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## **Languages and Peoples of the Eastern Himalayan Region (LPEHR)**

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*On the genetic position of Chakpa within Luish languages*

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### ABSTRACT

Chakpa is a ritual and heritage language which is usually classed under the Luish group of Tibeto-Burman language family. It was once spoken in the Imphal valley by such clans as Andro, Sengmai, and Phayeng (McCulloch 1859). However, they do not speak Chakpa anymore. They now speak a variety of Meitei and are collectively known as Lois (Devi L. B. 2002). The Luish languages are divided into three major groups: (i) Cak-Sak, (ii) Chakpa, and (iii) Kadu-Gnan (Matisoff 2013). In this paper, based on my field data (Cak, Sak, Kadu, and Ganan) and secondary sources (McCulloch 1859 and Basanta 2008), I will try to classify Chakpa within Luish.

### KEYWORDS

Tibeto-Burman languages, Luish group, subgrouping

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# *On the genetic position of Chakpa within Luish languages<sup>1</sup>*

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## 1 Introduction

Chakpa is a Luish (Asakian) language of Tibeto-Burman, once spoken in the Imphal valley, Manipur state, Northeast India. Although there are several Chakpa villages such as Andro, Sekmai (Sengmai), Phayeng, Chairel etc., people in these villages now speak varieties of Meitei (ISO 639-3 *mni*), a hitherto unclassified Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, Chakpa language is recited by a limited number of pandits, who have access to old manuscripts, only during traditional ceremonies such as in Lai Haraoba festival.

Chakpa is often called ‘Lois’ by local Meitei people, which resulted in the name ‘Luish’ coined by Shafer (1955: 104), followed by Shafer (1966: 5), Benedict (1972: 5), and Matisoff (2003: 5) among others. However, while almost all the Chakpas are included in Lois, not all Lois are Chakpas. For example, Kakching and Kwata villages are Loi villages although villagers therein are not Chakpa.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There are some studies on Meitei varieties spoken by Chakpa: L. M. Devi (2002) on Andro, Ch. Ch. Devi (1993) and H. S. Singh (1988) on Sengmai, and Kh. Ch. Devi (2018) on Phayeng.

<sup>3</sup> With my experience in Manipur, although Chakpa people regard themselves as Chakpa, the Meitei exonym ‘Loi’ is not necessarily pejorative for them. According to Parratt (1998), there are two kinds of Lois: (i) a tributary tribe, conquered by the Meithei, which existed from time immemorial, and (ii) men who were outcasted from Meithei [Meitei] society and banished to a Loi village.

While it is true that the autonym ‘Sak’ is preferable as the label for this language group as claimed by Grierson (1927: 77; Sak (Lüi) group), Löffler (1964; Sakisch), Luce (1985: volume I, 37; the Sak group), Bradley (1997: 20; Luish, the Sak group), and Matisoff (2013: 25; Asakian, Kantu-Sak), as it will be shown in Table 4 in 2.5.1, the proto-form for the autonym *\*cak* is not always pervasive in all the groups involved; the speakers of Ganan and Mokhwang Kadu do not refer to themselves as ‘Sak’ or ‘Asak’. Further, because the language of ‘Sak’ people in Old Burmese inscriptions is still unknown, it might be confusing to label this language group also using ‘Sak’.

Thus, for these rather negative reasons, I continue to use the controversial but traditional term ‘Luish’ here, although ‘Luic’ is a bit better given Shafer’s way of naming language groups and ‘Cak-Chakpa-Kadu-Ganan’ should be neutral. See Luce (1985: volume I, 37), van Driem (2001: 570), and Matisoff (2013: 25) for summaries on the use of ‘Lui’. See also L. B. Devi (2002) for more explanation on Lois in Manipur.

