

8-1-2012

**Himalayan Languages and Linguistics: Studies in Phonology,  
Semantics, Morphology and Syntax by Mark Turin and Bettina  
Zeisler, Eds.; Reviewed by Elena Bashir**

Elena Bashir  
*University of Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya>

**Recommended Citation**

Bashir, Elena. 2012. Himalayan Languages and Linguistics: Studies in Phonology, Semantics, Morphology and Syntax by Mark Turin and Bettina Zeisler, Eds.; Reviewed by Elena Bashir. *HIMALAYA* 31(1). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol31/iss1/21>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the DigitalCommons@Macalester College at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

# HIMALAYAN LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS: STUDIES IN PHONOLOGY, SEMANTICS, MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTAX

BY MARK TURIN AND BETTINA ZEISLER,  
EDS.

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. Hard cover. viii + 322 pp.  
ISBN: 978-90-04-19448-9.

Tibetan studies library, languages of the greater Himalayan  
region, Vol 5/12

REVIEWED BY ELENA BASHIR

This book contains nine articles, six of which are revised versions of papers presented at the 11th Himalayan Languages Symposium, held at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, in December 2005, and three are invited contributions. In addition, there is an introduction by the editors. The articles are divided into four groups: I. The Himalayas in History; II. Phonology and Script; III. Semantics; and IV. Morphology and Syntax. Of these, seven exclusively concern Tibeto-Burman (T-B) languages, one is a general historical discussion (Part I), and one discusses Indo-Aryan languages (Rehman).

Part I wholly consists of an invited article by George van Driem entitled “Lost in the sands of time somewhere north of the Bay of Bengal” (26 pp), an exploration of the ancient origins of the Austroasiatic and T-B language families. The first section of the paper—on paleoethnobotany and linguistic paleontology—is a detailed discussion of rice terminology, which concludes that the ancient Austroasiatics lived in a humid tropical environment and are the most likely candidates for the first cultivators of rice. The second section is a discussion of population genetics research. In general, van Driem concludes, “the genetic divide between Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic in the region shows a far more complex structure than the clear line demarcating Tibeto-Burman from Indo-European (p. 30).” Possible scenarios of prehistoric migrations and population mixing are discussed in terms of van Driem’s “Father Tongue Hypothesis”, that is, cases where Y chromosome markers (male descent) correlate better with the linguistic associations of populations than do mitochondrial DNA markers (maternal descent). Van Driem concludes that the original T-B homeland probably lies in the northeast of the Indian subcontinent, while that of the ancient Austroasiatics is somewhere in the area on either side of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta.

In Part II, Helen Plaisier’s article, “A key to four transcription systems of Lepcha” (13 pp.), compares transcription systems proposed by four scholars, including herself, and argues that her own system “offers the user the most accurate way of transcribing Lepcha. The transliteration is consistent with and faithful to the way text is written in the traditional Lepcha orthography, so it remains possible at all times to derive the original spelling from the transliteration” (p. 51).

Hiroyuki Suzuki’s paper is on “Dialectal particularities of Sogpho Tibetan - an introduction to the “Twenty-four villages’ patois” (19 pp.). Sogpho Tibetan is a Khams variety spoken in western Sichuan, China, bordering the Tibetan and rGyalrong-speaking area and Han China. The paper presents a description of the phonological system of this dialect along with examples of its phonemes, then identifies features both shared and not shared with other East Tibetan varieties. The author concludes that the phonological features of Sogpho Tibetan are partially shared with some of the dialects spoken in the Ethnic Corridor of West Sichuan, but not in a systematic way. Sogpho Tibetan shows a partial similarity in lexical features to some distant southern Khams Tibetan dialects. The historical relationships between these various Tibetan dialects and the degree and duration of language contact among them remain unresolved.

Part III contains two articles: Brandon Dotson’s paper, “On the Old Tibetan term *Khrin* in the legal and ritual lexicons” (21 pp.), and Kazuyuki Kiryu’s “A functional analysis of adjectives in Newar” (31 pp.). Dotson’s paper addresses the question of whether the Old Tibetan term *khrin* and the word *khrims/khrim* are distinct terms or dialectal variations of each other. After examination of uses and contexts of *khrin* in eight previously translated texts and one previously untranslated text, Dotson concludes that *khrins* is not a dialectal variant of *khrims/grims* but “a separate term with a related meaning” (p. 93).

Kiryu’s paper discusses questions arising from the fact that many words in Newar have properties of both adjectives and verbs, which has led some scholars to conclude that Newar has no adjectives. His stated goal is to establish clear criteria for the classes of verb, noun and adjective in Newar and to argue for the existence of a separate category of adjectives. The bulk of the article is devoted to discussion of the morphosyntactic properties of adjectives in Newar and to the coding of thirteen types of adjectival concepts: dimension, age, value, physical properties, human propensities (characteristics), speed, difficulty, similarity, qualification (truth, (in)correctness), quantification, position, and cardinal numbers. He concludes that there are three sub-classes of adjectives (verb-like adjectives, non-verb-like adjectives, and non-predicative adjectives), which are distinct from adjectival verbs.

