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## Newar-Thangmi Lexical Correspondences and the Linguistic Classification of Thangmi

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Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language of two mutually unintelligible dialects spoken by upwards of 30,000 people inhabiting the districts of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok in central-eastern Nepal. The Thangmi language occupies a half-way house between a canonical Kiranti-style verbal agreement system and that of the less inflecting Tibeto-Burman languages.

Drawing on manuscript sources and recently compiled dictionaries, this article is devoted to an analysis of the linguistic evidence for and against a Newar-Thangmi link, together with a historical evaluation of the competing theories suggesting a close genetic relationship. Thangmi has numeral classifiers (not a common feature among the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal) which are largely cognate with the numeral classifiers used in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. There are also over seventy lexical correspondences which appear to be cognate between Thangmi and Newar which are not attested in other extant Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal.

Two key questions emerge. First, are the Thangmi and Newar languages close genetic relatives? Second, if not, how can the range of lexical correspondences between the two languages best be explained, and in which direction did the borrowing take place?

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**Keywords:** Newari, Thami, Nepal, Tibeto-Burman, Linguistics

## 1. Introduction

Over the past six years, in conference papers and publications, I have demonstrated that Thangmi occupies a half-way house between a canonical Kiranti-style verbal agreement system and that of the less inflecting Tibeto-Burman languages. Moreover, I have provided evidence that Thangmi has numeral classifiers (not a common feature among the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal) which are largely cognate with the numeral classifiers used in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. During my research, two key questions have emerged. First, are the Thangmi and Newar languages close genetic relatives? Second, if we argue against a close genetic relationship, how can we best explain the range of lexical similarities between the two languages, and in which direction did this borrowing take place?

The present article is a much-revised version of Turin (2000) with two notable differences. First, a number of typographical errors were mistakenly introduced into the earlier article by the editors of the journal. As a direct result of these mistakes, many of the facts and arguments I presented were no longer coherent.<sup>1</sup> Since then, colleagues have urged me to republish the article in its correct form to offer both the data and my conclusions in their original light. The second motivation for reworking the earlier article stems from the recent publication of the *Dictionary of Classical Newari* by the Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee in September, 2000, and James A. Matisoff's immediately definitive *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman* in 2003. The *Dictionary of Classical Newari*, edited by Kamal Prakash Malla and colleagues, marks a genuine watershed for scholars working on the Newar language and culture. Compiled from manuscript sources, the 530-page collection is a mine of information on the lexicon and grammar of what the editors call "Classical Newari". In light of entries in this new dictionary, I have modified, and at once extended, my proposed list of Newar-Thangmi lexical similarities. Matisoff's *Handbook*, on the other hand, provides an excellent index of proto-forms and proto-glosses to facilitate lexical comparison. The remainder of this article is thus devoted to an analysis of the linguistic evidence for and against a close Newar-Thangmi link, together with a historical evaluation of the competing theories suggesting a close genetic relationship.

## 2. Early classifications of Thangmi within the Tibeto-Burman language family

Thangmi is a Tibeto-Burman language of two mutually unintelligible dialects spoken by upwards of 30,000 people inhabiting the districts of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok in central-eastern Nepal.<sup>2</sup> While anthropologists have paid little attention to the

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- 1) Of the 41 key lexical similarities that I proposed were shared by only Newar and Thangmi, eight were misspelled so significantly that it was no longer clear how these words might have been cognate with one another.
- 2) The Nepali name for this ethnic group and their language is *Thāmī*, an Aryan-inspired term ↗

Thangmi in their ethnographic accounts of Nepal, the same should not be said for linguists. Since the birth of Tibeto-Burman linguistics, scholars have been intrigued by the genetic position of the Thangmi language. The three-page grammatical description of Thangmi (then referred to as ‘Thāmi’) in the *Linguistic Survey of India* compiled by George Abraham Grierson does not begin auspiciously:

The Thāmis have formerly been considered to speak the same dialect as the Sunwārs. During the preparatory operations of this Survey the two dialects were confounded in Darjeeling, and separate returns were only made from Sikkim. (1909: 280)

Sten Konow, the author of this passage, concludes his introduction on a more promising note when he states that Thangmi is actually ‘quite distinct from Sunwār’, and that despite being ‘much influenced by Aryan dialects’, it appears to be ‘a dialect of the same kind as Dhīmāl, Yākhā, Limbu, etc.’ (1909: 280). This description appears in Volume III, Part I of Grierson’s *Survey*, in a section entitled ‘Eastern Pronominalized Languages’. The Thangmi language was then classified alongside Barām (then referred to as ‘Bhrāmu’) as forming an ‘Eastern Subgroup’ of the ‘Complex Pronominalizing’ branch of ‘Himalayan Languages’ within the ‘Tibeto-Burman’ language family (1927, Vol. I, Part I: 58). Konow based his putative classification on word lists collected by Brian Houghton Hodgson half a century earlier, specimens of which he provided in the publication. Hodgson himself had recorded these languages as ‘Thāmi’ and ‘Bhrāmú’ respectively, although in the present context, ‘Thangmi’ and ‘Barām’ are more ethnolinguistically appropriate terms.<sup>3)</sup>

The words and phrases presented in Konow’s list were collected from Thangmi speakers in Darjeeling and make for interesting reading. The lexical items are considerably influenced by the Nepali language, as one might expect from linguistic data collected in the tea estates of north-east India where indigenous tongues were soon jettisoned in favour of Nepali, the *Verkehrssprache* or vehicular ‘language of commerce’. It is revealing that Thangmi words and phrases recorded in Darjeeling almost 150 years ago show a greater degree of Nepalification than contemporary Thangmi spoken in the Nepali districts of Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok.

In his *Introduction to Sino-Tibetan*, Robert Shafer adds his support to the Grierson-Konow proposition of a close genetic relationship between Thangmi and Barām by placing them together in the ‘Eastern Branch’ of the ‘West Himalayish Section’ of the

↗ which the Thangmi themselves are eager to shake off. Culturally-active members of the Thangmi community request that they be referred to as ‘Thangmi’ and not ‘Thami’.

3) According to George van Driem, the Barām call their language *Bāl Kurā*, the ‘language of the people’, in which *kurā* is Nepali for ‘language’ and *bāl* is Barām for ‘people, person, somebody’. While the term *Barāmu* is allegedly still known to a few elderly non-Barām Nepali-speakers, the Barām themselves universally reject both *Barāmu* and ‘Bhrāmú’, and insist on the use of the term Barām in Nepali to describe the group and their language (van Driem 2001: 766).

‘Bodic Division’ of ‘Sino-Tibetan’ (1974: 145). Following Shafer’s classification, Thangmi and Barām would therefore also be close relatives of other West Himalayish languages such as Byangsi, Manchad and Zhangzhung. Shafer admits that this classification is ‘tentative’, but is in no doubt that ‘Thami and Bhramu are closely related’ (1974: 145). Regarding their affinity to other West Himalayish languages, Shafer is similarly cautious: ‘From the limited vocabularies of them one can only say that they are here placed in West Himalayish because they appear to be closer to that group than [sic] to any other’ (1974: 3). While the empirical basis for Shafer’s hypotheses was scanty, his belief in a close linguistic relationship between Thangmi and Barām has been of more lasting interest than his classification of these two languages as West Himalayish.

Shafer posited nine lexical similarities shared by Thangmi and Barām which he believed indicated a degree of close genetic relationship (1966: 128). These nine lexical items are given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Shafer’s Proposed lexical similarities**

Thami	Bhrámú	English
<i>di-ware</i>	<i>dé</i>	one
<i>nis</i>	<i>ni</i>	two
<i>u-ni</i>	<i>u-ní</i>	sun
<i>tśala</i>	<i>chala-wani</i>	moon
<i>nem</i>	<i>nam</i>	house
<i>su-wa</i>	<i>s-wá</i>	tooth
<i>tśiya</i>	<i>chá</i>	cat
<i>ku-lna</i>	<i>ká-pá</i>	ear
<i>ka-pu</i>	<i>ká-pá</i>	head

