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Languages and Peoples of the Eastern Himalayan Region (LPEHR)

Preliminary Impressions on Champang Language: A Field Report with a few Grammar Notes

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to introduce a Tangsa Naga language variety, Champang, in a detailed and descriptive manner. Champang is an undocumented, undescribed and unwritten language that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. This language, therefore, doesn't have any written literature. There is no work found directly relating to its speakers' culture, history, or religion. Nevertheless, many linguists have mentioned Champang while giving detailed descriptions of the various Tangsa Naga varieties that are spoken along the South-East Asian belt, including Myanmar, Arunachal Pradesh, and some parts of Upper Assam.

This paper is the outcome of my first field visit to Yopakan, a remote village at the top of the Patkai mountains, in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh in India. In India, besides Yopakan, there are around twelve more villages where the Champang people are found living peacefully with other tribes. However, the highest concentration of Champang population is found in Yopakan itself.

The paper begins with some background information about the language and the community. Then it goes on to illustrate the methodology adopted, and the equipment and the metadata used. Further, the paper shows the initial findings of the research by providing a detailed overview of the consonant and vowel inventory of the language, as well as its morphological and syntactic features.

KEYWORDS

Champang, Tangsa Naga, Tibeto-Burman

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Preliminary Impressions on Champang Language: A Field Report with a few Grammar Notes

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1 Introduction

This paper is an introductory piece on the study of the Champang language.¹ It gives a general overview of the background, living conditions, clans, customs, etc. of the Champang community. It also describes the preliminary observations and findings relating to the language as well as its speakers.

Champang is one of the many Tangsa-Naga language varieties which are spoken mostly in Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border areas in India and in Myanmar. It is a Tibeto-Burman language that belongs to the larger subgroup of ‘Sal’ languages (Burling, 1983), a term which was later refined to ‘Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw’. Under this larger umbrella, Burling further claims that Tangsa falls more specifically in the Konyak group, which is mostly known for being “sufficiently heterogenous” to such an extent that “some so-called ‘dialects’ lack mutual intelligibility”(Burling, 2003).

The Konyak languages are also referred to as ‘Northern Naga’ (Voegelin & Voegelin, 1977) and Tangsa is listed as one of them. Each of the languages within the ‘Northern Naga’ group has been named by the ISO, following Ethnologue, with the element Naga as the first part of the name (Morey, 2017). In India, they are called Tangsa Naga, whereas in Myanmar, the term Tangshang Naga is used.

Following another distinction, namely Pangwa Tangsa and Non-Pangwa Tangsa, Champang falls into the non-Pangwa branch. Of the larger Tangsa group, the Non-Pangwas were the first settlers in India (Saul, 2005). The Champang community, however, has migrated to India in recent years and settled near Ledo in Assam (Morey, 2017, p. 5).² Besides, unlike the Wihu or Sahwi Song of the Pangwas, the Non-Pangwas do not have any ritualistic or historical song tradition. On the other hand, like most of the Pangwa Tangsa communities, the Champang people also claim to have ‘paired’ languages which are very similar (Morey, 2017, p. 4). Such pairs of language varieties are even nearly identical and mutually intelligible. A few examples include, Champang-Chamkok, Lumnu-Hapo, Toke-Langpan, and Hachum-Jangno. The example in Table 1 exemplifies a greeting expression used in Champang and Chamkok which is very similar to one another.

Language Name	Champang	Chamkok
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¹ This paper is based on the notes and data collected during my first field trip in January, 2022.

² As compared to a few other Tangsa tribes.

Lexeme	oku	heku
Gloss	'hello'	'hello'

Table 1: Champang and Chamkok word

2 Area of Fieldwork

The present study has been carried out in a village called Yopakan located atop the Patkai mountain ranges above Tirap Colliery near Ledo town in the Tinsukia district of Assam. Previously, this entire hill region was a part of Tinsukia district of Assam. However, due to administrative and political differences, all the tribal communities living there jointly decided to move a little further into the hills and become part of the neighbouring state of Arunachal Pradesh.³ This shift remains a sensitive issue and beyond the purview of my research interest.

After the shift, the villagers started referring to their new settlements as Notun Basti or New Village, and abandoned their previous villages just as they were. Hence, when one walks past these hilly areas to reach their villages, they first encounter the abandoned villages. Fascinatingly, all the houses seem as if properly maintained and inhabited even though they have been abandoned. One reason could be that the shifting is very recent and as all the villagers have moved to nearby areas, they possibly keep visiting their old houses to spend time there. This attachment to their old houses or villages could be due to the fact that their families and relatives are buried there. One can easily spot both old and new graves, properly maintained, in those abandoned villages.

2.1 Route

The map in Image 1 gives an idea of how to reach Ledo from Guwahati. From Ledo town, it is an uphill journey of another one-hour bumpy drive.

