# East Bodish and Proto-Tibeto-Burman morphosyntax

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## 1. The Black Mountain Mönpa

The Black Mountains are a southern spur of the Great Himalayas, which runs from north to south over a distance of some 200km and separates western from central Bhutan. The range was allegedly so called by the British because of its dense vegetation and its formidable and precipitous, dark grey escarpments. In the Black Mountains, a small aboriginal group resides, locally called Mönpa.[1] To distinguish this indigenous East Bodish group of central Bhutan from the many other ethnolinguistic groups in Central Asia which designate themselves as Mönpa, or which are so designated by others, I use the term Black Mountain Mönpa, or just Black Mountain. There is a distinct western and an eastern dialect of Black Mountain Mönpa. The western dialect, which appears to be more conservative, is spoken by a tribe known as the 'Ole,[2] and their dialect is referred to locally as 'Olekha[3] 'the 'Ole language'. First mention of the existence of a language by this name is by Sanggä Doji (1990: i). Research on Black Mountain Mönpa and other languages of Bhutan is conducted by the author and his Bhutanese colleagues in the service of the Linguistic Survey of Bhutan, a research programme of the Royal Government of Bhutan coordinated by the Dzongkha Development Commission in Thimphu.

  The main 'Ole settlement is Rukha,[4] a village located on the western slopes of the Black Mountains. The younger and middle-aged generations have become linguistically assimilated to their Dzongkha[5] speaking 'Ngalop[6] neighbours to the west. There are six remaining speakers of 'Ole Mönpa in the village of Rukha. Three of these are blind: 'Ap Jag°a[7] and his wife 'Am Dröm,[8] both born in the year of the Earth Monkey, viz. 1908-9, and their son Tekpa,[9] born in the year of the Water Bird, viz. 1933-4. The two other speakers are Rindzi Phup,[10] born in the year of the Water Monkey, viz. 1932-3, and Chödröm,[11] of the year of

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[1] Bhutanese names in Dzongkha are given in the newly adopted, official system of romanization known as Roman Dzongkha. Roman Dzongkha is a phonological transcription of the standard dialect of modern Dzongkha, which makes use of 22 of the letters of the Roman alphabet (F, Q, V and X are not used) and of four diacritics. The apostrophe marks high tone in syllables beginning with a nasal, liquid or vowel. The circumflex accent indicates vowel length. The diaeresis indicates a long, apophonic vowel. The superscript circlet indicates a devoiced consonant followed by a low tone murmured vowel. The initial consonant symbols are: k, kh, g, g°, c, ch, j, j°, t, th, d, d°, p, ph, b, b°, pc, pch, bj, bj°, tr, thr, dr, dr°, ts, tsh, dz, zh, z, zh°, z°, sh, s, y, 'y, w, 'w, r, hr, l, 'l, lh, ng, ny, n, m, 'ng, 'ny, 'n, 'm, h. The vowel sounds are a, â, ä, e, ê, i, î, o, ô, ö, u, ü. The system, currently being implemented in phases, is explained elsewhere by the author (forthcoming b). Roman Dzongkha is not intended to replace the traditional script. The modern orthography in traditional script is provided in the footnotes.

2 ཨོ་ལེ་     3 ཨོ་ལེ་ཁ་     4 རུ་ཁ་

5 རྫོང་ཁ་     6 སྦྱ་ལོང་པ་     7 ཨཡ་རྒྱ་གར་

8 ཨཡམ་སྒྲོལམ་     9 སྟེག་པ་     10 རིན་འཛིན་ཕུརཔ་

11 ཆོས་སྒྲོལམ་

the Wood Dog, viz. 1934-5. All 'Olekha data in the present study originate from Rindzi Phup and Chödröm who worked with me during my two visits to Rukha in March 1992 and May 1993. The sixth speaker of 'Olekha in Rukha is 'Ap Sigä,[12] born of a Khengpa father and an 'Ole mother in the year of the Water Monkey, viz. 1932-3. 'Ap Sigä claims not to speak 'Olekha because of having spent the whole of his youth in the Henkha speaking area to the north. Rindzi Phup and Chödröm report that 'Ap Sigä has always lived in Rukha, and his cautious attitude is a source of puzzlement to both of them.