Of the nine lexical correspondences, seven may now be discounted since they are either widely attested in other languages or easily reconstructed to Proto-Tibeto-Burman forms, leaving only two possible words supporting a special link between Thangmi and Barām. The comparative evidence is as follows: the Barām and Thangmi words for ‘one’ seem to derive from the Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *\*t(y)ik* ‘one’ (Benedict 1972: 94) or *\*tyak* ~ *\*g-t(y)ik* ‘one, only’ (Matisoff 2003: 616), while the words for ‘two’ in both languages are also reflexes of the widely-attested Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *\*g-ni-s* (Benedict 1972: 16) or *\*ʔ-nit* ~ *\*ni* and *\*g/s-ni-s* ‘two’ (Matisoff 2003: 604). Consequently, the words ‘one’ and ‘two’ only serve to indicate the already indisputably Tibeto-Burman nature of Barām and Thangmi, and do not indicate any special relationship between the two languages. Likewise, where Shafer suggests that Barām *s-wá* ‘tooth’ and Thangmi *su-wa* ‘tooth’ are unusual forms, both can be recon-

structed to the Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *\*s-wa* ‘tooth’ (Benedict 1972: 106) or *\*swa* ‘tooth’ (Matisoff 2003: 604), and Barām *chá* ‘eat’ and Thangmi *tšiya* ‘eat’ are similarly reflexes of the common Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *\*dza* ‘eat’ (1972: 28) and *\*dzya* ‘eat’ (Matisoff 2003: 648). When Shafer suggests that Barām *ká-pá* ‘head, ear’ and Thangmi *ka-pu* ‘head’ are unique, he was unaware of the Nepali form *kapāl* ‘head, hair’ and the Kusuvār form *ká-pá* ‘head’. Even in the little known language of Thochú, the form *kapat* ‘head’ has been attested (Hodgson 1880: pull-out section containing the *Comparative Vocabulary of the languages of Hôr Sôkyeul and Sifán*). It seems more plausible to suggest that the words for ‘head’ in both languages are Indo-Aryan loans rather than arguing for a separate lexicogenesis. Finally, the Thulung word *nem* ‘house, dwelling place’ (Allen 1975: 224) is cognate with Thangmi *nem* and Barām *nam*, both meaning ‘house’. All that remain are two lexical correspondences, Barām *u-ní* and Thangmi *u-ni* meaning ‘sun’ (perhaps both derived from *\*nəy* ‘sun, day’ as noted by Matisoff (2003: 604)), and Barām *chala-wani* and Thangmi *tsala* meaning ‘moon’ (both likely cognate with *\*s/g-la* ‘moon, month’ as reconstructed by Matisoff (2003: 599)). Some of the above data were carefully summarised by the Leiden linguist Arno Loeffen (1995), who reached the conclusion that Shafer’s evidence for grouping Thangmi and Barām together is at best based on two lexical isoglosses showing a specific phonological innovation.

Despite the paucity of empirical data for his classification, it appears from more recent research that Shafer’s suspicion of a special relationship between the two languages may indeed be correct. The two proposed lexical isoglosses shared by Thangmi and Barām are now further supported by numerous morphological correspondences, particularly in the realm of verbal agreement affixes (van Driem, forthcoming). While the Barām system of verbal agreement has all but decayed, the verbal morphology of Thangmi is complex and reminiscent of the Kiranti model. The completeness of the Thangmi verbal paradigm thus provides an insight into the degenerated Barām agreement system.

Six years after the publication of Shafer’s *Introduction to Sino-Tibetan*, Paul King Benedict’s *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus* was published. In this classic work, Thangmi and Barām are passed over without specific mention and are classified as belonging to what Benedict labels a ‘Himalayish’ grouping within ‘Tibetan-Kanauri’ (1972: 7).<sup>4</sup> More important to the present discussion than the virtual absence of Thangmi and Barām, however, is Benedict’s suggestion that although the Newar language could not be ‘directly grouped with Bahing and Vayu [now Hayu]’ (1972: 5–6), it nevertheless showed ‘interesting lexical agreements’ with them, and ‘might be regarded as a Bodish-Bahing link’ (1972: 8). The ambiguous position of Newar within Tibeto-Burman had also been noted by Shafer, who rejected Konow’s typological classification of the

4) In his *Handbook*, Matisoff intriguingly suggests that ‘Thami’ is part of the Chin subgroup (2003: 702).

language as ‘non-pronominalised’, but remained unsure of its genetic position.<sup>5)</sup> The seeds of doubt shared by Shafer and Benedict about the Newar-Kiranti link would lie dormant for some twenty years before George van Driem’s *Mahākīrānti* hypothesis.<sup>6)</sup>

### 3. Cultural interdependence between the Newar of Dolakhā and the Thangmi

The Thangmi and Newar populations of the Dolakhā area have been in close cultural contact for some time. The Thangmi origin story features a Newar king who first imprisons a Thangmi man and then later impregnates a Thangmi woman story (for more details, see Turin, 1999, and Shneiderman & Turin, 2000). One male Thangmi clan, known as *roimirati* or *roimijati* (from Thangmi *roimi*, ‘Newar’ and Nepali *jāt*, ‘caste, ethnic group’) reckons its descent directly from this Newar-Thangmi liaison. The indigenous explanation of how the Thangmi ethnic group came to have a Newar clan is described at length in an earlier article, so suffice it to say that the original *roimirati* brothers are widely believed to have been fathered by a Newar king.

The brief description above demonstrates that the Thangmi have incorporated the Newar into their own socio-cultural world. Such an adaptation would be expected from a low-status ethnic group coming into contact with a regionally-dominant culture, in this case, the Newar. There are, however, many examples of the more surprising reverse situation in which the Thangmi have been incorporated into the Newar social paradigm. The most notable of these inclusions is the key role that Thangmi play in festivals celebrated by the Newar in the bazaar town of Dolakhā. These calendrical festivals, such as *khadgajātrā*, the ‘Sword Festival’ held on the eleventh day of *Mohanī* (Nepali *dasāī*), and *matsyendranāthjātrā* are explicitly Newar events which are also celebrated in other Newar-dominant areas, such as the Kathmandu valley. For the Newar of Dolakhā, active participation in certain of their rituals by specific members of the surrounding Thangmi community is obligatory. Should the Thangmi fail to perform their duties, or worse still, not come at all, then the Newar festival is effectively cancelled.

While the precise details of the Newar-Thangmi socio-ritual relationship outlined above are beyond the scope of the present article, there are two particularly salient features of this cultural interdependence worth noting here. First, ritual offerings and implements must be assembled to exact specifications by Thangmi villagers, and only then are they brought to Dolakhā. Second, Thangmi shamans and laymen have a rit-

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5) Shafer wrote: ‘From the limited number of comparisons brought together here one may tentatively say that Newarish (Newari and Pahari) is probably neither Baric nor Karenic, but somewhat intermediate between Bodic and Burmic; that is, its ties are with languages to the north (Tibet) and the east (Burma and the Indo-Burmese frontier) rather than with Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam’ (1952: 93)

6) In the intervening years, Scott DeLancey described an ‘Eastern Himalayan’ grouping, which would include ‘the Kiranti languages and others in eastern Nepal; probably also Newari’ (1989: 321).



ual role in festivals otherwise wholly officiated by Newar priests. These roles are played by Thangmi from specific villages: the *devikoṭ* and *khaḍgajātrā* duties are performed exclusively by Thangmi from the village of Dumkoṭ, while the *matsyendranāthjātrā* involves only Thangmi from the village of Lāpīlān. Such a division by village may suggest that these ritual duties originated as a form of taxation on the Thangmi by the local Newar rulers. At any rate, the Newar of Dolakhā view the presence of the Thangmi as essential to the efficacy of their rituals and festivals. Casper Miller describes in detail the happenings that led to the Thangmi villagers' refusal to play their part in the *devikoṭjātrā* of 1912 AD (1997: 89–93), an event which is remembered and discussed to this day.

