

A Study on the Tibeto-Burman Languages of Uttar Pradesh

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1.0 The area under study

The Uttar Pradesh hill districts in the north-western Himalayas form a geographical region popularly known as Uttarakhand. In old records these hill areas are known as the Kumaun and Garhwal Hills. The boundaries of this area extend up to Nepal and Tibet in the north-western Himalayan ranges. The whole area is now sub-divided into eight districts, three districts in the Kumaun region (Almora, Nainital, and Pithoragarh) and five districts in the Garhwal region (Dehradun, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Tehri-Garhwal and Pauri-Garhwal). The Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages of the districts of Pithoragarh, Chamoli and Uttarkashi, which border on Himachal Pradesh in the north and Nepal and Tibet in the north-west, will be the focus of the present study. The languages of the small groups of Khampas and other Tibetan migrants settled in the district towns in this area will not be discussed.

2.0 The languages, their locations, and their speakers

Grierson (1909) listed seven TB languages spoken in this region in his Linguistic Survey of India. Jad and Garhwal were listed in his classification as Tibetan dialects. Rangkas (Saukiya-Khun), Darmiya, Byangsi, Chaudangsi, and Janggali were placed under the western sub-group of pronominalized Himalayan languages of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family. But the amount of data on some of the languages in the Survey is too meager to classify the languages of this region conclusively under one group or the other. Jad has been found to be close to Spiti, a dialect of Tibetan. Moreover, Jad does not have the feature of pronominalization found in the languages of this area. So we can tentatively treat Jad as a Tibetan dialect. Detailed research may some day reveal its place in the TB family. But the so-called Garhwal dialect of Tibetan, actually known as 'Rongpo', can not be treated as a Tibetan dialect. It is actually a Himalayan language distinct from Tibetan, one with the distinctive feature of pronominalization (Zollar 1983).

Byangsi and Chaudangsi are very closely related and Darma has been found to be slightly less closely related to Byangsi and Chaudangsi. Rongpo and Raji are then related to this grouping. Raji and Rongpo contain a considerable number of IA loans, whereas there are relatively few IA loans in Byangsi, Chaudangsi, and

Darma. Geographic factors also play a role because Byangsi, Chaudangsi, and Darma share a contiguous region and use the same market, resulting in mutual intelligibility. Based on cognate counts, we can say that these languages form a close-knit group. However, at the present stage of our study we have not worked out the details of the sub-groupings and precise inter-group relationships.

2.1 Jad

Grierson treated Jad as being closely related to Spiti and other Tibetan dialects, and so grouped it under the Tibetan group. Jad is spoken in several villages, the major ones being Jadang and Nilang in Harsil Sub-division in Uttarkashi District. The name Jad seems to be derived from the village name 'Jadang', which is the summer village of the Jad speakers. During the winter the Jad speakers migrate to Dunda Sub-division, just 17 kilometers below the Uttarkashi district town on the banks of the river Bhagirathi. They are mainly involved in agriculture and the raising of sheep and goats. During the winter they engage in the weaving of wollen carpets and shawls. The total population of Jad speakers is only around 2000 according to the village census of 1991. The Jad tribe is also known as 'Bhotia', the cover term for all TB speakers in the whole of the western Himalayan region.

2.2 Rangpo (Garhwal dialect)

Grierson called the variety we are calling Rongpo the 'Garhwal dialect of Tibetan' but in fact it is an independent language with pronominalization (verb agreement). Zoller (1983) named it 'Rang Po Bhasa'. From our investigation we found that actually the word /rɔ̃pɔ/ is used for the language and for the community as well. In rapid speech it is realized as [rãpɔ], and thus it has come to be written as either Rongpo or Rangpo. Locally there are two other names given to the people and their language: 'Marcha' and 'Tolcha'. These names, though, are not very acceptable to the people. Rongpo is spoken in the Niti and Mana valleys in Joshimath Tehsil of Chamoli District. The borders of the Niti and Mana valleys extend up to the Tibetan border. The Marcha dialect is spoken in Mana and parts of Niti Valley, and the Tolcha dialect is spoken in Niti Valley. Marcha is the dominant dialect and our data is based on this dialect. The Rongpo people also migrate during the winter to the lower hills. Their winter villages are situated near Chamoli and Gopeshwar town. The total population according to the 1991 village census is 12,000.