There is a second 'Ole settlement of seven households, known variously as Reti,[13] Bäügang[14] or by the Nepali name of Goṅgkholā,[15] located on the eastern slopes of the Black Mountains. Whereas, Rukha is situated within what is reported to be the traditional 'Ole area, the settlement at Reti was established by four brothers during the reign of the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan, king 'Ugä 'Wangchu[16] (*imperabat* 1907-1926). These four 'Ole brothers, originally from the Rukha area, fled to the site of the present settlement to escape forced labour as tea porters between the tea gardens of Devāngiri[17] (Dewathang[18]) and 'Wangdi Phodr°a.[19] All Reti data are from Tandri[20] with whom I consulted in Trongsa[21] in May 1991 and who was then 45 years of age by Bhutanese reckoning, i.e. 44 years old. All Black Mountain data cited in this study, however, are from Rukha.

The Eastern Black Mountain Mönpa live on the eastern slopes of the Black Mountains in the villages of Wang'ling,[22] Jâmbi,[23] and Phumz°ur,[24] all located in Trongsa District south of Trongsa, and in the village of Cunseng[25] in Zh°ämgang[26] District, near the 'Ole settlement of Reti. The Eastern Black Mountain Mönpa are fast linguistically assimilating to the larger neighbouring ethnolinguistic groups, who speak Henkha in the north, and Kheng in the south. Mönpa from settlements such as Berdi in Zh°ämgang District report that they no longer speak their language, although they evidently know the meaning of common Black Mountain words. Eastern Black Mountain data are from a lad named 'Namgä[27] of Cungseng, whom I consulted in Zh°ämgang in May 1991.

## 2. East Bodish

In Shafer's phylogeny, Bodish is divided into a West, Central (inc. 'South') and East Bodish branch. On the basis of lexical comparison, Shafer determined that the East Bodish languages are the most conservative or archaic branch of Bodish, more conservative in fact than Central Bodish. Shafer's terminology is a bit misleading because for Central Bodish he also uses the name 'Old Bodish', since Tibetan, a Central Bodish language, has the oldest literary tradition of any Bodish language.

Northeast of Bhutan lies Tawang, a former Tibetan vassal state known in Tibetan sources as D°akpa Tsho'nga[28] 'The Five Hosts of the Dakpa' (Aris 1979a: xv). The language of Tawang identified as 'Northern Monpa' by Aris is D°akpa, and Hodgson's (1853) 'Tákpa' data are from the same language. Aris (1979a: xvi) points out that Hodgson's 'Tákpa' was

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12 ཁལ་སྲིད་རྒྱལ་    13 རེ་ཏི་    14 སྲས་ཡུལ་སྒང་

15 गोङ्खोला    16 ཨོ་རྒྱན་དབང་ཕྱུག    17 देवानगिरि

18 བདེ་བ་སྒང་    19 དབང་འདུས་ཕོ་བྲང    20 ཏ་མགྲིན་

21 ཀྲོང་གསར་    22 ཝང་སྒང་    23 ཇུང་སྦིས་

24 ཕུམ་ཟུར་    25 ཅུང་སེང་    26 གཞལ་སྒང་ (recently also གཞལམ་སྒང་)

27 རྣམ་རྒྱལ་    28 དག་པ་ཚོ་ལྔ་ (In Bhutan, the hypercorrect spelling དགས་པ་ is used)