As for the linguistic study of Chakpa, McCulloch (1859) is the best material published so far, which deals with Andro and Sengmai<sup>4</sup> varieties and provides around 423 words of basic vocabulary with some sentences. Basanta (2008: 194–199) lists 100 basic words and sentences. Huziwara (2013b) re-examines the Chakpa data in McCulloch (1859) as well as Basanta (2008: 194–199) and tries to reconstruct the grammar of Chakpa (Andro). Ch. Y. Singh (2014) is a brief account of Chakpa (Andro) based on his fieldwork with Chakpa people. Although the Chakpa language itself is not the primary target, Huziwara (2012b) and (2014b) try to reconstruct Proto-Luish forms based on his field data of Cak (ISO 639-3 *ckh*)<sup>5</sup>, Kadu (ISO 639-3 *zkd*)<sup>6</sup>, and Ganan (ISO 639-3 *zkn*)<sup>7</sup>, utilising Chakpa materials of McCulloch (1859) and Basanta (2008) as well. Matisoff (2013) is the best account on comparative Luish.<sup>8</sup>

It is no doubt that Chakpa belongs to the Luish group of Tibeto-Burman. However, its characteristics are not well known. This paper aims to present the main linguistic features of Chakpa by comparing them with other Luish languages.

## 2 Characteristics of Luish languages

### 2.1 *Luish within Sal*

Luish, as well as Chairel, and perhaps also Taman, are Sal (Burling 1983) as evidenced by following special diagnostic lexicons (cited from Benedict (1972: 7) except for Luish data). In (1a), Chakpa, along with other Luish languages (Cak, Sak, Kadu, Ganan), shares the same Proto-Luish form *\*ca-* ‘sun’ as well as the same word formation

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<sup>4</sup> Rorendrajit (2006) includes a sample of basic words and sentences of Sekmai (Sengmai), which sometimes contains data not found in McCulloch (1859). Although Rorendrajit (2006: 309) demonstrates some similarities between Chakpa and Zhuang words, they are not convincing.

<sup>5</sup> Hodgson (1853) was the only data on Cak/Sak before Löffler (1964) and Bernot (1966), both of them conducted a fieldwork in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the then East Pakistan. Huziwara (2008) is a descriptive grammar, while Huziwara (2016b) is a dictionary with forms of Marma loans and Proto-Luish. Maggard et al. (2007) provides lexical data of four Cak varieties spoken in Bangladesh. Cak is known as Sak in Burma. Luce (1985: volume II, chart K & L) gives some 200 basic words in two dialects of Sak. Thun Shwe Khaing (1988) is an ethnography of Sak in which a brief grammar and basic words are demonstrated. Moe Sandar (2010) is a grammar of Sak. Huziwara (2018) compares three regional dialects of Cak and two varieties of generation in Sak.

<sup>6</sup> Studies on Kadu concentrate in Setto dialect. Houghton (1893) and Brown (1920) are the first to provide Kadu data. Based on them, Grierson (1921) deepened the study of Kadu. Sangdong (2012) is a descriptive grammar with texts and an extensive wordlist. Khin Moe Moe (2004) and Huziwara (2013a) deal with phonology. Luce (1985: volume II, chart K & L) provides some 200 basic words of Molang dialect. Huziwara (2019) is a phonetic study of the eastern dialect of Mokhwang Kadu, while Huziwara (2015) tries to characterise Mokhwang Kadu within Kadu varieties.

<sup>7</sup> Compared with Kadu, studies on Ganan are limited. Luce (1985: volume II, chart K & L) is a list of some 200 basic words. Ma Myoe Myoe (2006) describes grammar and Huziwara (2012a) focuses on phonology.

