

Newari Language and Linguistics: Conspectus

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1. The Language and the Area

1.1 Name of the Language: Newari is one of four Tibeto-Burman languages with an old written tradition (the other three being Tibetan, Burmese and Manipuri) and the only member of the Himalayan group with such a tradition. The most common name for the language in linguistic literature is Nevari or Newari, but indigenous publications by Newari writers consistently refer to it as 'Nepāl Bhāsā'.¹ In colloquial term the language is simply known as Newā Bhāe (the Newā language) by the majority of native speakers.

1.2 Distribution of speakers: Newari speakers are concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley, with a few settlements in trading centres outside the valley. On the basis of the Nepal Census Reports of 1952/54 and 1961, Gopal Singh Nepali (The Newars, Bombay 1965: 19-20) and Dor Bahadur Bista (People of Nepal, Kathmandu 1967: 16) report a total of nearly 400,000 Newari speakers, of which fifty-five percent are living in Kathmandu Valley. Newari speakers living outside Nepal are to be found mainly in the Darjeeling District and Sikkim of India, Bhutan and Tibet where their speech forms have been increasingly influenced by language contact situations. No reliable data however are available to date on the migrating Newar population. The Nepal Census Report of 1971 places the number of native speakers of Newari living in Nepal at 457,949 which is roughly 4% of the total population of the country.

2. Classical Newari

The term 'classical Newari' was first used by Jorgensen (1936) in which he stated, "The language I call classical Newari, is the language of the MSS". This definition is seriously limited as it excludes the earlier history of written Newari which appears in stone or metal inscriptions, land grants or legal documents (tamsuk-s) written on palm-leaves, and other miscellaneous media written on paper. The role of classical Newari in the documentation of the history of the Nepal Valley

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is obviously an important one, and the classical period as such extends from Nepal Samvat (N.S.) 293 (A.D. 1173) the first attested use of Newari in an inscription (Tamot, N.S. 1097/1977), to the early part of this century. The work of Vajracharya (B.S. 2030/1973) however reveals a variety of Newari nominals found in Licchavi inscriptions (ca. 350 to 750 A.D.). On the basis of the Licchavi epigraphy, Tamot (N.S. 1100/1980) attempted an enumeration of the non-Sanskrit words, and Malla (1981:17) postulates that "the source language of most of these nominals is proto-Newari". Although the evidence may not be fully conclusive, the materials brought to light seem to indicate the antiquity of the language that dates back to pre-Aryan sources, and certainly beyond the beginning of a written tradition. From early 14th century to the entrance of the Shaha dynasty, many historical documents (such as inscriptions, vamsavali-s, thyasaphu-s etc.), technical manuscripts (on medicine, astronomy/astrology) and innumerable narrative texts (including religious and philosophical tantra-s) were written in classical Newari. Among these the bi-lingual Hitopadesa (N.S. 481/A.D. 1361 ?)², the two Amrakosa-s (N.S. 501/506: A.D. 1381/1386) and Gopalrājavamsāvali (N.S. 507-510/A.D. 1387-1390) are linguistically the most important.

Manuscripts continued to be written by hand in the Nepal script (Bhujimol, Pracalit or Ranjana scripts) until the advent of printing in the Kathmandu Valley around the beginning of this century. These texts are historically and linguistically important, and classical Newari is obviously an essential tool in the study of the development of the Tibeto-Burman languages in general and the Himalayan languages in particular.

3. Contemporary Newari

The most striking development in the history of modern Newari can be seen in the morphological structure of words. There is copious evidence to show that there has been systematic simplification in the morpheme structure and syllable structure of nominals and verbal roots in contemporary Newari. The older Newari forms in general had complex syllable structure consisting of monosyllabic roots and affixes (prefixes and suffixes) which according to Benedict (1972:96) characterize Tibeto-Burman morphology of antiquity. Shafer (1966:11) is also of the opinion that "Sino-Tibetan languages that have disyllabic and even trisyllabic words represent the primitive condition, the present monosyllabism being due to degeneration." The morphological analysis of Malla (1981:12-16) can be cited to show the changes in the structural elements of words:

<u>Ancient</u>	<u>Modern Newari</u>
(mā) kho-prin	kho-pa
mhas-prin	mhya-pi
pran-prin	pham-pi
khai-naṣ-pu	khad-pu
būgāyūmi	buṅga
lembati	lele
gullamtam	guita
satvaumalambā	satuṅgal/balambu
jamayambi	jamal
kicapricin	kisipidi
tuncatcatu	capali