confused by Shafer with 'Dwags',[29] a Tibetan dialect spoken south of the Tsangpo[30] and west of the Kongbo area.[31] Shafer's (1954, 1955, 1974) comparative work on 'Dwags' and 'proto-East Bodish' should therefore be read as applying to D°akpa and, by consequence, to the languages of the Bumthang group, which Aris (1979a) first identified as 'East Bodish'. In fact, with the exception of D°akpa, all modern East Bodish languages are native to central and northeastern Bhutan. East Bodish can be divided into Archaic and Mainstream East Bodish. The Archaic branch consists of the (1) Western and (2) Eastern dialect of Black Mountain Mönpa. Mainstream East Bodic includes (1) the diverse dialects of Henkha, known variously as Henkha, Mangde, 'Nyenkha, 'Adap and Phobjikha, (2) the three languages comprising the 'Greater Bumthang Language', viz. Bumthang, Kheng and Kurtöp, (3) Chali, (4) Dzala, and (5) D°akpa.
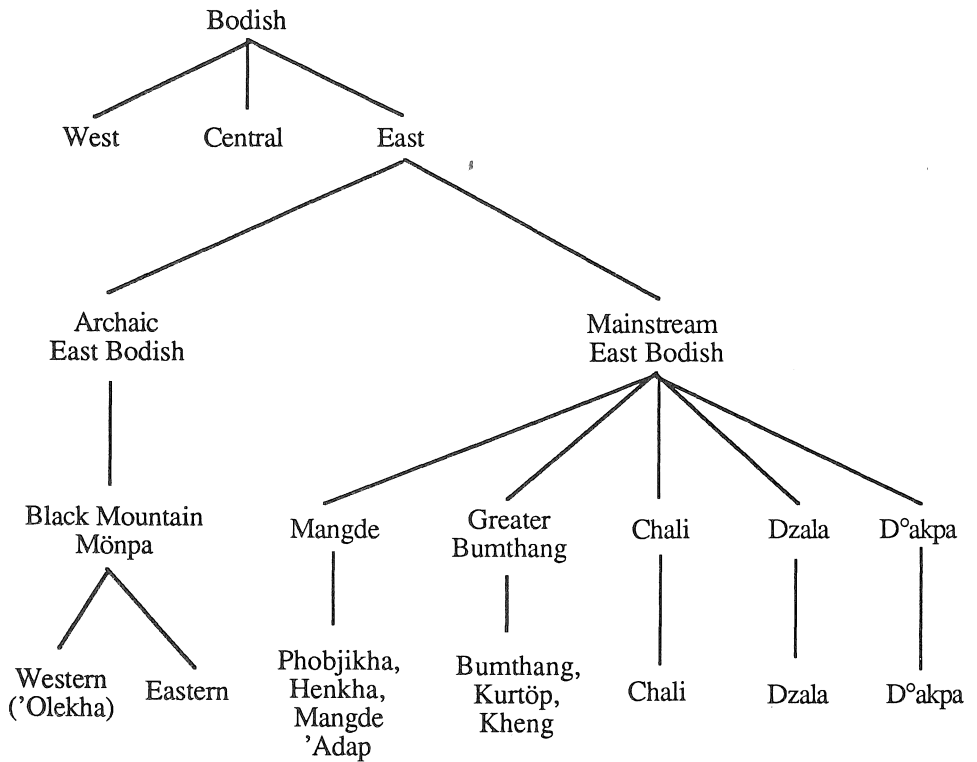


DIAGRAM 1: tentative family tree of East Bodish

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[29] དགས་པོ་

[30] གཙང་པོ་

[31] ཀོང་པོ་

## 3. Some remarks on Black Mountain phonology

Before embarking on our discussion of Black Mountain conjugational morphology, some phonological observations are in order. Black Mountain distinguishes fourteen vowel phonemes. The rounded back vowels /ü/ and /ö/ are long in duration and have the phonetic realisations [yː] and [ø] respectively. The remaining twelve vowel phonemes are arranged in six pairs, each consisting of a long and a short vowel. The long and short members of each such pair differ not only in length, but also in timbre: Long /î/ is realised as a long unrounded closed front vowel [iː], whereas short /i/ has various realisations [i ~ ɪ ~ e]. Long /ê/ has a rather open phonetic realisation [æː ~ ɛː], and short /e/ is realised as half-open [ɛ]. Long /â/ is a long open vowel [aː], and short /a/ has more central realisations [ə ~ ɑ]. Long /ɔ̂/ and short /ɔ/ are realised as the rounded half-open back vowels [ɔː] and [ɔ]. Long /ô/ and short /o/ are realised as the rounded half-closed back vowels [oː] and [o]. Long /û/ and short /u/ are realised as the rounded closed back vowels [uː] and [u]. The use of the circumflex accent to indicate long vowels is in accordance with a convention used in Roman Dzongkha.

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\begin{array}{ccccc}
\text{i} & \text{î} & \text{ü} & & \text{u} \;\; \text{û} \\
& \text{e} \;\; \text{ê} & \text{ö} & & \text{o} \;\; \text{ô} \\
& & \text{a} \;\; \text{â} & \text{ɔ} \;\; \text{ɔ̂} &
\end{array}
$$

As in Bumthang and Dzongkha, high and low register tone is distinctive in syllables beginning with vowels, voiced nasals, voiced liquids and semivowels. In such syllables high tone is indicated by an apostrophe, as in Roman Dzongkha, e.g. high tone *'ma* vs. low register *ma*. Syllables with voiced initial plosives, affricates and sibilants are automatically in low register tone, and syllables with voiceless initial plosives, affricates, sibilants and liquids are in the high register tone.

