

[5] A Cross-linguistic Study of Bhutanese Grains

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Despite its prominent position in the eastern Himalayas, near the border of South vs. SE Asia and sandwiched between India and China, very little is known about Bhutanese prehistory. Only six of Bhutan's approximately 20 languages have been studied to any degree (Driem 1998; Andvik 2010; Hyslop 2011; Driem 1995; Genetti 2009; Driem 2007; Nishida 2009) and one pre-historical archaeological study been conducted (Meyer et al. 2009). The aim of this study is to advance our understanding of Bhutan's past through linguistic study of grains used by Bhutan's disparate ethnolinguistic groups.

The estimated (based on definitions of 'language' versus 'dialect') 20 languages indigenous to Bhutan all belong to the Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family. Dzongkha, spoken in the west, is linguistically a dialect of Tibetan. The next largest language group is Tshangla, unclassified TB, spoken in the east. East Bodish languages (linguistic 'cousins' of Tibetan) are spoken in the central and north-eastern portions of the country, bridging the gap between Dzongkha and Tshangla. 'Olekha, Gongduk and Lhokpu are other unclassified Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in small, isolated pockets in various places throughout the Kingdom.

Rice is grown and consumed by all these ethnolinguistic groups and has an increased association with prestige. Different linguistic roots are used for different stages of the paddy > cooked rice process amongst the different languages. For example, Kurtöp *ipa* refers to cooked rice while in Khengkha it refers to paddy. For 'paddy', Kurtöp and Dzongkha reflect different reflexes of the same root: Kurtöp *mräs* versus Dzongkha *bjä* while in Phobjip *sem* reflects a root not currently found elsewhere in Bhutan.

There are three different millets used in Bhutan. Foxtail millet (*Setaria italica*) is *ran* in Kurtöp, *yangre* in Khengkha and *khê* in Dzongkha. Data for four languages show four different roots for finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*): Khengkha *kongpu*, 'Olekha *kombala*, Dzongkha *mömbja*, and Kurtöp *thre*, which is presumably cognate with the Dzongkha word for *Setaria. Panicum miliaceum* in Dzongkha is *pcham*.

Other grains cultivated in Bhutan are wheat (Kurtöp *go*; Dzongkha *kâ* Phobjip *kar*), Barley (Kurtöp *nas*; Phobjip *nes*; Dzongkha *nâ*), Bitter Buckwheat (Kurtöp *brama*; Phobjip *brëm*; Dzongkha *bj'ô*), Sweet Buckwheat (Kurtöp *cara*; Dzongkha and Phobjip *gere*), and maize (Kurtöp *bachukpa*; Dzongkha and Phobjip *geza*).

The linguistic data are presented together with photographs and relevant ethnobotanical information (such as processes employed in processing). We also present the data in light of a linguistic map of the country, allowing the researchers to make better inferences about the linguistic relationship of the lexical roots and (as opposed to?) the actual development of cultivation of each grain throughout the region.

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