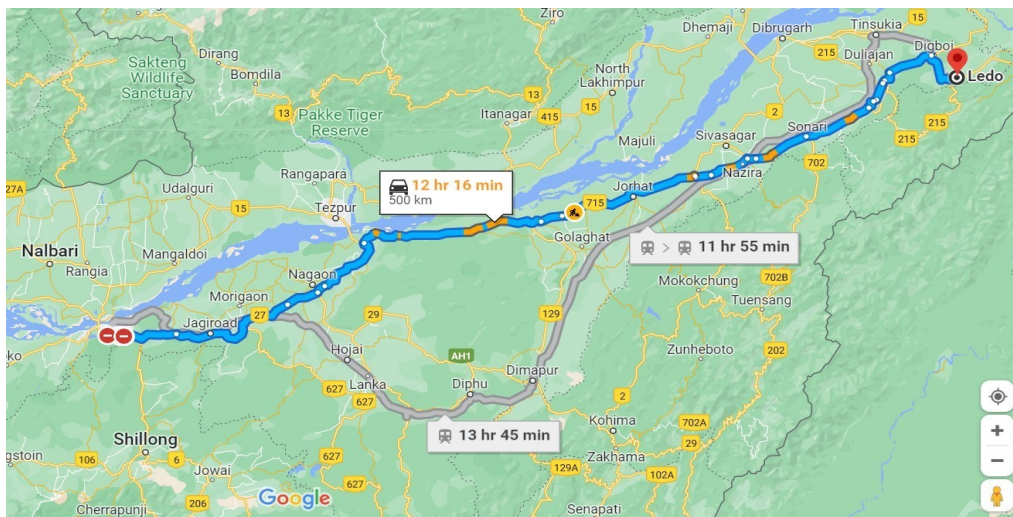


Image 1: Map of Guwahati to Ledo Route⁴

³ As informed by the villagers themselves.

⁴ Source: Google Maps

2.2 Traveling to the Field

The most budget-friendly and convenient mode of travel from Guwahati to Ledo is by train. It takes around 12-15 hours. After reaching Ledo, there are two options to reach the village. One, by hiring a vehicle from the railway station to the village on the mountain top. Or two, by taking a shared auto till Tirap Colliery and from there trek all the way for two to three hours up to the village. The first option is obviously going to cost more than the second one. The second option, however, is physically more demanding and almost next to impossible unless one is used to mountain trekking, as it requires a lot of stamina and energy.

From Ledo railway station, it is a 3 km travel to Tirap Colliery that takes around 10 mins by road. From the Colliery, which lies at the foothills just next to the main road, National Highway 38, the journey upwards takes a totally different shape. Depending on the season, that is, whether it is rainy or not, vehicles do ply on that mountainous terrain. In fact, a few hill people also own vehicles (pick-up vans) which they mostly use themselves for business purposes or which they put on rent. Another point to be noted here, is that only those vehicles that have four-wheel drive can be driven on that terrain due to its steep, rough and extremely curvy paths. It totally depends on the dryness of the soil to be able to drive a vehicle on that road. Because the soil is red, sticky and slippery, just after a spell of rain, the mountainous paths turn very dangerous for any vehicle to pass by. Therefore, prior to visiting this place, proper planning is essential, and the most important point to be kept in mind is the season. It is always advisable to visit this region during winter or at a time when chances of rainfall are very low.

2.3 Topography & Occupation

The Patkai Mountains are the main attraction of this region. The entire landscape is surrounded by a number of mountain ranges running all along the Assam-Arunachal borders up to Myanmar and China. The soil is very favourable for growing broom grass. However, the people don't actually plant them. The grass grows on its own in the wild and few local people get engaged in collecting and selling it in the market.

The presence of the Ledo colliery at the foothills is another source of income for the locals. Most people from the hill tribes as well as from the plains work as daily wage-earning labourers in Tirap Colliery whose job it is to lift coal-filled sacks on their backs and carry them to designated places. These sacks weigh a maximum of up to around 150 kilos. They get Rs. 3 to 4 for carrying one kilo of coal.

Apart from that, agriculture is the main occupation of the people living in the hills. It is their only reliable way of making a living because work at the Tirap Colliery at the foothills is not consistent, especially since the time of Covid 19 restrictions. Hence, during the farming season, which starts from April-May and continues till August-September, all the villagers remain busy in their fields. They follow the practice of Jhum cultivation. During the rest of the months, they are almost free of work and lead a relaxed life.

The Champang people are very simple, easy-going folks. The men are either engaged in farming or in doing odd-jobs in the Colliery at the foothills. Few villagers, who are comparatively well-to-do, have their own pick-up vans which they use in the coal-mining business. They engage some labourers for mining coal, which they later dump in some open space and sell off. This is, however, a seasonal business. The poorer ones, as mentioned already, mostly work there as daily

wage-earning labourers. The work at the Colliery has been affected severely by the Covid 19 pandemic.