## 4. Black Mountain conjugational morphology

Black Mountain personal pronouns, particularly those of the first person, are not as 'Bodiform' as those of Bumthang, which here are juxtaposed to the Dzongkha pronouns. The first singular pronouns of Black Mountain, *kö* 'I', and Gongduk, *za* 'I', appear to be related, the initial of the latter apparently having undergone palatalisation. It should be pointed out that the Gongduk third person pronoun *gon* is cognate with the Bumthang deictic pronoun *gon* 'he, she, the other one', comparable in meaning to Dzongkha *zhenmi*.[32] The Lepcha pronouns are listed as given by Mainwaring (1876), whereby I use the circumflex accent for the flourish in the native Lepcha script known as a *ṛân*. Mainwaring (1876: 5), who retains the native diacritic in his Roman transliteration of Lepcha, describes it as 'a sort of circumflex sign', which is used in combination with Lepcha orthographic *a* and *i* to represent two pairs of distinct vowels.

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[32] གཞན་མི་

TABLE 1: personal pronouns

**Lepcha** (Mainwaring 1876)

| | singular | dual | plural |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | go | ka-nyî | ka-yú |
| 2 | hó | a-nyî | a-yú |
| 3 | hu | hu-nyî | hu-yú |

**Black Mountain (Rukha)**      **Gongduk**

| | singular | plural | singular | plural |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | kö | ɔŋdat, ɔŋnak [iŋc]; anak[exc] | za | ziŋ |
| 2 | iŋ, andat | iŋnak, iŋ | gi | giŋ |
| 3 | ho?ma [m] | ho?oŋ, hoŋnak | gon | gonmat |
| | ho?met [f] | | | |

**Bumthang**      **Dzongkha**

| | singular | plural | singular | plural |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ŋat | ŋet | nga[33] | ngace[34] |
| 2 | wet | yin | chö[35] | chä[36] |
| 3 | khit | bot | kho[37] [m] | khong[38] |
| | | | mo[39] [f] | |

In Rukha, the plural suffix <-nak> in the plural pronouns may be replaced by the collective suffix <-chachap>, a loan suffix from Dzongkha.

Each cell in tables 1 and 2 lists the future and plain forms of the verb. Agreement endings of negative future and negative plain forms are the same as those of the affirmative forms. Negation is indexed by the negative prefix <mâ->, which has the form <man-> before verb stems with initial /y/.

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[33] ང་

[34] ང་བཅས་

[35] ཁྱོད་

[36] ཁྱད་

[37] ཁོ་

[38] ཁོང་

[39] མོ་

The morpheme <-ŋa> (1sAS) indexes first singular agent or subject and occurs in intransitive verb forms with a first singular subject and in transitive 1s→2/3 forms. The suffix <-ŋa> occurs in the person and number slot, suffixal slot sf1. The morpheme <-ŋa> has the allomorph <-na> after verb stem final /t/ and /n/ and <-ma> after final /p/ or /m/.

The *portemanteau* morpheme <-sâŋ> (p→1) indexes the transitive relationship between a plural agent and a first person patient and occurs in 2p→1 and 3p→1 forms in suffixal slot sf1, preceding the suffix <-ka ~ -ki> (n1AS).

The morpheme <-ya> (1) marks the involvement of a first person actant in all forms in which first person actant is not indicated by another morpheme, viz. the first singular agent/subject morpheme <-ŋa> or the p→1 *portemanteau* morpheme <-sâŋ>. The suffix <-ya> occurs in intransitive verb forms with a first plural subject and in transitive 1p→2/3, 2s→1 and 3s→1 forms. First person involvement, indexed by any one of the three morphemes <-ŋa> (1sAS), <-sâŋ> (p→1) and <-ya> (1), is obligatorily marked in the Black Mountain verb.

The morpheme <-nak> (n1p) indexes plural number of a non-first person agent or subject and occurs in intransitive forms with a non-first person plural subject and in transitive 2p→3 and 3p→2/3 forms in suffixal slot sf1, preceding the morpheme <-ka ~ -ki> (n1AS). The suffix <-nak> is cognate with the suffix <-nak> in the plural personal pronouns. The suffix <-nak> does not occur in 2p→1 and 3p→1 verb forms where plurality of agent is indexed by the *portemanteau* morpheme <-sâŋ> p→1.

