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## Himalayan Linguistics

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*Towards a History of Verb Agreement in Tibeto-Burman*

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### ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the case for reconstructing verb agreement for Proto-Tibeto-Burman. It shows first that, given the distribution of cognate agreement systems across the family, there is no alternative to reconstructing it for the proto-language. Secondly it describes the paths by which agreement has been lost in those languages where it is absent.

Evidence is presented to demonstrate the prevalence of evidence for the PTB paradigm in languages across the family. It is shown that, contrary to assertions which have been made in the literature, the agreement systems of Jinghpaw, Nocte, and Northern Chin are cognate to those of the so-called “Rung” branches (Kiranti, rGyalrongic-Qiangic, Nungish, and West Himalayan), and that even without, but especially with, this evidence the “Rung” hypothesis is inconsistent with other proposals for subgrouping Tibeto-Burman. Once the cognacy of the Jinghpaw and Nocte systems is recognized, there is no further reason to believe in a genetic “Rung” unit. Several case studies are presented which show that agreement systems can be quickly and easily lost in TB languages, as a result of intense language contact and/or through the replacement of older finite structures by innovative new constructions based on clausal nominalization.

### KEYWORDS

Tibeto-Burman, verb agreement, subgrouping, Rung, Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw

This is a contribution from *Himalayan Linguistics*, Vol. 9(1): 1–39.

ISSN 1544-7502

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# *Towards a History of Verb Agreement in Tibeto-Burman\**

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In this paper I return once again to the question of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman provenance of the suffixal verb agreement system which is substantially retained in Kiranti, Kham, Chepang, Nungish, and rGyalrongic, and remains in clearly recognizable form in many other languages of the Qiangic, West Himalayan, East Bodish, Mizo-Kuki-Chin, and Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw branches of TB. Over the past several decades a strong case has been presented that these languages retain agreement morphology from a paradigm which is reconstructible for Proto-Tibeto-Burman (Henderson 1957, Bauman 1974, 1975, 1979, DeLancey 1980, 1981a, 1983, 1988, 1989, van Driem 1993a, 1999, Sun 1983, 1988, 1995, Watters 2002, *inter alia*). However, there remains a significant body of opinion in the field which holds that the case has not yet been made, and that it is more likely that the verb agreement is a secondary feature which has developed in a subset of the family (Matisoff 1993, Nishi 1995, LaPolla 2001, 2003a, 2005). With this contribution I hope to finally lay the issue to rest.

## **0 Introduction**

After a century and a half of research on Tibeto-Burman, the question of the historical status of verb agreement in the family remains one of the more vexed and controversial issues in TB linguistics. As implied by the name, the original European conception of TB grammar was based on the two great literary languages of the family, Tibetan and Burmese. Since neither language has any system of agreement in the verb, the absence of any such feature has traditionally been considered a part of what Bauman (1975) calls the “morpho-syntactic stereotype” of the family. On the other hand, the fact that some languages of the family do show very elaborate verb agreement systems has been known since the pioneering work of Hodgson (1857). But since this feature is not part of the traditional “stereotype” of TB, it was assumed to be a secondary development, possibly borrowed from Indo-European or Munda. Over the course of the second half of the 20th century, an ever-increasing amount of evidence has accumulated which shows evidently cognate verb agreement paradigms to be widespread throughout the family.

There remains, however, a body of opinion which adheres to the older view that the phenomenon of verb agreement is somehow foreign to the spirit of TB, and that everywhere that it occurs in the family it is necessarily a secondary development. Randy LaPolla, the leading exponent of this view, has argued steadily against the idea that agreement should be reconstructed

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\* I am grateful to David Bradley and Guillaume Jacques, whose advice and suggestions have materially improved this paper.

for PTB. In earlier work, LaPolla threw out a volley of objections to the hypothesis of PTB agreement, not all of them mutually compatible (LaPolla 1989, 1992, 1994). In recent statements (LaPolla 2003a, 2005), he moves to a position considerably closer to the majority view, in that he recognizes that many of the agreement systems in the family, in branches not formerly considered to be genetically close, are cognate and must be reconstructed for the common ancestor of a substantial portion of the family. He now acknowledges that the agreement systems of West Himalayan, Kiranti, rGyalrongic, and Nungish are indisputably cognate, and suggests (2003b) that Qiang is also associated with this branch, thus conceding the greater part of the argument. However, he considers these groups to represent a distinct genetic subgroup of TB, “Rung”, and attributes the agreement system only to the common ancestor of that branch. He still states that the suffixal agreement paradigms of Jinghpaw and Nocte, which are generally recognized as belonging to the same Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw (Burling’s “Sal”) branch of the family (Burling 1983, Thurgood 2003), are not cognate with each other, much less with these others, and thus presumably must have been independently innovated, either through parallel evolution or through contact. He also maintains his argument that branches of the family such as Lolo-Burmese which lack verb agreement must never have had it.

Thus there remain two major issues between LaPolla and those who attribute verb agreement to PTB: the cognacy of the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw (and Northern Chin, as we will discuss below) suffixes to the rest of the family, and the origin of non-agreement in branches such as Bodo-Garo and Lolo-Burmese. In this paper I will present a set of arguments in which these issues are intertwined. In Section 2, I will argue that the agreement systems of Nocte, Jinghpaw, and Northern Chin are cognate to those of the rest of the family, so that any “Rung” solution will have to be even broader and more improbable than the current proposal. In Section 3, I will present case studies showing the primary mechanisms by which TB languages, including close relatives of Jinghpaw-Nocte and of Northern Chin, have lost verb agreement, and evidence that these mechanisms are in fact the explanation for the prevalence across the family of languages which lack this feature.

As a preface to this I will outline in Section 1 the overall logic of the argument for reconstructing a verb agreement paradigm for Proto-Tibeto-Burman. This is for only for background to the following sections, and is not intended as a definitive demonstration or reconstruction. The case for PTB agreement, with proposed reconstructions, is laid out in detail in the references listed in the first paragraph. I will, however, note in passing remnants of the PTB system in a few languages outside the established genetic nuclei, including both languages which conceivably could be Rung, if such a thing existed (Newar, Thangmi) and languages which presumably would not be (Kaman, Dhimal, Lepcha). I bring these in partly for their evidentiary value, but also to counter the assertion sometimes made (e.g. LaPolla 1992:301) that verb agreement systems are a rare phenomenon in the family.

The substantive contributions of this paper are the further demonstration (after Henderson 1957, Bauman 1975, DeLancey 1989, and van Driem 1993a) that the Jinghpaw, Nocte, and Northern Chin agreement paradigms are highly relevant to the issue, and the presentation of a set of mechanisms which can easily explain the widespread independent loss of verb agreement in many languages and branches of the family.

## 1 The Agreement Hypothesis

The simple reason for the controversy is that a substantial number of TB languages have verb agreement, and a substantial number lack it. Neither pattern is restricted to a particular genetic or areal subset of the family; rather, both “Pronominalized” and non-“Pronominalized” languages are found across major branches, and throughout the length and breadth of the geographical range of the family. LaPolla once wrote of “the small number of languages that have verb agreement systems” (1992: 299), “almost all geographically contiguous” (1992: 300), neither of which is an entirely reasonable claim. There are over three dozen languages with indisputably cognate agreement systems in eastern Nepal alone, with at least as many more (depending on exactly how one counts “languages”) scattered across the rest of the family. And TB languages with apparently cognate suffixal agreement systems range from Rangpo in Uttarakhand in the west to Jinghpaw in Yunnan in the east, and from rGyalrongic in Sichuan in the north to Northern Chin in Manipur and western Burma in the south – an area which is “contiguous” only in the sense that all Tibeto-Burman-speaking territory is contiguous.

The various agreement systems show both striking morphological similarities and important differences. On the one hand, we find systems whose similarities are of a sort which cannot possibly be due to chance in languages widely separated geographically and (at least on any plausible current subgrouping scheme) genetically, as between Kiranti and Jinghpaw. On the other, we find systems which cannot plausibly be cognate – for example, the exclusively or almost exclusively prefixal agreement paradigms of the Mizo-Kuki-Chin languages cannot be directly cognate to the primarily or exclusively suffixal systems of Qiang or Western Kiranti.

LaPolla wants to place most of the languages with verb agreement in a genetic “Rung” unit within Tibeto-Burman comprising rGyalrong, Nungish, Kiranti, Kham, and Western Himalayan, on the basis of “clearly cognate complex person marking systems”,<sup>1</sup> which he regards as a Rung-level innovation. He also reconstructs for Proto-Qiangic an agreement system which he suspects “may be related at a very deep time depth to the system of the Rung group” (2003a: 30); Thurgood’s version of Rung, which LaPolla presumably supports, explicitly includes Qiangic as well as the Central Nepal languages Kham and (provisionally) Magar and Chepang (Thurgood 2003). This does begin to sound like “deep time depth” indeed, but for LaPolla it is not yet PTB. LaPolla mentions agreement in Jinghpaw and Nocte, but doubts that these systems are cognate with one another, and asserts without argument, or reference to the contrary claims of Bauman (1975), DeLancey (1989), and van Driem (1993a), that the Jinghpaw system “is not cognate with that of the Rung group” (2003a: 32).

In section 1.1 and 1.2 we will examine a small sample of the abundant evidence for the cognacy of these and other agreement systems. Since the cognacy of the agreement systems of the West Himalayan, Kiranti, Kham-Chepang, Nung, and Qiangic (including rGyalrongic) groups is no longer in dispute (see sec. 1.1), I will not present detailed arguments for this claim; more extensive comparisons have been given elsewhere (see the references above), and need not be repeated here. In outlining these languages I will concentrate on data which will be useful in our comparison of these with the Jinghpaw-Konyak and Northern Chin paradigms in Section 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Almost all comparative research on the verbal suffixes discussed here is based on the inspectional similarity of contemporary forms, rather than on phonological comparison or branch-level reconstruction. I will therefore adopt Bauman’s (1975) convention of marking inferred suffixes with # to indicate that these are preliminary reconstructions whose exact form remains a question for further research.

### 1.1 First and second person suffixes

The essential case for reconstructing an agreement paradigm is easily illustrated by a few verb forms (see Sun 1983 for a similar illustration using a substantially different set of languages).

#### 1.1.1 First person indices

In each of the examples below, the final morpheme indicates 1<sup>st</sup> person singular agreement:<sup>2,3</sup>

lCogtse (rGyalrongic)	jə-pi-ŋ	‘AORIST-come-1SG’
Trung (Nungish)	ta-ŋ	‘hear-1SG’
Sunwar (Kiranti)	pi-ŋa	‘come-1SG’
Rangpo (W. Himalayan)	rha-ŋ	‘come-1SG’
Jinghpaw (BKJ)	wa r-iŋ	‘return CISLOCATIVE-1SG’
Nocte (BKJ)	ka <sup>1</sup> r-ɬŋ	‘go CISLOCATIVE-1SG’
Tiddim (Mizo-Kuki-Chin)	pai \n-iŋ	‘go FUTURE-1SG’

**Table 1: Tibeto-Burman 1<sup>st</sup> person singular forms**

Obviously, given independent evidence that these are related languages, our first reaction to these data will be to hypothesize that the agreement markers, and the system of which they are part, are cognate. But, of course, if the issue were so simple there would be no debate about it.