The motivations for these changes are far from clear, e.g. why did -prin in kho-prin and mhas-prin evolve into -pa in one case and -pi in the other? Malla (17) takes the view that "these changes appear to be different depending perhaps upon dialectal, regional, social-cultural, and language-contact factors". While these resulted in the loss of consonants and consonant-clusters, the basic formations of stems and affixes (e.g. then-co, san-ko, kopun-dul, te-khum, te-gval, etc.) as found in ancient epigraphy are still used in present day Newari in the same sense. The loss of syllabification noted above may also be related to the process of stem variation in Newari nouns. For historical reasons a large number of nouns in Newari have lost their stem-final syllables, which however are still retained in the oblique case forms of these nouns. These alternations can be seen in the following examples:

/la:/ 'water'	-	/lakha-e/	[l̥ə .khE:]	'in the water'
/phae/ 'wind'	-	/phasā-ā/	[phə .sā:]	'by/from the wind'
/pwā:/ 'stomach'	-	/pwātha-e/	[pwa.thE:]	'in the stomach'
/bhoē/ 'feast'	-	/bhoja-e/	[b̥ ^w o.dzE:]	'at the feast'
/koe:/ 'bone'	-	/kōca-e/	[k ^w ō.tsE:]	'in the bone'

where the hyphen stands for the morpheme break and the dot for the syllable break.

When the lost stem-final syllables re-appear in locative/ablative formations, we can assume that the final syllables -kha, -sa, -ha, -ja, -ca in the above examples belong to the old stems

rather than the suffixes. This interpretation simplifies the morphological analysis of words and the segmentation of morphemes into phonological syllables. Contemporary Newari in this sense could be viewed as a language with the preferred syllable structure of CV, CCV or CVV, and where, as in the case of stem variation, the constraints on syllabically motivated processes are related to morpho-syntactic constructions in a formal way.³

Another important aspect that characterizes modern Newari is the large-scale intrusion of words and expressions from Indo-Aryan languages and to some extent from English. While this is not a new phenomenon, and contact with Indo-Aryan languages has a long history, the extent and rate of such borrowings have reached such proportions as to render the language of the fashionable generation almost unintelligible to more conservative speakers. The influx of Sanskritized Nepali or Hindi on the other has had, as some see it, an adverse effect on the use of the language. Although borrowings are not unnatural in language-contact situations, there is today a tendency to revive, at least in writing, the native stock of words that has gone out of use under the impact of external influences.

Another communicative problem is perhaps internal to the language itself, namely the existence of widely divergent dialect groups divided by geographical distance and lack of socio-cultural interaction. There are for example several distinct dialects of Newari within Kathmandu Valley, but the channels of communication are not ideal. The problem becomes more acute when one encounters the primitive state of the language in the Dolakha dialect where intelligibility tends to be lost almost in toto. The dialect of Kathmandu proper, however, is generally recognized as the standard form in speech and writing. The Kathmandu dialect in this sense could be regarded as the norm in which a large bulk of published materials, some linguistic descriptions and a few Dictionaries are available.

4. Review of Earlier Works on Newari

According to Hale and Hale (1969:3) "most of what has been written about Newari is ancillary to anthropological studies, supportive of classificatory studies, or relevant primarily to the history of the language." They go on to cite the works of numerous scholars like Conrady (1891, 1893), Hodgson (1828, 1847), Jørgensen (1921, 1928, 1936a, 1936b, 1941), Shafer (1952), Joshi (1956), Sagar (1962), to name only a few, who have produced dictionaries and attempted various grammatical analyses of the language. In Grierson's (1909) Linguistic Survey of India 3:1, Newari was also one of the languages surveyed and partially

analysed. Shafer (1955, 1966-67) attempted a classification of Sino-Tibetan languages with particular reference to Newari. Apart from the earlier compilations of word lists of Newari by Kirkpatrick (1811:220-249), Hodgson (1874:3-8), Wright (1877:300-305) and Conrady (1891:1-35; 1893:539-573), the most valuable single contribution to the lexicography of classical Newari is Hans Jørgensen's 6000-word Dictionary of the Classical Newari (1936) which, although not comprehensive, covers the late Malla period as found in narrative texts. This was followed in 1941 by A Grammar of the Classical Newari which represents a historical treatment of the language.

Hale and Hale in (1969:4) noted that "most of the materials relevant to the descriptive, synchronic analysis of Newari of which we have knowledge are at present unpublished." In this connection they refer to scholars such as R.K. Sprigg, J. Brough and T.W. Clark, who are understood to have extensive unpublished materials at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. There are also other scholars like Boyd Michailovsky, A. Peter Burleigh, E.H. Bendix and R.R. Howren who have private unpublished collections of materials on Newari, but of which we have no detailed information.