The morpheme <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ki ~ -gi ~ -ta ~ -ti> (n1AS) indexes a non-first person agent or subject. The morpheme occurs in intransitive forms with a non-first person subject and in transitive 2→3, 3→2/3, 2p→1 and 3p→1 forms. The suffix has the allomorphs <-ki ~ -gi ~ -ti> before the future tense suffix <-m>, the allomorphs <-ga ~ -gi> following a vowel, and the allomorphs <-ta ~ -ti> after stem final /t/. The non-first person agent/subject morpheme does not occur in 2s→1 and 3s→1 forms, which are formally indistinct from 1p→2/3 forms and intransitive first plural forms. Occurrence of the first person morpheme <-ya> in suffixal slot sf2 precludes the occurrence of the non-first person agent/subject suffix. The vowel /a/ in the non-first person agent/subject morpheme <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ki ~ -gi ~ -ta ~ -ti> (n1AS) becomes /e/ in yes-no questions.

The Black Mountain future tense in <-m> expresses some future event, whether it be a potential future, a factual or scheduled future event or a present future of immediate realisation. There is a Black Mountain evidential suffix <-go>, which is similar in meaning to the Dzongkha ending <-bä ~ -wä>[40] and expresses a recently acquired insight, or deduced or recently observed phenomenon. The evidential does not occur in the future tense and is not attested in forms with a first person agent or subject. The full form of the evidential suffix <-go> occurs after the ending <-ya> in 3s→1 forms, e.g. *ho?me-se kö-ŋa baheya-go* (he-ERG I-PAT give-PRG-1 EV) 'he is giving it to me'. In other forms, the evidential fuses with the non-first person agent/subject suffix <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ta> to give the ending <-ko ~ -go ~ -to>.

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40 པས་ ~ པས་

TABLE 5. endings of the imperative

| 2→1 | (mâ)-Σ-sâŋ-lo |
|---|---|
| 2s→3 | (mâ)-Σ-lo |
| 2p→3 | (mâ)-Σ-nak-lo |

Other Black Mountain person and number agreement markers are found in the imperative and in the perfect gerund. A morpheme <-sâŋ> marks 2→1 imperative forms and is evidently related to the suffix <-sâŋ> (p→1), which indexes transitive relationships between a plural agent and a first person patient in indicative forms. The non-first person plural morpheme <-nak> (n1p) marks 2p→3 imperative forms and renders them distinct from 2s→3 imperatives. All imperative forms take the imperative suffix <-lo> and, in the negative, the negative prefix <mâ->.

The Black Mountain perfect gerund translates into Dzongkha as the past participle in <-di>[41] and into Nepali as the gerund in <-era>. The gerund expresses an action or event preceding the situation denoted by the main verb or an activity adverbially modifying the situation denoted by the main verb. The Black Mountain gerund has the form <-ga> (GER/1s) when the subject or agent is a first person singular actant, and the form <-sa> (GER) when the subject or agent is not a first person singular actant, e.g. *Kö-löse hô-ga ba-ŋa* (I-ERG wash-GER/1s give-1sAS) 'Having washed it, I gave it [to him]'. *Dirik kö-ŋa hô-sa ba-sâŋ-ga* (today I-PAT wash-GER give-p→1-n1AS) 'Today, having washed it, they gave it to me', *Kö shä-ga gö-ŋa-m. Iŋ yä shä-sa mâ-gö-ge?* (I wander-GER/1s go-1sAS-FUT. you too wander-GER NEG-go-n1AS/Q) 'I am going a-wandering. Aren't you going a-wandering too?'

## 5. The East Bodish and Proto-Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement systems

The Black Mountain first person singular agent/subject suffix <-ŋa> (1sAS) is cognate to the first person singular ending *<-ŋ ~ -ŋa> (1s) in the reconstructed model of Proto-Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement (van Driem 1993a, modified in forthcoming c). The velar initial of the distinct first person singular gerund <-ga> (GER/1s), as opposed to the regular Black Mountain gerund ending <-sa> (GER), may also represent the reflex of the interaction of some older segment with the Proto-Tibeto-Burman first person singular morpheme *<-ŋ ~ -ŋa> (1s). The Black Mountain p→1 *portemanteau* <-sâŋ> appears to reflect both the first person singular proto-morpheme *<-ŋ ~ -ŋa> (1s) and some reflex /s/ of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman dual morpheme *<-si> (d), reanalysed as a marker of plural meaning. The Black Mountain morpheme may in its entirety be cognate with the Hayu preterite first person singular patient/subject morpheme <-suŋ> (1sPS/PT), which, to our present state of knowledge, may or may not be compatible with an etymological relationship with the Proto-Tibeto-Burman dual morpheme *<-si>.

