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# Review of 'Trans-Himalayan Linguistics: Historical and Descriptive Linguistics of the Himalayan Area' edited by Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill

Luke Lindemann  
Yale University

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...a significant contribution (and corrective) to our understandings of what “development” is and how it works.

**Mark Liechty on *Mediating the Global: Expatria’s Forms and Consequences in Kathmandu***

management policies. This is where Hindman’s ethnographic and archival work leads readers into what are probably (for most anthropologists) some of the most rarified and inaccessible domains of “Expatria.” These are the international labor recruiting policies and practices, business rationales, management guidelines, and “best practices” that characterize the economic logic of the neoliberal era. Hindman repeatedly helps us trace the lines between formal (and ideologically driven) policy, its implementation, and outcomes in the day to day practices and possibilities of expatriate lives. Most interesting is how the logic of neoliberal “best practices”—that business and development expats are expected to introduce and enforce—is the same logic that increasingly makes the “traditional” long-term expat obsolete in favor of new “protean” laborers. These “flexpats” both give up much of the security of the old labor forms, and bring an even more radically technocratic (one size fits all) set of answers to complex development problems. If “development” is a phenomenon known for its perpetual failure, Hindman’s account of recent transformations gives us little hope for change.

This points to another of the book’s strengths: its longitudinal nature. By following developments over a twenty year period Hindman is able

to graphically illustrate not just what has changed, but how and why. As someone who has spent a lot of time in Kathmandu over these same decades I was fascinated by Hindman’s ability to explain a whole range of phenomena that I had seen but never really understood or connected or contemplated. For example, this is the first work I have encountered that attempts to make sense of the amazing rise of “voluntourism” that is now *everywhere* in Nepal. The “hollowing out of aid-land”—with long-term development professionals replaced by a combination of short-term technicians and deskilled volunteers—is something that I witnessed but never understood. In fact a recurring sensation I had while reading this book was of the organization of what had been (for me) random impressions collected over the years into a new image that suddenly helped make sense of things I had observed in new ways. In short, by focusing our attention on the lived experience of expats in their world of “Expatria,” Hindman has given us a valuable new perspective on development and globalization.

*Mark Liechty is an Associate Professor in the departments of Anthropology and History at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of several books on Nepal and co-editor of the Nepal Studies journal Studies in Nepali History and Society.*

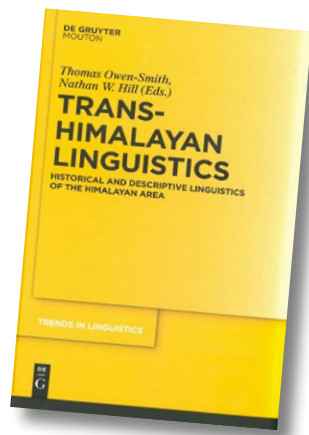
***Trans-Himalayan Linguistics: Historical and Descriptive Linguistics of the Himalayan Area.***

**Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill, eds.** Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2013. 444 pages. ISBN 9783110310832.

**Reviewed by Luke Lindemann**

Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill have compiled a collection of historical and descriptive papers on the languages of the Himalayan region. These articles are derived from papers and talks presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> Himalayan Language Symposium at the University of London in 2010. It is not easy to assemble twelve distinct papers into a single volume, and Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill have done an exceptional job of building a solid narrative.

The twelve papers of this volume are divided into three topics: historical linguistics, language description, and language planning. The first seven papers contribute to issues in the historical reconstruction of the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-European language families. The next four consist of detailed descriptions of the phonology, morphology and syntax of particular languages, and the lone contribution of the third section is a proposal for an orthography based on phonological research.



A common thread among the authors of the first section is the need for more descriptive data in order to make concrete claims about historical reconstruction in the region. “It is sobering to reflect,” writes George van Driem in the first contribution, “that less is known today about the Tibeto-Burman historical grammar than was known in 1835 about Indo-European grammar” (p. 18). The following two sections provide examples of the detailed language description that is required, which lends an overall symmetry to the volume.

Crucially, the term “Trans-Himalayan” has two meanings. First, as discussed by Owen-Smith and Hill in their introduction, it may refer to a geographical region in which roughly nine language families are spoken. Conceived of in this way, their volume is notably unbalanced; of these nine language families, eleven articles deal with the Sino-Tibetan/Tibeto-Burman family, and one deals with potential Indo-European cognates in Burushaski.

“Trans-Himalayan” is also an alternative name for the Sino-Tibetan/Tibeto-Burman language family, as proposed by van Driem in the volume’s first paper. This proposal presents the term as a more theoretically neutral alternative to “Tibeto-Burman” or “Sino-Tibetan.” These terms are associated with either side of a long-standing debate about the primacy of Chinese in the highest reconstruction of the family. Additionally, as discussed by Roger Blench and Mark W. Post (Ch. 3), the names themselves

betray a bias in favor of literate state languages: “A focus on ‘high cultures’ (Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese) has led to an emphasis on these languages and their written records, something wholly inappropriate for a phylum where an overwhelming proportion of its members speak unwritten languages” (p. 93).