Bharati V. Modi (1967) has given a phonemic analysis of Newari, purportedly from the point of view of Zellig Harris' structural approach to phonology. This is certainly one of the earliest works on Newari phonology, and was at the time the only published phonemic statement of the language.

Edward H. Bendix (1974) has published material which rests upon an interesting implicit analysis of the relationship between the Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman language families in terms of Nepali and Newari tense systems. Margrit and Austin Hale (1969) have published a phonemic summary which is actually more nearly morpho-phonemic than phonemic. Austin Hale has also produced a wide range of materials on Newari phonology and syntax, notably Hale (1970a,b,c) on segmental and textual structures; Hale (1973) on the form of verbal bases in Newari; and Hale (1980) on Finite Conjunct and Disjunct verb forms, which constitutes one of his most important contributions to the study of Newari syntax. Hale has also played an active role in various collaborative projects such as Hale and Hale (1970), a computerized compilation of Newari Concordance; Shresthacharya, Maskey and Hale (1971) on conversational materials; Hale and Manandhar (1973) on Case and Role in Newari; Friedman, Kansakar, Tuladhar and Hale (1975) on the variants of Newari vowels; Hale and Watters (1973) on clause patterns; and the preparation of a comprehensive Dictionary of contemporary Newari compiled with Thakurlal Manandhar (in press). Iswaranand Shresthacharya has published materials

on Newari lexicography and grammar particularly on areas of syntax (nouns and verbs), research work on Jyāpu vocabulary, and co-authored papers, namely Shresthacharya and Hale (1972) on Roman Newari orthography; Hale and Shresthacharya (1973) on Newari as a Classifier Language; and Shresthacharya (1976) on the redpublication in Newari verb phrase. Shresthacharya has also recently published a book on the Newari Root Verbs.

Mantaro J. Hashimoto has undertaken preliminary research work on Newari dialects, and recently published a classified lexicon of the Bhaktapur dialect, Hashimoto (1977). Margaret Langdon attempted a phonemic analysis of Newari as part of a field methods course under the guidance of Mary Haas, University of California, Berkeley.

Ulrike Kolver's Ph.D. dissertation on "Newari Sentence Structure" completed under the supervision of Prof. Hansjakob Seiler and material help from Austin Hale, was accepted by Cologne University in 1975. Bernhard Kolver and Ulrike Kolver have also published a few notable papers on Newari syntax, namely Kolver and Kolver (1975) on Newari noun inflection; Ulrike Kolver (1977) on nominalization and lexicalization in Modern Newari; Ulrike Kolver (1978) on Newari noun phrases; and Kolver and Kolver (1978) on Classical Newari Verb Morphology. K.P. Malla has published papers on the antiquity and history of the language, namely Malla (B.S. 2028/1971, 1973, 1980a, 1980b, 1981), and has recently published a book on Classical Newari Literature. Malla has also in manuscript form a Reference Grammar of Contemporary Newari, due to be published soon.

Kashinath Tamot has contributed several papers on the lexicography and etymological studies of the language, namely Tamot (1975, 1977a, 1977b, 1979, 1980, 1981). Hemraj Shakya has produced standard reference works on the old Newari scripts, Shakya (1952, 1973). Kansakar (1977, 1979, 1980, 1981a,b, 1982) represent some recent works on Newari phonology.

5. Genetic Classification

The classification of Tibeto-Burman languages and the placement of Newari among them, has been a matter of some controversy. Scholars and linguists who have treated the problem include Hodgson (1828), Sten Konow (1909), Shafer (1952, 1955, 1966), Voegelin and Voegelin (1964/65), Glover (1970) and Benedict (1972).

The earliest statement on the genetic affiliation of Newari was made by Hodgson (1828) who made a systematic comparison of the core vocabulary of Newari and Tibetan, and concluded that

"the root and stock of Newari are trans-Himalayan and northern...". This conclusion was presumably based on the shared phonological and morphological correspondences, as distinct from Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan lingua-francas. Hodgson however did not elaborate on the possible sub-grouping of languages within the Sino-Tibetan family. Grierson (1909: Vol. 3, Part I) which represents the work of August Conrady and Sten Konow, assigns Newari to the non-pronominalized group of the Himalayan languages, along with Gurung, Tamang, Sunwar and Magar. In this classification (see Figure 1) the language most closely related to Newari is Pahari, though by some standards it might be considered a dialect of Newari. By the time of this classification, the family relation of Newari with Sino-Tibetan had been established beyond dispute.