The Black Mountain first person ending <-ya> (1) appears to be a reflex of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman first and second person plural marker *<-i> (1p/2p), widely reflected both in Kiranti languages and in Tibeto-Burman conjugations outside of the Himalayan region. Whereas the first person singular and the dual proto-morphemes, *<-ŋ ~ -ŋa> (1s) and *<-si> (d),

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41 �སྦྱེ· ~ སྡེ· ~ སྡེ·

occupy anterior positions in the suffixal chain of the Proto-Tibeto-Burman verb, the first and second person plural proto-morpheme *<-i> (1p/2p) is located at the end of the suffixal chain. This ancient element order is reflected in the relative position of the Black Mountain agreement markers.

The Black Mountain non-first person agent/subject marker <-ka ~ -ga ~ -ki ~ -gi ~ -ta ~ -ti> (n1AS) appears to be cognate with the Dumi second and third person subject morpheme <-a> (23S) and the Dumi second/third person singular suffix <-a> (s23). If this is the case, it would necessitate revamping earlier speculations concerning the provenance of these Dumi suffixes to bring them, and perhaps the Bahing 3s→3 *portemanteau* <-a>, into line with the Qiāng, Nocte, Jinghpaw and Primi reflexes of the posited Proto-Tibeto-Burman third person suffix *<-a>.

The Black Mountain non-first person plural suffix <-nak> (n1p) does not seem to have any obvious cognate in the flexional systems of other Tibeto-Burman verbs. The fact that this suffix also occurs in Black Mountain pronouns suggests that the morpheme, and the incorporation of this suffix into the Black Mountain conjugation, may have been a recent or local development.

Black Mountain has preserved no reflex of either the Proto-Kiranti non-preterite tense suffix *<-k> or the Proto-Tibeto-Burman preterite tense suffix *<-tɛ>. The Black Mountain future morpheme <-m> appears to be a reflex of the same ancient copula as the Hayu assertive marker and nominalising suffix <-mi> (<-m> after vowels), the Dumi nominalising and imperfective aspect suffix <-m> and the Newar relativiser <-mhɔ>, suffixed to verbs which are used adnominally to singular animate referents. A modern full reflex of this ancient copula is the Dumi fourth conjugation copula used with animate referents <-moː-/-mɨ-/-mu->.

It is significant that a conjugation which reflects the hypothetical Proto-Tibeto-Burman verbal agreement system has been retained in an archaic representative of East Bodish, which itself is held to be a conservative branch of Bodish. A possible implication is that loss of conjugational morphology was a secondary development in Bodish. Not only do the agreement affixes of the Black Mountain conjugation match reconstructed proto-morphemes in form and meaning, the sequential order of elements in the East Bodish verb also appears to match that of the periphrastic agreement model reconstructed for the Proto-Tibeto-Burman verb.

The Mainstream East Bodish languages, which have not retained any conjugational morphology, are spoken by population groups whose ancestors were involved in the early spread of Buddhism in central Bhutan in the eight and ninth centuries. The spread of the Greater Bumthang Language into Kheng and Kurtö may, in fact, have been contemporaneous with the introduction of Buddhism into these areas. Black Mountain, on the other hand, is spoken by a people who until recent historical times — at least on the western slopes of the Black Mountains — led a semi-nomadic existence, inhabiting a village site for a few generations before moving on to clear land elsewhere. Only gradually are the Western Black Mountain Mönpa adopting traditional Bhutanese architecture in house building, and many houses are still built in the style of temporary dwellings. The ancestors of Black Mountain speakers appear to have lived largely beyond the bounds of traditional, mainstream Bhutanese culture and, until recent times, to have remained relatively unstirred by many of the developments which led to the formation of this culture.

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42 དུག་ཕོས་སངས་རྒྱས་རྡོ་རྗེ།

43 རྫོང་ཁའི་བདའ་གཞུང་གསར་པ།