

# The internal diversity of the Tshangla languages: Insights from Bjokapakha

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## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Tshangla and the Tshangla cluster**

Tshangla is one of the 19 known languages of Bhutan and belongs to the Trans-Himalayan (Tibeto-Burman) language family. The language is spoken in eastern Bhutan, but also in adjacent areas in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and in some pockets in Tibet. Tshangla has traditionally been classified as being a language closely related to the Tibetan or Bodish branch of Trans-Himalayan, e.g. Shafer (1955), Shafer (1974), Benedict (1972), van Driem (2001), Bradley (2002) or Matisoff (2003). However, this classification has not been verified with rigorous methodological research.

The major variety of Tshangla, which is spoken in the cities of Mongar and Trashigang in eastern Bhutan, is a strong supra-regional language, spoken by approximately 150.000–200.000 speakers, and is used as a lingua franca in the whole country. Furthermore, this variety has been conceived and treated in the literature as a single language with only minor dialectal variation under the name ‘Tshangla’ or ‘Sharchop-kha’ (in Dzongkha). However, taking a look at peripheral Tshangla varieties, it becomes apparent that Tshangla-internal variation is greater than assumed. The linguistic situation of Tshangla can be described as a dialect continuum. Only some varieties have been described to some extent, while others have remained completely undocumented to the present day. Most of the minor varieties are endangered languages, since they are under the constant pressure to assimilate to one of the regional lingua francas, such as standard Tshangla or Dzongkha.

Some of these minor varieties represent rather conservative languages, in that they retain archaic structures and diverging morphosyntactic features. The most notable of these are Bjokapakha of southern central Bhutan, various Dungsam varieties of Pema Gatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar, the sociolect Yabrang of Trashigang, Dirang Tshangla of Arunachal Pradesh, and the Pemakö variety spoken in Tibet. Most of these varieties lack extensive linguistic description and are only documented by phrase books or sketch grammars (e.g. Das Gupta 1968; Egli-Roduner 1987; Hoshi 1987; Zhāng 1986; Hofrenning 1959). Some of these varieties, e.g. Dirang and Bjokapakha, are allegedly only partially mutually intelligible with standard Tshangla. Major linguistic descriptions of the standard Tshangla variety include Wangdi (2004) and Andvik (2010) and the ethnolinguistic description by Bodt (2012).

Since the name ‘Tshangla’ is both used to refer to the widespread lingua franca variety of Tshangla and as a cover term for the various closely related dialects of Tshangla, a terminological clarification is needed. Here, it is suggested that the name ‘Tshangla’ or ‘Sharchop-kha’ is used for the single standard variety, while the term ‘Tshangla cluster’ can be used to refer to the subgroup consisting of all the varieties closely related to Tshangla, including Tshangla itself.

### **1.2 Bjokapakha**

Bjokapakha is a small Tshangla variety spoken at the western border of the Tshangla cluster area, in the Bjoka block at the eastern border of Zhemgang district in central Bhutan. Bjokapakha is the only Tshangla language spoken in Zhemgang district and is surrounded by the East Bodish language Khengkha. To the north-east, Bjokapakha

verges on the Gongduk speaking region, while the linguistic neighbours in the south are the Dungsam Tshangla varieties. Figure 1 shows the location of Bjokapakha in the linguistic landscape of Bhutan.



*Figure 1: Bjokapakha in the linguistic landscape of Bhutan (map source: George van Driem; adapted by the author).*

Bjokapakha represents an endangered variety with approximately 1.500 speakers. Many speakers of the younger generations leave their Bjoka homeland to live in the urban areas where they tend to assimilate to the standard Tshangla variety or other major languages.

Linguistic research on Bjokapakha has been conducted since 2012, both in Geneva, Switzerland, with expatriate informants, and in Bhutan. A first descriptive account is currently being finalised by the author (Grollmann under review).

## **2 Insights from Bjokapakha**

The present paper focuses on selected aspects of the linguistic structure of Bjokapakha which diverge from Tshangla and thus reflect the internal diversity of the Tshangla cluster. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how these diverging structures can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Tshangla cluster as a Trans-Himalayan subgroup. Moreover, it is considered important to stress the relevance of documenting minor varieties of more widespread languages, since the small varieties may often retain some conservative linguistic features which may provide us with important knowledge, as will be shown in the following.