2.4 The field site and the Community

The village where most of the fieldwork was done is called Yopakan, pronounced as /zopakan/. This village is located in the Namtok Circle of the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh, at around 27°16'25" North and 95°45'41" East as shown in Image 2:

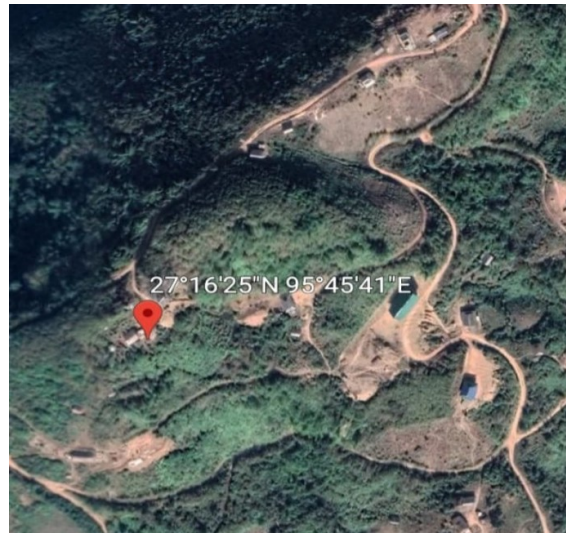


Image 2: Latitude-Longitude of Yopakan⁵

The map in Image 3 below gives a bird's eye-view of the exact field site.⁶

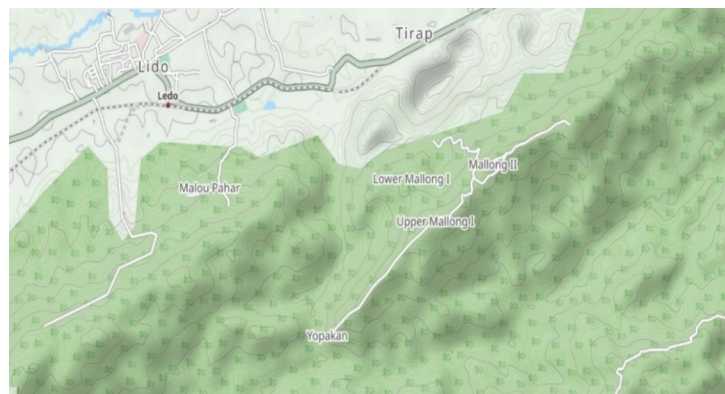


Image 3: Map of Yopakan⁷

⁵ Source: Google Earth

⁶ I am very grateful to Kellen Parker van Dam for adding Yopakan in OpenStreetMap.

⁷ Source: OpenStreetMap. UR: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=14/27.2798/95.7569&layers=C>

In Champang, /ʒo/ means ‘water’, /pa/ means ‘side of’ and /kan/ means ‘mountain’. ‘Mountain by the side of a river’ is what the name *Yopakan* translates to. Indeed, a beautiful river, Terim, flows by the side of the hill in which Yopakan and few other villages are situated. However, unless one doesn’t climb down a few metres from the village, the river is not easily visible.

Yopakan is home not only to the Champang community, but also to a number of other Tangsa-Naga communities such as Hakhun, Bongtai, Hahcheng, Chamkok, Shangwal and Ngaimong. The people of all of these different tribes live peacefully together. The Champang people speak in their mother-tongue in their home domain, among the members of their family as well as relatives. However, due to their proximity with other language communities, they switch between different languages. All the villagers, belonging to different language communities, can fluently speak and understand each other’s languages. In community gatherings or mass prayers, they don’t have any common language to address the gathering; instead, the speakers speak in their own mother-tongue and all can follow them.

2.4.1 Status of Education

The educational situation among the Champang population, living in Yopakan and nearby villages, is very unfortunate as they lack the privilege of receiving quality education. There is a government-run primary school in Yopakan where all the children of the village and nearby areas receive their initial education. This school has only one appointed teacher for more than 50 students at various levels in the primary section. Hence, the student-teacher ratio itself is a huge challenge to overcome.

Moreover, as Yopakan is situated at the top of a mountain, it becomes next to impossible for children to commute on a daily basis to other schools located in the plains like Jagun or Ledo for pursuing studies in the secondary, senior secondary or at higher levels. Due to that, parents have only two options – either they send their children to stay at hostels or relatives’ places to continue their studies, or take them out of school altogether.

2.5 The Consultants

I stayed at the residence of Mr. Najung Champang (31), ex-village head, who was kind enough to let me live with his family during my entire stay at Yopakan. Najung lives with his wife Meolan Longri Champang (28) and two children – a daughter, Menrin Champang (5) and a son, Konsang Champang (2).

My main consultants are Chokjung Champang (28), Kanwang Champang (30) along with Najung Champang himself. Besides, few other villagers like Sanwi Champang (28), Nawang Champang (38), Ranghan Champang (30) and few more also takes active part in the discussion and recording process.



Image 4: From the left Najung Champang, Ranghan Champang, myself and my husband, Bhaskar Datta, Chokjung Champang and Kanwang Champang

3 Methodology

The present research has been carried out taking a functional-typological approach (Dixon, 1979), where emphasis is given to a data-driven and inductive method to document and analyze the various natural uses of the language variety under study. Hence, I started off by recording some elicited words and sentences, and later I switched to recording natural speech, conversations and narrations, which took place in a natural environment. Additionally, I also had some data collected previously by Dr. Stephen Morey, which he very generously shared with me for further study. These recordings, of almost 10 to 12 hours of audio files, served as my primary source of data. All these data have been transcribed using IPA, as well as translated in English. Further, they are also annotated using various software like FLEx, ELAN and PRAAT.

