

## A note on Proto-Burmese-Lolo prefixation

Benedict, Paul K.

1975

Benedict, P. K. (1975). A note on Proto-Burmese-Lolo prefixation. *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, 2(2), 289-291. <https://dx.doi.org/10.32655/LTBA.2.2.07>

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/178665>

<https://doi.org/10.32655/LTBA.2.2.07>

---

© 1975 The Editor(s). All rights reserved.

*Downloaded on 22 Apr 2025 16:49:43 SGT*

A Note on Proto-Burmese-Lolo Prefixation

Paul K. Benedict

In an early (1939) study of K[anburi] L[awa], the writer pointed out that this deviant BL language has initial l- for PBL \*s-: le 'fruit' < \*sey, lak 'tree' < \*sik (cf. lan 'neck' < \*liŋ), as well as for PBL \*z-: lo- 'child' < \*za (cf. ŋo 'five' < \*ŋa), contrasting with d- for \*s- in don 'three' < \*sum (cf. yun 'house' < \*yum, with \*u maintained after \*y-); also th- for \*ts-: than 'elephant' < \*tsaŋ, as well as for \*ś-: ŋa-tha 'fish' = 'fish-flesh' (this compound often found in TB vocabulary lists under 'fish') < \*śa. Note ŋa- 'fish' < \*nyā and -tha 'flesh' < \*śa, contrasting with ŋo 'five' < \*ŋa and lo- 'child' < \*za, exactly paralleling the development (STC: 54) shown by Lakher [Kuki-Naga] ŋa 'fish' and sa 'flesh', contrasting with pəŋo 'five' and so 'child'. An additional pair of forms, of unusual interest for the BL comparativist, was overlooked in that study: thi (Kwe Noi dial.) - li (Kwe Yai dial.) 'seven', from PBL \*snis, the former apparently via \*sti[s] (cf. Kanauri stis ~ tis, Arch./Anc. Chinese 七 ts'iĕt < \*tshit < \*sthit), paralleling WB -hnats (with \*-n- > -n- or -t-), the latter paralleling PL \*si(t) (with \*-n- > zero).<sup>1</sup> Note that this cluster (\*sn-) is unique for PBL as well as for PTB (Benedict 1976); also that PBL final \*-s can be reconstructed here and in \*(s-)nis 'two' on the basis of the PL \*-it ≠ \*-ī proto-variation (cf. the roots cited in Matisoff 1972).

The same volume of STL (Shafer and Benedict 1939) contains a number of Southern Lolo tables, which include entries from four Tonkin (N. Vietnam) BL languages: White Lolo (WhL), Black Lolo (BlL), Khoanh, and Mư̄ng. These languages show some unusual features, including forms for 'four' which point to an earlier \*mle (< \*b-le), paralleling KL pli: WhL məi, BlL ze, Khoanh vai,

Murung ndzi (contrast WhL and BIL le- 'wind' < \*le). Of special interest here, however, are the reflexes (incomplete) of the PBL dental and palatal sibilants and obstruents which present a parallel to the KL reflexes:

	<u>PTB/PBL</u>	<u>KL</u>	<u>WhL</u>	<u>BIL</u>	<u>Khoanh</u>	<u>Murung</u>
fruit	* <u>sey</u>	le	si	si	si	-si
tree	* <u>siŋ</u> × * <u>sik</u>	lak	si-	si-	-	se
finger nail	* <u>(m-)syen</u>	-	-san	-san	-	-
three	* <u>g-sum</u>	doŋ	doŋ	duŋ	doŋ	duŋ
kill	* <u>g-sât</u>	-	de	-	-	-
child	* <u>za</u>	lo-	-	-	-	-
fat, n.	* <u>tsil</u>	-	-si	-si	-tsi	-
fat, adj.	* <u>tsow</u>	-	-	-	-	tsu
elephant	/ <u>*tsaŋ</u>	thaŋ	tsaŋ	tsaŋ	tso	-
ten	/ <u>*tsay</u>	se	di	di	tsi	coi
salt	* <u>tša</u>	-	da	do	da	do
person	/ <u>*tsaŋ</u>	-	daŋ	da	do	doŋ
eat	* <u>dza</u>	-	za	za	-	co
flesh	* <u>ša</u>	-tha	gha	hou	kha	hou
iron	* <u>sryam</u> × * <u>šam</u>	-	khəm	kue	khoe	-
goat	/ <u>*cit</u>	-	tsi	tsi	die	toi

The indicated reflexes for PTB/PBL \*s- are as follows:

(as initial): KL l-, Tonkin group s-

(after prefixed \*q-): KL d-, Tonkin group d- (perhaps ɗ- phonetically)

Support for this distinction is furnished by the PBL reconstructions attained by Matisoff (1972; and see also STC: fn. 259) through an analysis of the tonal system: \*siŋ × \*sik 'tree' (HIGH), as opposed to \*C-sat 'kill' (LOW). Although the available material is scanty, it does appear that KL and the Tonkin group reflect an earlier initial \*s- vs. stop prefix + \*s- distinction, through secondary voicing of the \*s- in the latter.<sup>2</sup> The Tonkin languages

also appear to show a parallel distinction in the reflexes of PTB/PBL \*ts-, with some inconsistency in one root ('ten'), suggesting the reconstructions \*tsi 'fat (n.)', \*tsu 'fat (adj.)', and perhaps \*tsaŋ 'elephant' (possibly a loan from Tai; cf. White Tai, Black Tai caŋ < PT \*jaŋ, and note the 'irregular' rhyme reflex when compared with 'person', below), contrasting with \*(C-)tsay 'ten', \*C-tsa 'salt', and \*C-tsaŋ 'person'. Similarly, for the remaining roots, the suggested reconstructions are \*(C-)dza 'eat', \*(C-)ša 'flesh', \*šam 'iron', and \*(C-)cit 'goat', the last to be compared with Matisoff's \*V-cit. The reflexes for PBL \*š- are noteworthy, and tend to support the suggestion by Bradley (1975) that these roots be reconstructed with initial \*x-.

### Notes

1. I.e., with 'prefix-preemption'. [JAM]
2. Ingenious as Benedict's explanation is for the double KL and Tonkin reflexes of \*s-, on the basis of the six forms available (fruit, tree, fingernail, seven; three, kill) another interpretation of the conditioning factor is also possible: maybe \*s > KL l-, Tonkin s- only before an original front vowel or palatal glide (fruit, tree, fingernail, seven), and otherwise \*s- > KL, Tonkin d- (three, kill): [JAM]

### REFERENCES

- Benedict, Paul K. 1939. "Kānburi Lawā," in Appendix III of Sino-Tibetan Linguistics ("STL"), Vol. 12 (Shafer and Benedict 1939).
- 1972. Sino-Tibetan: a Conspectus ("STC"). Cambridge University Press.
- 1976. "Sino-Tibetan: another look." JAOS (to appear).
- Bradley, David. 1975. Lahu Dialects and Proto-Loloish. Ph.D. dissertation, University of London. Typescript.
- Matisoff, James A. 1972. The Loloish Tonal Split Revisited. Research Monograph No. 7, Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley.
- Shafer, Robert and Paul K. Benedict. 1939. Burmish-Loloish. STL, Vol. 12, Berkeley, California (typescript).