2.3 Raji

Raji is listed under the name 'Janggali' in Grierson's Survey, though very little data is recorded. In fact, the Raji are a very small tribe, and the most primitive in the region. They are mostly confined to the deep forests and this pattern of living

in the forests must have prompted the neighbouring populations to call them 'Janggali' ('forest dwellers'). Kumaunis also call them 'Ban Rawat' or 'Ban-Khaniya Rawat', which also has a similar meaning. But these names are derogatory, so the name 'Raji', which is acceptable, is used in official records. The Raji language is spoken in four villages in Dharchula Tehsil, four villages in Didihat, and one village in Champawat Tehsil of Pithoragarh District. Some villages of Rajis are also found across the border in Nepal, but no population figures are available from there. The population of Raji in India, according to a census in 1988 done by the development officers, was just 472. The Rajis have been basically food gatherers and hunters, but recently efforts have been made to settle them in villages. The Rajis are a peculiar tribe since their physical appearance does not resemble the neighbouring populations. The only striking similarity is that of the type of language they share with other TB speech communities. But there does not appear to be day-to-day contact with other TB speakers. D. D. Sharma (1990:171) states, as if taking it for granted, that, 'basically the language of the Rajis of Askot belongs to the Munda Group of the Austro-Asiatic family'. The data used by D. D. Sharma (1990) is based on an article consisting of 11 pages by Dr. Shobha Ram Sharma, for which a complete reference is not available. It is strange that D. D. Sharma was able to produce a 58 page description of Raji based only on a short article and some personal communications with the author. Therefore D. D. Sharma's statement that Raji is a Munda language can not be taken at its face value. There is no discussion of why Raji is being treated as a Munda and not as a TB language. Our data show that it is a TB language with a very high percentage of Indo-Aryan borrowings. However, we do not claim that our study is an exhaustive one. (See the article on Raji by Shree Krishan in this volume.)

2.4 Byangsi

Byangsi, actually known as Byāsi, is the most dominant language among the tribal languages spoken in Dharchula sub-division. It is spoken in Byangs Patti of Dharchula sub-division of Pithoragarh District in Uttar Pradesh. The Patti of Byangs and Chaudangs are formed along the river Kali, which meets the river Dhauli at Tawaghat, a few miles upriver from Dharchula town. This is the region between these two rivers. The Patti Chaudangs starts from Tawaghat and extends up to Zipti village. Then there is a stretch of steep and barren hills for a few miles. The Patti Byangs starts from Budi village and extends up to Kuti village, which is the last village on the Indian side of the border with Tibet. Byangs Valley is further separated by the rivers Kali and Kuti Yangti. There are three or four villages of Byangs people found in Nepal.¹⁾ The river Kali forms a natural boundary between India and Nepal. There is a path which passes through Byangs Valley and up to the Hindu holy place called Kailash-Mansarowar in Tibet. During summer there are regular pilgrimages from India to visit this place. There was also

regular trade between Tibet and India through this route before the Indo-China conflict in 1962. Trade is being revived now since the signing of an agreement with China in 1992.

All the Tibeto-Burman speakers in this area refer to themselves as 'Rang'. Byangs call their dialect 'Byangkho lo'. It is interesting to note that all the Tibeto-Burman speaking populations except the Raji maintain their homes in the upper reaches of the mountains during the summer and during the winter they migrate to the lower hill villages around Dharcula town. This pattern of migration was much more prevalent before the Indo-Chinese conflict when these people regularly used to go to Tibet to buy and sell certain goods. From India they usually carried tea leaves, salt, and horses and in exchange they would bring wool, sheep and goats, ghee, and dried cheese. This exchange trade was carried out without any official formalities. Since the interruption of trade in 1962, many people have been trying to settle permanently in the lower hill villages.

The population figures for the Byangs are not available separately. The total tribal population of Pithoragarh and Almora districts was 19,472 in the 1981 census. More than 99% of the tribals live in Pithoragarh District and the tribes included are Byangs, Chaudangs, Darma, and Raji. For the Raji the exact figures are available separately (472). This means that the population of the Byangs, Chaudangs and Darma tribes together was approximately 19,000 in the 1981 census.

2.5 Chaudangsi

Chaudangsi is closely related to Byangsi. It is spoken in Patti Chaudangs, which starts from Tawaghat and goes up to Zipti village. The Chaudangs do not migrate like their neighbours. The local name for their language is 'Bangba lo'. Population figures are not available separately but certainly their population is less than that of the Byangs. The Byangs and Chaudangs live in close proximity, as the Byangs migrate during the winter to Chaudangs villages which are situated on the lower hills. (See the article on Chaudangsi by Shree Krishan in this volume.)