Part IV consists of the following articles: Ellen Bartee, “The role of animacy in the verbal morphology of Dongwang Tibetan” (50 pp.); René Huysmans, “The Sampang verbal

agreement system” (36 pp.); Khawaja A. Rehman, “Ergativity in Kundal Shahi, Kashmiri and Hindko” (15 pp.), and Bettina Zeisler, “Kenhat, the dialects of Upper Ladakh and Zanskar” (67 pp.). Barte’s paper is “the first report in which an animacy split and conjunct/disjunct patternings co-occur in the verbal morphology of a language” (p. 133). After describing the conjunct/disjunct systems in Standard Tibetan and Dongwang Tibetan, Barte presents a detailed discussion of existentials in Dongwang, where existential verbs show an animacy split which extends to situations when these existential verbs are used as auxiliaries, and is also found in other areas of the grammar. While Standard Tibetan has two existential verbs, in Dongwang there are four: *ndo* (conjunct, animate), *zɛ* (conjunct, inanimate), *ndo dz̥ iʔ* (disjunct, animate), and *zɛ dz̥ iʔ* (disjunct, inanimate). Barte argues that this animacy split is an innovation, most likely due to language contact, and that it is likely to be an areal phenomenon.

Huysmans describes the verbal templates of Sampang, a Kiranti language of the “complex pronominalizing” type, in which transitive verbs agree with both the agent and the patient. The various verbal agreement affixes derive from ancient independent pronouns. After presenting the conjugations of Sampang simplicia, involving eleven pronominal characteristics, Huysmans discusses two alternate analyses of the morpheme <*i*>: that it is (i) a non-preterite tense marker, or (ii) a marker of singular number of second or third person actants. The Sampang morphological template consists of one prefixal slot and ten suffixal slots, each of which is discussed in detail in the third section of the paper. The article concludes with a comparison of the Sampang system with those of other Kiranti languages, finding that it is especially similar to the systems of Kulung, Limbu and Lohorong.

Rehman’s paper provides a first look at the endangered Indo-Aryan language Kundal Shahi, spoken by 3,371 people in the Neelum Valley in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. In particular, the paper compares its split-ergativity with that of the Kashmiri and Hindko of the same region. This early research finds that Kundal Shahi split-ergativity is highly similar to that of most of the Indo-Aryan languages of the subcontinent. Regarding Kashmiri, Rehman notes that it does not display a DATIVE-ERGATIVE alternation correlating with volitionality contrasts, as does Hindko.

Zeisler’s article begins with suggesting a revised classification of Ladakhi dialects into historically younger but lexico-phonetically conservative Shamskat dialects and historically older but lexico-phonetically partly conservative and partly innovative Kenhat dialects. The features distinguishing the Kenhat from the Shamskat dialects are described, first situating them in their geographical settings, then turning to phonetic and morphological features, an interesting discussion of tonogenesis, and discussions of the historical fate of several morphological and case-marking features. These two dialect groups, Zeisler concludes,

reflect separate historical developments as well as different linguistic sub- and adstrates.

As with any conference proceedings volume, this book discusses a potpourri of topics. The bulk of the book consists of several specialized articles on T-B languages. The introduction, Part I, has a wider scope; and Rehman’s article will be of special interest to people interested in the Indo-Aryan, especially Dardic, languages.

*Elena Bashir is a linguist specializing in field work on the languages of north Pakistan, especially Kalasha and Khowar, and on comparative and typological issues in South Asian languages. She currently teaches Urdu at the University of Chicago (ebashir@uchicago.edu) and is working on preparation of a reference grammar of Khowar.*

## REIGNING THE RIVER: URBAN ECOLOGIES AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN KATHMANDU

BY ANNE M. RADEMACHER

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. 264 p. Ill., maps. ISBN 978-0-8223-5062-0.

REVIEWED BY KELLY D. ALLEY

What resonates after reading Anne Rademacher’s new book, *Reigning the River*, about the troubled Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers of Kathmandu is its opening story. In this, members of a local rally are walking along the banks of an urban rivulet, reflecting on the modern history of this city and its lack of good governance and river ecology. To investigate the problem of river decline from a number of perspectives, the author sets out to explore what she calls *urban ecologies* as they are played out in the capital of Kathmandu. The book walks through a turbulent twenty years of Kathmandu’s history and outlines the political crises, human settlements and resettlements, and global reaches of river restoration discourses. She orients and frames this journey by identifying three narratives of urban ecology.

Rademacher traces out the political and environmental transformations that together impact and create the degraded reaches of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. The book highlights the networks of professional activists and bureaucrats that are involved in talking about river