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Review of *A Grammar of the Thangmi Language: With an Ethnolinguistic Introduction to the Speakers and Their Culture* by Mark Turin

Narayan P. Sharma
University of Oregon

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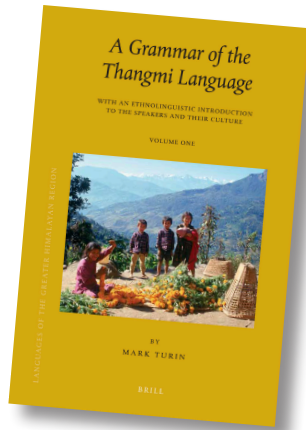
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A Grammar of the Thangmi Language: With an Ethnolinguistic Introduction to the Speakers and Their Culture.

Mark Turin. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012. 958 pages. ISBN 9789004155268.

Reviewed by Narayan P. Sharma

This is an excellent comprehensive grammar of Thangmi, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by approximately 30,000 people in the Dolakha and Sindhupalchok districts of Nepal. Turin offers a detailed discussion of a grammatical description of the Dolakha dialect of the Thangmi language, including a large collection of glossed oral texts, a lexicon, and an extensive ethnolinguistic introduction to the speakers and their culture. The book contains two volumes: the first is a 484-page grammar comprised of seven chapters and the second is devoted entirely to transcribed texts and lexicon. The goals of descriptive analysis are well covered and are well illustrated from a rich natural corpus.

In the opening chapter of the grammar (pp. 1-30), Turin describes the linguistic classification of Thangmi. While almost half of the affixes of the Thangmi verbal agreement system have clear cognates with Proto-Kiranti

morphemes (p. 6), and Thangmi kinship terms appear to be cognate with Classical Newar forms, possible genetic affiliation of Thangmi with Baram, Dolakha Newar and Kiranti languages needs further exploration.

Ethnolinguists will be particularly interested in Chapter Two on the Thangmi ethnolinguistic context. He includes many interesting details. For example, it is considered sinful to marry or have sexual relations with a relative until seven generations have elapsed (p. 116). Turin introduces the ritual rites like marriage and death, though he does not provide any types of marriage in Thangmi culture.

After this introduction to the people and their language, Turin then describes a language in terms of its phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax in Chapter Three. Here Turin makes the novel claim that Thangmi phonology does not differ considerably from Nepali phonology, since Nepali is a lingua franca. Thangmi contrasts six points of articulation (bilabial, dental, alveolar, palatal, velar and glottal) in thirty-two consonants and distinguishes six vowel phonemes. Unlike many Tibeto-Burman languages, only breathy voiced nasal /nh/, and retroflex sounds such as /t/, /tʰ/, /d/ and /dʰ/ are attested in this language, which are the defining characteristics of South Asian languages (Colin P. Masica. 1976. *Defining a Linguistic Area: South Asia*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 187).

While Turin discusses the various morphophonological processes such as liquid-nasal alternation, assimilation, intervocalic approximants, and syncope in Chapter Four, he describes the nominal morphology in Chapter Five. Thangmi ergative-absolutive-dative case-marking pattern, compared to that of some Tibeto-Burman languages, will fascinate

researchers, where the agent-like argument of transitive clause (A) bears the ergative case *-e/-ye*, the patient-like argument of a transitive clause (P) has an unmarked case but no absolutive case, and the human patient noun bears the patient marker *-kâi/-gâi*. In Thangmi, unlike Kiranti languages such as Puma (Narayan P. Sharma. 2014. *Morphosyntax of Puma, a Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal*. London: SOAS, University of London, 122-125), while the ergative case also marks the subject of intransitively conjugated transitive verbs (p. 238), the locative case does not contrast in a four-way manner (up, down, neutral and across). Similarly, unlike many Kiranti languages, the Thangmi pronominal system exhibits neither an inclusive versus exclusive distinction, nor does the language differentiate for dual number. Like in Indo-Aryan languages such as Nepali, a distinct use of special words for days and years in the past and the future is very wide spread in Tibeto-Burman languages, including the Kiranti sub-group. Turin lists distinct Thangmi lexical items for four days in the past future, and from four years in the past to two years in the future. There are special forms for eight days and years before and after the present day or year in Chepang (Ross C. Caughley. 2000. *Dictionary of Chepang: A Tibeto-Burman Language of Nepal*. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 539). It is also helpful that Turin provides Nepali-language equivalents for examples 143-146 (pp. 264-265).