The following sections will present linguistic features of Bjokapakha from several linguistic domains and will contrast them with the structures found in Tshangla as described by Wangdi (2004) and Andvik (2010). First, two topics from phonology, i.e. differences in phoneme inventories and phonotactics, will be discussed in sections

2.1 and 2.2 respectively, followed by the presentation of the Bjokapakha possessive pronouns in section 2.3. Section 2.4 contrasts non-finite complement marking and the final section 2.5 discusses equative copulas.

## 2.1 Consonants and vowels

The consonant and vowel inventories of Bjokapakha differ from the ones of Tshangla in the following three points:

1. Bjokapakha exhibits dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ instead of alveolar /s/ and /z/.
2. Bjokapakha exhibits a central vowel /i/ which does not occur in Tshangla.
3. Bjokapakha differentiates between /i/, /e/ and an additional lax front high vowel /ɪ/. This is not found in Tshangla, but in some Dungsam varieties.

Cognates contrasting the dental and alveolar fricatives in Bjokapakha and Tshangla are shown in Table 1 below. Bjokapakha speakers tend to assimilate their dental fricatives to alveolar [s] and [z] if linguistic outsiders are present.

*Table 1: Dental vs. alveolar fricatives*

	<b>Bjokapakha</b>	<b>Tshangla</b>
‘three’	<i>θam</i>	<i>sam</i>
‘change (v.)’	<i>θorp-</i>	<i>sor-</i>
‘son’	<i>ða</i>	<i>za</i>
‘wash (v.)’	<i>ðik-</i>	<i>zik-</i>

The central vowel /i/ of Bjokapakha contrasts with the other high vowels /i/ and /u/, e.g. in the minimal pairs *phi-* ‘sharpen (v.)’ vs. *phi* ‘fart’ vs. *phu* ‘mountain’. Bjokapakha /i/ corresponds to Tshangla /i/ in most cases, see the cognates in Table 2.

*Table 2: Central vowel /i/ in Bjokapakha*

	<b>Bjokapakha</b>	<b>Tshangla</b>
‘fire’	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>
‘year’	<i>ɲij</i>	<i>nying</i>
‘do (v.)’	<i>phi-</i>	<i>phi-</i>
AGT	= <i>gi</i>	= <i>gi</i>

The lax front high vowel /ɪ/ contrast with the two other front vowels /e/ and /i/ in Bjokapakha, as can be seen in the minimal pair *shi-* ‘die (v.)’ vs. *shu* ‘glass’ vs. *she-* ‘kill (v.)’. A lax vowel /ɪ/ is also found in other conservative Tshangla varieties, e.g. the Dungsam Khoidung, which are adjacent to the Bjokapakha area. It is assumed that the distinction of three front vowel phonemes constitutes an archaic feature which was present in Proto-Tshangla, but lost in the standard variety (see also Bodt 2014: 404). As can be seen in Table 3, the Bjokapakha lax vowel corresponds to Tshangla /e/, which suggests that /ɪ/ has merged with /e/.

Table 3: Lax vowel /ɪ/ in Bjokapakha

	Bjokapakha	Tshangla
‘tongue’	<i>li</i>	<i>le</i>
‘glass’	<i>shi</i>	<i>she</i>

We will now explore the insights that the diverging features of Bjokapakha can yield. First, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, and to some extent also the central vowel /i/, most likely constitute contact influence from Gongduk. Gongduk, which is a linguistic neighbour of Bjokapakha, also exhibits dental fricatives and a similar central vowel. While the dental fricatives are very likely to be an areal feature (see Gerber under review), the development of a phonemic central vowel in Bjokapakha cannot be exclusively led back to Gongduk influence. The central vowel /i/ stands in almost complementary distribution with the lax vowel /ɪ/ and seems to have developed from a conditioned split of Proto-Tshangla \*ɪ in certain phonological environments, see Grollmann (under review) for details.