One long-standing argument is that the pronominal origin of these suffixes is so transparent that they must be relatively new developments. In most of the languages on the list (though not, let us note, in Sunwar, Rangpo, or Tiddim) the independent 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun is a very direct reflex of PTB #ŋa, and this would seem to be the source for the agreement suffix. Thus it might be possible to imagine this set of data as representing widespread independent parallel developments. To support this argument Matisoff (1993) presents a purported instance of recent development of pronominal verb agreement in the Loloish language Sangkong. Sangkong has a conjunct (DeLancey 1992a) or egophoric (Tournadre 2008) particle ŋa<sup>55</sup>, which is homophonous with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun. Since conjunct or egophoric forms occur primarily in 1<sup>st</sup> person declarative sentences, one can understand the temptation to interpret the particle as a grammaticalization of the pronoun, and thus an example of an innovative verb agreement system. But what is described for Sangkong is quite clearly an egophoric system, not a true agreement system. Note first that the system makes only a two-way distinction, between 1<sup>st</sup> and non-1st person; typical TB agreement systems, in contrast, tend to pay particular attention to 2<sup>nd</sup> person, often distinguishing it with extra or innovative marking. But the critical evidence – explicitly noted

<sup>2</sup> Sources for data used in this paper will be cited at first mention of the language.

<sup>3</sup> Sunwar data in this paper are my own (see also Genetti 1988a, Borchers 2008); Jinghpaw data are my own, provided by LaRaw Maran (see also Hanson 1917, Dai and Xu 1992); Nocte forms are from unpublished notes of the late Alfons Weidert (see also Weidert 1985), who re-elicited the paradigms in Das Gupta 1971. Other sources for this table are: lCogtse (Nagano 1984), Trung (Sun 1982, also Lo 1945), Rangpo (Zoller 1983), Tiddim Chin (Henderson 1965).

by Matisoff – that the system is fundamentally an evidential system, not an agreement paradigm, is the fact that 3<sup>rd</sup> person clauses occur with the supposed “1<sup>st</sup> person” affixes to indicate direct evidentiality (Matisoff 1993: 132-3). Finally, Matisoff provides a very plausible etymology for the non-1<sup>st</sup> person form in an old copula *\*ray*. All of this is quite normal for a conjunct-disjunct system, which, unlike true verb agreement, is actually attested in Loloish, in Akha (Egerod and Hansson 1974). The oddity of Sangkong, if it were actually the case, would be the intrusion of a pronominal element into the system, which is not in the least typical of conjunct-disjunct marking. But this is illusory. The conjunct particle in Sangkong, and its Akha cognate *ηáa*, are related not to the pronominal root but to the locative copula represented by Akha *ηə* ‘to be’, Jinghpaw *ngà* ‘to be, exist, be located’, Japhug rGyalrong *ηu* ‘be’ (Jacques 2004: 304), etc. Both Loloish languages have very ordinary, well-behaved egophoric systems, based on copulas as such systems in TB typically are, and have no connection to pronouns or to verb agreement systems.

### 1.1.2 Second person indices

We see a different problem in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms. In Table 2 I have added one more Nungish and two Kiranti languages for reasons that will become evident:<sup>4</sup>

ICogtse (rGyalrongic)	<b>tə-po-n</b>	‘2-go-2SG’
Trung (Nungish)	<b>nu-tə</b>	‘2-hear’
Rawang (Nungish)	<b>é-di</b>	‘2-go’
Sunwar (Kiranti)	<b>pi-ye</b>	‘come-2SG’
Thulung (Kiranti)	<b>jar-na</b>	‘fall-2SG’
Limbu (Kiranti)	<b>kε-thaŋ</b>	‘2SG-come.up’
Rangpo (W. Himalayan)	<b>gya-n</b>	‘go-2/3SG’
Jinghpaw (BKJ)	<b>wa r-in</b>	‘return CISLOCATIVE-2SG’
Nocte (BKJ)	<b>ka ɔʔ</b>	‘go-2SG’
Tiddim (Mizo-Kuki-Chin)	<b>pai tɛʔ</b>	‘go-2SG’

**Table 2: Tibeto-Burman 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular forms**

We have here a presumptive case for a 2<sup>nd</sup> person suffix #-*n(a)*, but we also have several apparently non-cognate forms, as well as several languages with a prefix instead of or in addition to a suffix. One striking fact is that these innovations appear to be quite shallow; note that within Kiranti, Thulung has retained the original suffix, while Sunwar seems to have replaced it with a different suffix, and Limbu with a prefix. Similarly note that Jinghpaw and Nocte, which we will see are closely related, both retain the old 1<sup>st</sup> person suffix, but Nocte has innovated a new 2<sup>nd</sup> person morpheme. Finally, note the prefixes; not only are the rGyalrong, Limbu, and Nungish forms different, even the two Nungish forms have no evident resemblance to each other. In fact, as

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<sup>4</sup> Rawang (Barnard 1934), Thulung (Allen 1975, Lahaussais 2003), Limbu (van Driem 1987).

documented by Bauman (1975) there is a tendency across the family to innovate not only new 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms, but whole new constructions, often involving new prefixes.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1.3 The transitive paradigm

Many TB languages have distinct intransitive and transitive verb conjugations. Comparison of the transitive paradigms provides stronger and deeper evidence for cognacy. Consider the following forms, where e.g. “1→2” labels a verb form with 1SG subject and 2SG object. (The meaning of “P” in the Jinghpaw and Nocte columns will be given below in Section 2.1):<sup>6</sup>

	ICog-tse	Proto-Qiang	Rawang	Sunwar	Jinghpaw	Nocte
1→2	tə-a-V-n	*V-aŋ	V-ŋ	V-na	P-ŋ	P-ε
1→3	V-ŋ	*V-w-aŋ	V-ŋ-u	V-ŋa	P-ŋ	P-Λŋ
2→3	tə- V(-u)	*V-wa-n	é-V-u	V-wa	P-n	P- ɔʔ
3→3	V-u	*V-wa	V-u	V-wa	P-uʔ	P-a
3→2	tə- V-n	*V-s-an	é-V	V-n	P-n	P-h-ɔʔ
3→1	u-V-ŋ	*V-s-aŋ	é-V-ŋ	V-yi	P-ŋ	P-h-Λŋ
2→1	kə-u-V-ŋ	*V-n	é-V-a	V-yi	P-ŋ / -n	P-h-Λŋ

**Table 3: Transitive verb forms in “Rung” and Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw**

There are two important correspondences across these forms which provide strong evidence for their cognacy. The first is the *-u ~ -wa* found in 3<sup>rd</sup> person object forms in rGyalrongic, Qiangic, Nungish and Kiranti. It has generalized to a 3<sup>rd</sup> person index (i.e. not restricted to objects) in Jinghpaw (see Section 2.1.1), and we will see it indexing 3<sup>rd</sup> person in other secondary subject-agreement paradigms. This etymon is important because, unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> *-ŋ* and 2<sup>nd</sup> *-n* forms, it does not represent a widespread pronominal root; although demonstrative roots in /o/ or /u/ occur in various languages, and it is quite likely that the agreement suffix is related to a PTB distal demonstrative root *#u ~ ə* (Benedict 1982), we cannot look at most of the languages in Table 3 and immediately see the likely source for *-u* as an agreement marker, as we often can for the 1SG suffix. The suffix cannot be explained away as a recently grammaticalized pronoun in a language or branch which has no such pronoun. (For additional evidence for the antiquity of *#-u* see DeLancey 1981a, Turin 1998, van Driem 2004, Jacques 2009, and Section 1.3 below).

The second correspondence is the hierarchical agreement pattern, where the verb indexes a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person argument in preference to 3<sup>rd</sup>, regardless of which is subject or object – note in particular the consistent 1<sup>st</sup> person marking across all the languages in the 3→1 row. This is a typologically marked pattern (which is to say that, in languages of the world, simple subject agreement is much more common), and thus its consistency across all the branches is evidence that the systems are cognate.

<sup>5</sup> See King 2002 for a useful discussion of the exceptionality of sentences with 2<sup>nd</sup> person objects.

<sup>6</sup> Proto-Qiang reconstructions are from Evans 2004; cp. LaPolla 2003b:144.

## 1.2 The “Rung” paradigm

In earlier work LaPolla disputed the likelihood that any of the paradigms exemplified in Tables 1-3 could be actually cognate any deeper than the branch level. He now (2003a: 30) recognizes the cognacy of all but the last three systems (Jinghpaw, Nocte, and Northern Chin, the last omitted from Table 3 because it manifests neither the hierarchical pattern nor the 3<sup>rd</sup> person #-u), which presumably then must still be explained as parallel evolution, “drift”, borrowing, or something. The other languages LaPolla groups into his “Rung” unit, whose sole motivation seem to be to create a place for an ancestral agreement system which is more recent than PTB. The “Rung” branch is based on the indubitable cognacy of these forms (LaPolla 2003a: 30):

	1SG	1PL	2PL	DU	reflexive/middle <sup>7</sup>
Proto-rGyalrong	*-ŋ	*-i	*-ñ	*-tsh	
Proto-Nungish	*-ŋ	*-i	*-n	*-si	*-si
Proto-Kiranti	*-ŋ	*-i	*-ni	*-ci	*-nsi
Proto-W. Himalayan	*-g/ŋ	*-ni	*-ni	*-si	*-si

**Table 4: LaPolla’s evidence for Rung**

Of course, to postulate suffixes with these functions in a language implies a fuller paradigm; presumably no 2SG form is included because, as we have seen, the evidence is not quite so overwhelming as it is for 1SG #-ŋ. There is in fact considerably more evidence than this to connect these branches, and others as well. We have seen that the 2SG form is subject to some variation, often at quite shallow levels. Nevertheless, note that the 2SG suffixes of lCogtse, Rangpo, the Kiranti languages Thulung and Limbu, and Jinghpaw are evidently cognate, so that both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> singular forms match across any plausible genetic classification of the languages listed. We can easily reconstruct 2<sup>nd</sup> person #-n or #-na for rGyalrong-Qiangic as well as for Proto-Kiranti (for which see van Driem 1990, 1991, 1992), even though many languages of both branches also use innovative prefixes to mark 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Saxena (1997) reconstructs 2SG intransitive \*-na for Proto-West Himalayan. Thus just in the branches which LaPolla assigns to Rung there is as much evidence for PTB 2SG #-n(a) as for the reflexive suffix. Add in Jinghpaw and the case is effectively as strong as for 1SG #-ŋ. (I am considering here only the languages where the 2SG #-n is found as a suffix; there is a number of languages with a coronal nasal 2<sup>nd</sup> person prefix, often the only prefix in the paradigm (Watters 2003)).