More specifically, I analyzed the data using software like PRAAT (PRAAT Version 6.1.52, 2021) where I annotated the words and made separate sound files for each word, ELAN (ELAN Version 6.2, 2021) where I annotated the phrases and sentences, FLEx (FLEx 9.0, 2020) where I interlinearized the data and created a dictionary, and Phonology Assistant (Phonology Assistant Version 4.0.2, 2020) where I assembled the phoneme inventory charts, and accounted for syllable structure and minimal pairs. The use of technology has, in fact, helped a great deal in automating the otherwise arduous task of linguistic analysis.

3.1 Equipment, Specifications and data format

For recording purposes, the device that was used was a Zoom H1n Handy Audio Recorder. The sound quality that this recorder produces is excellent. The best thing about this recording device is its portability as it weighs only 60 grams. It has the dimensions of 50 x 137.5 x 32 mm (W x H x D) only, and dual interface of Mic 3.5 mm in and 3.5 mm headphone out. It records in wav format. It has one-touch button controls, and Micro USB port for data exchange to and from computer. It works with two AAA alkaline batteries that provide up to approximately 10 hours of

operation. It allows recording at 44.1/48/96 kHz at 24 or 32 bit and has a slot for microSD and micro SDHC that supports memory of up to 32 GB.

For the present study, data has been recorded using the frequency of 44.1 kHz or higher in 16 or 24 bit in the .WAV format.

3.2 Metadata

While organizing the recorded sound files, the following convention has been used for renaming the files –

[Date of recording_Serial No._Name of recorder_Linguist's Name_Name of Consultant(s)_Genre]

For example, 20220116_01_H1n_AB_CC-NC_Wordlist.WAV

This convention helps in locating the sound files easily as well as maintaining an organized folder either by date of recording or by genre.

In addition, a separate excel sheet containing a detailed record of the metadata of the consultants who have helped in the recording process was also maintained. This looks like the example in Table 2:

Sl. No	Name of Consultant	Age	Gender	Address	Occ.	Recordings
1.	Full Name	As informed	M/F	Complete address	Service/ business/ farming	Wordlist Narrations Conversations

Table 2: Example for metadata sample

4 Data Collected

In this study, data collection started with eliciting wordlists and gradually shifted to collecting simple narrations that included various conversations on different topics covering family history, clans, marriage customs, the village and the other tribes living there, etc. Additionally, a process description was also collected wherein the speaker talked about building a traditional Champang house.

This paper is based on the data collected during my first and only fieldtrip done so far. Hence, it is the result of a total of more than 1200 transcribed, segmented, annotated and interlinearized words, in which the proportion of elicited words and sentences is more than naturalistic speech recorded so far.

5 Initial Findings

5.1 Phonology

This section talks about the tentative Champang phonology including the consonant and vowel inventories and the basic syllable structure found in the language.

5.1.1. Consonants

	Bilabial		Labio-dental		Alveolar		Post-alveolar		Alveolo-Palatal		Palatal		Velar		Uvular		Glottal	
Plosive	p	b			t	d							k	g	q		ʔ	
	(p ^h)												(k ^h)					
	(p ^j)				(t ^j)													
Nasal		m				n								ŋ				
		(m ^j)												ŋ ^j				
Affricate									te	dz								
										(dz ^h)								
Trill						r												
Fricative		β		v	s		ʃ	ʒ										h
					(s ^j)													
Approximant						l						j		w				

Table 3: Consonant Chart

Champang has 31 consonant phones which are shown in Table 3 below. Out of the 31 sounds, 7 are put under brackets because their occurrence in the data is found to be very limited, which will be confirmed and updated later with more data.

5.1.1.1 Contrasts between Plosives

/p/ versus /p^h/

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/pən/	‘to pluck’	/p ^h ən/	‘tribe’

The frequency of this contrast between /p/ and /p^h/ is very limited in the word-initial position. This contrast is missing in the word-medial and word-final position. At the alveolar and velar places of articulation, aspiration contrast is not found at all.

/p/ versus /p^j/

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əpet/	‘to squeeze and pull while milking’	/əp ^j en/	‘flat’

/p/ is very limited in its occurrence, and is found only in word-medial position as shown above.

/p/ versus /b/

Word /əpun/	Gloss 'to itch'	Word /əbun/	Gloss 'to chop'
/dapu/	'moon'	/dzabu/	'house with raised floor'

This contrast is found only in word-medial position, as shown above.

/t/ versus /d/

Word-initial position

Word /təŋ/	Gloss 'family'	Word /dəŋ/	Gloss 'machete'
/təp/	'to cut'	/dək/	'to lick'

Word-medial position

Word /ətum/	Gloss 'to sniff'	Word /ədun/	Gloss 'to exit'
/wəntəp/	'fireplace'	/pəndək/	'leaf'

The above contrast is not found in word-final position.