#### 4. Before and after Mahākirānti

At the 13<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of Nepal, George van Driem advanced his *Mahākirānti* or 'greater Kiranti' theory: a 'hypothetical genetic unit' including Kiranti and Newar (1992: 246).<sup>7)</sup> While his idea attracted both immediate attention and criticism, van Driem continued to refine his thinking as new linguistic data (specifically on Thangmi and Barām) came to light. In 2001, van Driem redefined the Mahākirānti group as consisting of 'the Kiranti languages proper and...the Newaric languages Newar, Barām and Thangmi. The set of languages which are related to Mahakiranti...includes Lepcha, Lhokpu and the Magaric languages' (2001: 591).<sup>8)</sup> In *Languages of the Himalayas*, van Driem sets out the implications of his idea:

the linguistic ancestors of modern Mahakiranti groups and of Bodic language communities, which appear to be closer to Mahakiranti than to Bodish, peopled the Himalayas from the east and form a cluster of languages connected not only by shared geographical provenance but perhaps also related by more intimate genetic association and shared prehistorical contact situations. (2001: 590–591)

But what evidence does van Driem provide for the existence of Mahākirānti? Dismissing lexical data as merely 'suggestive' and inadequate for 'systematic comparison to yield decisive evidence' (2003: 23), van Driem has stressed that the comparison of inflexional morphology provides evidence of a 'highly sound and compelling kind' (1992: 246). The morphological evidence of the Kiranti-Newar genetic link comes from Dolakhā Newar, the 'most divergent...dialect of the language' (van Driem 2001: 759) spoken in and around Dolakhā, an ancient Newar settlement and trading post 'dating back perhaps as far as the Licchavī period [circa 300–879 A.D.]' (2001: 759). The verbal agreement system of Dolakhā Newar is cognate with the conjugational

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7) It is fitting to point out at this juncture that the term of choice in English for both the indigenous people and language of the Kathmandu valley is 'Newar', and emphatically not the Aryan-inspired 'Newari', which is considered offensive to contemporary Newar sensibilities.



morphology attested in Kiranti languages: verbs in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar agree for person and number with the intransitive subject and transitive agent in all tenses. Not only is the structure of Dolakhā Newar verbal morphology reminiscent of the Kiranti model, but Dolakhā also appears to be one of the more archaic and conservative of the extant Newar dialects. Van Driem makes this point succinctly:

Classical Kathmandu Newar...retains vestiges of a verbal agreement system like that of Dolakhā Newar. Therefore, the Classical Newar system is likely to derive from a more complete verbal agreement system, and the Dolakhā Newar verb probably represents a more faithful reflexion of this Proto-Newar system. (2001: 764)

More specifically, however, the Dolakhā dialect of Newar shares an important morphological trait with Thangmi and the Kiranti languages. In Dolakhā Newar, the morpheme <-u>, indexing third person future (3/FUT), is a verbal agreement suffix and also a reflex of the Tibeto-Burman proto-morpheme \*<-u>. More specifically, the <-u> suffix in Dolakhā Newar denotes the involvement of a third person actant in the syntactic role of patient, a meaning also found in Thangmi and the Kiranti languages proper. As van Driem writes elsewhere:

The third person proto-morpheme \*<-u> is ubiquitously reflected in Tibeto-Burman...In the Himalayas, these reflexes are all suffixes, and, in Kiranti languages, they all denote third person *patient* involvement. The Dolakha data likewise reflect third person patient marking: The vestigial suffix <-u> in the negative indicative, singular imperative and singular optative of r-stem verbs is clearly associated with grammatical patient marking, as it occurs only after transitive verbs. Similarly, in the past indicative, third singular subject is indexed by the suffix <-a> in intransitive verbs, but by <-u> in transitive verbs. (1993b: 36–37)

While acknowledging that verbal morphology constitutes only ‘one type of evidence which has yet to be corroborated by regular lexical and phonological correspondences’ (1992: 246), van Driem sees the morphological evidence for the antiquity of the Dolakhā system as ‘decisive because in comparative linguistics conjugational agreement endings such as Dolakhā Newar \*<-u> or the third person singular ending <-s> in the English present tense are precisely the type of elements...which are inherited, not borrowed’ (2001: 764–765).<sup>9)</sup>

8) That Magaric languages may be genetic relatives of Mahākirānti is an interesting proposition. A different interpretation is offered by the Newar linguist, Tej Ratna Kansakar, who places Thangmi in a so-called ‘Magar Group’ of languages as distinct from ‘Kirantish Languages’ (1993: 167).

9) It is prudent to note that flexional morphology is the heart of the inherited portion of any ↗

While reactions to the Mahākīrāntī hypothesis have been mixed, the strongest reaction against the proposed grouping came not from Western linguists, but from academics and laypeople within the Newar community. Van Driem describes their resistance as ‘inherently suspect’ (2001: 599), pointing out that their unwillingness to accept the Mahākīrāntī hypothesis stems from the social exclusivity of the Newar community. Van Driem is, however, careful to acknowledge that while the communities may be linguistically related, in a ‘cultural sense these language communities could not be more different’ (2001: 599), and he points to the gulf in the socio-cultural worlds between the different Mahākīrāntī groups:

The Newars have for centuries had an advanced metropolitan culture, and, though they are linguistically Tibeto-Burmans, the Newars cultivated their own flourishing Sanskrit literary tradition. By contrast, the Kiranti, i.e. Rais and Limbus, were rural agriculturalists of the eastern hills, whereas the Barām and the Thangmi have remained amongst the socio-economically most disadvantaged groups of central Nepal. (2001: 599)

After a linguistic field trip to Bhutan in 2001, however, van Driem began to reconsider his Mahākīrāntī hypothesis. While in Bhutan, he collected data on the Gongduk language, particularly on its conjugational morphology and biactantial agreement system which contains reflexes of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman third person patient morpheme \*<-u> (3/P).<sup>10</sup> On analysing the data, van Driem realised that:

the two specific morphological traits shared between Newar and Kiranti are not unique to Newar and Kiranti, but would appear to be the shared retention of a far older trait of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system. Nothing else about Gongduk suggests any immediate affinity with either Newar or Kiranti within Tibeto-Burman. Therefore, the narrow but morphologically highly specific empirical basis for entertaining the Mahakiranti hypothesis no longer exists. (2003: 23–24)

In the conclusion to this article, van Driem suggests that while he no longer entertains the Mahākīrāntī hypothesis, the ‘case for Newaric or *Mahānevārī* has grown’ (2003: 25), and he proposes that Thangmi and Barām ‘together form a coherent subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman family’ (2003: 24). Accordingly, the linguistic relationship between the Newaric languages (Newar, Thangmi and Barām) antedates ‘by a large

↗ language, and genetic relationships between Indo-European languages had been firmly established on morphological grounds long before sound laws were discovered.

10) Van Driem draws attention to the Gongduk portmanteau suffix <-uŋi ~ -oŋe> (1→3) when compared with the first person subject morphemes <-yŋi> and <-yŋi>, and to the Gongduk portmanteau suffix <-uri ~ -ore> (2p→3) when compared with the second person plural subject morpheme <-ire> (2003: 23).

margin the rise of the great Newar urban civilisation in the Kathmandu Valley, let alone the much later emergence in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century of the political entity of the kingdom of Nepal' (van Driem 2001: 599).<sup>11</sup> In section §5.3.3 below, I present a number of specific lexical isoglosses which support the antiquity of the proposed Newar-Thangmi link.

## 5. Thangmi-Newar lexical correspondences and the case for Newaric

### 5.1. Shared numeral classifiers

Following the clues suggesting a special relationship between Thangmi and Newar outlined in the first incarnation of the Mahākīrāntī hypothesis, I pursued the evidence for the proposed genetic link further. Supporting data came from the unlikely corner of a common set of numeral classifiers shared by the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi and the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. A brief word about numeral classifiers in Tibeto-Burman languages will serve as a suitable point of departure here.

Aside from the well-attested case of Newar, few of Nepal's Tibeto-Burman languages show any sign of having an involved numeral classifier system. A number of Kiranti languages do show remnants of classificatory systems, however, the best known instance of which comes from the pioneering study of Thulung by the Oxford-based anthropologist Nicholas Allen. Allen reports that in 19<sup>th</sup> century Thulung, as studied by Hodgson, 'countable nouns fell into classes defined by classifier particles associated with numerals' (1975: 113). Allen isolated six classifying particles (CLF) for Thulung: <-bop> meaning 'round objects' (or 'rounds' in Hodgson's notes), as in *ko bop miksi* (one CLF eye) 'one eye'; <-seol> meaning 'elongated object' as in *ko seol khel* (one CLF leg) 'one leg'; <-phe> meaning 'flat object' as in *ko phe nophla* (one CLF ear) 'one ear'; <-wan> meaning 'hollow circular object'; <-phu> meaning 'growing things, trees' and <-si> meaning 'holes, roads'. Allen goes on to describe what he calls significant 'variability' in the choice of particle, adding that this might indicate that 'the classifier system was beginning to break down' even in Hodgson's time (1975: 113–115).

More recent evidence of numeral classifiers present in extant Kiranti languages has been collected by members of the Himalayan Languages Project of Leiden University, corroborating Hodgson's early findings. For example, Joyce van Hoorn documents the numeral 'three' as *sumbo?* in Chiling (personal communication), a fusion of the Tibeto-Burman numeral *sum* 'three' and a numeral classifier *bo?*, most likely cognate with Thulung <-bop> meaning 'round objects'. Similarly in Sāmpāng, another Kiranti language, *i-bo* 'one' is made up of the numeral *i* 'one' and the classifier <-bo>, once again cognate with Thulung <-bop> meaning 'round objects' (René Huysmans, personal communication). Dumi also attests a numeral classifier cognate with Thu-

11) For a list of major Newar settlements which are believed to date back to the Kiranti period, see van Driem (2001: 732).

lung <-bop>, in *mu-bo* ‘six’, segmented by van Driem as *mu* ‘six’ and the classifier <-bo> (1993a: 87–89). While interesting for comparative and historical reasons, however, these Kiranti classifiers have little in common with those attested for Thangmi or Newar.