<sup>8</sup> While Matisoff (2013: 16) regards Chairel as a Luish language, Grierson (1927), Shafer (1970: 390) and Huziwara (2014a) do not as it lacks major characteristics of Luish languages. See Huziwara (2014a) for evidence.

for ‘sun’ (‘day’ + ‘eye’).<sup>9</sup>As for ‘fire’, as shown in (1b), all the Luish languages share the same Proto-Luish form \*wal.<sup>10</sup>

1) ‘sun’ PTB \**tsyar*

Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *chameet* (*camit*); PLu \**ca-mik*, Cak *cəmi?*, Sak *səmi?*, Kadu/Ganan *səmi?*; Chairel *sal*; Taman *pupek* cf. Jingpho *džān*; Namsang (Northern Naga) *san*, Moshang (Northern Naga) *śar*; Garo *sal*

2) ‘fire’ PTB \**b<sup>w</sup>ar* ≠ \**p<sup>w</sup>ar*; Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *wal*; PLu \**wal*, Cak/Sak *vaiŋ*, Kadu/Ganan *wan*; Chairel *phal*; Taman *ve* cf. Jingpho *ɣwàn*; Namsang (Northern Naga) *van*, Moshang (Northern Naga) *var*; Garo *waʔl*

The following ‘foot’ and ‘hand/arm’ pair is first pointed out by Benedict (1972: 34, fn 108) and also useful to determine whether a language is Sal or not. As shown in (3), all the Luish languages have this pair. Thus it is safe to say that they belong to Sal.

3) ‘foot’ vs. ‘hand/arm’

Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *ta*<sup>-11</sup> vs. *takmeŋ* ‘nail’; PLu \**ta* vs. \**tak-*, Cak *ɣáta* vs. *taɣmiŋ* ‘nail’, Kadu/Ganan *ta* vs. *taɣmiŋ* ‘nail’; Chairel *la* vs. *lak*; Taman — vs. *la* < \**lak*; cf. Garo *dža* vs. *džak*, Dimasa *ya* vs. *yau*; Tableng *ya* vs. *yak*, Tamlu *la* vs. *lak*, Banpara *tšia* vs. *tšak*, Namsang *da* vs. *dak*, Moshang *ya* vs. *yak*

However, Luish languages are different from other Sal languages in many respects including phonology, morphology, syntax as well as lexicon, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## 2.2 Phonology

In this section, major phonological correspondences of Luish languages will be shown to determine the characteristics of Chakpa.

<sup>9</sup> Although Taman does not share the same etymon, the word formation is the same as other Luish languages.

<sup>10</sup> In following examples, Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) forms are cited from McCulloch (1859), which is influenced by English spelling convention. Thus, normalised forms by the present author are given in parenthesis when necessary.

<sup>11</sup> McCulloch (1859) lists *taka* ‘foot’, *tankhoo* (*tankhu*) ‘knee’, *takpok* ‘calf’, and *takatol* ‘toe’, from which *ta-* can be extracted for the root of ‘foot’.

### 2.2.1 Initials

The most salient phonological correspondences among Luish languages are summarised in the table below. As shown in the table, Chakpa is most similar to MWK and Ganan in which P<sub>Lu</sub> \**b* is realised as *m*, \**r* as zero, and \**khy* as *h*.

	PLu	Chakpa	Cak	STK	MWK	MLK	Ganan
(4)	* <i>b</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>m</i>
(5)	* <i>d</i>	?	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>t/l</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>l</i>
(6)	* <i>r</i>	zero	<i>r</i>	zero	zero	zero	zero
(7)	* <i>khy</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>h</i>

Table 1 Major correspondences of initials among Luish languages

- 4) ‘eggplant’ P<sub>Lu</sub> \**bok*; Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *mok min see* (mokminsi); Cak/Sak *bəʔónsi*, STK *pauʔpɔci*, MWK *mouʔmɔci*, MLK *bauʔbɔci*, Ganan *mouʔsapshi* cf. PKC \**bok-boon* ≠ \**buk-bu* (STEDT #4010)
- 5) ‘wrap’ P<sub>Lu</sub> \**dip*; Chakpa —; Cak/Sak *díʔ*, STK *tep*, MWK *(t/l)ep*, MLK *dep*, Ganan *lep*
- 6) ‘buffalo’ P<sub>Lu</sub> \**k-réy*; Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *ké*; Cak/Sak *krí*, STK *cé*, MWK *cé*, MLK *cé*, Ganan *cé* cf. PTB \**lwa:y* (STEDT #2427)
- 7) ‘red’ P<sub>Lu</sub> \**khyá*; Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *ha*; Cak *fá*, STK *há*, MWK *há*, MLK *há*, Ganan *há* cf. Jingpho *khye*

### 2.2.2 Rhymes

For rhymes, Chakpa is most conservative within Luish as it retains the final \*-*l*. At the same time, Chakpa is more similar to Kadu-Ganan in which they have lost the final \*-*r*, while Cak retains it as -*ŋ*.