/t/ versus /tʰ/

Word-medial position

Word /wətet/	Gloss 'parrot'	Word /ətʰet/	Gloss 'to bind an animal with a rope to a post'
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This contrast is limited to only a single occurrence in word-medial position. This is not found in the other two positions.

/k/ versus /k^h/

The frequency of occurrence of /k^h/ is very low in the data. However, the following near-minimal pairs show the contrast between the aspirated and the unaspirated variant:

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ke/	'old'	/k ^h et/	'silver'
/ʒukku/	'monkey'	/suk ^h u/	'to cough'

/k/ versus /g/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ke/	'old'	/ge/	'to answer'
/kəm/	'country liquor'	/gən/	'body'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/sukmo/	'stag'	/dzugmon/	'bamboo rat'
/wəkəm/	'fishing bird'	/kəgəŋ/	'pillow'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/rik/	'to kill'	/hriɡ/	'louse'

/q/ versus /ʔ/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/laqsisan/	'star'	/laʔsan/	'arrow'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/pəq/	'to jump'	/ʒəŋpəʔ/	'lightning'

5.1.1.2 *Contrasts between Affricates*

/tɕ/ versus /dz/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/tɕa/	'to take or buy'	/dza/	'to burn'
/tɕaʔ/	'to cut'	/dzaʔ/	'light in weight'
/tɕuŋ/	'place'	/dzuŋ/	'to grow'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ətɕuk/	'to drown'	/ədzuʔ/	'to drink'

As shown above, this contrast is visible only at the word-initial and word-medial positions, and are not found in the word-final positions. In other words, both these sounds mostly occur in syllable-initial positions.

/dz/ versus /dzʰ/

The aspirated sound /dzʰ/ is very rarely found in the dataset and hence there is no contrast found between these two affricates.⁶ The only example found so far of this aspirated sound is shown below:

Word	Gloss
/dzʰiŋ/	'to drive away'

⁶ This sound needs to be cross-checked with more data.

5.1.1.3 *Contrasts between Fricatives*

/β/ versus /v/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/βən/	'green'	/vən/	'to cut'
/βun/	'to put on clothes'	/vum/	'ground rice'

No contrast is found so far between these two sounds in the word-medial and word-final positions.

/β/ versus /b/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/βutum/	'macaque'	/bute/	'warm/big'
/βən/	'green'	/bəŋa/	'five'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/mənβon/	'cheek'	/wənbon/	'flame'

This contrast is made because there is a striking similarity between these two sounds, the bilabial fricative and stop. The above examples are mostly near-minimal pairs in the word-initial and medial positions. Neither of these sounds occurs in the word-final position.

/s/ versus /ʃ/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/sum/	'pus'	/ʃum/	'salt'
/sumkoʔ/	'claw'	/ʃumtoʔ/	'blister'
/sika/	'ginger'	/ʃikəp/	'ring for finger'

The contrast between /s/ and /ʃ/ is not found in word-medial and word-final positions.

/ʃ/ versus /ʒ/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ʃum/	'salt'	/ʒum/	'house'
/ʃumʒəp/	'salty'	/ʒumʒabu/	'storehouse'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əʃtəp/	'to rub two things together'	/əʒtəm/	'to fall'

No contrast is found between /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ in the word-final position.

/s/ versus /h/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əsəm/	'to do'	/əhun/	'to wipe off'
/dasən/	'calf of leg'	/wahən/	'wild hen'

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/son/	‘to light fire’	/hon/	‘to wash clothes’
/susa/	‘calf’	/huse/	‘to be ashamed’

This contrast is not found in word-final position.

5.1.1.4 *Contrasts between Nasals*

/m/ versus /n/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/məŋ/	‘to stand’	/nəŋ/	‘you’
/mane/	‘cat’	/nane/	‘female sibling’

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əmmən/	‘ripe’	/ənnəm/	‘spoiled/rotten’
/mətmun/	‘eyelash’	/putnu/	‘part of intestine where food gets collected’

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/merisənkɔm/	‘rainbow’	/pənkɔn/	‘bark of tree’

/m/ versus /ŋ/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ma/	'for'	/ŋa/	'to say'
/maʔ/	'sharp'	/ŋaʔ/	'fish'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/hrumku/	'famine'	/muŋku/	'heart'
/sumkoʔ/	'claw'	/luŋko/	'stone/rock'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/kəm/	'country liquor'	/pəŋ/	'to brush'
/pum/	'medicine'	/puŋ/	'shoot of young plant'

/n/ versus /ŋ/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/nan/	'new'	/ŋan/	'complete'
/noʔkəm/	'bent'	/ŋoʔ/	'to sit'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/pəŋkoʔ/	'tree'	/məŋko/	'grave'
/məna/	'which'	/bəŋa/	'five'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/pən/	'to pluck'	/pəŋ/	'to brush'
/mən/	'ripe'	/məŋ/	'to stand'

/ŋ/ versus /ŋʲ/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ŋeʔ/	'after'	/ŋʲe/	'I/my'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/bəŋa/	'five'	/ləŋʲaʔ/	'banana'

The frequency of occurrence of this palatalized nasal /ŋʲ/ is very low, and the above contrast is not found in word-final position.