Newar numeral classifiers, on the other hand, have received considerable attention from linguists of Tibeto-Burman languages and beyond.<sup>12)</sup> A full discussion of the scholarship on this feature of Newar grammar is beyond the scope of the present discussion. In the following paragraphs, attention is focussed on the set of classifiers apparently cognate between Newar and Thangmi.

In her descriptive and historical account of the Dolakhā dialect of Newar, Carol Genetti notes that numerals are ‘always followed directly by numeral classifiers’ and then describes ten classifiers which ‘are not used with any other nominal modification besides numerals’ (1994: 68). In Dolakhā Newar, she writes, numerals are ‘always followed directly by numeral classifiers’ (1994: 68). Seven of these classifiers appear to be cognate with Thangmi numeral classifiers or nouns that I have collected from the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi. In each case, the Newar and Thangmi classifiers are similar in both form and function.

The Thangmi noun *dan* ‘year’ from the Sindhupālcok dialect is likely cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-da> ‘years’ (Genetti 1994: 69), and the Thangmi classifier <-paṭe> ‘clothes, bamboo mats’ is probably cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pta> ‘clothes (vests, pants, rugs, shirts, raincoats)’ (Genetti, personal communication). The Thangmi classifier <-pur> ‘branches, trees, long things’ may well be cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pu> ‘hairs, bananas, ropes, necklaces, garlands, tongues, branches, sticks, brooms, pens’ (Genetti 1994: 69), and the Thangmi classifier <-pa> ‘leaves, paper, thin or flat things’ may be cognate with either the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pat> ‘leaves, pieces of paper, silver leaf’ (Genetti 1994: 69) or the classifier <-pā> ‘fingers, knives, legs, arms, wings, ears’ (Genetti 1994: 68).<sup>13)</sup> Finally, the Thangmi numeral classifier <-gore> ‘houses, general things’ may be cognate with either the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-gar> ‘eggs, rice, rocks, noses, apples, balls, houses, stars, autos’ (Genetti 1994: 68) or the classifier <-gur> ‘(general classifier)’ (Genetti 1994: 69). The above examples provide powerful evidence of lexical similarities between the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi and the Dolakhā dialect of Newar. Three further Thangmi numeral classifiers have no obvious cognates in Newar, and concomitantly, the five remaining classifiers present in Dolakhā Newar are not found in Thangmi.<sup>14)</sup>

12) I refer the reader to Austin Hale and Iswaranda Shresthacarya (1973) and Peri Bhaskararao and S. K. Joshi (1985).

13) According to Dörte Borchers, the Sunwar language (also known as Koīnts) has a numeral classifier <-pa>, as in *nim-pa koel* (two-CLF leg) ‘two legs’ (personal communication). This may well be cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-pā> ‘fingers, knives, legs, arms, wings, ears’ described above.

14) There are only two numeral classifiers attested in the Dolakhā dialect of Thangmi: <-gore> ↗

All Thangmi numeral classifiers are grammaticalised forms with no clear derivation from any related Thangmi nominal lexeme, apart from the classifier for human referents <-kapu>, which is also the Thangmi noun for ‘head’. The similarity between the Dolakhā Newar numeral classifiers and those found in the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi are striking, and leaves open the question of whether these forms are borrowed or whether they reflect a close genetic relationship between the two languages.<sup>15)</sup> If the numeral classifiers are borrowed, which direction the borrowing took place remains unresolved. The Thangmi forms may be the more archaic as two of the Thangmi classifiers are disyllabic whereas their Newar counterpart are monosyllables: Thangmi <-gore> and <-paṭe> versus Newar <-gar ~ -gur> and <-pta>. If the Thangmi classifiers were borrowed from Newar, then the suffixation of a velar nasal [ŋ] in the Thangmi classifier for ‘years’ <-daŋ> to the original Newar classifier <-da> ‘years’, and the presence of a trill [r] at the coda of the Thangmi classifier <-pur> are also difficult to explain.

Numeral classifiers are used to enumerate things in trade relations, and there is significant evidence of social and economic contact between the Thangmi and Newar groups as outlined above in section §3, which may provide an argument for suggesting that these are borrowed forms. Whether the shared classifiers can be used to argue for a close genetic relationship between the two languages or whether these impressive lexical similarities are merely a sign of intensive borrowing between Thangmi and Newar remains a central question.

## 5.2. The changing face of the Classical Newar language

Pursuing the idea of the alleged Thangmi-Newar link still further, I searched through lexical lists and dictionaries of contemporary and Classical Newar in search of possible correspondences. As this section illustrates, my findings add weight to the suggestion that when taken together, Newar, Thangmi and also Barām, form the higher-level grouping of Newaric.

The time depth of the Classical Newar language has long been debated, as has its variational breadth. The controversy can be traced back at least as far as Hans Jørgensen, who described Classical Newar as simply ‘the language of the MSS [manuscript]’ (1936: 3). Five years later, in the *Preface* to his grammar of the language, he

↗ for ‘non-human’ and <-ka> for ‘human’. While Thangmi <-gore> ‘non-human’ is likely to be cognate with the Dolakhā Newar classifier <-gur> ‘general classifier’, Thangmi <-ka> ‘human’ appears to have no cognates in Newar. The ‘human’ versus ‘non-human’ distinction is more reminiscent of Hayu, which has classifiers <-pu> for ‘human’ and <-uŋ> for ‘non-human’ (Michailovsky 1988: 123).

15) Quite why and how numeral classifiers attested in the Dolakhā dialect of Newar should have cognates in the Sindhupālcok dialect of Thangmi rather than the geographically closer Thangmi dialect spoken in Dolakhā remains unexplained. It is, however, possible that these classifiers were once also present in the Dolakhā dialect of Thangmi but are now no longer remembered, and are retained only in the Sindhupālcok dialect. This issue certainly warrants further exploration.

noted the explicitly ‘historical’ nature of Newar: ‘since the manuscripts, on which it is based, range from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, and the natural changes in the language during this period have to some extent been reflected in them’ (1941: 3). The editors of the recently published *Dictionary of Classical Newari* are well aware of the implications and make their position extremely clear. In the *Introduction*, they state:

All we know at this stage is that Classical Newari is not a single homogenous monolithic stage nor a variety, dialect or stylistic label. (Malla *et al.* 2000: vii)

‘Classical Newari’ is thus an umbrella term to describe the older forms of the language used in the 96 manuscript sources consulted for the dictionary, the chronological span of which ranges from 1115 A.D. to 1900 A.D. The editors reiterate their point by precluding comparisons between ‘Classical Newari’ and features of other so-called ‘Classical’ languages, such as Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic. As they see it, ‘Classical Newari’ is little more than a convenient term used to separate a range of older Newar language varieties from Colloquial Newari (2000: viii).

This view is not shared by the Newar scholar Kashinath Tamot (*Kāśīnāth Tamot*). Tamot believes that the existing linguistic divergences are more than ‘mere spatial variations—variations of individual dialects, (social/regional) or evidence of diaglossia [sic] (high style/low style)’ (Malla *et al.* 2000: viii). According to Tamot, there are ‘at least two stages of Classical Newari, i.e., Early and Late...This is approximately equivalent to the division of Nepal’s history into Early (879–1482) and Late (1482–1768) Medieval periods’ (2002: 13). Tamot is quick to point out the linguistic implications of this argument: Jørgensen’s dictionary would now only cover the Late Classical and Early Modern periods of the Newar language (from 1675 A.D. to 1859 A.D.). Tamot suggests that Early Classical Newar exhibits pre-Aryan features which were replaced by Sanskritic vocabulary in the Late Classical and Early Modern periods. Professor Kamal Prakāś Malla, Chief Editor and Project Leader of the *Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee*, is palpably non-plussed by this theory and others of what he refers to as ‘Tamot’s hobby-horses’ (Malla *et al.* 2000: iv).<sup>16)</sup>

At the 9<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies in June, 2000, Kashinath Tamot presented a paper entitled ‘Some characteristics of the Tibeto-Burman stock of Early Classical Newari’. I was interested to find cognates between Thangmi as spoken to this day in Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok and certain ‘Early Classical Newar’ words, lexical items which were replaced by Sanskritic loans in Late Classical Newar.<sup>17)</sup> Subsequently, Tamot and I realised that a number of Thangmi ritual words for body parts closely resemble Classical Newar forms, a discovery which lends

16) Sadly, this important lexicographical project on the Newar language was not without its tensions and disagreements. Malla writes of ‘unexpected and unhappy turns’ (2000: iii), which included the resignation of Kashinath Tamot, the Chief Compiler of the project.