TIBETO - BURMAN

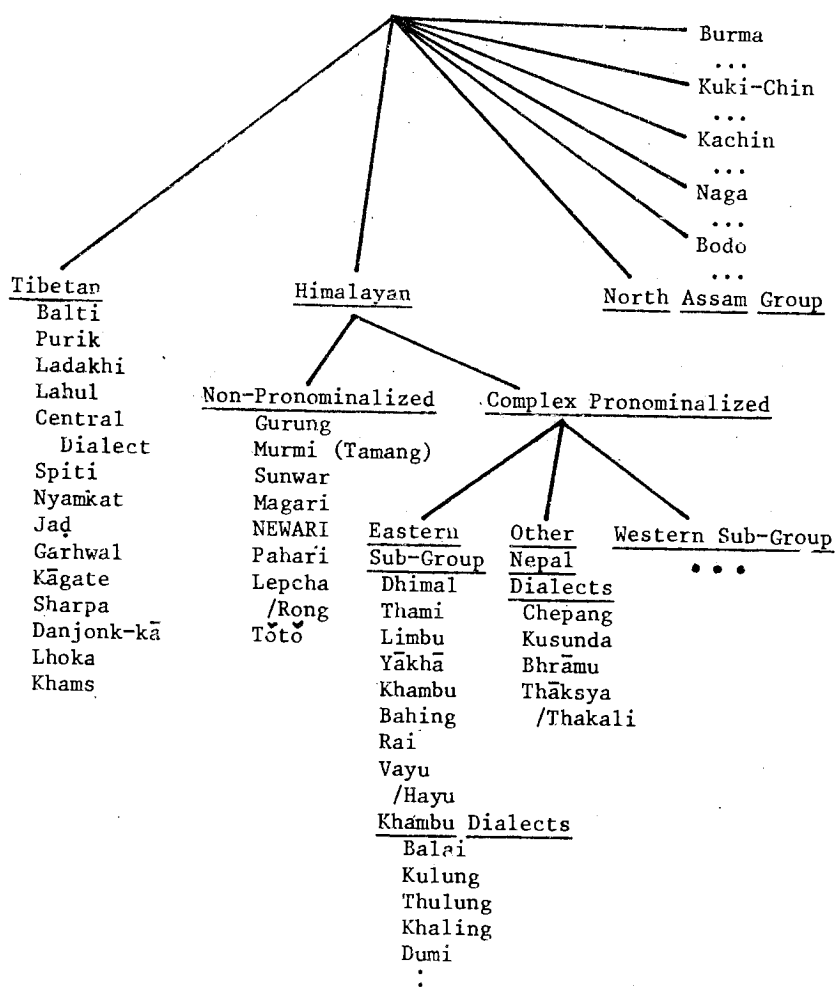


Fig. 1: Genetic classification of Tibeto-Burman languages, according to Grierson (1909).

Shafer (1955) places both Newari and Pahari within the Newarish section of the Bodic Division of Sino-Tibetan. Later in (1966) Shafer leaves the divisional classification of the Newarish section uncertain ('probably sections of Bodic, possibly of Burmic, certainly not of Baric'). This situation may be related to Shafer's earlier paper on Newari in which he concluded that "the loss of nearly all traces of (archaic Tibeto-Burman) prefixes and of many final consonants connects Newari with the languages to the north (Tibet) and to the east (Burma and the Indo-Burmese frontier) rather than with the Tibeto-Burmic languages of Assam" (Shafer 1952:93).⁴ Shafer's (1966) classification, as shown in Figure 2, shows Newari to be relatively distant from the other languages in the Bodish and Himalayish sections of the Bodic Division.

C.F. and F.M. Voegelin (1964/65) on the other hand, classify Newari and Pahari together with Gurung and Tamang as members of the non-pronominalized sub-group of the Gyarung-Mishmi family of the Sino-Tibetan phylum. The classificatory terms used by them suggests a geographical division of languages in which the linguistic distance between two speech forms is proportionate to the geographical distance. They maintain that

The family tree model is more appropriate for the different language families in the Sino-Tibetan phylum than for the phylum itself ... We avoid the controversy by giving exclusive attention to the languages spoken today in each of the constituent language families.

(Voegelin and Voegelin 6:3, 8-9)

The model proposed by Voegelin and Voegelin is shown in Fig. 3.