5.1.1.5 *Contrasts between Trill and Approximants*

/r/ versus /l/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/rum/	'three'	/lum/	'to cook'
/raŋ/	'sky'	/laŋsan/	'kite'

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/hənɾəŋ/	‘uncooked’	/janləm/	‘to dry grains in the sun’
/munro/	‘termite’	/panlo/	‘fence’

/w/ versus /l/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/wat/	‘to weave’	/lat/	‘to wrap hair in a bun’
/wən/	‘fire’	/ləŋ/	‘to kill’
/wuŋ/	‘rice husk’	/luŋ/	‘stone’

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/banwo/	‘jungle fowl’	/panlo/	‘fence’
/pawəŋ/	‘stepfather’	/tealəŋ/	‘courtyard’

/r/ versus /w/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/reko/	‘bed’	/wekɔŋ/	‘thigh’
/rum/	‘three’	/wuŋ/	‘rice husk’

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/munro/	‘termite’	/banwo/	‘jungle fowl’
/miʔwa/	‘man’	/suʔra/	‘thorn’

/j/ versus /w/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/jən/	‘hot’	/wən/	‘fire’
/jəŋka/	‘bird wings’	/wəŋgiʔ/	‘charcoal’
/jonan/	‘thirsty’	/wonu/	‘hen’

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/sajaŋ/	‘infant’	/ŋawan/	‘mithun’
/bojat/	‘market’	/sowat/	‘braid’

5.1.2. Vowels

Champang exhibits 9 vowel phonemes in total, as shown in Table 4 below. The inventory is quite simple with the vowels distributed evenly in all the three positions, front, central and back.

	Front		Central		Back	
Close	i					u
Close-Mid	e					o
Mid			ə			
			(ə̃)			
Near-Open			(ɐ̃)			
Open	a					ɒ

Table 4: Vowel Chart

5.1.2.1. Monophthongs

There are four front vowels, /i/, /e/, and /a/, three central vowels, /ə/ along with its nasalized counterpart (/ə̃/and /ẽ/)⁷, and three back vowels, /u/, /o/ and /ɔ/.

5.1.2.1.1. The Front Vowels

The distribution of /i/, /e/, and /a/ are shown in the examples below:

/i/ versus /e/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/sika/	'ginger'	/seka/	'near'
/kipo/	'tail of firefly'	/kepet/	'duck'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/hi/	'blood'	/he/	'clean grain from dirt'
/nini/	'father's sister'	/nane/	'female sibling'

The vowel /a/ is very commonly used in this language. Few examples of /a/ occurring in all the three positions in a word are shown below:

<u>Word-initial</u>		<u>Word-medial</u>		<u>Word-final</u>	
Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/alum/	'warm'	/paʔ/	'to jump'	/vənpa/	'guest'
/ahi/	'sour'	/bat/	'forest'	/suʔra/	'thorn'

⁷ Awaiting more data to come to a definite conclusion regarding these two sounds.

/i/ versus /a/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/piʔ/	'he/she'	/paʔ/	'to jump'
/miʔ/	'human'	/maʔ/	'sharp'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/pi/	'to sew'	/pa/	'male'
/ri/	'to smell'	/ra/	'should'

/e/ versus /a/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əpet/	'to squeeze and pull while milking'	/əpat/	'to vomit'
/teka/	'old'	/takon/	'wall'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ne/	'baby'	/na/	'CONJ'
/nane/	'female sibling'	/nana/	'older sister'

5.1.2.1.2. The Central Vowels

Interestingly, the mid-central vowel /ə/ has a nasalized counterpart /ə̃/ which occurs in only a few instances in the dataset, as shown below:

/ə/ versus /ə̃/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	237	Word	Gloss
/pək/	'to eat'		/də̃k/	'hand'

Only a near-minimal contrast is found, in word-medial position, between /ə/ and /ǝ/ so far in the dataset, as shown above, since the occurrence of /ǝ/ is limited to only a few words. The following examples show the occurrence of /ə/ in different positions in a word:

<u>Word-initially</u>		<u>Word-medially</u>		<u>Word-finally</u>	
Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əpək/	‘solid food’	/pək/	‘to eat’	/milə/	‘bad’
/ətɛa/	‘to buy’	/mət/	‘to extinguish’	/gənliŋə/	‘hiccup’

/e/ versus /ǝ/

Word-initial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ɛŋɛ/	‘thus’	/ǝŋǝn/	‘blunt’

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/kɛt/	‘to go’	/kǝtpi/	‘to sew’

No contrast is found in the word-final position between these two central vowels. The below examples show the occurrence of /e/ in the different positions in a word:

<u>Word-initially</u>		<u>Word-medially</u>		<u>Word-finally</u>	
Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/ɛja/	‘that’	/sɛtpa/	‘rice grain’	/ŋɛ/	‘to say’
/ɛŋɛ	‘thus’	/tɛk/ ₂₃₈	‘chop’	-	-