17) Now published as an article with the same title, see Tamot (2002).



further credence to the proposed closeness of the Newar and Thangmi peoples and their languages. In the following sections, I present an overview of the lexical similarities between Thangmi and Classical Newar.

### 5.3. Three classes of Thangmi and Classical Newar lexical correspondences

Lexical items shared by Thangmi and Classical Newar fall into three categories. The first, and also the least spectacular, are words which are well-attested reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman roots found across the genetically-related languages of Nepal and the higher Himalayas. That Thangmi and Classical Newar share these words does little more than reconfirm their membership in the Tibeto-Burman language family. The second class of shared items are Indo-Aryan loan words which have entered both Thangmi and Classical Newar. While many of the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal are considerably influenced by Indic, the Newar are the sole Tibeto-Burman people to have adopted both a Sanskrit literary tradition as well as a version of the Indo-Aryan caste system, a result of which is a heavily Sanskritised lexicon. The most likely explanation for these shared Indic loans is that one of the two languages loaned words from Sanskrit which were then, at a later date, borrowed by the other. Another possibility is that both Thangmi and Classical Newar were in contact with the same Indic language, perhaps even at approximately the same time. At any rate, as can be seen from the examples below, there are a number of shared Indic loans for words where one might have expected to find a non-loaned and native Tibeto-Burman form. The third and final class of lexical items shared by Thangmi and Classical Newar is by far the most interesting. This category consists of the numerous correspondences between the two languages, few (if any) of which are attested in other Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayan region.

A brief disclaimer at this point would be prudent: Tibeto-Burman historical linguistics is still in its infancy in comparison with the depth of comparative and historical scholarship which exists for Indo-European languages.<sup>18)</sup> It is likely that some of the lexical items I include in the proposed list of those shared by only Thangmi and Classical Newar will prove, over time, to be reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman roots or cognate with elements found in other extant Himalayan languages.

The data are presented according to the three categories outlined above. Following each citation of a proto-Tibeto-Burman form or Classical Newar word, its provenance is indicated by brackets with the following abbreviations: (B) for Benedict's *Sino-Tibetan*, (J) for Jørgensen's *Dictionary of the Classical Newāri*, and (NB) for the Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee's recent *Dictionary of Classical Newari*. Matisoff's recent *Handbook* builds on, and further develops, many of Benedict's early proto-forms, and I refer to these reconstructions in the forthcoming sections when cognates or reflexes are apparent. I refer interested readers to a helpful index of reconstructed

18) James Matisoff writes of the 'present imperfect state of TB [Tibeto-Burman] historical phonology' (2000: 368).



proto-forms available on the STEDT project website at: <<http://stedt.berkeley.edu/data/HPTBEtymav1.html>>.

### 5.3.1. Shared common reflexes of Tibeto-Burman

In this section, I present the list of Thangmi and Classical Newar words which are reflexes of well-attested Proto-Tibeto-Burman forms, or clearly cognate with lexical items in other extant Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayas.

The reflexes of common Tibeto-Burman proto-forms include body parts, animals, food stuffs and verb roots. Reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*s-wa ‘tooth’ (B) are Thangmi *suwa* ‘tooth’ and Classical Newar *wā* ‘tooth’ (J); reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*kliy ‘excrement’ (B) are Thangmi *kli* ‘excrement’ and Classical Newar *khi* ‘excrements’ (J) and *khi* ‘faeces’ (NB); \*(g-)yak ‘armpit’ (B) has reflexes *yakho* ‘armpit’ in Thangmi and *yāko* ‘armpit’ (J) in Classical Newar; Thangmi *nyu* ~ *nyu* ~ *nyi* ‘brain’ and Classical Newar *hni-pu* ‘brain’ (J) and *nhipu* ‘brain’ (NB) are cognate with Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*nuk ‘brain’ (B); Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*r-mi(y) ‘man’ has reflexes *mi* ‘person, man’ in Thangmi and *mim* ‘man’ in Classical Newar (NB); Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*r-sa ‘vein’ (B) has reflexes *sasa* ‘vein, tendon’ in Thangmi and *śaśa* ‘sinews, vein’ in Classical Newar (NB); Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*sya=śa ‘meat’ (B) has reflexes in both Thangmi and Newar indicating bovines, since these were once eaten by Newars (and still are eaten by the Thangmi): *sya* ~ *shya* ‘cow’ in Thangmi and *śā* ‘cow’ in Classical Newar (NB). The related forms *syaca* ‘calf’ in Thangmi and *sacā* ‘calf’ in Classical Newar (NB) are derived from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*sya=śa ‘meat’ (B) and \*tsa ‘child’ (B) respectively. Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*s-rik=śrik ‘louse’ (B) has reflexes *sirik* ‘louse’ in Thangmi and *śi* ‘body louse’ in Classical Newar (NB); and Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*lak ‘arm, hand’ (B) has reflexes *lak* ~ *la?* ‘hand, arm’ in Thangmi and *lā* ‘hand, arm’ (J) and *laka* ‘arm’ (NB) in Classical Newar.

Other reflexes for animal and organic words are as follows: Thangmi *amu* ‘eagle’ and Classical Newar *imā* ~ *yumā* ‘eagle’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*muw=məw ‘eagle’ (B); Thangmi *kucu* ‘dog’ and Classical Newar *khicā* ‘dog’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*kwiw=kəy ‘dog’ (B); Thangmi *kucuca* ‘puppy’ and Classical Newar *khicācā* ‘puppy’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*kwiw=kəy ‘dog’ and \*tsa ‘child’ (B); and the related forms *ma-kucu* ‘bitch, female dog’ in Thangmi and *mā-khicā* ‘bitch’ in Classical Newar (J) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*ma ‘mother’ and \*kwiw=kəy ‘dog’ (B); Thangmi *naru* ‘horn’ and Classical Newar *na* ‘horn’ (J) and *na* ~ *nakura* (NB), both evidently containing another element than just reflexes of Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*krew=krəw or \*ruŋ=rwan ‘horn’ (B); Thangmi *nana* ‘fish’ and Classical Newar *nā* ‘fish’ (J) or *nam* ‘fish’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*nya ‘fish’ (B); Thangmi *pya* ‘pig’ and Classical Newar *phā* ‘hog, boar’ (J) or *phā* ‘pig, boar’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*pwak ‘pig’ (B); the Thangmi bound morph <-sek> ‘fruit, round organic object’ and Classical Newar *se* ‘fruit, corn, grain’ (J) and *se* ‘fruits’ or *cākuse* ‘a kind of sweet yellow citrus fruit about the size of an orange’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman

\*sey ‘fruit’ (B); Thangmi *jake* ‘rice’ and Classical Newar *jāke* ~ *ke* ‘rice, husked rice’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**dza* ‘eat’ (B); Thangmi *chya* ‘salt’ and Classical Newar *chi* ‘salt’ (J) or *cī* ‘salt’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**tša* ‘salt’ (B) and Thangmi *marci* ‘chilli’ and Classical Newar *maracabhatā* ‘chilli’ (NB) which are cognate with Yamphu *marchu* ‘Spanish pepper, red pepper, *Capsicum annum*’ (Rutgers 1998: 555) and many other Tibeto-Burman languages, and most probably derived from Sanskrit *marica* ‘pepper’.<sup>19</sup> Two notable kinship terms are *nini* ‘husband’s sister, father’s sister’ (J) and *nini* ‘aunt, father’s sister’ (NB) in Classical Newar and *nini* ‘father’s sister’ in Thangmi, from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**ni(y)* ‘aunt’ (B); and Thangmi *bubu* ‘elder brother’ and Classical Newar *phupa* ‘elder brother’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**puw=pəw* ‘brother, older’ (B), another reflex of which is Kulung *bu* ~ *bubu* ‘elder brother’ (Tolsma 1999: 197).