The computations of cognate groupings for thirty Tibeto-Burman languages by Glover (1970) seem to confirm Shafer's placement of Newari among the Himalayish languages. Glover arrived at a genetic classification on the basis of the percentage of semantic and phonetic cognates shared by two or more diverging languages. Figure 4 based on Glover (1970) shows the percentage of probable cognates, and the dates represent the time depths of separation calculated from the respective percentage figures. In this classification, Newari is closer to Chepang (with 28 percent shared cognates) than to any other language.

The grouping of languages by Shafer and Glover can be compared with the results of Benedict's (1972) work which, while covering the same ground as Shafer, incorporates fresh supporting

criteria for the divergence of languages. Benedict, working primarily on the basis of phonological correspondences, introduces the seven principal Divisions or Nuclei of Tibeto-Burman and indicates the direction of divergence from a common nucleus. In this organization, Newari is shown as belonging possibly to the Kiranti Nucleus from which it has diverged to a considerable extent. In this scheme of classification, summarized here in Fig. 5, the relationship between the Bodish Group of the Tibetan nucleus and the Kiranti languages is quite explicit, while Newari seems to have developed independently from the Kiranti source.

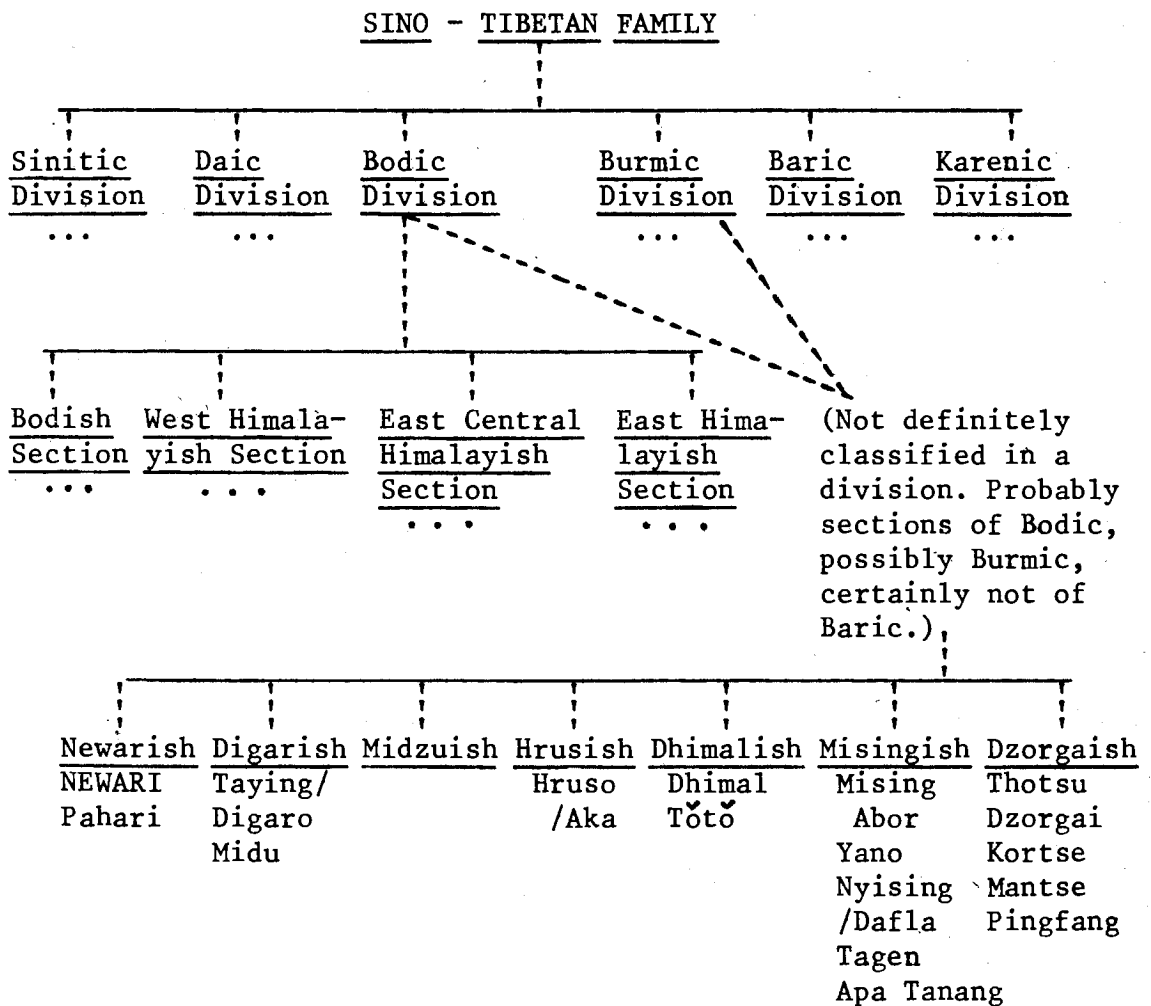
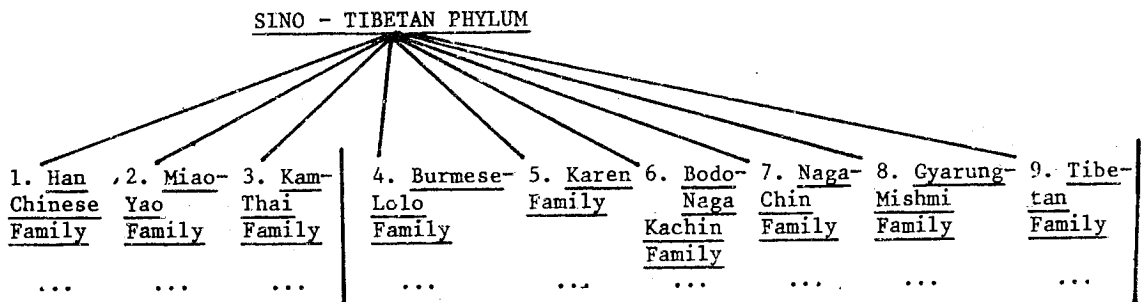
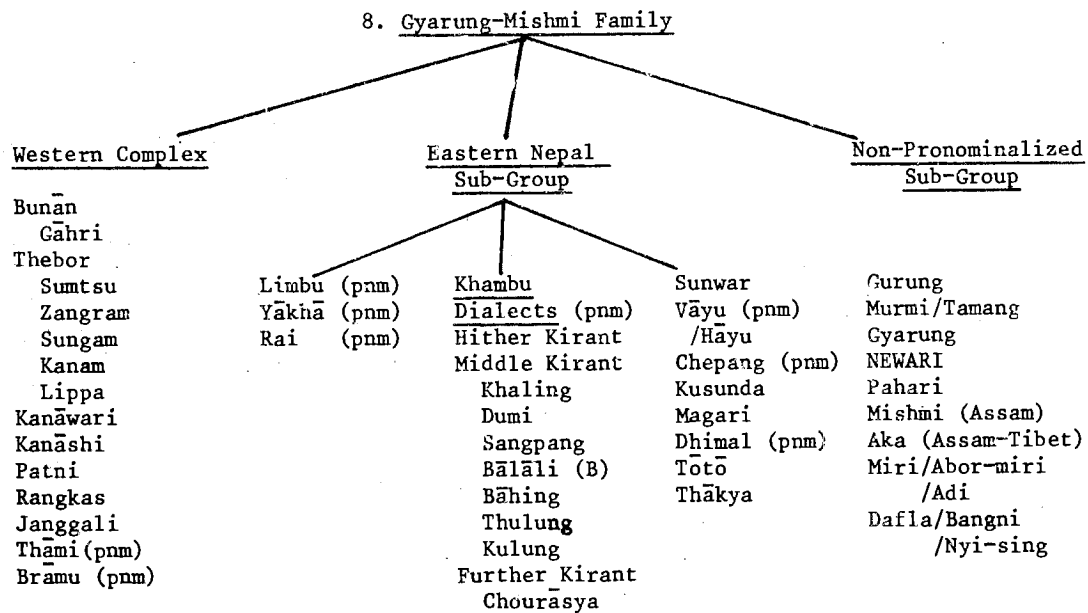


Fig. 2: Division of Sino-Tibetan family, based on Shafer (1966)



Traditionally Tibeto-Burman, but Voegelin and Voegelin do not use this as a classificatory term.



pnm = pronominalized language
 B = Bontawa language
 / = alternate name for the same language

Fig. 3: Division of Sino-Tibetan families, showing mainly the Gyarung-Mishmi languages, based on Voegelin and Voegelin (1964/65)

