

EDITORIAL

This issue of the *Bulletin of Tibetology* is devoted chiefly to linguistics, but more especially to the field of Tibetology in its quintessence. The contributions are devoted not just to Sikkim and the languages of Sikkim, but together they present the most substantive new collection of studies on Bodish languages and on Bodic as a linguistic subgroup. In detailing the most recent linguistic insights and clarifying the relationship between Tibetan, Drenjongke and Dzongkha, this issue of the *Bulletin* updates our understanding of the Bodish languages. At a higher taxonomic level in the family tree, a new understanding is also presented of Bodic as comprising an important branch within the Trans-Himalayan language family.

The first instalment outlines the sociolinguistic situation of Sikkim's indigenous languages, i.e. Drenjongke, Limbu and Lepcha. Whilst Lepcha constitutes a linguistic subgroup or independent branch in its own right within the Trans-Himalayan language family, Limbu must be discussed in relation to the Kiranti subgroup of which the language either forms part or with which Limbu is closely allied. Similarly, Drenjongke is a Bodish language and its linguistic affinities must be understood within the context of the Bodish subgroup within the larger Bodic branch to which the language belongs.

A sound understanding of modern Tibetan history and recent developments in international Sino-Tibetan relations is indispensable to an appreciation of the language endangerment situation which faces Tibetan and *mutatis mutandis* also the related Bodish languages Drenjongke and Dzongkha. The repercussions of political decisions in recent history have severely impacted the sociolinguistic situation and the prospects of survival of Bodish languages in general. In light of its overwhelming sociolinguistic ramifications, this historical geopolitical elephant in the room can no longer be ignored. Therefore, in this holistic context, the historical sociolinguistic situation of Sikkim's indigenous languages is explained. Subsequently, the phylogenetic positions of Limbu, Lepcha and Drenjongke in the Trans-Himalayan language family are correlated with the phylogeography of Y-chromosomal haplogroups found to be borne by male speakers of the language communities in question in order to shed light on the prehistory and origins of the indigenous peoples of Sikkim.

The second instalment represents a grand opus in historical linguistics by Timotheus Adrianus Bodt. Drenjongke, Dzongkha and Tibetan belong to the Bodish subgroup of the Bodic branch of the Trans-Himalayan language family. Nicolaes Witsen provided the first specimens of written Tibetan published in the West in 1692, and the linguistic study of Tibetan was initiated by Augustinus Antonius Georgius in 1762. Increasingly since the 19th century, much linguistic work has been conducted on Tibetan. Scholars have striven to gain an understanding of the precise phylogenetic position of the language within the family, as well as the exact relationship of Drenjongke, Dzongkha and Tibetan to related languages of the Himalayan region.

Over the course of more than two centuries, progress has been made, but until now no definitive clarity was reached. Now for the first time, in this issue of the *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Tim Bodt's historical linguistic comparison of Bodish and Bodic sound laws sheds a clear light on the position of Drenjongke, Dzongkha, Tibetan and closely related languages within the Trans-Himalayan language family tree, as well as providing a lucid understanding of the relationships of these languages to each other. Bodt redefines the terms Bodish and Bodic so that these old labels are now empirically grounded in historical phonology and linguistic phylogeny, and so presents a new view of the field of Trans-Himalayan linguistics.

A third instalment by Nathan Wayne Hill on the Tibetan passive construction in the Old Tibetan *Rāmāyaṇa* showcases the erudition and linguistic and philological expertise of the author at its best. Hill's prose is always a delight to read. Any reader who happens to have had the pleasure of getting to know the author can imagine hearing the text spoken in Hill's voice whilst relishing his prose. Finally, a lovely book review by Alexander Colin McKay provides some icing on the cake.

George van Driem
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