5.1.2.1.3. The Back Vowels

None of the three back vowels, /u/, /o/ and /ɒ/, occur in word-initial position. The contrast between them is shown in the examples below:

/u/ versus /o/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əpʊp/	'to cut a round object'	/əpɒp/	'blunt'
/ʒum/	'house'	/ʒom/	'to fall'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/mʊŋku/	'gut'	/mɒŋko/	'grave'
/kohu/	'wet nasal mucus'	/hoho/	'mother's brother'

/u/ versus /ɒ/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əbun/	'to chop'	/bɒn/	'bunch'
/kuŋ/	'hill/mountain'	/kɒŋ/	'shelf'

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/kumnu/	'mare'	/komnɒ/	'area of riverbed'

/o/ versus /ɒ/

Word-medial position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/əbon/	‘be tired’	/bɒn/	‘bunch’
/nokoʔ/	‘mouth’	/nɒkku/	‘church’

Word-final position

Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
/keno/	‘waist’	/komnɒ/	‘area of riverbed’

5.1.2.2. *Diphthongs*

In addition to the above monophthongs, the dataset also exhibits few instances of a single diphthong /ai/⁸, which is quite interesting to note. This is shown in the following examples:

<u>Word</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
/aija/	‘light’
/tealai/	‘crocodile-like amphibious animal’

6 Syllable Structure

The basic structure of a syllable in the language is shown in the table below:

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
CV	/so/	‘hair’
CVC	/hap/	‘to kick’
CCVC ⁹	/hraj/	‘slim/lean’

Table 5: Basic Structure of a Syllable

⁸ The diphthong /ai/ is considered as a single vowel V, and not a vowel sequence.

⁹ It is to be noted that the /hr/ sequence in CCVC structure may have other possible interpretations, such as, fricative rhotic, etc., which could be confirmed later with more data.

7 Morphological Overview

Champang exhibits a fairly simple morphology. The characteristics of the three major types of morphemes found in Champang, i.e., roots, prefixes and suffixes, with respect to their phonological shape, are discussed below:

7.1 Roots

In Champang, most roots are disyllabic, however, there is also a considerable number of monosyllabic and multisyllabic roots. Table 5 below illustrates this.

Word Type	Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
Monosyllabic	CV	/tea/	'to buy'
Disyllabic	CV.CV	/pewe/	'peas'/'beans'
Trisyllabic	CV.CVC.CV	/dasiŋko/	'toe nail'
Quadrisyllabic	CV.CV.CVC.CVC	/merisənkom/	'rainbow'

Table 5: Syllabic shape of Champang words

Nominal Roots

<u>Root</u>	<u>Word Type</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
/p ^h ən/	monosyllabic	'tribe'
/wengiʔ/	disyllabic	'charcoal'
/mopurəŋ/	trisyllabic	'centipede'

Verbal Roots

<u>Root</u>	<u>Word Type</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
/dza/	monosyllabic	'to burn'
/ləŋkəm/	disyllabic	'be broken'
/teaʔ/	monosyllabic	'to cut'

Adjectival Roots

<u>Root</u>	<u>Word Type</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
/teka/	disyllabic	'being old'
/holo/	disyllabic	'be long'
/teomsik/	disyllabic	'be beautiful'

7.2 Affixes

Verbal Affixes

The data, so far, exhibits very few prefixes. One such prefix is /ə-/ which is found to attach to most verbs, used in isolation, as shown below. However, this prefix gets dropped when the verb occurs in sentences.

Verb lexeme	Morpheme break	Gloss
/əsum/	/ə-/ + /sum/	'to do'
/əŋoʔ/	/ə-/ + /ŋoʔ/	'to sit'
/ətaŋ/	/ə-/ + /taŋ/	'to punch'
/əvəŋ/	/ə-/ + /vəŋ/	'to come'

Table 6: Verbal affix ə-

The example sentence in (1) shows that in connected speech, the prefix /ə-/ is seen to get dropped in the verb /vəŋ/.

- 1) *maŋo* *zəŋwo* *ŋje-dzum-kə* *vəŋpa* *vəŋ-tə-kaʔβa*
 yesterday daylight my-house-at guest come-stay-PST
 'Guests came to my house yesterday.'

Nominal Affixes

In the examples presented in Table 7, nominal stems are suffixed with /-duŋ/ which conveys a sense of honorificity and attaches to stems referring to family relations.

Lexeme	Morpheme break	Gloss
/paduŋ/	/pa/ + /-duŋ/	'father'
/nuduŋ/	/nu/ + /-duŋ/	'mother'
/widuŋ/	/wi/ + /-duŋ/	'grandmother'
/wəŋduŋ/	/wəŋ/ + /-duŋ/	'uncle'

Table 7: Nominal honorific suffix

Moreover, the first-person singular pronoun *ŋje* 'I' also functions as a possessive prefix, as shown in Table 8.