LaPolla has claimed that the hierarchical indexation pattern is evidence that these paradigms represent “relatively recent grammaticalizations of discourse prominence” (1989: 358; this is said a bit more obliquely in 1992: 311); later in the same paper he describes such systems as reflecting “a pragmatic rather than a structural principle” (1989: 361). The logic of this assertion is not explained, and seems to be incorrect. The pragmatic motivation of the hierarchical pattern has long been evident (see DeLancey 1981b), but I do not see how this entails that such a system

<sup>7</sup> I will not discuss this form much in this paper, since there is no evidence for it in most of the languages that I am primarily concerned with (but see Section 1.3). But in the general spirit of this work I will mention in passing the Meithei reflexive -cə /-jə (Singh 2000:49-50, Chelliah 1997:213-5)), as a cognate far outside the “Rung” orbit.

cannot be maintained over time or integrated into the syntactic organization of a language. In any case the implied claim, that hierarchical agreement is evidence of a recently grammaticalized system, is empirically false. Hierarchical systems very similar to those found in Tibeto-Burman occur in many languages around the world (DeLancey 1981b, Klaiman 1992, Givón 1994, Zuñiga 2006, *inter alia*), and in many cases – most notoriously Algonquian – they are deeply involved in the basic syntactic organization of the clause, and are clearly not recent developments. In families such as Algonquian and Kiowa-Tanoan the system is indisputably coeval with the family. (LaPolla now acknowledges that the original “Rung” system was hierarchical (2003a: 30), so, depending on the time depth attributed to Rung, this issue may no longer be in dispute).

### *1.3 Evidence from other Bodic languages*

All classification schemes for Tibeto-Burman include a Bodish unit which includes Tibetan, Tamang-Gurung-Thakali, East Bodish and Tshangla. All except for Thurgood and LaPolla include the West Himalayan group as quite closely connected with these, and Kiranti and the Central Himalayan languages (Kham, Magar and Chepang) as a separate branch of a larger Bodic or Western unit (see sec. 2.3). For LaPolla it is necessary that not only Kiranti but even West Himalayan be Rung, so that all languages with self-evidently cognate agreement systems can belong to some unit more recent than PTB. We will briefly look here at evidence from two presumably Bodic, and probably closely related, languages, Newar and Thangmi. These may or may not be more closely linked to the Kiranti side of Bodic, and thus do not necessarily furnish direct independent witness for the paradigm outside of “Rung”. However, Newar provides an excellent example of the rapid loss of a verb agreement system, which we will return to later (Section 3.1.2). We note here in passing that we also find verb agreement paradigms including material from the PTB paradigm in the “Archaic East Bodish” languages of Bhutan (van Driem 1995, 2001: 926-33). There is as yet very little published material on these languages, but if they are in fact Bodish, then the fact that they retain an agreement paradigm relatable to that of the other branches is a lethal threat to the Rung hypothesis. All of these languages serve as particularly strong witnesses to the age of the agreement paradigm in the family: in each language we find a velar nasal 1SG suffix, but either the stop-initial or some completely innovative 1SG pronoun. Thus in these languages, as in others which we will consider later, verb agreement predates the contemporary pronominal paradigm, and so cannot represent a recent grammaticalization of independent pronouns.

Kathmandu Newar, the standard and best-known Newar variety, shows a fascinating egophoric or conjunct/disjunct system (Hale 1980, DeLancey 1992a, Hargreaves 2005, Hale and Shresta 2006), but no immediately evident trace of verb agreement. However, the Dolakha variety has subject agreement for three persons, singular and plural, across four tense/aspect categories (Genetti 1994, 2007). The plural forms seem to be innovative, and in two tenses there is a 1SG suffix *-gi* of uncertain origins. But Genetti (1994: 102-3, 133-4) is able, by very shallow internal reconstruction, to identify 1SG *-ŋ*, 2SG *-n*, and 3SG *-u* as basic elements of the Dolakha paradigm. Kansakar (1999) adduces additional evidence from Classical Newar for the retention of 3SG *#-u* to and beyond Proto-Newar. There can hardly be any doubt that these morphemes reflect the corresponding forms in the original conjugation, although the paradigm as it occurs in Dolakha has been drastically simplified (Genetti 1994, van Driem 1993c).

A much more elaborate and conservative agreement system is found in Thangmi, also spoken primarily in Dolakha district of Nepal (Turin 1998, 1999, In press). The verb agreement system is much more similar to Kiranti, with familiar suffixes in the familiar hierarchical pattern. Thangmi has lost the dual and exclusive categories in the verb, but otherwise has the full set of etyma which we have discussed so far: reflexive *-fi*, 1SG *-ŋa*, 2SG *-na*, 1PL *-(?)i*, 2PL *-ni*, 3OBJ *-u*, as well as a composite form *-uŋ* in the 1SG→3 configuration, which precisely matches a form in the same paradigmatic slot in Limbu and several other Kiranti languages, and appears also in East Bodish. In the closely-related Barām language the “system of verbal agreement has all but decayed” (Turin 1998: 477).

Until the recent work of Turin, Thangmi was virtually undocumented, and it is not mentioned in the major contemporary essays at classification of the family. But there is significant lexical evidence suggesting a close relationship with Newar (Turin 2004, van Driem 2001, 2004). Turin (1999, 2004) notes that the lexical similarities of Thangmi lie primarily with Newar, and the morphological similarities more with Kiranti. But if the paradigm shared by Thangmi and Kiranti is common inheritance from PTB, or even Proto-“Mahakiranti”, then the similarities between Thangmi and Kiranti in and of themselves need not indicate an especially close relationship. Since we know from the Dolakha evidence that Newar inherited some version of the PTB agreement paradigm, whether we place Thangmi and Newar together in a separate group, or assign them both to a larger Mahakiranti, we have a case study here of a drastic reduction of the original paradigm in Dolakha, and its complete and rapid disappearance in Kathmandu and apparently Barām. We will return to this later (Section 3.1.2).

## **2 Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw, Northern Chin, and “Rung”**

Other languages which have figured prominently in the case for the PTB agreement paradigm are Jinghpaw, Nocte (a Konyak or Northern Naga language of Nagaland), and the Northern Chin languages Sizang and Tiddim. It is possible that all of these may belong to the same major subgroup of TB; in any case all have always been generally recognized as belonging to branches distinct from the Bodic languages. All show a highly grammaticalized system in which the agreement indices are suffixed to a set of morphemes, generally consisting of a single consonant, forming a syllable which follows the lexical verb as an independent word. My purpose in this section is to demonstrate two points: first, that contrary to LaPolla’s interpretation, the systems of Jinghpaw and Nocte are unquestionably cognate with one another, and thus agreement must be reconstructed for the common ancestor of Jinghpaw and the Konyak group and, quite likely, of Bodo-Garo as well (we will return to this question later), and second, that this system is also cognate with those in the other branches. This is a challenge to the Rung hypothesis, since Rung with Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw packed into it would be even more of a grab-bag than the present proposal. We will also examine the Northern Chin evidence, which will be an important part of another argument later in the paper, and which, in that it shows that not only Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw but also Mizo-Kuki-Chin (and hence Kuki-Chin-Naga) share the ancient suffixal agreement paradigm, adds one more layer of implausibility to the idea that all the necessary languages can be lined up in one genetic subunit of the family.

## 2.1 *Jinghpaw and Nocte*

LaPolla asserts that “Within [Bodo-Konyak-Garo] only Nocte and Jinghpaw have person-marking systems, and they do not appear to be cognate” (2003b: 32). In fact, while some Konyak languages (Chang, Phom, Konyak) lack verb agreement paradigms, others, in particular those referred to as “Tangsa”, do have paradigms unmistakably related to that of Nocte (Das Gupta 1980, Morey In press). (The division between Konyak languages with and without agreement correlates very neatly with the division of the group which Marrison (1967: 260-68) proposes on phonological and lexical grounds). Similarly, there are varieties of Jinghpaw (particularly the Singpho language of Assam) which show no trace of verb agreement. However, although the Jinghpaw system is more complex than anything reported for Konyak, there are direct correspondences between some of the morphemes and basic structural principles of the Jinghpaw system and those of Nocte (DeLancey In press a), such that the system must be reconstructed for their common ancestor, and thus for the ancestor of Singpho and Chang. In this section I will concentrate on evidence which shows that the Jinghpaw and Nocte systems are cognate; in Section 2.3 we will look at additional evidence from each language which links it to some or all of the “Rung” paradigms.

### 2.1.1 Person indices

In Table 5 are listed the singular agreement suffixes in Jinghpaw and Nocte. An important point of correspondence between them is an alternation in both languages between two series of agreement suffixes. In Jinghpaw the alternate 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> forms are the inherited nasals and their homorganic stops, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms are distinguished by a vowel alternation. In Nocte the 1<sup>st</sup> person forms are exactly parallel to those in Jinghpaw, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms are distinguished by the presence or absence of /ʔ/. The distinction between the two paradigms has been lost in Nocte in the innovated 2<sup>nd</sup> person form, which is further evidence that this form is a later, Konyak-internal intrusion into an old paradigm inherited from the common ancestor of the two languages:<sup>8</sup>

	Nocte	Jinghpaw
1sgI	- <sup>1</sup> ʌŋ	-iŋ/-eŋ
1sgP	-ʌk	-iʔ/-eʔ (coda /-ʔ/ < *-k)
2sgI	-ɔʔ	-in/-en
2sgP	-ɔʔ	-it/-et
3sgI	-a	-uʔ
3sgP	-aʔ	-aʔ

Table 5: Jinghpaw and Nocte singular agreement suffixes

<sup>8</sup> I have glossed the alternate forms as ‘I’ and ‘P’ to imply a broad aspectual force which is still present in Jinghpaw, where the stop series is associated with inceptive, perfective, and punctual values. In the limited Nocte data available, the two series are never in direct contrast, each occurring with a particular set of initial particles, so that, for example, the cislocative *r-* requires the I series, while the past *t-* and negative *m-* both require the P series.

The paired agreement series are a shared innovation between Jinghpaw and Konyak, with no direct parallel elsewhere in the family. It is probably also noteworthy that the languages share the *-a?* 3<sup>rd</sup> person form. This may be of Proto-Tibeto-Burman provenance (see van Driem 1995:241) and thus shared retention, but it is absent in many other languages with very conservative verb paradigms. The rest of the material of the paradigms is all familiar: 1<sup>st</sup> *-ŋ* and, in Jinghpaw, both 2<sup>nd</sup> *-n* and 3<sup>rd</sup> *-u?*.

### 2.1.2 The morphological structure of agreement

In Jinghpaw, Nocte, and Tangsa (as well as Northern Chin, which I will discuss below), agreement suffixes are attached to grammatical particles marking tense/aspect, mood, and other verbal categories (the “P” of Table 3). The resulting “sentence-final word” (Dai and Diehl 2003) is phonologically independent of the lexical verb. In the modern languages these particles are something of a descriptive problem, but diachronically they represent highly grammaticalized auxiliary verbs. All TB languages have grammaticalized verbs which carry out auxiliary functions. In languages with verb agreement, the final auxiliary will inflect for person; typically the lexical verb does not (although there are exceptions). In the forms below, the agreement morphemes are attached to the cislocative particle *r-* (DeLancey 1985, In press a).