Inanimate nouns with common reflexes are Thangmi *asku* ‘smoke’ and Classical Newar *kum* ‘smoke’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**kuw=kəw* ‘smoke’ (B); Thangmi *asa* ‘oil’ and Classical Newar *so* ‘oil’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**sa-w* ‘oil’ (B); Thangmi *uni* ‘day, sun’ and Classical Newar *hni* ‘day’ (J) and *nhī* ‘day’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**niy=ŋəy* ‘day’ (B); Thangmi *nasa* ‘soil, earth, ground’ and Classical Newar *cā* ‘soil’ (NB) are likely cognate with Tibetan *sa* ‘earth, the ground’ (Jäschke 1968: 568); Thangmi *rapa* ‘axe’ and Classical Newar *pāo* ~ *pā* ‘axe’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**r-wa=r-pwa* ‘axe’ (B); Thangmi *khaŋou* ‘door, door-frame’ and Classical Newar *khā* ‘door’ (J) or *kāpā* ‘door’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**m-ka* ‘door’ (B); Thangmi *ṭaye* ‘night’ and Classical Newar *cā* ‘night’ (NB) perhaps from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**ya* ‘night’ (B); Thangmi *cinem* ‘iron’ and Classical Newar *ṅam* ‘iron’ (NB) perhaps from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**syam=sam* ‘iron’ (B); Thangmi *me* ‘fire’ and Classical Newar *mi* ~ *me* ‘fire’ (J) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**mey* ‘fire’ (B); Thangmi *me-thap* ‘fireplace’ and Classical Newar *mi-thap* ‘chimney (culli)’ (J) from the two Proto-Tibeto-Burman elements \**mey* ‘fire’ (B) and \**tap* ‘fireplace’ (B); Thangmi *kham* ‘word, tale, story’ and Classical Newar *kha* ‘word, tale, story’ (J) or *kham* ‘matter, fact, talk, dispute’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**ka* ‘word, speech’ (B); Thangmi *siŋ* ‘tree, wood’ and Classical Newar *śima* ~ *siŋ* ‘tree, a plant, wood’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**siŋ* ‘tree’ (B); and Thangmi *ulam* ‘path, road’ and Classical Newar *lam* ‘road, way, direction’ (J) or *lam* ‘way, road’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**lam* ‘road, direction’ (B).

Common verb cognates and other grammatical particles are Thangmi *cabusa* ‘to carry’ and Classical Newar *ku buyu* ‘v.t., to carry’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**buw=bəw* ‘carry on back or shoulders’ (B); Thangmi *gandu siŋ* ‘dry wood’ and Classical Newar *gaŋga siŋ* ‘dry wood’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**kaŋ* ‘dry up’ (B); Thangmi *walŋa* ‘five’ and Classical Newar *ṅam* ‘five’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**l-ŋa* ~ *b-ŋa* ‘five’ (B); Thangmi *ca* ‘small, young, diminutive’, *caca* ‘very small’ and

19) Chillies most likely arrived in South Asia some time after the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

*cacha* ‘grandchild’ and Classical Newar *cā* ‘a young one (of animals)’ (J) or *cā* ‘child, young, small, diminutive suffix’, *cacā* ‘small, minor’ and *chaya* ‘grand-daughter, grandson’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**tsa* ‘child, grandchild nephew/niece’ (B); Thangmi *pisa* ‘to give (away)’ and Classical Newar *pi-të* ‘to give away’ (J) and *biye* ‘to give, to pay’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**biy=bəy* ‘give’ (B); Thangmi *losa* ~ *loksa* ‘to pour’ and Classical Newar *lu-* ‘to pour’ (J) or *luya* ‘to pour’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \*(*m*-)*lu(w)* ‘pour’ (B); Thangmi *lupsa* ‘to sink, to be submerged’ and Classical Newar *lop* ‘to sink, to be submerged’ (J) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**lip* and/or \**nup* ~ \**nip* ‘sink’ (B); Thangmi *saisa* ‘to know’ and Classical Newar *saya* ‘to know, to understand, to be conversant with’ (J) or *sayā* ~ *saye* ‘to get notice, to know’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**syey* ‘know’ (B); Thangmi *the* ‘self’ and Classical Newar *thao* ‘self’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**tay* ‘self’ (B); Thangmi *dun* ‘inside’ and Classical Newar *duone* ‘inside’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**tsyu-ŋ=tu-ŋ* ‘inside’ (B); Thangmi *namsa* ‘to smell’ and Classical Newar *naṃṃa* ‘to smell’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**m-nam* ‘smell’ (B); Thangmi *nuisa* ‘to laugh, smile’ and Classical Newar *nhira* ~ *nhile* ‘to laugh’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**m-nwi(y)* ‘laugh’ (B); Thangmi *sisā* ‘to die’ and Classical Newar *sica* ‘to die’ (NB) from Proto-Tibeto-Burman \**siy=səy* ‘die’ (B); and Thangmi *su* ‘who?’ and *susu* ‘whoever?’ and Classical Newar *su* ‘who? (of persons only)’ (J) or *sū* ‘who’ and *susu* ‘whoever’ (NB) are cognate with modern written Tibetan *su* ‘who?’ (Jäschke 1990: 573).

Certain Thangmi and Classical Newar words are also cognate with Sampang, a Kiranti language spoken in the north-eastern quadrant of Khoṭān district.<sup>20)</sup> Thangmi *chusa* ‘to fasten’ and Classical Newar *chuya* ‘to fasten, to attach’ (J) are cognate with Sampang *chuyma* ‘to fasten’; Thangmi *bok* ‘inflorescence of corn or rice flower’ and Classical Newar *bo* ‘flower’ (J) and *bo* ‘flower’ (Modern Newar *buṃ*) (NB) are cognate with Sampang *bun* ‘flower’; Thangmi *mesya* ‘buffalo’ and Classical Newar *mes* ‘buffalo’ (J) or *mesa* ‘buffalo’ (NB) are cognate with Sampang *mesi* ‘buffalo’ and Kulung *me:si* ‘water buffalo’ (Tolsma 1999: 220).

Overall then, the above examples only serve to demonstrate that Thangmi and Newar are Tibeto-Burman languages which contain reflexes of well-attested proto-forms which have cognates in extant Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayas.

### 5.3.2. Shared Indo-Aryan loans

The second category contains lexical items which both Thangmi and Classical Newar have borrowed from Indo-Aryan, and here I focus solely on the loans which are particularly similar. Thangmi *aji* ‘mother-in-law’ and Classical Newar *aji* ‘grandmother (paternal and maternal)’ (J) or *aji* ‘grandmother’ (NB) may well have been loaned from Hindi *ājī* ‘paternal grandmother’ (McGregor 2002: 82); Thangmi *kapale* ‘forehead’ and Classical Newar *kapāra* ‘forehead’ (NB) are both cognate with Nepali *kapāl*

20) The Sampang data are provided by René Huysmans, via personal communication.

'forehead, scalp'; Thangmi *kanṭu* 'throat, neck' and Classical Newar *kaṃṭhu* 'throat' (NB) are probably borrowed from a later reflex of Sanskrit *kaṅṭha* 'throat, neck'; Thangmi *tupuri* 'hat, cap' and Classical Newar *tupuli* 'a sort of head-gear' (J) from Hindi or Maithili *ṭopī* 'cap'; Thangmi *ṭhai* 'place, location' and Classical Newar *ṭhāya* 'place' (NB) are likely etymologically related to Nepalli *ṭhāū* 'place'; Thangmi *dudu* 'milk, woman's breast' and Classical Newar *dudu* 'milk, the breast of a woman' (J & NB) may be loaned from Nepali (or another neighbouring Indo-Aryan language) *dud* or *dudh* 'milk, female breast, udder'; Thangmi *ḍumla* 'common fig, *Ficus carica*' and Classical Newar *dubala* '*Ficus racemosa* (formerly known as *Ficus glomerata*)' may derive from Sanskrit *uḍumbara* '*Ficus racemosa*'; Thangmi *sakalei* 'all, everything, everyone' and Classical Newar *śakala* 'everybody', *sakale* 'all' (NB) and *sakale* 'all' (J) likely derive from a later reflex of Sanskrit *sakala* 'whole'; Thangmi *paṭasi* 'women's traditional dress' and Classical Newar *patāsi* 'the lower garment' (J) or *patāse* 'a woman's lower garment' (NB) may derive from a later reflex of Sanskrit *paṭaḥ* 'cloth' or Nepali *pāṭ* 'flax, fibre'; Thangmi *naka* 'old' and Classical Newar *naka* 'new' (NB) may derive from a later reflex of Sanskrit *nava* 'new, fresh'; Thangmi *sewa* 'greetings, hello' and Classical Newar *sevā* 'a term of address to show respect to elders' (NB) are derived from a later reflex of Sanskrit *sevā* 'attendance (upon someone), servitude'; and finally Thangmi *makar* 'monkey' and Classical Newar *markaṭ* 'monkey' (J) or *mākarha* 'monkey' (NB) are most probably loaned from Nepali *markaṭ* 'monkey' and so ultimately derived from Sanskrit *markaṭa* 'monkey'.