PLu	Chakpa	Cak	STK	MWK	MLK	Ganan
*-p	-p	-ʔ	-p	-p	-p	-p
*-t	-t	-ʔ	-t	-t	-t	-t
*-k	-k	-ʔ	-ʔ	-ʔ	-ʔ	-ʔ
*-m	-m	-ŋ	-m	-m	-m	-m
*-n	-n	-ŋ	-n	-n	-n	-n
*-ŋ	-ng	-ŋ	-ŋ	-ŋ	-ŋ	-ŋ
*-l	-l	-ŋ	-n	-n	-n	-n
*-r	zero	-ŋ	zero	zero	zero	zero

Table 2 Major correspondences of codas among Luish languages

For space constraints, only the examples of liquid rhymes are shown in (8) and (9).

- 8) ‘fire’ Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *wal*; PLu \**wal*, Cak/Sak *vaiŋ*, Kadu/Ganan *wan*; Chairel *phal*; Taman *vè*
- 9) ‘flower’ Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *pa ba* (papa); PLu \**pár*, Cak/Sak *ʔapáŋ*, Kadu/Ganan *pəpá*; PTB \**ba:r* (STEDT #2153)

### 2.2.3 The additional final stops

The addition of final stops after high vowels is sporadically attested in Tibeto-Burman languages in Indo-Burma borderland such as in Maru of Northern Burma (Burling 1966) and Huishu of Imphal valley (Mortensen 2004, 2012). Within Luish, Ganan shows the systematic addition of final stops after high vowels with low tones (Huziwarra 2017).

In Chakpa, as far as the available data are concerned, it is possible to point out some examples in which a final stop is added after a high vowel as in (10). However, it is also possible to show a counter-example in which Ganan has the final stop while Chakpa does not as in (11). With the very limited data of Chakpa, it is impossible to say whether the additional final stop is a regular or irregular phonological process.

- 10) ‘rat’ PLu \**k<sup>H</sup>-yuw*<sup>12</sup>  
 Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *kooyook* (*kuyuk*)  
 Cak/Sak *kəyvu*, STK *kəyù*, MWK *kəyù*, MLK *kəyù*, Ganan *cù?*  
 cf. PTB \**b-yəw-n* (STEDT #2796)
- 11) ‘smoke’ PLu \**wan-huw*  
 Andro *walkhoo* (*walkhu*), Sengmai *walhoo* (*walhu*)  
 Cak/Sak *vaiŋhvu*, STK (*wans<sup>h</sup>uŋ*), MWK —, MLK —, Ganan *wannu?*

<sup>12</sup> The superscript <sup>H</sup> stands for a high-toned element on the prefix.

### 2.2.4 Tones

Proto-Luish had two distinctive tones. Cak/Sak also retains this two-tone system. Ganan developed the third tone (low tone), in which the original low tone became the secondary low tone after the high tone. Kadu also developed the third tone (low tone), from which emerged the fourth tone (creaky tone) in Setto and Molang varieties.

PLu	Chakpa	Cak	Kadu	Ganan
High	?	High	High Mid/Low/Creak	High
Low	?	Low	y	Mid/Low

**Table 3 Correspondences of tones among Luish languages**

Generally speaking, tones of Chakpa are unknown as they are no longer spoken nor recorded. Ch. Y. Singh (2014) shows two distinctive tones (mid and high) for Chakpa. However, compared with Cak, Kadu, and Ganan, the correspondence is irregular.