Lexeme	Morpheme Break	Gloss
/ŋjelippuk/	/ŋje-/ + /lippuk/	'my book'

Table 8: Nominal Prefix ŋje-

Apart from the above affixes, the language also employs a number of nominal and verbal suffixes as exemplified below:

Nominal Suffixes	
/-e/ or /-je/	NOM case
/-kə/	LOC case
/-ka/	GEN case
/-ŋe/	INSTR case
/-nəŋ/	POSTP
/-kə/	POSTP
/-ŋeʔ/	AG

Table 9: Nominal Suffixes

Verbal Suffixes	
/-saʔ/	CONT
/-wa/	CONT
/-laʔ/	IMP
/-la/	NEG
/-kat/	FUT
/-sik/	PST
/-kaʔβa/	PST

Table 10: Verbal Suffixes

7.3 Root Compounding

Champang exhibits a very rich compounding system where new noun, verb or adjective stems are formed by combining two noun stems or a noun and a verb stem together. This is shown in Table 11.

Compound	Meaning	Type	Word Class	Root 1	Gloss	Root 2	Gloss
/pəkmun/	‘armpit hair’	NN	Noun	/pək/	‘armpit’	/mun/	‘small hair’
/nesiŋ miʔwa/	‘boy child’	NN	Noun	/nesiŋ/	‘child’	/miʔwa/	‘man’
/bake pəŋ/	‘to brush teeth’	NV	Verb	/bake/	‘teeth’	/pəŋ/	‘to brush’
/kətto gəp/	‘to fold cloth’	NV	Verb	/kətto/	‘cloth’	/gəp/	‘to fold’
/dzumŋəm/	‘domestic’	NN	Adjective	/dzum/	‘house’	/ŋəm/	‘meat’

Table 11: Root Compounding

The last example in Table 11, /dzumŋəm/ ‘domestic’, is worth noting because in this compound, two nouns are joined together to form an adjective, which is quite unique. However, such combination is very rare in the data collected so far.

8 Syntactic Overview

8.1 Word Order and Sentence Types

Champang is a verb-final language. The basic order that a simple sentence follows is SOV. The following example sentences offer a rough understanding of the basic structure of sentences in Champang.

I. Declarative Sentences

- 2) *ŋje-kə moto məŋtɛt ŋosik*
 I-GEN vehicle one have
 'I have a car.'
- 3) *ŋjenəp zəŋwo ŋje bojat katte*
 tomorrow daylight I market will.go
 'I will go to the market tomorrow.'
- 4) *maŋo zəŋwo ŋje-dzum-kə vənpa ŋoʔtə-kaʔβa*
 yesterday daylight my-house-at guest stay-PST
 'Yesterday guests stayed at my house.'

II. Imperative Sentences

- 5) *wən dza-laʔ*
 fire burn-IMP
 'Start the fire.'
- 6) *han-laʔ*
 to wake-IMP
 'Wake up.'

III. Interrogative Sentences

- 7) *ləkle mowo kusi -βaʔ*
 tongue why to.show -PRES
 'Why do you stick your tongue out?'

9 The Plan Ahead

A thorough and exhaustive data repository is to be built which can be taken as the base before writing a comprehensive reference grammar of the language. This would require an extensive travel plan to the field site and many more hours of recordings. Hence, my way forward is collecting more data, interacting more with the speakers of the language, and visiting the field as often as possible. This will enable me to dive deeper into the various intricacies of the language and come out with more discoveries.

Firstly, I will complete my collection of the NILDA (NEILS Indigenous Languages Documentation Award 2011) wordlist, which was designed especially for documenting the

languages of Northeast India. At the same time, I will keep collecting texts in natural environments. Secondly, I plan to visit as many villages as possible where Champang people are found so that a comparative study of the different dialects can be carried out for a better understanding of the language. Besides, such a comparison will also help to arrive at a certainty as to whether Champang speakers as a whole have any dialectal differences based on their geographical location. Next, I am very keen on producing a comprehensive dictionary on Champang for the members of the community, and I do believe that it would be possible with dedication and a focused attempt. Finally, I strive to work extensively on producing a 'grammar of Champang' which, I am sure, will be the first of its kind that will, in turn, serve as the reference point for all research scholars and linguists interested in Tibeto-Burman languages, as well as the community members of Champang.

10 Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to place Champang in the category of the larger Tangsa group of languages by presenting a detailed description about the language background, including the location, living conditions, and occupations of its speakers. Next, it gives a detailed information about the methodology that was adopted while carrying out the research, including the equipment, specifications and formats used while recording the data. Further, it also reports on the conventions concerning the metadata used while organizing the data repository. Furthermore, it draws a preliminary picture of Champang phonology by showing a tentative consonant and vowel inventory along with some sample words and sentences transcribed and annotated for a better understanding. It is, however, important to note that this is just the beginning of a major research project, and hence, that many findings are preliminary and tentative, and might be modified and updated in due course.

ABBREVIATIONS

NOM	Nominative	NEG	Negative
LOC	Locative	FUT	Future
GEN	Genitive	PST	Past
INSTR	Instrumental	PRES	Present
POSTP	Postposition	IMP	Imperative
AG	Agentive	CONT	Continuous

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