As outlined above, Newar has a highly Sanskritised lexicon and it is thus not surprising that even words which might be considered part of the core lexicon, such as 'very', 'milk' or 'breast', have been loaned from Indo-Aryan. More surprising, however, is that Thangmi has also borrowed these terms, and furthermore, that the loans seem to have undergone similar phonological shifts in both languages. Examples are the reduplicative *dudu* 'milk' from Indo-Aryan *dud* or *dudh*, and the extra syllable added to the loan for 'hat, cap' as in Thangmi *tupuri* and Classical Newar *tupuli*, from Indo-Aryan *ṭopī*.<sup>21)</sup>

The most plausible explanation for this similarity in loaned words is that one of the two languages borrowed words from a neighbouring Indic language which were then at a later date borrowed 'once-removed' into the second language. The sequence of these loans was most probably Classical Newar borrowing from Indo-Aryan and then Thangmi borrowing an Indic or Sanskritised lexical item from Newar. Thanks to the high level of literacy and the extensive written tradition of Newar civilisation, loans directly from Sanskrit into Classical Newar were commonplace. For Thangmi, how-

21) Although less phonologically persuasive, other possible shared Indo-Aryan loans may be Thangmi *aṭhu* 'joint(s) of the body' and Classical Newar *athi* or *āthi* 'joints, articulations' (NB), both perhaps from a later reflex of Sanskrit *asthi* 'bone, joint' or Hindi *asthi* 'bone' (McGregor 2002: 70), and Thangmi *aṭhe* 'very' and Classical Newar *ati* 'very, exceedingly' (J) which may have been loaned from Maithili, Nepali or Hindi *ati* 'very, very much'.

ever, which remains to this day an unwritten language far from any urban centre of learning, direct loans from Sanskrit are distinctly unlikely. The transfer scenario outlined above would support the hypothesis that the Thangmi and Newar languages (and hence their speakers) were in close contact with one another from an early date. In the absence of such early contact, one would have expected Thangmi to borrow lexical items directly from Nepali (rather than from Sanskrit via Newar) when the Nepali language was brought to Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok by Nepali-speaking settlers.

### 5.3.3. Lexical correspondences specific to Thangmi and Newar

The final category comprises those lexical similarities which I believe to be shared by only Thangmi and Classical Newar which are probably not cognate with other Tibeto-Burman languages. I have resisted the temptation to order the lexical similarities into classes (such as animate nouns, body parts and verbs) since this would impose a further arbitrary hierarchical order on the data. As far as possible, I have followed the alphabetical order of the Newar dictionaries, thus facilitating cross-referencing for those interested readers.

Thangmi *elepe* ‘spleen’ is cognate with Classical Newar *al-pe* ‘spleen’ (J) and *alape* ‘spleen’ (NB), and Matisoff reconstructs \*r-pay ‘spleen’ (2003: 208); Thangmi *pin* ‘fingernail’ may be cognate with Classical Newar *r* ‘nail’ (NB); Thangmi *ekaṭe* ‘alone’ is cognate with Classical Newar *ekāṭa* ‘alone’ (NB), the first syllable of both being cognate with and derived from Sanskrit *eka* ‘one, a, only, alone, single’; Thangmi *kaṭasa* ‘to quarrel’ closely resembles Classical Newar *kacāda* ~ *kacāḍa* ‘quarrel, dispute’ (NB); Thangmi *kapale kosa* ‘skull’ and Classical Newar *kapāla kosa* ‘skull’ (NB); Thangmi *kasyu* ‘boil, pimple’ and Classical Newar *kasu* ‘boils’ (NB) or Classical Newar *cāsu kacha* ‘a pimple that itches’ (NB) are most probably cognate, as are Thangmi *kimi* ‘tape worm’ and Classical Newar *kimi* ‘hook worm’ (NB).

Other lexical correspondences may include Thangmi *cyuku* ‘ant’ and Classical Newar *kumicā* ‘white ant, termite’ (NB), Thangmi *kosa* ‘bone’ and Classical Newar *kvase* ~ *kosa* ‘bones’ (NB); Thangmi *papasek* ‘testicles’ and Classical Newar *si-pā* ‘the testicles’ (J) and *kvāse* ‘testicles’ (NB), Matisoff reconstructs \*səw ‘testicles, virility’ (2003: 182); Thangmi *ukhiṅ* ‘dark’ and Classical Newar *khiṅnu* ‘dark, darkness’ (J) and *khiṅnu* ‘dark’ (NB); Thangmi *gui* ~ *gwi* ‘thief’ and Classical Newar *khu* ‘thief’ (NB); and Thangmi *khen* ‘face’ and Classical Newar *khem* ‘face’ (NB). The Thangmi topicaliser *guri* may be cognate with Classical Newar *guri* ‘a classifier denoting place’ (NB); Thangmi *naṭe* ‘cheek’ resembles Classical Newar *natāl* ‘cheek’ (J) or *naṃtārha* ‘cheek’ and Modern Newar *nyatāḥ* ‘cheek’ (NB); Thangmi *ṭakadu* ‘sweet’ is most likely cognate with Classical Newar *cāku* ‘sweet’ (J) and *cāku* ‘sweet thing, molasses’ (NB); and Thangmi *cime* ‘hair’ is most likely cognate with Classical Newar *cimilū=cimī* ‘the hair (of the body)’ (J) and *cimilisām* ‘body hair’ (NB), while Matisoff reconstructs \*mil ~ \*mul ~ \*myal ‘hair (body)’ (2003: 602).



Other possible cognates are Thangmi *jakcho* ‘wheat’ and Classical Newar *cho* ‘wheat’ (J) or *co ~ cho* ‘wheat’ (NB); the Thangmi affable suffix *che* and Classical Newar *che* ‘2.s. you (used mostly in addressing superiors or equals)’ (J) or *cha* ‘you’ (NB); Thangmi *cache jyamari* ‘granddaughter’s husband’ and Classical Newar *chaya jiri* ‘granddaughter’s husband’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *chyosa ~ thosa* ‘to send’ and Classical Newar *choya* ‘to send, to dispatch’ (J) or *choye ~ choya* ‘to send’ (NB); Thangmi *jukun* ‘only’ and Classical Newar *jak* ‘only’ (J) or *juko* ‘only’ (NB); the Thangmi noun *jet* ‘work’ and Classical Newar *jjā* ‘work’ (NB); and Thangmi *jjanganen* ‘bird’ and Classical Newar *jhamgara* ‘a bird’ (NB). Another set of lexical similarities shared by the two languages includes Thangmi *thumsa* ‘to bury’ and Classical Newar *thumñā ~ thumne* ‘to bury’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *themsā* ‘to destroy, to break down’ and Classical Newar *thoña ~ thone* ‘to demolish, to destroy’ (NB); Thangmi *dan* ‘year’ and Classical Newar *da ~ dam* ‘year’ and Modern Newar *dam* ‘year’ (NB); the Thangmi male clan *ḍanguri* and Classical Newar *ḍhamguri* ‘a Newar caste’ (NB); the Thangmi kinship term *tete* ‘elder sister’ and Classical Newar *tatā* ‘an elder sister’ (J) or *tatāju* ‘elder sister (hon.)’ (NB); Thangmi *thope* ‘broom, sweep’ and Classical Newar *tuphe* ‘a broom’ (J) and *tuphi* ‘broomstick, brush’ (NB); Thangmi *du* ‘tiger, leopard, wild cat’ and Classical Newar *dhu* ‘tiger’ (J) and *tedu* ‘leopard’ (NB); the Thangmi verb *thisa* ‘to touch’ and Classical Newar *thiye* ‘to touch’ (NB); Thangmi *thumsa* ‘to immerse’ and Classical Newar *thune* ‘to immerse’ (NB); the Thangmi shamanic and ritual ethnonym for their own ethnic group *thani* and Classical Newar *thāni* ‘one kind of caste’ (NB);<sup>22)</sup> and the Thangmi noun *toṅ* ‘home-made beer’ and Classical Newar *thvam* ‘beer’ (NB).