- 12) ‘hen’ *ù* (Chakpa Andro: Ch. Y. Singh 2014) cf. Cak *ʔu*, Kadu *ʔu*, Ganan *ʔu*
- 13) ‘drink’ *u* (Chakpa Andro: Ch. Y. Singh 2014) cf. Cak *ʔu*, Kadu *ʔu*, Ganan *ʔu*

In the examples (12) and (13) above, ‘hen’ and ‘drink’ belong to the same tone category in Cak, Kadu and Ganan, while they are different in Chakpa recorded by Ch. Y. Singh.

## 2.3 Morphology

The most distinctive feature of Luish morphology is the infixation in Kadu<sup>13</sup> and Ganan. As shown in (14), within Luish, Kadu and Ganan have developed the special infix *-l-*, which is not shared by Cak and Chakpa.<sup>14</sup>

- 14) ‘fat’ PLu *\*sáw*; Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *sa*; Cak/Sak *ʔasá*; STK *s<sup>h</sup>əló*, MWK *s<sup>h</sup>əló*, MLK *s<sup>h</sup>əló*, Ganan *shəló* cf. Jingpho *sáu* PTB *\*sa:w* (STEDT #60)

## 2.4 Syntax

### 2.4.1 Special auxiliary verbs of motion

The andative (go and do something) marker *\*-a* and the completive marker *\*-an* are attested exclusively in Cak, Sak, Kadu and Ganan. They are one of the most important

<sup>13</sup> The Kadu infix is first described in Sangdong (2012: 158–160).

<sup>14</sup> According to Ch. Y. Singh (pc. 2017), there is one Chakpa pair in which an infix is involved: *uta* ‘friend’ and *unita* ‘female friend’. The ‘*ni*’ might be a female infix. However, it seems to be not productive and different from the infixation in Kadu and Ganan.

Luish features. However, for Chakpa, it is difficult to find one as the available data are limited.

### 2.4.2 The order of numerals and classifiers

For counting ‘one’, Luish languages employ the constituent order of ‘classifier-one’,<sup>15</sup> while from ‘two’ onward, ‘numeral-classifier’. This system is also attested in Thai. Thus the Luish system might be a result of language contact with Tai languages.

- 15) ‘CL: thing-one’; Chakpa *hata* (*ha-ta*)<sup>16</sup>; Cak/Sak *sú-wa*, Kadu/Ganan *huʔ-ʔa*
- 16) ‘two-CL: thing’; Chakpa *keengha* (*kiŋ-ha*); Cak/Sak *niŋ-sú*, Kadu *kəleiŋ-hûʔ*, Ganan *kɛ-huʔ*

## 2.5 Lexicon

There are several words which are attested almost exclusively within Luish.

### 2.5.1 Autonym

As the table below shows, the autonym of Luish languages can be reconstructed as *\*cak*. The name ‘Chakpa’ is probably a combination of *\*cak* and a nominaliser.

PLu	Chakpa	Cak	Sak	STK	MWK	MLK	Ganan
<i>*cak</i>	<i>Chakpa</i>	<i>ʔácaʔ</i>	<i>ʔásaʔ</i>	<i>ʔəsàʔ</i>	<i>mɔ , zàʔ</i>	<i>ʔəsàʔ</i>	<i>kənáŋ</i>

Table 4 Antonyms of Luish languages

### 2.5.2 The negative prefix *\*a-*

In Luish, including Chakpa, the negative prefix *\*a-* is pervasive.<sup>17</sup> This prefix can be found in other TB languages, but only sporadically such as in Old Burmese, Naxi, Nosu<sup>18</sup>, and Gyalrong.

PLu	Chakpa	Cak	Sak	Kadu	Ganan
<i>*a-</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>ʔa-/ʔá-</i>	<i>ʔə-/ʔé-</i>	<i>ʔə-</i>	<i>ʔə-</i>

<sup>15</sup> The ‘one’ here might be an emphatic marker initially.

<sup>16</sup> In McCulloch (1859), the ‘*hata*’ is glossed only as ‘one’. However, it is probably ‘CL:thing-one’, as the same morpheme ‘*ha*’ is also included in ‘two’.

