern Lolo-Burmese languages. Research into the historical syntax of TB is still in its infancy, and it is high time for it to grow up!

Meanwhile, we historical linguists might well profit from the moral of this fable itself. Let us not at this stage be too confident about what we can recover from the distant history of our language families, lest some cosmic bird of prey come swooping down to punish us for our grandiosity!

\textsuperscript{19} Cf. the reconstructions of the following Lahu functors in the list of reconstructed vocabulary (§3, above): \textit{ve, le-le, e, le, lo, pâ, pa-tô, la, tê, qhe, cê}. 
ABBREVIATIONS

Form-classes

ABL ablative
ACC accusative
Adv adverb
AGT-NOM agentive nominalizer
CAUS causative
CIS cisative motion
Clf classifier
DET determiner
LOC locative
Mpxf prefixable morpheme
Next extentive noun
Npron pronoun
Nspat spatial noun
Num numeral
Pn noun particle
Pquot quotative particle
Prt particle
Puf final unrestricted particle
Punf nonfinal unrestricted prt
Puniv universal unrestricted prt
Pv verb particle
PROG progressive
SUSP suspensive
TEMP temporal
TOP topic
Vadj adjectival verb
Vv posthead versatile verb
vV prehead versatile verb

Works cited

DL JAM 1988
GL JAM 1973/1982
GSR Karlgren 1957
GSTC JAM 1985
HCT Li 1977

Pal. suff. JAM 1995
STC Benedict 1972
TBL Dai & Huang 1992
TSR JAM 1972a
ZMYYC Sun et al 1991

20 For a complete list of my form-class abbreviations for Lahu, cf. GL pp. xxxi-xxxvii.
REFERENCES