Turin critically examines the morphology of simplicia in Chapter Six. It is interesting to note that there is only a prefixal position for negation *-ma* and six suffixal positions in Thangmi. In contrast to many Kiranti languages, Thangmi exhibits no paradigmatic stem

This is a great contribution to Thangmi studies due to its many insightful details in the discussion, and is an invaluable resource that will be of great interest particularly to those working on Tibeto-Burman linguistics, anthropology, historical linguistics and linguistic typology.

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alternations, except in two verbs (p. 358). The Thangmi language shows a pattern of split ergativity, similar but different to that of the Kiranti type, as in Thangmi, only the first person is marked ergatively, and the second and third persons bear accusative markers.

The final chapter on other verbal constructions and morphosyntax includes a lengthy section on the imperative. In Thangmi, while intransitive imperatives agree only with subject, transitive imperatives agree with both agent and patient. Furthermore, Thangmi does not make a distinction between direct and indirect speech. Turin does not provide much information about relative clauses, except to note that they can be identified by structural properties but are not marked by specific morphemes (p. 407). In fact, the second volume of the grammar includes rich analyzed texts (pp. 485-754) on forty-five different topics, followed by a Thangmi lexicon (pp. 755-918), an appendix of kinship charts, and index. These are just a few of the highlights of the grammar, which is an extraordinary achievement reflecting Turin's profound knowledge of Thangmi.

The book is remarkably free of typographic and editing errors. I noticed only a few worth mentioning: I have no idea what ω in $-\omega\eta$ (1s \rightarrow 3) (p. 8) indicates, and there should be *nij* in example 60 on p. 243 instead of *nin* to refer to stone in Thangmi. Turin endeavours to contribute to the field of Nepali loan

words. However, the Nepali loan words and Nepali equivalent words contain some typographical errors. For example: *piṅḍālu* should be *piḍālu* on p. 116; *sothar* should be *sotar* on p. 122; *Dolakhâ* and *Sindhupâlcok* should be *Dolakhā* and *Sindhupâlcok* on p. 131; *dewār* should be *dewar* on p. 144; Nepalese rhododendron tree should be Nepalese *lālīgurās* tree on p. 180; Nepali should be as Nepali...in example 4 (p. 408), 52 and 53 (p. 418); *arke pani chan* should be *aru pani chan* in example 30 (p. 414); *maile huncha bhanne* should be *maile huncha bhanē* on p. 418. Likewise, the Nepalese form *malāi rīs āyo* at the end of p. 246 is not acceptable; instead *ma rīsāē* may be acceptable. Additionally, on glossing part of the example 60 (p. 243), there should be *-ye* as *ins* and in example 120 (p. 406) the gloss of *-ye* erg is missing. Indeed, a distinction between elicited and naturally occurring examples would have added value and this would have been especially useful in providing sample verb paradigms.

Overall, aside from these minor inconsistencies, this book should be required reading for anyone thinking of further research in any of the Thangmi dialects. This is a great contribution to Thangmi studies due to its many insightful details in the discussion, and is an invaluable resource that will be of great interest particularly to those working on Tibeto-Burman linguistics, anthropology, historical linguistics and linguistic typology.

Narayan P. Sharma is a postdoctoral research associate in the Department

of Linguistics, University of Oregon. He earned his Ph.D. at SOAS, University of London. His primary research interests include language documentation and description, morphosyntax, linguistic typology, field linguistics, and endangered and minority languages.