<sup>17</sup> Taman also has the negative prefix *a-*, which is not found in Brown (1911) but discovered in Huziwara (2016a).

<sup>18</sup> The use of *a-* in Nosu is pointed out by the reviewer.

Table 5 The negative prefix in Luish languages

## 2.5.3 Numerals

Chakpa shares mysterious word formation for ‘forty’ and ‘fifty’ with Cak/Sak, in which the simple combination of ‘four’ and ‘ten’ or ‘five’ and ‘ten’ is somewhat reduced for unknown reasons.<sup>19</sup> For comparison, ‘sixty’ is also listed below.

- 17) ‘forty’ Chakpa *peenjee* (*pinji*); Cak *práinjít*: *prí* ‘four’ + *jít* ‘ten’ > *prí jít* is expected.
- 18) ‘fifty’ Chakpa *ngang jee* (*ňanjji*); Cak *ňáinjít*: *ňá* ‘five’ + *jít* ‘ten’ > *ňájít* is expected.
- 19) ‘sixty’ Chakpa *kok jee* (*kokji*); Cak *kru?cí* : this form is a combination of *kru?* ‘six’ and *cí* ‘ten’.

It seems that the peculiar formation of these two numbers is not shared innovation in Cak and Chakpa, but retention from Proto-Luish. For Kadu and Ganan, it is impossible to find cognates, as Kadu and Ganan retain only one, two, three, four in native words, while others are replaced by Red Shan (ISO 639-3 *tjl*).

## 2.5.4 The special marker for borrowed verbs

In Kadu, Ganan, and Chakpa, the special marker is employed when verbs are borrowed from other languages: in case of Kadu and Ganan, for Red Shan and Burmese loans, and in Chakpa, for Meitei loans.<sup>20</sup>

- 20) ‘linker for borrowed-verbs’ PLu *\*(t/l)ó*; Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *-do/to*; Cak/Sak —, STK *-tó*, Ganan *-ló*
- 21) ‘difficult’ Chakpa (Andro/Sengmai) *chindo* < Meitei *chil-ba*
- 22) ‘be happy’ Kadu *pyɔ-tó*, Ganan *pyɔ-ló* < Burmese *pyɔ*

## 3 Conclusion

Within Luish, Chakpa shares one idiosyncratic feature of the special morpheme to refer to borrowed verbs with Kadu and Ganan, which separates Chakpa and Kadu-Ganan from Cak within Luish. Besides, Chakpa, along with Kadu and Ganan, has lost *\*r* in initial, medial, and coda positions, which again separates Chakpa, Kadu, and Ganan from Cak. Compared with Kadu-Ganan, Chakpa is similar to Ganan and Mokhwang Kadu in that the reflex of the Proto-Luish *\*b* is realised as */m/* as well as the addition of

<sup>19</sup> Huziwara (under review) has recently proposed *\*n-sí* ‘ten’ for Proto-Luish to account for this irregularity.

<sup>20</sup> This unique element might be related to the Burmese sequential marker *lô*.

final stops after high vowels. Both correspondences might seem to be rare, however, can happen independently. Thus they do not always work as decisive criteria for subgrouping.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

CL	classifier	PLu	Proto-Luish
MWK	Mokhwang Kadu	PTB	Proto-Tibeto-Burman
MLK	Molang Kadu	STEDT	Sino-Tibetan Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus
PKC	Proto-Kuki-Chin	STK	Setto Kadu

#### LANGUAGE SOURCES

Andro (Chakpa): McCulloch (1859) modified by Huziwara  
Cak: Huziwara (2016b)  
Chairel: McCulloch (1859) modified by Huziwara  
Kadu (STK, MWK, MLK): Huziwara's field note  
Ganan: Huziwara's field note  
Jingpho: Maran (1978)  
PLu: Huziwara (2012b; 2014b; 2016b)  
PTB: STEDT  
Sak: Huziwara's field note  
Sengmai (Chakpa): McCulloch (1859) modified by Huziwara  
Taman: Brown (1911)

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