Van Driem’s proposal is intentionally placed center stage in *Trans-Himalayan Linguistics*. Owen-Smith and Hill, Scott DeLancey (Ch. 2), and Blench and Post all explicitly endorse the proposal in their own works, and other contributors underline the issue by pointing out the difficulties inherent to upper-level reconstruction of the family given the current state of the field or through their descriptions of under-studied languages.

A dominant theme among the papers on historical reconstruction is the reevaluation of received models as a result of fresh language data in understudied areas. DeLancey’s paper on the typological effects of creolization and Post’s and Blench’s contribution on the phylogeny of North Indian languages propose re-orderings of the Sino-Tibetan model. Nicolas Tournadre (Ch. 4) and Gwendolyn Hyslop (Ch. 6) separately conclude that the family tree model itself may be particularly unsuited to the reconstruction of Tibetic and East Bodish respectively. Ilija Čašule’s contribution on kinship terms of purported Indo-European origin in Burushaski (Ch. 7) is an obvious outlier to Owen-Smith’s and

Hill’s overarching narrative on the phylogeny of the Tibeto-Burman/Trans-Himalayan family, but it shares with other contributions a focus on the necessary application of varied and detailed language data in making claims of linguistic descent.

Papers in the second section range from detailed descriptions of particular language phenomena, such as Christian Huber’s treatment of argument agreement in Shumcho (Ch. 8) to Jean Robert Opgenort’s grammatical sketch of Tilung based on interviews with four of the twelve known remaining speakers (Ch. 11). Opgenort’s sketch is noteworthy in that it dramatically increases the amount of published material on a largely unstudied language. While their papers are not explicitly focused on linguistic theory, Huber and Alexis Michaud (Ch. 9) both describe typologically interesting phenomena that should be of theoretical interest to formal syntacticians and phonologists.

Tim Bodt’s contribution to language planning (Ch. 12) in the third section is a detailed collection of suggestions for the development of a standard orthography for writing the Tshangla language based on a modified version of the ‘Ucen script used for Dzongkha. In keeping with the overall theme of careful language description, Bodt presents his suggestions with careful regard for the particularities of Tshangla phonology and the broader socio-linguistic relationship with Dzongkha and other state languages

...a wealth of historical work and primary language data for the Trans-Himalayan language family as well as general insights on the nature and necessity of working on understudied languages.

Luke Lindemann on *Trans-Himalayan Linguistics: Historical and Descriptive Linguistics of the Himalayan Area*

*Trans-Himalayan Linguistics* provides a helpful introduction to major issues in the field. It will be most useful for linguists working on Sino-Tibetan languages as a solid contribution to Tibeto-Burman historical reconstruction and description. Overall, contributions are light on theoretical concerns beyond the issues of historical comparison and construction and instead focus on the data at hand. The volume will also be of interest to scholars working on the documentation of endangered and understudied languages because many of the contributors explicitly raise issues that emerge over the course of field studies. Post and Blench stress the untapped resource of local administrative materials and difficulties inherent to working in a political unstable region. David A. Peterson (Ch. 10) and Opgenort separately describe the particular circumstances that led to meeting and working with speakers of the severely endangered languages of Rengmitca and Tilung respectively. Michaud's contribution is particularly interesting because of the detail with which he describes particular problems encountered during fieldwork on Yongning Na, peppering the description of his project with musings about the way in which elicitation mistakes may shed light on deeper linguistic questions, or the necessity of "bootstrapping" from basic assumptions arrived at by trial and error in building a description of basic tone categories.

Owen-Smith and Hill do an admirable job of marrying van Driem's proposal for the term Trans-Himalayan with the diverse analyses and interpretations of a large group of linguists working on these languages. Their volume contains a wealth of historical work and primary language data for the Trans-Himalayan language family as well as general insights on the nature and necessity of working on understudied languages.

*Luke Lindemann is a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics at Yale University.*

***Climate Change Modeling for Local Adaptation in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region (Community, Environment and Disaster Risk Management, Volume 11).***

**Armando Lamadrid and Ilan Kelman, eds.** Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2012. 237 pages. ISBN 9781780524863.

**Reviewed by Pasang Yangjee Sherpa**

This edited volume examines the application of environmental modeling methods toward local adaptation to climate change in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region. It contains chapters on each of the HKH countries—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. These chapters highlight the complex social and environmental contexts of the region while presenting the challenges of using different knowledge sources for local climate change adaptation. The editors frame the book as one where consideration for local peoples' terms are emphasized while developing, testing, and implementing solutions, and also where physical systems modeling is recognized as one knowledge system among many that is needed for adaptation and other development works in the region. The book begins by introducing the HKH mountain systems and concludes by comparing the case studies from each country and drawing lessons from them. Through multiple perspectives from different countries