	Jinghpaw <i>sa</i> ‘go’	Nocte <i>ka(t)</i> ‘go’
1SG	sa r-ing	ka <sup>1</sup> r-Λŋ
2SG	sa r-in	ka r-ɔ?
3SG	sa r-a?	ka r-a?
1PL	sa ra-ga?	ka r-i?
2PL	sa mǎ-r-in	ka <sup>1</sup> r-Λn
3PL	sa mǎ-r-a?	ka r-a?

**Table 6: Jinghpaw and Nocte paradigms (with cislocative *r-*)**

We can see that, while there is significant correspondence between the singular forms, there is little or none in the plural series. We will return to this issue in Section 2.3.

In both languages the verb can occur without a following particle. In Nocte, the agreement markers then occur as independent syllables: *ka <sup>1</sup>Λŋ* ‘go 1SG’. In Jinghpaw, the agreement is likewise syllabic, but is then repeated prefixed to the sentence-final particle *ai*: *sa wa ng-ng-ai* ‘go 1SG’. Although forms like Nocte *<sup>1</sup>Λŋ* are synchronically best analyzed as lacking a particle, they must historically reflect an original inflected copula which functioned as an auxiliary (Section 2.4.1).

### 2.1.3 Hierarchical agreement

One last important point of correspondence between the two systems is that they share hierarchical agreement, i.e. indexation of a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person object in preference to a lower-ranked subject (see

Section 1.1.4, DeLancey 1981a, b, In press a). Recall from Table 3 that in both languages a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person argument is indexed in preference to a 3<sup>rd</sup> person, regardless of grammatical role. The relevant forms are repeated here:

	Jinghpaw	Nocte
1→3	P-ŋ	P-Λŋ
3→1	P-ŋ	P-h-Λŋ
2→3	P-n	P-ɔʔ
3→2	P-n	P-h-ɔʔ

**Table 7: Hierarchical agreement in Nocte and Jinghpaw**

A striking feature of the Nocte paradigm, not shared with Jinghpaw, is explicit marking of the grammatical category called inverse. The argument to be indexed on the verb is determined by person, rather than by grammatical or semantic role; the *h-* ‘inverse’ morpheme indicates that the indexed argument is not the A or subject argument.

Thus the Jinghpaw and Nocte paradigms have in common some morphological material, a unique morphological alternation, the “sentence-final word” system, including a cognate cislocative particle, and hierarchical agreement. There can hardly be any doubt that an agreement system including this material and structure must be reconstructed for their common ancestor. But, while the structure, and several of the basic forms, of the Jinghpaw and Nocte paradigms correspond perfectly, many of the actual indices in the two paradigms do not. We will look again at both the Jinghpaw and Nocte paradigms in Section 2.5, where we will see that, in simplifying the complex paradigm inherited from PTB, each language has preserved a partially different set of etyma. And, since substantial parts of the system can be derived easily from the proto-“Rung” system (see Section 2.3), it follows either that Jinghpaw and Konyak must also be Rung – a solution which we will examine in Section 2.5 – or else that the agreement system is even older than Rung, which is to say, is of PTB age.

## 2.2 *Dhimal and Kaman*

As we have noted, LaPolla considers the agreement systems of Nocte and Jinghpaw to be independent developments. We have seen, on the contrary, that these languages are indubitably cognate, and retain significant parts of the PTB agreement paradigm. Here we will note evidence from two other languages which are probably most closely related to the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw nucleus. In both cases there is good evidence connecting the attested paradigm to the PTB system. The agreement system in both languages is greatly altered from the original paradigm, with loss of old and addition of new material. As in Newar-Thangmi, Archaic East Bodish, and Northern Chin, also in Dhimal and Kaman we find evidence of the old 1SG suffix *#-ŋa* in languages which do not have the corresponding nasal stem as an independent pronoun, attesting to the age of the paradigm. (These paradigms are not recent, in any case, unless they have achieved their current morphological opacity in a remarkably short time).

### 2.2.1 Kaman, Jinghpaw, and Rung

Kaman (格曼 Geman), also called Miju Mishmi, has been grouped with the other Mishmi languages, but Mishmi, like Naga, Kachin, and other terms used as language names in the Tibeto-Burman realm, is an ethnopolitical concept, not a linguistic one. It is evident on inspection that Kaman is not particularly closely related to the other languages which are referred to as “Mishmi” (Burling 2003). It is apparently most closely connected with Jinghpaw, Nungish, or both (Sun 1983, 1988, 1995, Thurgood 1984). This question bears on the way in which Kaman data are relevant to issues of subgrouping and reconstruction. Sun and Matisoff both propose a close genetic connection between Jinghpaw and Nungish. If this is the case, then either Jinghpaw (and, thus, Konyak, and thus, presumably, Bodo-Garo) are Rung, or there is no Rung, and the arguments presented below in Section 2.3 are otiose. However, I am inclined at present to share the doubts expressed by Thurgood (2003: 15) and LaPolla (2003b: 674) about this proposal. If there is no branch-level unit including both Jinghpaw and Rawang, then Kaman cannot be particularly close to both of them, but may be closely-related to one or the other.

Like Dolakha, Kaman has a suffixal subject-agreement paradigm (Sun et al. 1980: 264-7; cp. Das Gupta 1977) including apparent innovations overlaid on material suggestive of the original PTB paradigm. By internal reconstruction Sun (1983: 21-24) identifies inherited 1SG *-ŋā*, 2SG *-n*, and 2PL *-nìn*, all relatable to PTB etyma, and all attested in either Jinghpaw (1SG *-ŋ*, 2SG *-n*) or Nocte (1SG *-ŋ*, 2PL *-n*). This is part of the basis for Sun’s classification of Kaman in a group with Nung and Jinghpaw (1983, 1988), though as with Thangmi and Newar we must be cautious in using what we can now see to be common inheritance in subgrouping.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.2.2 Dhimal

Dhimal (King 2002, 2009) does not have a generally-accepted classification, but the best current guess associates it with Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw, most closely with Bodo-Garo (van Driem 2001: 549-53). Dhimal has several constructions which show person agreement, each built on material inherited from the PTB paradigm. Like Kaman, Dhimal has a suffixal subject-agreement paradigm showing considerable secondary development, but including 1SG *-ŋ*, 2SG *-n* (King 2002: 45, 61-2), as well as a 1/2DU *-niŋ* which is probably relatable to the PTB 2PL *#-ni* (see below). Since both Kaman and Dhimal have stop-initial 1<sup>st</sup> person pronouns (Kaman *ki*, Dhimal *ka*), the 1SG suffixes cannot represent recent developments in either language. In fact, both languages have other 1SG agreement suffixes which do appear relatable to the independent pronouns, supporting the inference that the nasal indices are archaisms. In any case in both languages these forms occur in the most archaic portions of the verb paradigm (Sun 1983: 21, King 2002: 61). Thus the latest possible age for the origin of the Jinghpaw-Konyak agreement forms is pushed farther back, to their common ancestor with Dhimal and Kaman.

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<sup>9</sup> Many forms from the Kaman paradigm look like forms from other paradigms, but with completely different values, e.g. a 1SG *-i*, which resembles the PTB inclusive plural. I have suggested (1989) that some of these might in fact represent reanalyses of forms from the PTB paradigm. If this very speculative idea has any merit, then the paradigm seems to have more in common with Nungish than with Jinghpaw.

There is a second paradigm used “to index the marked social relationship among affinal kin groups”. The forms, 1SG *-kya* and 2SG *-nya*, reflect the plural indices *#-ka* Exclusive (see Section 2.3) and *#-na* 2PL (King 2002: 46). The evidence for *#-ka* here is particularly important: it is attested elsewhere only in Kiranti and Jinghpaw (Section 2.3), and thus its occurrence in Dhimal supports the classification of Dhimal with Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw. The PTB dual *#-si* remains in the Dhimal dual imperative *-se* and dual adhortative *-siŋ* (King 2002: 47); as noted above, it has been replaced in the indicative paradigm by a form of 2PL *#-ni*.

But the most striking residue of the original paradigm is found in two 2<sup>nd</sup> person object forms (to which King attaches the peculiar label “imperious”): 3s→2 *-nau* and 1s→2 *-niŋ*. The first of these is a secondary development, but manifestly built of ancient material. Most TB languages have simple 2<sup>nd</sup> person indexation for 3→2 configurations (see Table 3), and we can recognize this in the first two segments of the Dhimal form. Even without comparative evidence we might then infer that the /u/ was originally a 3<sup>rd</sup> person index, thus adding subject agreement to the original indexation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person object. With comparative evidence, we can identify the /u/ as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person *#-u*. In the original paradigm this was restricted to forms with 3<sup>rd</sup> person object (and hence can plausibly be interpreted as an inverse marker rather than person agreement per se, see DeLancey 1981a), but we have seen that in Jinghpaw it now indexes 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjects, so the shift is not only attested elsewhere, but attested in a closely related language.<sup>10</sup>

The 1s→2 *-niŋ* is presumably the same form as the 1/2DU, which is a very plausible source for a form which indexes the combination of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person. (Nocte likewise uses the 1PL form for the 1→2 transitive configuration (DeLancey 1981a)). It has no evident source in either function within Dhimal. King suggests deriving it from the PTB 2PL *#-ni*. The explanation for the final segment of the form is not certain. As King notes, a few other languages, Rawang for example, also have *-niŋ* as a 2PL; compare also the Kaman 2PL *-niŋ* above. The Trung 2PL form is *-n < #-ni*, but *-niŋ* does occur in forms where a 1<sup>st</sup> person is requesting permission from a 2<sup>nd</sup> person (Sun 1982: 108-9). Unravelling the history and interconnections of these various forms is beyond the scope of this paper, but the striking similarity of a set of forms all associated with some combination of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person must reflect some common inheritance.

### ***2.3 Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw and the rest of TB***

We have seen already that the Jinghpaw and Nocte paradigms share several significant features with the “Rung” languages. The substantive correspondence of agreement morphemes like 1SG *#-ŋ*, 2SG *#-n*, and, in the transitive paradigm, 3<sup>rd</sup> person *#-u* is bolstered by the structural correspondence of hierarchical agreement. Below (Section 2.4) we will see a 2<sup>nd</sup> person coronal stop form in the Jinghpaw paradigm which is related to 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms elsewhere in the family, including Northern Chin *-tɛʔ* (again see Bauman 1975). In this section we will examine other correspondences between the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw paradigms and those of the rest of the family. Let us look again at the agreement morphemes, extracted from the forms in Table 6:

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<sup>10</sup> Van Driem (1993:322-3) suggests the opposite course of development, with an originally general 3<sup>rd</sup> person index specializing in Kiranti into a patient marker.

	Jinghpaw	Nocte
1SG	-ing	-ʌŋ
2SG	-in	-ɔʔ
3SG	-aʔ	-a / -aʔ
1PL	-gaʔ	-iʔ
2PL	mǎ-P-in	-ʌn
3PL	mǎ-P-aʔ	-a / -aʔ

**Table 8: Jinghpaw and Nocte agreement affixes**

The Nocte paradigm includes three of LaPolla's five characteristic etyma. Nocte has lost the dual category, and we have no information on how the language expresses reflexive, but the other Rung hallmarks are there: 1SG  $-{}^1\ʌŋ$ , 1PL  $-iʔ$  and 2PL  $-{}^1\ʌn$ , especially when taken as a set, are evidently related to the LaPolla's  $*-ŋ$ ,  $*-i$ , and  $*-ni$ .