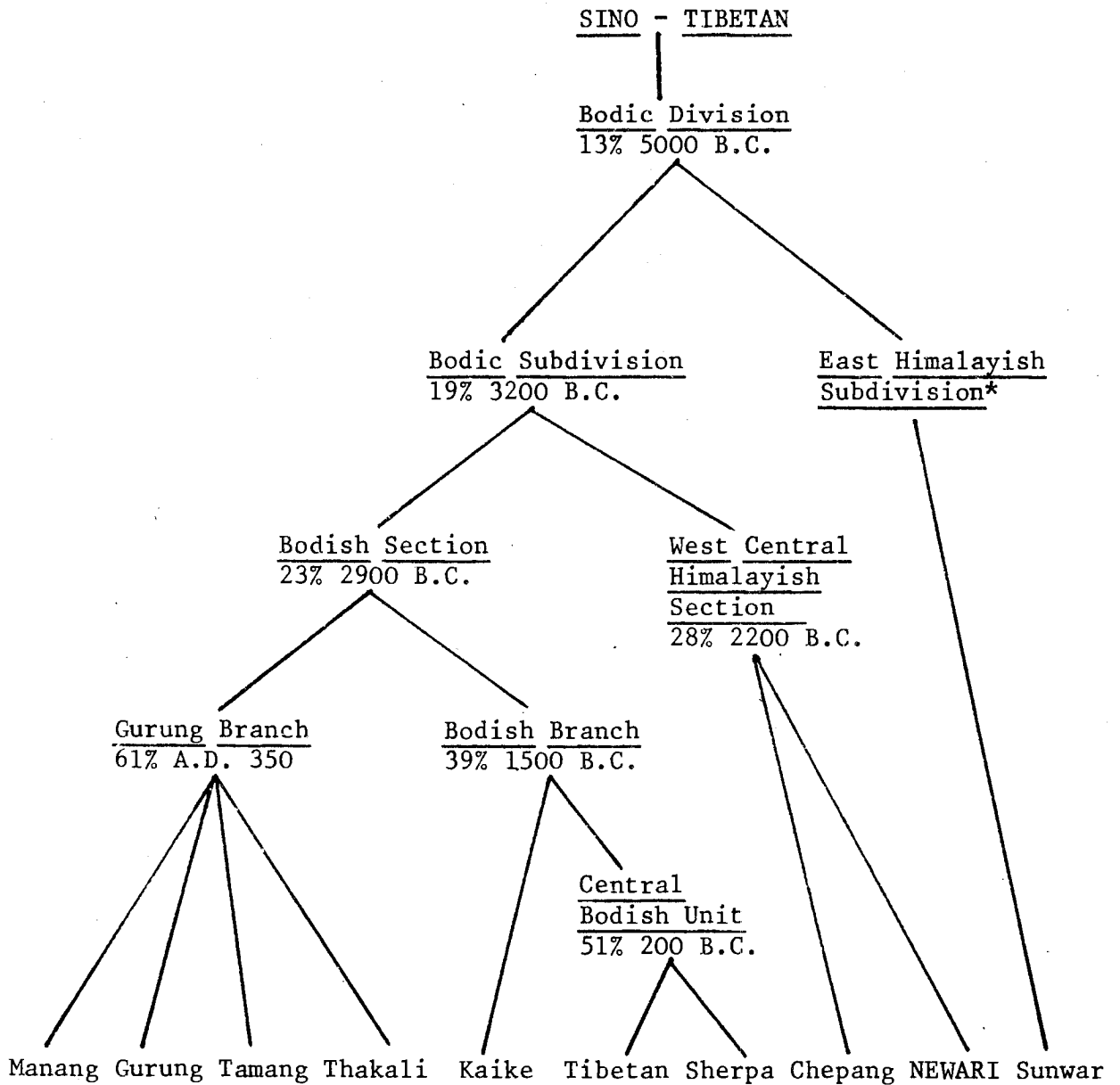


Fig. 4: Relation of Newari to Sino-Tibetan, based on Glover (1970) who has preserved Shafer's terminology.
*East Himalayish includes two or more branches.