2.6 Darma

Darma is spoken in Darma Valley and is locally known as 'Darma lo'. The area of Darma Valley runs from Tawaghat up along the river Dhauli. The valley is divided into Talla Darma and Malla Darma, i.e., lower and upper valleys. It is bounded by Tibet in the north and by the chain of Panchuli mountains in the west. The Darma people also migrate during the winter months to the lower hills and the villages around Dharchaula. Population figures for the Darma people are not available separately, but their population is said to be less than that of the Byangs. (See the article on Darma by Shree Krishan in this volume.)

2.7 Rangkas or Saukiya Khun

The Rangkas have not been able to maintain their original TB language and now speak the dominant language Kumauni, an Indo-Aryan language. Rangkas was said to be spoken in Johar Valley in Pithoragarh District. Johar Valley is bounded by Tibet in the north, Darma Valley in the east, Chamoli District of Garhwal in the west and Danapur and Sira divisions of Pithoragarh District in the south. Johar Valley is also divided into Tolla Johar and Malla Johar. Johar Valley is drained by the Dhauli Ganga river. In *The Linguistic Survey of India* (1909) the language is said to have been spoken in five villages of Malla Johar and Malla Danapur. But as early as 1953 R.P. Srivastava (1967), a famous Indian anthropologist, who also added Goriphat to the Rangkas area, failed to find any speaker of it while conducting a survey of the area, and most of the local people did not believe that there had been another language spoken in Johar. However, an old man told him that he heard his father speaking such a language in Goriphat during their migration to Johar, and it was said that speakers of Rangkas could still be found in Malla Johar, i.e., the upper valley, but on our fieldtrip we found that the only traces of any TB language found were village names like Ralam, Lwan, and Sumdu, and the surnames formed after their village names, such as Martolia. The neighbouring Darma and Byangs tribes consider the Rangkas their kin. The Darma people call them 'Chyanam', the Rangpo call them 'Kyonam' and the Byangs call them 'Canpa', which are names similar to those that are often found among the TB speakers in this area. The suffixes used in the names, such as /-nam/ and /-pa/, are also typical of the suffixes found in the TB languages of this area. The word /nam/ means 'village' or 'home' in Rangpo as well as in some other Himalayan languages, and /-pa/ is the typical 'person' suffix in TB languages. It has also been found that some kinship terms and a few vocabulary items are of TB origin. The speakers contacted claimed their linguistic and social identity to be one with the Kumauni speakers. So it is difficult to say that they spoke a language named Rangkas as such. In all possibility it has died out already. A detailed study may reveal some traces of a TB substratum even though they have merged their identity with the dominant Kumauni people.

3.0 Sociolinguistic patterns and language use

As stated above, there are six TB languages in this region under study. These six languages are Rongpo, in Chamoli District, Jad, in Uttarkashi, and Byangsi, Chaudangsi, Darma and Raji, in Pithoragarh District. Garhwali is the dominant language in the Chamoli and Uttarkashi districts and Kumauni is the dominant language in Pithoragarh District. Garhwali and Kumauni are both Indo-Aryan languages closely related to Hindi. Hindi is the official language of Uttar Pradesh and is widely used as a medium of education and instruction from primary

school to the university level. All written communication, mass media, radio and television, political speeches, and formal and official discussions take place in Hindi. English is taught as one of the subjects at the high school level and some of the science subjects are also taught in English at the university level.

All the TB languages are used in the home with family members and friends from the same group. TB languages are not used in any type of written communication. Code switching and code mixing are very common. A coordinate and stable type of bilingualism must have existed for a long time. No one has been reported to be a monolingual in any age group among the speakers of TB languages. The populations of the villages are mixed; the speakers of TB languages are not living in isolated areas like in other hill areas in India. This increased pressure on the TB languages from the dominant languages around them has already caused the displacement of Rangkas by Kumauni.

The TB people are basically traders and agriculturists by profession. Due to their proximity to Tibet, the male members of all the groups except Raji have been trading with Tibet, but the trade was stopped after the Indo-Chinese conflict. Now efforts are being made to revive the trade links. Some older male members have been found to have some working knowledge of Tibetan as well. Some speakers of Byangsi, Darma, and Chaudangsi have also been found to have command of Nepali as well. The border with Nepal is almost open and there are close links among the neighbours on both sides of the border. Migratory patterns of all the groups except the Raji are similar. During the summer they move upwards to the snowbound habitats and during winter they move downwards. They maintain two homes. Even schools and administrative officials used to migrate. Now these migrations are limited to the native people, as the government administration does not migrate to the uphill areas. Even among the tribal people the migrations are on the decline, as stated earlier.

