Abstract

Of the approximately 19 Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Bhutan, only a handful has been closely studied. Although these represent a diverse range of subgroups, one subgroup, East Bodish, is almost completely unique to Bhutan. The national language, Dzongkha, along with a few other languages around the kingdom, is a representative of Tibetic, a widely spread clade whose members descend from Old Tibetan. East Bodish is local to the central and eastern parts of the country, and is internally divided into a Dakpa-Dzala subgroup and a Bumthangic subgroup. Two other languages, Chali and Upper Mangdep (variously known as Mangdebikha, 'Nyenkha, Henke, and Phobjip in existing literature), have an unclear relative position (Hyslop 2013a).

The foundational goal of this work is to describe the structural and functional grammar of predication in Upper Mangdep. Despite the established placement of Upper Mangdep in the East Bodish group, this grammar superficially appears to share many similarities with Dzongkha (Tibetic). The existing phylogenetic placement is based on lexico-phonological study, and indeed a plurality of Upper Mangdep lexemes have an East Bodish etymology, including verb roots. Additionally, however, certain developments in Upper Mangdep and other East Bodish languages are strong evidence of a common origin. On the other hand, there are many examples of isomorphy (correspondence) between predicational constructions in Upper Mangdep and Dzongkha. That is, verbal constructions in the two languages, both transparent and opaque (non-compositional), often make use of similar structures, have similar functions, appear in similar distributions, and/or share conceptual paths to grammaticalisation.

This thesis shows that these similarities arise through contact-induced convergent developments, namely replication of grammaticalisation paths, and replication of morphological structure and/or function. This is demonstrated with a number of types of evidence. Firstly, it re-affirms the place of Upper Mangdep in East Bodish, also explicitly excluding it from Tibetic. Secondly, it is argued affirmatively that the similarities between certain constructions in the two languages are the result of language contact. This is achieved through comparative description of Upper Mangdep verbal constructions in
relation to Dzongkha and other East Bodish languages, notably Kurtöp, for which the most complete description exists (Hyslop, 2011a). Finally, this is corroborated with evidence of other contact phenomena in Upper Mangdep which are consistent with these developments, such as the replication of abstract phonological patterns.

This work also makes a few preliminary suggestions as to the socio-political and historical circumstances that have prompted contact-induced change in Upper Mangdep, with especial reference to differences between Upper Mangdep dialects. In particular, as this is one of very few studies demonstrating changes to grammatically-encoded epistemic modality by contact, the potential sociological impact on epistemic marking in the two major dialect groups is also discussed. It is suggested that changes in social organisation may have been partly responsible for the obsolescence of the epistemic contrast of egophoricity in the perfective aspect for speakers of the eastern dialect of the language.

This thesis is consequential as undoubtedly the second-most complete descriptive and historical study of an East Bodish language, and the only significant work on the Upper Mangdep language; but also as a thorough case study of what contact-induced changes to predication look like in a Tibeto-Burman language. The attempts to place the description within a sociological context make it an ideal case study of language contact phenomena, particularly with regard to epistemic modality.