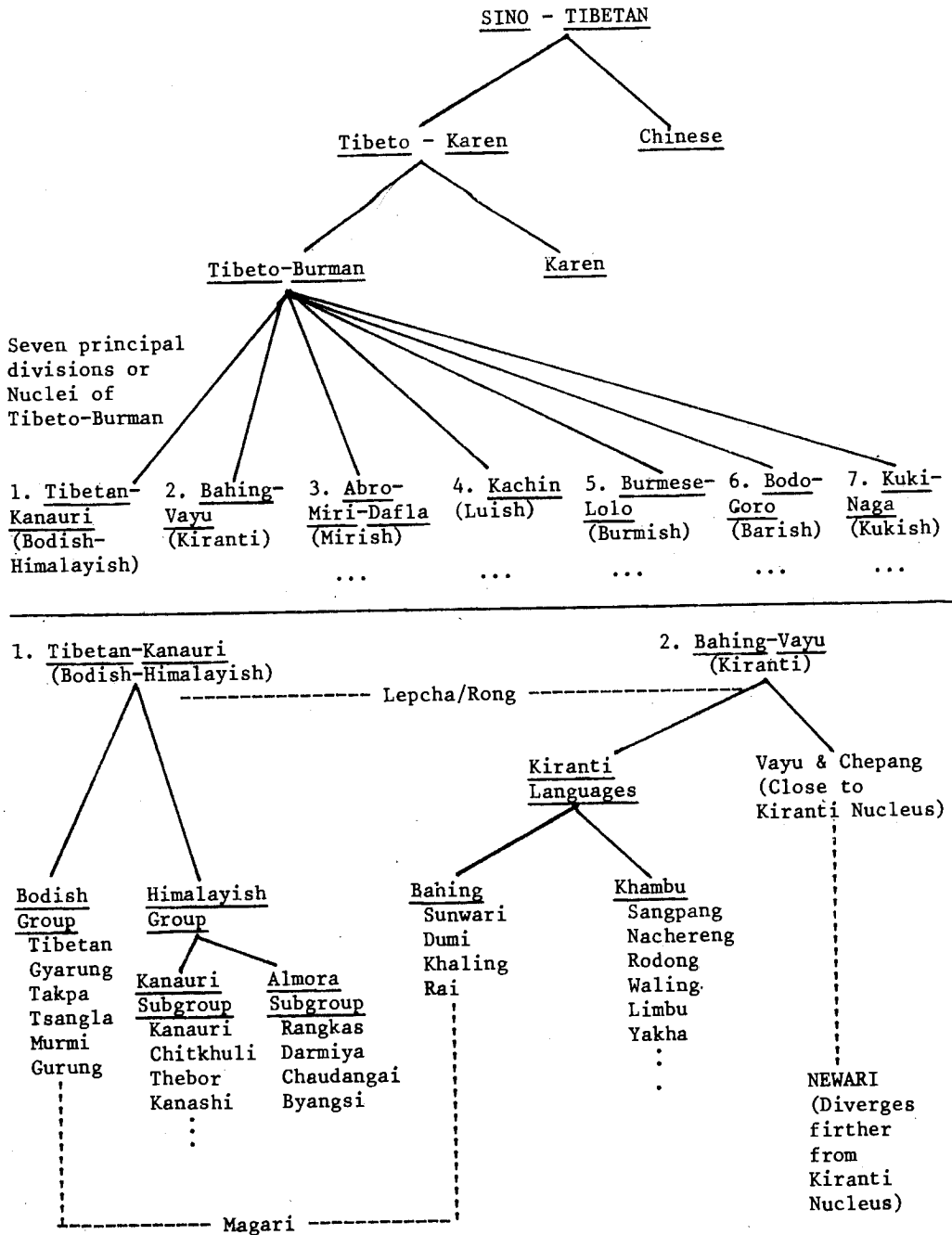


Fig. 5: Division of Tibeto-Burman languages showing mainly the Bodish-Himalayish and Kiranti groups, based on Benedict (1972)

The classificatory works surveyed above seem to indicate considerable difficulty and uncertainty about the placement of Newari. The initial problem may be due to the inability of scholars to connect Newari with the migration pattern of Tibeto-Burman speakers, as proposed in the Linguistic Survey of India. Further, Newari separated from the "Tibetan" group and the basically pronominalized Himalayan languages at an early period of its history. In this respect it is difficult or at least arbitrary to reconstruct the basic stratum that had contributed to present day Newari speech. The truth perhaps lies in the fact that Newari is a language evolving from mixed racial/linguistic influences that do not lend easily to a neat classification.

NOTES

1. The evidence from manuscripts and historical documents shows that the language was originally known as 'Nepāl Bhāsā' from Nepal Samvat 500 (A.D. 1380), and came to be referred as 'Newari' by foreign scholars only from N.S. 880 (A.D. 1760) onwards. For an etymology of the word 'Nepāla', see Malla (1980a, 1981).
2. Some doubt has recently been cast on the date of this document, long believed to be the oldest Newari manuscript. Scholars, however, have not arrived at conclusive verification.
3. For details on Newari syllable structure, see Kansakar (1980:9-16), and Kansakar (1982) for an account of Newari verb morphology.
4. This view seems to contradict the popular hypothesis proposed in the Linguistic Survey of India of two branches of migration along the Himalayas from east to west. Chatterjee (1951) and Regmi (1960) assign the origin of the first branch to north Assam and NEFA (the Newars included), and the second branch to Tibet in the north.

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