The trade with Tibet operated on a barter system. From India they used to carry salt, cloth, sugar and tea; and in exchange used to bring wool, goats and sheep. The migrations and trade have played a major role in the development of bilingualism.

The TB speakers are called different names by the different neighbouring groups. 'Bhot' or 'Bhotia' is a cover term for all the groups and this name is used in official records. But it is interesting to note that Raji is not included under this term. The Nepali call the TB people of this area 'Sauka', and the Tibetans call them 'Jaba'. The TB speakers also have their own names for their neighbours and for themselves. The cover term for the Byangs, Chaudangs, Darma and Rongpo is 'Rang', and a common name for all the languages is 'Ranglo' or 'Rang Bhasa'. It is interesting to find that the term 'Rang' includes the now extinct language speakers Rangkas but not the Raji. The root /ran-/ in most of these languages means 'to sell'. This meaning goes well with their trading profession. The TB speakers in

Pithoragarh District call the Kumauni speakers /waløn/. This name is not very much welcomed by the dominant population. Apart from this they are also known by other terms.

The Jad practice Buddhism and the Raji follow their own system of religious beliefs. All other groups practice the Hindu religion. The modes of dress and other ways of living of the dominant Garhwalis and Kumaunis are being copied by the TB speakers. But there is no codified form of religion followed by the TB speakers. Most marriages among the TB speakers take place within their respective groups but intergroup marriages are not unknown.

4.0 Bilingualism and Diglossia

The sociolinguistic patterns described above reveal that the TB speakers in this area are in close contact with the dominant speakers of Garhwali and Kumauni in their oral communication and with Hindi in written and spoken modes due to the nature of the socio-political and educational systems. The TB speakers start learning both their native languages and Kumauni or Garhwali simultaneously. Native languages are learnt at home within the family and Garhwali or Kumauni is learnt from friends outside the home. There is a clearcut demarcation of domains of L1 and L2, L1 being one of the respective TB languages and L2 being either Garhwali or Kumauni. Hindi is learnt at schools and is spoken with officials and teachers who do not know Garhwali or Kumauni. For all written communication Hindi is used. There is an increasing amount of code switching between Hindi and Kumauni/Garhwali in discussions, both formal and informal. Hindi enjoys high prestige and the TB languages have low prestige. According to Fishman's (1972) definition of diglossia, the TB languages, Kumauni, Garhwali and Hindi are distributed in a manner typical of diglossia. However, Ferguson's (1959) defining feature that the distribution must include varieties of the same language is not applicable. The groups are within the same political and economic entity.

There is a movement among the dominant Byangsi speakers to design a script for their language, and this movement has made the speakers of all the TB languages aware of their linguistic identities. This awareness will go a long way to preserving the native languages of these small populations. The native TB languages are maintained in the face of an increased number of domains being occupied by the majority languages and Hindi. If the present socio-political and economic situation, and the sociolinguistic patterns of language use continue to exist, it is possible to predict that the speakers of the TB languages in this region will eventually shift completely to the majority languages, though it may turn out that a stable bilingualism will continue to exist, preserving the TB languages.

5.0 Borrowings

All the TB languages under study are in close contact with the dominant majority languages Garhwali, Kumauni, and Hindi. Due to various factors such as better road transport, increased interaction with Hindi, educational and literacy movements, radio, television and mass media in Hindi, an increased number of jobs in various government offices and army camps, popular Hindi film songs, and the increased movement of tourists, the Indo-Aryan languages are making in-roads among the speakers of the minority TB languages. Rangkas is a good example of a language whose speakers shifted completely to the majority language. There are a large number of borrowings in most of the TB languages from the majority languages. The amount of borrowings differs from language to language and from generation to generation. The largest number of borrowings from Garhwali are found in Rongpo in Chamoli District. It has been observed that the younger generation, between the age of 10 and 20, has a higher percentage of borrowings and the number decreases as we move upwards in age. Women have been found to be more conservative in terms of borrowing. An interesting fact about the borrowing is that when a lexical item is borrowed it is the monomorphemic root which is taken and suffixes and prefixes are added from the native languages. Sometimes suffixes are borrowed along with forms. The other languages, like Byangsi, Chaudangsi, Darma, Raji and Jad, have borrowed to a lesser degree. During our fieldwork, efforts were made to contact informants from the age group of 35 and above so that we could get the TB forms rather than the borrowed ones. However, the borrowings come to the mind of the speakers more easily. Informants have been found consulting their wives and mothers to ascertain the form they should give for our recording.