Further Thangmi-Classical Newar lexical correspondences are as follows: Thangmi *duṅ bisa* ‘to enter (inside)’ and Classical Newar *dumbiya* ‘to enter, to offer’ (NB); Thangmi *dudu pur* ‘nipple of the breast’ and Classical Newar *dudu pipiri* ‘nipple of the breast’ (NB); Thangmi *nama* ‘with’ and Classical Newar *na* ‘with’ (NB); the Thangmi plural suffix *pali* and Classical Newar *paṇi* ‘plural suffix’ (NB); Thangmi *paṅ* ‘sour’ and Classical Newar *pāṅnu* ‘sour’ (NB); the Thangmi transitive verb *palsa* ‘to chop’ and Classical Newar *pāle* ‘to cut, to behead’ (NB); Thangmi *prin* ‘outside’ and Classical Newar *pi ~ piṃ* ‘outside’ (NB); the Thangmi transitive verb *busa* ‘to cover, fill’ and Classical Newar *puya* ‘to cover, to fill’ (NB), while Matisoff reconstructs \**pun* ‘wrap, cover, wear’ (2003: 495); the Thangmi noun *puya* ‘seed, seedling’ and Classical Newar *pu* ‘seed’ (J) or *pū* ‘seed’ and *puvā* ‘paddy seedlings’ (NB); and the related Thangmi form *puyapasa* ‘grains and seeds’ and Classical Newar *puvāpāsā* ‘grains and seeds’ (NB); the Thangmi kinship term *pairi* ‘elder brother’s wife’ and Classical Newar *pair-abe* ‘elder brother’s wife’ (NB).

Other plausible lexical correspondences are Thangmi *pokole* ‘knee’ and Classical Newar *paulr* ‘knee’ (NB); Thangmi *phaṭu* ‘pumpkin’ and Classical Newar *phaṭ-si* ‘a kind of pumpkin’ (J) or *phaṭase ~ phaṭse* ‘pumpkin’ (NB);<sup>23)</sup> Thangmi *phasa* ‘wind,

22) As intriguing as this definition is, no supplementary information is provided.

23) Both may be derived from Nepali *pharsi* ‘pumpkin’.

storm, air' and Classical Newar *phas* 'air, wind' (J) or *phasa* 'wind' (NB); Thangmi *pebu* 'field' and Classical Newar *bu* 'a field' (J) or *bū* 'a field' (NB); Thangmi *bosa* 'to grow' and Classical Newar *boye* 'to grow, to come up' (NB); the Thangmi verb *mraṅsa* 'to swell' and Classical Newar *maṅ-gwo* 'swelling' (J) and *māṅa ~ māṅe* 'to swell' (NB); the Thangmi noun *maṅa ~ maṅiṅ* 'bread' and Classical Newar *mādhe* 'bread' (NB); Thangmi *mesyaca* 'buffalo calf' and Classical Newar *mesacā* 'buffalo calf' (NB) (a composite form particular to Thangmi and Newar, although the constituent elements are well-attested throughout Tibeto-Burman); Thangmi *moṭe* 'soybean' and Classical Newar *mvāca* 'soybean' (NB); and the Thangmi transitive verb *rasa* 'to bring' and Classical Newar *rāsa ~ rāye* 'to seize, catch' (NB).

A particularly interesting lexical similarity shared by Thangmi and Classical Newar is Thangmi *libi* 'after, later, behind' and Classical Newar *lithe* 'later', *lī* 'after' and *livā* 'afterwards' (NB). Further correspondences are Thangmi *lukusa* 'back, backbone' and Classical Newar *luku* 'back of body' (NB); Thangmi *khaśu* 'cloud' and Classical Newar *śu* 'cloud' (NB); and Thangmi *sumaka* 'quietly' and Classical Newar *sumhaka* 'quietly' (NB). The final list of correspondences are those lexical items found only in Jørgensen's *Dictionary* and not present in the newer *Dictionary of Classical Newari*: Thangmi *wasa* 'to plough' and Classical Newar *wāsā* 'a plough'; Thangmi *aṅaldu* 'ashamed' and Classical Newar *ṅālā-pu* 'ashamed, shame'; Thangmi *baṭi* 'cat' and Classical Newar *bhaṭi* 'a cat'; Thangmi *makarpapa* 'spider' and Classical Newar *mā-khā-pi-khā* 'a spider'; Thangmi *maṅ* 'body' and Classical Newar *hma* 'a body'; Thangmi *lānga* 'courtyard' and Classical Newar *lām-hṅe* 'a yard, a court'; Thangmi *sebi* 'leather, hide, skin' and Classical Newar *se-bu* 'leather'; and Thangmi *ṭamsil* 'marrow' and Classical Newar *sel* 'marrow'.

## 6. Concluding thoughts on the genetic affinity of Thangmi

Section §5.3.3 above contains over seventy likely cognates between Thangmi and Classical Newar, many of which may ultimately turn out to be derived from attested Proto-Tibeto-Burman roots, but which, at any rate, appear to have a shared history at an earlier stage of both Thangmi and Newar. However, even if half of the above proposed lexical similarities between Thangmi and Classical Newar turn out to be reconstructable to Proto-Tibeto-Burman, over 35 lexical similarities remain. As mentioned at the outset, Shafer's argument for Thangmi and Barām relatedness was based on nine lexical similarities shared by the two languages, seven of which may be immediately discounted as they are widely attested in other Tibeto-Burman languages. Even though only two of Shafer's proposed similarities remain, his hunch of a special relationship between Thangmi and Barām has been corroborated by more recent research by van Driem and myself. While many Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal have some lexical cognates with *either* Thangmi *or* Classical Newar, to my knowledge there is no other language which shares as many lexical correspondences with Thangmi and Clas-



sical Newar as these two languages do with one another.

I conclude as I started, by asking a question. Should the similarity between Thangmi and Classical Newar simply be put down to borrowing, or does it reflect a deeper genetic relationship? If one opts for the more cautious explanation, explaining the similarities through cultural contact and lexical borrowing, then the question remains as to how the speakers of these two distinct languages could have exchanged so much so long ago.<sup>24)</sup> If, on the other hand, one chooses to conclude that the lexical similarities shown above are an indication of a close genetic relationship between Thangmi and Newar, then sound historical evidence must be produced to support this suggestion.<sup>25)</sup>

It will be interesting to further examine the linguistic evidence from the Dolakhā dialect of Newar when it becomes available. Genetti has suggested that many of the Thangmi lexical items presented here have clear cognates with Dolakhā Newar (personal communication, February 2001), which is to be expected given the socio-cultural links between the two groups that I outlined above in section §3. Genetti writes of Dolakhā as a ‘centre for trade and commerce’ (1994: 8), but also of the ‘relative isolation of Dolakhā as compared to Kathmandu’ (1994: 8). It is precisely this isolation that van Driem sees as crucial in determining the relative antiquity of the Dolakhā dialect of Newar:

the original Newar grammatical system remains more intact in the language of the descendants of the early Newar mercantile colonists in Dolakhā than in the innovative prestige dialects spoken in Kathmandu and Pāṭan. (2001: 766)

On account of the geographical location of the town of Dolakhā, Genetti suggests that the ‘Dolakha people would have had more contact with the Kiranti peoples of the east’ (1994: 8), a particularly intriguing statement in light of the verbal agreement morphology shared by Kiranti languages and Thangmi on the one hand, and the lexical correspondences described above between Thangmi and Newar on the other. While Genetti dates the split between the Kathmandu and Dolakhā dialects of Newar to a ‘minimum of seven hundred years ago, and possibly much longer’ (1994: 8), van Driem boldly suggests that the ‘divergence between the Kathmandu Valley dialects and Dolakhā Newar may perhaps be datable to a period of unrest between 750 and

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24) Tej Ratna Kansakar, a leading scholar of the Newar language and Tibeto-Burman linguistics, is unconvinced by the argument for a close genetic relationship between Thangmi and Newar. He suggests that the linguistic and cultural links between the two groups are most likely the result of ‘contact-induced changes’ and that there is historical evidence to show that the Newar, wherever they settled, sought the assistance of ‘various caste groups to fulfil religious, social and ritual functions’ for them. Other than the Thangmi of Dolakhā, a further example Kansakar offers is of Tibetans in their native Lhasa, who were conscripted to play a ritual role in Newar festivals (personal communication, 18 September, 2000). Kansakar’s position may in part be a reflection of his status as a prominent member of the Newar scholarly community and thus not divorced from a certain ‘Newarocentricity’ prevalent in elite Kathmandu Newar circles.

983 A.D.’ (2001: 766), ensuring a stability of the linguistic community which in turn contributed to the ‘evident archaism of Dolakhā verbal morphology’ (2001: 766).

The next step in the analysis of the Thangmi-Newar link will be to determine whether there are any phonological correspondences between the two languages, thereby taking this study to a deeper level beyond the inspection and comparison of surface forms. Only then will we learn more about the essence of the relationship between Thangmi and Newar, and the relative position of both languages in the *Stammbaum* of Tibeto-Burman.

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25) To paraphrase van Driem, the ‘current impression is that the older the Newar vocabulary, the more specific lexical correspondences can be identified with Thangmi and Barām’ (2001: 761).

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