Jinghpaw shows only one of LaPolla's five, since he does not reconstruct the 2SG suffix which we have discussed above, but its plural forms show two very important points of connection specifically with Kiranti in the 1PL and 3PL morphemes. Consider the following sampling of Kiranti plural forms:<sup>11</sup>

	1PL EXC	1PL INC	2PL	3PL
Limbu	-i-ge		-i	mɛ-
Chamling	-ka	-i	-i	mi-
Dumi	-k-i	-k-i	-i-ni	ham-
Khaling	-kaa	-ki	-ni	-nu
Thulung	-ku	-ci	-ni	-mi
Hayu	-kok	-ke	-ne	-me
Sunwar	-ka/-ki	-i	-ni	-me
Proto-Kiranti	#-(i)-ka	#-i/#-ka	#-i/#-ni	#me-/#-me

**Table 9: Kiranti plural affixes (intransitive)**

While the daughter paradigms show a great deal of mixture of the two categories, Bauman (1975) makes a case for reconstructing  $\#-ka$  exclusive and  $\#-i$  inclusive for Proto-Kiranti.<sup>12</sup> The inclusive PL  $\#-i$  and 2PL  $\#-ni$  are two of LaPolla's common Rung features, and we have already seen that both are preserved in Konyak. Exclusive  $\#-ka$  and 3PL  $\#ma-$  are not attested in rGyalrong, Nungish, or West Himalayan. Thus, on the Rung hypothesis, they must both be Kiranti

<sup>11</sup> Chamling (Ebert 1997), Dumi (van Driem 1993b), Khaling (I. Toba 1973, S. Toba 1979), Hayu (Michailovsky 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Van Driem (1993a) segments the exclusive form into a  $\#k$  1PL and  $\#ya$  EXCL, but that does not affect the argument here.

innovations. However, they both have cognates in Jinghpaw, the 1PL *-gaʔ* and 2/3PL *mǎ-* from Table 8. Although both of these forms are widespread in the family, as far as I know they are not attested as a part of the verb system outside of Kiranti and Jinghpaw. The 2/3PL form is particularly important since it corresponds not only in form and specific paradigmatic meaning, but also in marked prefixal position. In Kiranti it occurs exclusively as a suffix only in those Western Kiranti languages which lack agreement prefixes altogether; in languages with prefixes it occurs as a prefix in the intransitive paradigm, but often as a suffix *-m* in transitive forms. In Jinghpaw it occurs prefixed to the TAM+Agreement syllable: *mǎ-l-it*, *mǎ-r-aʔ*, etc.

If we consider these correspondences to reflect features of the PTB paradigm, then the shared retention of both in two independent branches requires no special explanation. Otherwise we seem to be looking at shared innovation, implying a special relationship between Kiranti and Jinghpaw. But that idea is as contrary to the Rung hypothesis as it is to every other subgrouping scheme, so shared innovation limited to these two groups can be eliminated as a possible hypothesis. Independent innovation cannot be completely ruled out; the abundant evidence for an independent pronominal root *#ka* has been discussed in the literature (Bauman 1975, Thurgood 1985, Benedict 1998), and reflexes of it are widely attested in 1PL forms, some of which have specifically exclusive reference. Bauman notes the similarity of the Tiddim Chin independent pronouns /*ei* 1PL Inclusive and \*kou* 1PL Exclusive to Kiranti *-i* and *-ka*, and the exclusive root is attested also in Qiangic, e.g. Longxi Exclusive *qà lià*, Inclusive *ú lià*. But independent innovation of both forms, with their paradigmatic relationship, and the unusual positional behavior of *#ma-* seems unlikely.

And such an explanation – independent parallel grammaticalization of two number agreement morphemes in two different branches – is only necessary if we assume a priori that the Jinghpaw and Kiranti paradigms cannot be cognate. For if they are, then the obvious explanation for the distribution of *#-ka* as an agreement suffix in TB is that the exclusive/inclusive distinction, coded by the opposition between *#-ka* and *#-i*, was part of the original conjugation. The opposition remains only in Kiranti; other branches collapsed the distinction, with Jinghpaw retaining *#-ka* as 1pl and losing *#-i*, and the other branches retaining the *#-i* suffix and losing the exclusive form.<sup>13</sup> Again, there is no other evidence than this to lead us to imagine a particularly close relationship between Jinghpaw and Kiranti, and such a supposition runs counter to all other available evidence. Thus the evident explanation for the fact that these cognate morphological constructions are shared by Jinghpaw and Kiranti is that they represent shared inheritance from their nearest common ancestor – which can only be PTB.

## 2.4 Northern Chin

Since the Luce expedition of 1954 (Luce 1959), the Mizo-Kuki-Chin branch has played a role in the question of TB verb agreement. Mizo-Kuki-Chin is a low-level branch of Tibeto-Burman, defined as a genetic unit in part by striking morphosyntactic innovations, including a unique paradigm of proclitics or prefixes manifesting subject agreement, which are largely identical with the possessive pronominal clitics. But participants in Luce’s “linguistic tour” documented two

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<sup>13</sup> This requires that the inclusive/exclusive distinction was maintained in Proto-Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw, since Nocte has retained the inclusive form and Jinghpaw the exclusive.

Northern Chin languages, Tiddim or Tedim (Henderson 1957, 1965) and Sizang or Siyin (Stern 1963), which also have a suffixal agreement paradigm, with evident deep TB roots, alternating with the characteristic K-C proclitic construction.

#### 2.4.1 The morphological structure of agreement

In both languages the suffixes occur in exactly the same morphological construction as in Nocte. As in Nocte, the agreement morpheme may occur as a separate word (Tiddim, Henderson 1965):

- (1)    \pai \iŋ  
      go 1SG  
      'I go.'

Or it may be attached to a grammatical particle of *C-* or *CV-* form to create a syllable which is then the final word of the sentence:

- (2)    \pai /ke-ŋ  
      go NEGATIVE-1SG  
      'I don't go.'
- (3)    \pai /n-iŋ  
      go FUTURE-1SG  
      'I will go.'
- (4)    \pai \le:-ŋ  
      go CONDITIONAL-1SG  
      'If I go.'

This paradigm is attested in the Northern Chin languages of Manipur (Singh 2002, Barih 2009). The precise conditions under which it occurs instead of the newer prefixal paradigm vary somewhat across the languages. As in Nocte, these forms never suffix directly to the verb stem. In all the languages, the postverbal paradigm occurs with a particular set of tense/aspect/modality markers, usually including the negative, with which they form a syllable which is independent of the main verb. In some, like Tiddim, they can occur directly after the main verb, with no other tense/aspect/modality morpheme, but always as an independent word. In Taron these forms function as the equational copula (Singh 2002: 49):

- (5)    kəy dəkətəŋ əŋ  
      1SG doctor 1SG  
      'I am a doctor.'
- (6)    nəŋ dəkətəŋ ce  
      2SG doctor 2SG  
      'You are a doctor.'

- (7) *əmai dəktər*  
3SG doctor  
'He is a doctor.'

This suggests that where, as in Tiddim and, presumably, Nocte we see what appears to be the agreement morphemes alone as independent words, what we actually, or at least historically, have is a conjugated copula which was integrated into the tense/aspect paradigm in the typical Tibeto-Burman fashion (DeLancey In press c). Further evidence for this is the fact that in Konyak and Northern Chin, the negative marker attaches directly to the agreement suffixes in the manner of a tense/aspect/modality morpheme. This is especially significant in Konyak, which retains the ancient PTB negative prefix *#ma-*. In the Nocte 1SG negative *m-ak* we must infer an earlier stage in which the *m-* was prefixed to an auxiliary, which also bore person agreement. The vowel of the independent 1SG agreement syllable is the last remnant of this form.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Northern Chin and PTB

If the Northern Chin suffixal paradigm is a direct reflection of the PTB paradigm which we have posited, there is very little left of it. The only suffixes left are 1SG *-ŋ*, 2SG *-tɛ?* (palatalized to *ce* in the “Old Kuki” languages of Manipur), and plural *u?*. But all of these have good TB pedigrees. The 1SG suffix is directly relatable to forms across the family, as we have already seen, and thus presumably reflects the PTB paradigm. The plural morpheme appears relatable to the 3PL *#-u* suffix reconstructed for PTB by Van Driem (1993a: 320). The second person form may or may not be related to the *#-n* which we reconstruct for 2SG, but, as first noted by Bauman (1975), it has cognates in other languages, including rGyalrongic (note the 2<sup>nd</sup> person *tə-* prefix in Table 2), Chepang 2<sup>nd</sup> person *-te?* (Caughley 1982), Magar 2<sup>nd</sup> person *-də/tə-* (Angdembe 1999b) and in Jinghpaw 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms like *nin d-ai*.

Thus the postverbal agreement forms must predate Proto-Mizo-Kuki-Chin, since they have cognates outside the branch. Since neither of the roots occurs in the Proto-KC pronominal system (Thurgood (1985) reconstructs 1SG *\*kai*, possessive *\*ka* for Northern Chin, *\*kei* for Mizo-Kuki-Chin), the 1<sup>st</sup> person form must have grammaticalized as an agreement marker at a time when the ancestor of Proto-Mizo-Kuki-Chin still retained the old *#ŋa* root as an independent pronoun. The 2<sup>nd</sup> person *#te* forms in other languages are generally bound forms, as in Northern Chin.

This is absolute evidence only for the relative age of the paradigm – Mizo-Kuki-Chin, like almost all of the generally-recognized subgroups of TB, is relatively shallow, and Proto-MKC could have had time to innovate new grammar between the time of its divergence from PTB and its jettisoning of the nasal pronominal forms; so it is hypothetically possible that what we see here is an independently developed suffixal paradigm which predates Proto-MKC, but postdates the early divergence between Rung and the rest of the family. But given the evidence that the Jinghpaw-Konyak paradigms are cognate with the rest of the family (see Section 2.3), Rung is dead (see

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<sup>14</sup> Consider, for example, the Trung copular paradigm (Sun 1982:91): 1SG *ij*, 2SG *mu-è*, 3SG *è*.

Section 3), and there is no longer any reason to seek such complex explanations for simple comparative facts.

### 2.4.3 The history of agreement Jinghpaw, Konyak, and Northern Chin

The structural similarity of the Northern Chin and Jinghpaw-Konyak verb could well represent shared inheritance from a common ancestor, but the evidence to hand does not compel this conclusion. What Jinghpaw, Konyak, and Northern Chin have in common is a system in which the agreement suffixes combine with a set of morphemes of *C-* or *CV-* form into syllables which follow the main verb. The source construction for this pattern is the inflected auxiliary or serialized verb, an ubiquitous phenomenon in TB. The cislocative *r-* which we have seen in Nocte and Jinghpaw is a grammaticalization of the verb *#ra* ‘come’, which is widespread in the family (e.g. Byangsi *ra*, Rangpo *rha*), and shows up as a grammaticalized cislocative also in several Naga languages (DeLancey 1985). We can see an analogue of the source construction which gave rise to the Jinghpaw-Konyak cislocative in the Hayu example (16) (Michailovsky 1988: 152), where the verb *la-* ‘go’ is lexically secondary to *khok* ‘walk’, and functions to provide deictic specification for the motion verb:

- (8) *gu khok la-ŋ*  
 I walk go-1SG  
 ‘I’m leaving’

One common outcome of further grammaticalization of such a construction is amalgamation of the entire complex into one word, which is common in Kiranti. What Jinghpaw-Konyak and Mizo-Kuki-Chin have done instead is to keep the TAM-AGREEMENT complex as a separate word as it grammaticalizes. Compare the Kiranti, Jinghpaw, Konyak and Northern Chin forms:

Sunwar	<i>pʰi-n-uj</i> come-NONPAST-1SG ‘I am coming’
Jinghpaw	<i>sa n-iʔ</i> go PERFECT-1SG.P ‘I have gone’
Moklum <sup>15</sup>	<i>wat n-ang</i> beat FUTURE-1SG ‘I will beat’
Tiddim	<i>\pai /n-ij</i> go FUTURE-1SG ‘I will go’

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<sup>15</sup> Das Gupta 1980, Morey In press.

The Sunwar form represents a very recent morphologization of an earlier Nominalizer+Copula construction (DeLancey 1992b) based on the copula *na*. This is a widespread form in TB, and it is quite possible – though obviously not a given – that any or all of the *-n* morphemes in the other languages might reflect this same root.

This difference in development is probably determined by prosodic differences in the various languages, and prosodic patterns can be shared areally, so it is possible that the very similar verbal morphosyntax of Northern Chin and Jinghpaw-Konyak might represent shared areal development rather than shared inheritance. But as we can see, at the root of the system is a construction with a grammaticalized auxiliary inflected with agreement suffixes which fit neatly into the pan-TB system. The secondary developments which have led to the apparent differences between the modern “Rung” and BKJ/KC systems are easily identified and “deconstructed”, to borrow a term from LaPolla (1989), and what is left behind is quite recognizable as inheritance from our original PTB paradigm.

### 2.5 *The Rung hypothesis*

No one disputes that the agreement paradigms of the languages which LaPolla groups in Rung are indeed cognate. The issues are, whether Rung, which is a major break from other classification schemes, is a plausible subbranch of the family, and, even if so, whether reflexes of the same paradigm may be found outside of it, thus forcing the ancestral paradigm to an even deeper level.

The Rung hypothesis, which is based in part on earlier work by Thurgood (1984, 1985), is incorporated into Thurgood’s (2003) most recent classification scheme for TB. His classification (with Karen and some irrelevant languages omitted) is summarized below. Bolded languages/branches have some version of the suffixal agreement paradigm. In all but Mizo-Kuki-Chin it is prevalent throughout the branch. Italicized languages are the members of LaPolla’s and Thurgood’s putative Rung branch:

<b>Bodic</b>	<b>BKJ</b>	<b>KCN</b>	<b>Rung</b>	<b>Lolo-Burmese</b>
Tibetan	<b>Jinghpaw</b>	<b>Kuki-Chin</b>	<i>rGyalrongic</i>	Loloish
TGT	<b>Konyak</b>	Angami	<i>Nungish</i>	Burmish
E. Bodish (Tshangla)	Bodo-Garo	Ao	<i>Kiranti</i>	
		Zeme	<i>West Himalayan</i>	
		Tangkhul	<i>KCM</i>	
		Karbi	<i>Qiangic</i>	
		Meithei		

(KCN = Kuki-Chin-Naga, TGT = Tamang-Gurung-Thakali, KCM = Kham-Chepeng-Magar)

**Table 10: The Thurgood-LaPolla classification**

Taking the rest of the classification seriously, the identification of cognate agreement machinery in Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw and Mizo-Kuki-Chin gives us attestation in three of six (counting Karen)

branches, thus effectively requiring that the ancestral paradigm be reconstructed for PTB even with every other suffixal agreement paradigm in the family gathered together in one branch. But, if the only relevant criterion for inclusion in Rung is possession of an agreement system, then Rung could be preserved by simply tossing in the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw branch (we will see later what happened to the system in Bodo-Garo), and tossing out the Northern Chin data as too thin to be reliable, thereby saving the hypothesis that Tibetan and Lolo-Burmese have never had a verb agreement system.

The resulting branch, however, is quite a gryphon, including a range of languages with little in common beyond shared PTB heritage and cognate verb systems. For example, compare Thurgood’s classification with that of Matisoff (1996); again languages which in the Thurgood-LaPolla classification are assigned to Rung are italicized:

Himalayish	Kamarupan	Jinghpo-Nungic	Tangut-Qiangic	Lolo-Burmese
Bodish- <i>WHim</i>	<i>Konyak</i>	<i>Jinghpaw</i>	<i>Tangut</i>	Loloish
<i>Kiranti-KCM</i>	Kuki-Chin-Naga	<i>Nungish</i>	<i>Qiangic</i>	Burmish
	Bodo-Garo	Luish	<i>rGyalrong</i>	
	Meithei			
	Karbi			

**Table 11: Matisoff’s classification**

The systems which I have argued are cognate are spread across four of Matisoff’s six (counting Karen) branches, and thus on this classification must unavoidably be reconstructed back to PTB. But even ignoring the Jinghpaw-Konyak and Chin data, we still see that the “Rung” languages are spread across no less than three of the six branches. The same is true if we look at Bradley’s (1997) classification:

Western	NE India	Central	Eastern	
			NE	SE
<i>Kiranti-KCM</i>	Bodo-Garo-Konyak	<i>Nungish</i>	<i>Qiangic</i>	Lolo-Burmese
<i>WHimalayan</i>	Luish-Jinghpaw	Tani	<i>Tangut</i>	Karen
Tshangla	(Kuki-Chin-Naga)	Digarish	<i>rGyalrong</i>	
Bodish		<b>Kaman</b>	Naxi	
			Moso	

**Table 12: Bradley’s classification**

Once again, we see languages with reflexes of the original paradigm in four of five branches, and “Rung” languages spread across three of five.

In other words, Rung is substantially inconsistent in one way or another with all other classifications of the family. Thurgood’s original Rung proposal (1984) includes Jinghpaw, and in earlier work LaPolla (1987, 1992) gave some credence to the idea that Jinghpaw and Nungish should be grouped together, as in Matisoff’s classification. In fact, LaPolla in 1992 argues against

an earlier version of the argument I have given in this section for the cognacy of the Jinghpaw paradigm by suggesting that Jinghpaw might well be “Rung”, although he was not yet using that term (1992: 300). But, as we have noted, in more recent work he explicitly denies the cognacy of the Jinghpaw and Rung systems (2003: 32). In principle, the more languages and branches which have to be stuffed into “Rung” in order to keep the reconstructed verb agreement paradigm away from PTB, the more implausible the resulting construct. But since I don’t see any principled evidentiary basis for either version of Rung, I can’t really see that a Rung which includes Jinghpaw, or for that matter the whole of Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw, is significantly more or less implausible than one without. Both versions deviate considerably from past and present consensus – in particular, the connection between the Bodish languages, including Tibetan, and West Himalayan is recognized by every other scholar in the field. The reality is that by any plausible classification of Tibeto-Burman, including the Thurgood classification which incorporates LaPolla’s claims, we find demonstrably cognate agreement suffixes in a majority of the major branches of the family.

### **3 How has verb agreement been lost?**

LaPolla (1992: 301-2) seems to consider the independent loss of agreement three different times, in Tibetan, Newar, and Lolo-Burmese, to be an improbable idea requiring strenuous explanation. He considers it strong evidence against reconstructing agreement for PTB that:

Those languages that do not have verb agreement systems, the vast majority of all Tibeto-Burman languages, have *no trace whatsoever* of ever having had one. (LaPolla 1992: 301, emphasis original)

He is, of course, quite incorrect about the “vast majority”. The rest of his objection presupposes that the loss of an agreement system must take place gradually over time, through the mechanisms of “phonological attrition and leveling” (1992:304), so that, as in French, we will see fewer and fewer distinct forms in the paradigm over an extended process of loss . But in fact relatively or even extremely sudden loss of complex morphology is not only possible, but quite common – probably more common than LaPolla’s scenario. Indeed, all of the languages which we have considered here have close relatives which have nearly or completely lost their agreement systems, many in quite a short time: Dolakha and Kathmandu, Thangmi and Barām, Nocte-Tangsa and Chang-Phom, Dhimal and Bodo-Garo, Jinghpaw and Singpho. So clearly it is neither a rare occurrence nor necessarily a drawn-out process.

So, if PTB had a complex agreement system, the modern languages give us more than the occasional example of its disappearance – we have several whole branches where it is gone without a trace. Critics of the hypothesis of PTB agreement have legitimately held this issue up as a challenge. In this section I will show that the challenge is not in the least difficult to meet. There are no doubt a number of idiosyncratic paths away from agreement to be discovered in Tibeto-Burman; we will look briefly at the complex reorganization of the paradigm in Newar (for other studies of radical simplification and reorganization see Qu 1983 and Angdembe 1999a, b; Qiangic gives striking examples of the decay of the suffixal paradigm through phonological attrition). My main purpose in this section is to describe two prevalent causes or mechanisms for the loss of agreement which, between them, are entirely adequate to deal with the question: creolization, the

morphosyntactic simplification and regularization which a language often undergoes when it is used as a lingua franca, and the well-known tendency of TB languages to recruit new finite main clause constructions from old nominalizations.

### *3.1 Newar-Thangmi*

LaPolla (1992: 301) singles out as especially compelling witnesses to the recency of verb agreement in TB the languages “which have writing systems more than four centuries old”, yet lack any trace of agreement: specifically Tibetan, Newar, Burmese and Yi. (He notes that the fifth, Tangut, does have agreement). I find this argument puzzling in many ways (for example, why are Burmese and Yi being presented as independent witnesses?). While scholars may differ on the question of the time depth of PTB, it surely must be enough that four centuries constitutes a relatively small proportion. But even if we take the argument at face value, we can see that the testimony of Newar is precisely the opposite of what LaPolla wants it to be. We have seen (Section 1.3) that Proto-Newar must have inherited some version, perhaps already somewhat simplified, of the original paradigm, and that its common ancestor with Thangmi, probably a close relative, inherited something very close to the Kiranti paradigm. Thus Newar-Thangmi serves in a sense as Tibeto-Burman writ very small, in that we have conservative varieties with inherited agreement material and very closely-related varieties with no agreement at all.

In the case of Kathmandu Newar, we are not dealing with the simple disappearance of the paradigm, as we will see below in Singpho. Rather, the original paradigm has been replaced by a new verbal system based on a different set of categories: egophoric/non-egophoric rather than argument indexation (Genetti 1988b, 1994: 134-6). Most of the finite forms of the modern Kathmandu paradigm occur in Classical Newar also as nominalized and relative clauses, suggesting that, like other languages we will discuss below, Kathmandu abandoned the older inflected verb forms in favor of new constructions based on nominalizations (Genetti 1994: 135).

Of particular interest for our present purpose is the occurrence of an *-u* suffix in some disjunct (roughly, non-1<sup>st</sup> person) forms. Genetti (1988b: 188) suggests, very plausibly, that this may be a reanalysis of 3<sup>rd</sup> person *#-u*, which occurs in Dolakha and thus was present in the Proto-Newar paradigm. If this is correct, then even in Kathmandu it is not the case, as LaPolla contends, that we find “no trace whatsoever” of the old agreement paradigm. There may indeed be many such traces to be found, once we understand what to look for. In fact, we find traces of this same *#-u* in irregular verb stem alternations conditioned by 3<sup>rd</sup> person in several languages, including others besides Newar where there is no other recoverable trace of the old paradigm (Jacques 2006: 11 (fn. 12), 2009). One telling example is Lepcha, a language never suspected of Rungish sympathies, where the verb ‘give’ has a stem *bi* used when the recipient is 3<sup>rd</sup> person, and *bo* when the recipient is 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person (Plaisier 2007). The /o/ form appears to represent 3<sup>rd</sup> person *#-u* (which must then have functioned as a subject rather than an object index; cf. fn. 11).

In Newar we see operating both of the factors which I am proposing as the explanation for the loss of agreement morphology. The primary mechanism by which the paradigm was lost in Kathmandu seems to have been the replacement of the original conjugated verb forms with nominalizations. In this case it is quite evident that language contact was a driving force behind this shift. As both Genetti (1994, 2007) and van Driem (1993c) point out, the history of Kathmandu Newar – much more than that of Dolakha – involves an extended period of intense

language contact, one which continues to the present day. It is well-known that archaic linguistic traits tend to be better preserved in small, isolated communities, while the language contact and mixing which accompanies urbanization and state-level political organization commonly leads to simplification (van Driem 1993a, McWhorter 2007).

### 3.2 *Nominalization*

The readiness of TB languages to shed verb agreement (and to replace TAM morphology, but that is a separate topic) is a result of the common pattern in which an erstwhile nominalized clause construction is reanalyzed as a finite pattern, and ultimately replaces the earlier finite construction (Noonan 1997, Bickel 1999, DeLancey In press c). Since nominalizations typically do not inflect for person, the result is a new finite clause construction in which there is no agreement – although, rather than say that agreement has been lost, it is more accurate to say that the construction in which agreement was manifested has been replaced by one where it is not. If the nominalized verb does show agreement, it is likely to be in the manner of nouns, rather than verbs; we see in most of Mizo-Kuki-Chin the complete replacement of the old finite conjugation with a new one based on nominalizations, with agreement indices derived from possessive clitics.

#### 3.2.1 *Nominalized Clause Constructions*

Most TB languages have at least one tense/aspect construction which is built on a nominalized clause treated as an argument of a finite copula. This is clearly the case, for example, for much of the verb paradigm in the modern Tibetan languages, as in the Central Tibetan perfective forms, which consist of the verb nominalized with *-pa* in construction with one of the equational copulas *yin* and *red* (see DeLancey 1992a):

(9) *nga phyin-pa yin*  
I went-PERFECTIVE/EGOPHORIC  
'I went'

(10) *kho phyin-pa red*  
he went-PERFECTIVE  
'He went.'

Some languages which mark agreement on the verb may use an inflected form of the lexical verb in a similar construction, as in Sunwar (DeLancey 1992b):

(11) *kyarše 'sad-a 'baâ-ta*  
goat kill-3SG exist-3SG.PAST  
'He killed a goat [I hear or infer].'

This is the origin of the peculiar “repeated agreement” which we see in some Kiranti and other languages. But more commonly the lexical verb is in nominalized form; for example, contrasting

with the inferential construction, Sunwar has a mirative/direct evidential form built on the same copula, but with the lexical verb in an invariable nominalized form:

- (12) *kyarše 'saî-šo 'baâ-ta*  
 goat kill-NOMZ exist-3SG.PAST  
 'He was killing a goat/goats.' [I saw]

Note that in both constructions the copula is in the 3SG form, with the result that the mirative construction in (14) no longer inflects for person of any argument in the clause. Thus in this construction agreement no longer functions. If one or more constructions of this type completely replace the older finite construction, agreement can disappear instantly. Let us look at some other examples of this phenomenon.

### 3.2.2 Mizo-Kuki-Chin

In the Mizo-Kuki-Chin branch, the PTB suffixal paradigm has been replaced with a new set of proclitic agreement markers (section 2.4). As we have seen, traces of the original paradigm remain in the Northern Chin languages; elsewhere in K-C they have completely disappeared. The structure of the new finite clause construction betrays its origins in a nominalized clause construction.

Two facts about the Mizo-Kuki-Chin paradigm argue for this origin. First, the agreement proclitics are also the possessive proclitics; we can see them in both functions in these Sizang examples (Stern 1984):

- (13) *na-lá:i hong thák ka-ngá: a:*  
 2<sup>nd</sup> -letter CISLOCATIVE send 1<sup>st</sup>-receive NONFINAL  
 'I having received your letter which [you] sent to me ...'
- k-ong thûk kí:k lâ-lê:u hî:*  
 1<sup>st</sup>-CIS reply again once more FINAL  
 'I in turn reply to you.'

Here we see the proclitics functioning both as possessives (*na-lá:i* 'your letter') and as agreement markers (*ka-ngá:* 'I receive', *k-ong thûk* 'I reply [to you]').

The second piece of evidence is the final particle *hî:*, which terminates the clause chain. This is homophonous with the equational copula *hî:*, and that is clearly its origin. Thus the original construction must have been a Nominalizer+Copula construction with a nominalized verb stem, its subject expressed as a grammatical possessor, and the copula as the finite verb. Final particles in general can be taken as traces of an older Nominalizer+Copula construction (see below), but when the form is transparently identical to the synchronic copula the case is clear.

This construction – the finite verb with a possessive proclitic representing subject agreement, and a sentence final particle related to the copula – is ubiquitous throughout Mizo-Kuki-Chin, and clearly must be reconstructed for the proto-language. But, as we have seen, the suffixal paradigm must represent inheritance from an earlier stage where some nasal reflex of #*ŋa*

still existed as a pronominal form. It thus predates Proto-MKC, even if it has persisted to the present in only one subbranch. Thus both paradigms must have been present in Proto-MKC. That is, Proto-MKC, or some precursor of it, was a language like those discussed by Noonan (1997) and Bickel (1999) in which a nominalized construction is used instead of the ordinary finite construction for some marked purpose. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the suffixes are in complementary distribution not only with the proclitics, but with the entire construction – the final particle occurs only on clauses with proclitic agreement, never with a suffixed verb. Henderson's data suggest that the function of the alternation between the old finite and the nominalized clause constructions may have been stylistic, with nominalization associated with more formal style.

Thus the Mizo-Kuki-Chin languages furnish an example of how quickly the nominalization cycle can erase any trace of a verb agreement system. Mizo-Kuki-Chin is a very cohesive, shallow group, more on the order of Bodo-Garo than of Bodo-Jinghpaw-Konyak, but between Proto-MKC and most of the modern languages what was once a thriving suffixal verb agreement system has been entirely discarded. The copula was presumably a 3SG form (probably zero-marked), so as the old finite construction is replaced by the new nominalized construction, the old agreement paradigm is gone.

### 3.2.3 Copulas, nominalizers and final particles

The observation that many finite constructions in TB languages are built on a grammaticalized copula will hardly surprise any Tibeto-Burmanist, nor is there anything typologically unusual about such constructions. But it becomes very relevant to our present concerns once we realize how easily the innovation of such constructions can erase the older inflected construction. I will not rehearse here a list of languages which have recent, unmistakable constructions of this type; rather, in this section we will look at a less transparent type of evidence which is widespread across the family.

Many TB languages, for the most part languages which lack agreement, have more-or-less obligatory sentence-final particles in declarative sentences. These are often identifiable as identical with or derived from nominalizers or copulas, or as reflexes of etyma which occur in both functions. We have seen that in Mizo-Kuki-Chin the final particle, which occurs throughout the branch, attests to the origins of the modern finite construction in an older nominalization construction. Final particles are ubiquitous throughout the Naga, Lolo-Burmese, and Bodish languages, including Classical Tibetan – a fair sampling of the languages and branches which have completely lost agreement.

Since Tibetan is the most anciently attested TB language, and shows no sign of verb agreement even in its earliest attestations, it is often invoked as an argument against PTB agreement (LaPolla 1992: 301). In fact, from its earliest attestation, the Tibetan finite clause construction shows the stigmata of a Nominalizer+Copula origin. We find a declarative final particle 'o, which geminates a preceding final consonant (examples from Hahn 1974: 39):

- (14) *nyi = ma 'char ro*  
sun rise FINAL  
'The sun rose'

This can serve duty as an equational copula:

(15) *bram = ze de dbul = po zhig go*  
Brahmin that pauper a FINAL  
'That Brahmin was a pauper.'

(16) *khyim de chen = po-'o*  
house that big FINAL  
'That house is big.'

So we can interpret it as the reanalysis of an original copula in a nominalization construction. The final particle 'o has evident cognates in copular forms in other Bodish languages, as in West Himalayan (which Tibeto-Burmanists other than LaPolla and Thurgood consider to be genetically quite close to Tibetan) Rangpo *hwə-* (Zoller 1983), and Kiranti forms such as Limbu existential *wə* (van Driem 1987). All of these reflect the widespread TB copula *\*way* (Thurgood 1982, Matisoff 1985, 2003: 35).

Throughout the family we find numerous languages in which the ordinary finite sentence ends with a final particle, which may or may not be synchronically identifiable with a copula or nominalizer. The famous case is Lahu *ve* (Matisoff 1972), a reflex of a declarative verb particle *\*way*<sup>3</sup>, which Bradley (1979: 376-7) reconstructs for Proto-Loloish, and ultimately of the PTB copula (Matisoff 1985). Most if not all Lolo-Burmese languages have one or more such final particles, often synchronically identifiable as nominalizers, e.g. Burmese *sany* (Okell and Allot 2001: 245-7). The phenomenon seems to be equally prevalent among the Naga languages, e.g. the Mongsen "declarative mood marker" *-u?* (Coupe 2007: 142-4).

That the innovation of new finite structures out of nominalizations is a common phenomenon can hardly be controversial. If the presence in a language of a declarative final particle is evidence of such an episode in a language's past, then this phenomenon is not simply common, but ubiquitous throughout the family. And in that case the widespread loss of the PTB agreement system is not at all mysterious.

### 3.3 *Creolization*

A very common route to loss of morphology throughout the world is creolization, in the broad sense. When a significant proportion of the regular users of language in an area are adult second language learners of it, who have learned and use it as a lingua franca, drastic morphological simplification can occur very quickly (McWhorter 2007). We have seen in Newar how intense contact can be associated with the replacement of complex morphological structures with simpler forms: the pressures of language contact may then be a causal factor in the process of change discussed in the preceding section. In two case studies within Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw we can see the process of language replacement resulting in dramatic and immediate abandonment of agreement morphology. Elsewhere the evidence is not (or not yet) as clear, but where we do not have historical evidence we can infer a history involving the kinds of processes which are attested in better-understood cases.

### 3.3.1 Singpho and Valley Jinghpaw

Even without the comparative perspective developed in Section 2, the particle + agreement system of Jinghpaw seems to have fairly deep roots, purely on internal grounds. However, it is absent in Singpho, spoken in Assam, the westernmost member of the Jinghpaw dialect chain. I have previously suggested this as evidence of how quickly and easily such a system can be lost (DeLancey 1989). LaPolla turns this argument on its head, suggesting instead that Singpho represents the original Proto-Jinghpaw situation, and that all the other Jinghpaw dialects must have innovated their systems relatively recently:

It seems far more likely that that dialect, out of range of the areal features to the east, never developed a verb agreement system at all. If this were the case, it would give us a time depth of less than one thousand years for the development of the Jingpo verb agreement system, just what we would expect judging from the Tangut data. (1992: 303)

Since the agreement systems of the other attested dialects are indubitably cognate, down to idiosyncratic details, this would entail a claim that there is a fundamental genetic split within Jinghpaw between Singpho and everything else – a claim for which I have not seen any independent evidence. There is no question that the entry of the Singpho into Assam is quite recent, considerably less than one thousand years (see e.g. S. Baruah 1985: 376, T. Baruah 1977). Nor is there any evidence to suggest that the languages are as divergent in any other respect as they are in the stark contrast between the complete lack of agreement in Singpho and the complex and opaque paradigm found throughout most of the rest of the group. The sole exception proves the point; according to LaRaw Maran (personal communication), the agreement system is rarely used in the “Valley” Jinghpaw spoken as a lingua franca by other “Kachin” and neighboring groups in northern Burma.

In any case, as we have seen, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Jinghpaw and Nocte agreement systems contain cognate elements, which means that a common ancestor of both, and thus a fortiori of Singpho, had an agreement system. The loss of the system in Singpho then requires explanation, and the evident explanation is that it came to be spoken by significant speakers of other languages, and thus underwent typical simplification through creolization. In the case of Singpho, a major locus of creolization must have been the numerous Assamese slaves who worked ricefields for the Singpho (Maran 2007: 58-60). The spread of Jinghpaw to other communities in China, Burma and Northeast India (as Singpho) continues into modern times (Leach 1954: 294-7, Dai 1999: 57-8).

### 3.3.2 The origin of Bodo-Garo

And, once we have demonstrated that the Jinghpaw-Konyak agreement system is ultimately cognate to those of the other TB languages, and thus represents inheritance from PTB, the same logic then requires that the lack of agreement in the Bodo-Garo languages must be a secondary development. In fact, when we compare Bodo-Garo with comparable branches such as Kiranti, Jinghpaw, or Mizo-Kuki-Chin, we note that it doesn't have that much morphology at all, and most of what there is looks very new and fresh (Wood In press). A few traces of older structures, such as

the PTB prohibitive prefix #*da-* and a remnant use of the widespread TB nominalizing prefix #*kV-* (Konnerth In press) on modifying adjectives, confirm that the language does have a respectable TB ancestry. But in general the grammatical structure of Bodo-Garo languages involves simple and regular combination of fairly transparent, loosely-bound elements, the characteristic sign of newly-developed grammar. The Bodo-Garo branch is also notable for its geographical extent. Even today Bodo-Garo languages are spoken from southeastern Nepal and northern Bangladesh all across Northeast India. In modern times most of this territory is Assamese or Bengali-speaking, and Bodo-Garo languages occur only in patches, but it appears that formerly Bodo-Garo was the predominant speech over the entire Brahmaputra Valley, perhaps as recently as a few centuries ago.

Burling (2007) has recently suggested that the grammatical transparency and regularity of Garo suggests an origin as a creolized lingua franca, similar in structure and function to contemporary Nagamese or Naga Pidgin. This suggestion can certainly be taken further: the wide distribution, shallow time depth, and grammatical regularity of the Bodo-Garo languages in general can best be explained by supposing that Proto-Bodo-Garo was a widespread lingua franca throughout the area, and came to be adopted by originally non-TB (or, at least, non-BG) communities. Like Singpho and Plains Jinghpaw, it was adopted in its most levelled and regularized form, which was then the ancestor of the modern languages. This interpretation of the linguistic evidence is in accord with the little historical information available (see also DeLancey In press b).

Most scholars assume a demographic sequence in Assam which begins with an autochthonous Austroasiatic-speaking population, followed by Tibeto-Burman-speaking migrations from the north and east, beginning around 1,000 BCE or earlier (Kakati 1941, S. Baruah 1985, van Driem 2001, inter alia). The identification of the pre-Tibeto-Burman stratum as Austroasiatic is plausible but unproven (but see Przyłuski 1921-2, 1924-9); nevertheless the Brahmaputra Valley is clearly not the original center of dispersal for Tibeto-Burman, so there must have been a pre-TB stratum, whatever languages may have been involved. Serious Indic influence apparently dates from about the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE; the earliest datable inscriptions, in Sanskrit, date from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang notes that the language of Kāmārupa is “slightly different from that of Central India” (1996: 299), suggesting that the Aryanization of the area was already well advanced. His comment must be in reference to the court language; even today the territory of Kāmārupa is not completely Assamese-speaking, and it certainly was not 1400 years ago, when Indic language and culture were still a relatively recent introduction into the region. There is no explicit historical evidence of the identity of the vernacular languages of the area at the time, but tradition suggests that some Bodo-Garo language, which we may identify with Proto-Bodo-Garo, was the dominant language, and presumably a lingua franca, in the middle Brahmaputra valley well into late antiquity (Barua 1933, Pulloppillil 1997), and in subsequent centuries, prior to the Ahom invasions of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the central Brahmaputra valley consisted of Boro or “Kachari” kingdoms (Endle 1911, Shakespear 1914, Gait 1926).

Even without inferring any special status for Proto-Bodo-Garo, we can expect it to have been subject to creolizing influences. There is no doubt that, whenever Tibeto-Burman languages first moved down the Brahmaputra, the valley was already populated, so that whatever TB languages were in the mid- or lower Brahmaputra valley would have been subject to significant creolizing forces from the beginning. But we can further infer that Proto-Bodo-Garo was probably already present and widespread in what is now Assam already during the period of Aryanization –

a historical circumstance in which some sort of lingua franca would be a necessity. If we take Proto-Bodo-Garo to have been that lingua franca, we neatly explain both its geographical extent and relative lack of divergence, and the peculiarities of its linguistic structure when compared with its nearest relatives. And, among the peculiarities which are explained is the complete loss of the agreement system which is retained in Konyak and Jinghpaw.

### 3.3.3 Creolization in other branches

The role of language contact and creolization in the creation of Chinese is well-known (Ballard 1984, La Polla 2001, Ansaldo and Matthews 2001, Blench 2008, inter alia). Chinese originated as a Tibeto-Burman-like, SOV language<sup>16</sup> which adopted the characteristic Southeast Asian creoloid syntactic pattern from local languages (Benedict 1972, Nishida 1976, see also van Driem 2008). It is likely that a similar story could be told for Lolo-Burmese (DeLancey 2010). If we follow Bradley and van Driem in recognizing an Eastern branch subsuming Qiangic and Lolo-Burmese, then Lolo-Burmese stands to the morphologically more conservative Qiangic (and especially rGyalrongic) languages as Bodo-Garo does to Jinghpaw. And, as with Bodo-Garo, so with Lolo-Burmese it is very plausible on historical and ethnographic grounds to imagine creolization as an important factor in the formation of the branch. Yunnan, the presumptive cradle of Lolo-Burmese, is in historic times the meeting ground of languages of most of the families of Southeast Asia, including several very distinct branches of Tibeto-Burman. Early Chinese sources record an equally multiethnic population (Fan 1961). Thus there is reason to project the kind of fluid system of ethnic identity and language choice described for the region in recent times by Leach and others (see e.g. Davies 1909) very far back in time, as does Blench (2009), who sees the “Southern Yunnan Interaction Sphere” as having been a region of intense language contact since long before Proto-Lolo-Burmese. By the time of the Nánzhāo kingdom (737-902 CE), the Loloish-speaking population – which at that date could conceivably have not yet diverged into distinct daughter languages – had achieved considerable political power and status in the region (Blackmore 1960, 1967, Backus 1981, Luce 1985). This must have been preceded by a long period of expansion, involving the spread of Proto-Lolo-Burmese and then its young daughters to new communities, as Yi and, more spectacularly, Burmese then continued to do over the next millennium. It has long been alleged on physical grounds that the culturally and linguistically Yi population must represent a coalescence of physically distinct earlier groups (see e.g. Feng and Shryock 1938, Luce 1985: 103-4), from which one might infer language contact as a feature of the initial formation of the language.

## 4 Summary

There is no longer any disagreement that several important branches of TB share reflexes of an ancient suffixal verb agreement system; all participants in the discussion now acknowledge that the agreement systems of rGyalrong and Qiangic, West Himalayan, Kiranti, Kham, and Nungish are

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<sup>16</sup> This is self-evidently the case independent of the question of whether Sinitic is best considered one branch of Sino-Tibetan or a branch or sub-branch within Tibeto-Burman.

cognate. The remaining dispute has to do with whether this ancestral agreement system is to be reconstructed for PTB or for a more recent proto-language which is ancestral only to these branches, but not to Bodic, Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw, Mizo-Kuki-Chin-Naga, or Lolo-Burmese. In this paper I have demonstrated that the agreement paradigms of Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw and Northern Chin are cognate with those of the “Rung” languages. We have seen evidence that several other languages of uncertain classification likewise share inheritance from the original paradigm, and that some of these (Newar-Thangmi and especially Archaic East Bodish) threaten to pull Bodish, one of the last remaining substantial genetic units untainted by remnants of the ancient agreement paradigm, into the set.

At that point the non-Rung remnant of the family would consist of Karen, Lolo-Burmese, Naga, Meithei, Karbi, Mishmi (minus Kaman), Tani, and a handful of other currently unclassified languages. Even with Bodish added back in, we have on this list only individual languages and low-level genetic units, with the shallow Bodish and Lolo-Burmese units the largest and deepest nuclei outside of the gargantuan Rung. In effect, the set of languages and higher-level units where there is no trace of the original agreement paradigm is simply a bag of leftovers, and it is difficult to see how the resulting classification of the family has any plausibility. Since the only evidence for Rung is shared agreement morphology, if that morphology derives from PTB, the Rung hypothesis is pointless. And this is particularly so once we realize how easily languages can lose their agreement morphology, as an effect of creolization and/or through natural grammaticalization processes. We have examined a number of cases where this has happened quickly and simply, so there is no reason to imagine that it could not have done so repeatedly in other branches where we do not know the history.

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