Summing up, the following observations can be noted:

- Bjokapakha is the only Tshangla language known so far exhibiting dental fricatives and a central vowel /i/.
- Bjokapakha presents further evidence that the interdental pronunciation of the coronal sibilants is a development which is prone to areal spreading.
- Bjokapakha presents further evidence for the lax front vowel /ɪ/ to be an archaic feature of Tshangla which probably can be reconstructed back to Proto-Tshangla.
- The contact situation with Gongduk must have been to such an extent that phonetic features like /θ/, /ð/ and /i/ could spread from Gongduk to Pre-Bjokapakha. The hypothesis entertained in Gerber (under review) and Grollmann (under review) is that these features arose from an interference pattern. According to this assumption, they are the result of Gongduk native speakers learning Pre-Bjokapakha as their second language and retaining a Gongduk ‘accent’.

## 2.2 Syllable

Bjokapakha allows a more complex syllable with more varied onset clusters and also coda clusters than Tshangla. The maximal syllable structure of Bjokapakha is C<sub>1</sub>LVC<sub>2</sub>C<sub>3</sub>, where ‘L’ stands for ‘liquid’ and ‘V’ for both monophthongs and diphthongs. The maximal Tshangla syllable structure is C<sub>1</sub>(r)VC<sub>2</sub>. Tshangla consonant clusters are limited to the syllable onset and the maximal cluster consists of a stop plus a rhotic. Six possible cluster onsets are listed in Andvik (2010: 14): /pr/, /phr/, /br/, /kr/, /khr/ and /gr/, but the velar initial clusters are pronounced as coronal retroflexes and thus cannot count as synchronic clusters. Only conservative dialects, such as Bjokapakha, still exhibit a free alternation between coronal retroflexes /t/, /t<sup>h</sup>/ and /d/ and velar clusters (Bodt 2014: 419).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bodt (2014) and Andvik (2010: 15) list yet another consonant cluster /pɕ/, which Bodt (2014: 419) states to be a recent innovation under the influence of Dzongkha occurring only when followed by the high front vowel /i/, as in *pshi* ‘four’. This lexeme is preserved as *phi* in the speech of elder people. The cluster /pɕ/ in Bjokapakha is attested, as for example in the peculiar Bjokapakha lexeme *pshai* ‘language’, which is not found in other Tshangla varieties.

Bjokapakha differs from this structure by allowing not only rhotic clusters but also clusters with lateral glides, i.e. the onsets Cl and Cr. According to Bodt (2014: 420), clusters with a lateral glide are only reported to occur in Dirang or Khalaktang varieties, e.g. in the Dirang lexeme *pleŋ* (~ *phreŋ*) ‘slip (v.)’. In Bjokapakha, we find more clusters with the lateral glide /l/, i.e. /kl/, /gl/, /pl/, /phl/ and /ml/.<sup>2</sup> The velar plus rhotic cluster in the syllable onset is never realised as a retroflex, but as [kr], [k<sup>h</sup>r] or [gr]. Note that dental plosives are neither found in rhotic nor in lateral clusters, both in Tshangla and in Bjokapakha.<sup>3</sup>

Table 4 compares possible onset clusters in Bjokapakha and Tshangla.

*Table 4: Onset clusters compared*

	<b>Bjokapakha</b>	<b>Tshangla</b>
k/kh/g + r	<i>krat</i> - ‘pluck (v.)’	retroflexed
	<i>khrat</i> ‘waist’	retroflexed
	<i>grum</i> - ‘munch (v.)’	retroflexed
k/g + l	<i>klap</i> - ‘hit (v.)’	–
	<i>glant</i> - ‘be disgusted’	–
p/ph/b + r	<i>prak</i> - ‘spread (v.)’	<i>pra</i> - ‘distribute (v.)’
	<i>phröyk</i> - ‘vomit (v.)’	<i>phros</i> - ‘vomit (v.)’
	<i>brek</i> - ‘push (v.)’	<i>brek</i> - ‘push (v.)’
p/ph/b + l	<i>plot</i> - ‘put off (v.)’	–
	<i>phlem</i> - ‘slip (v.)’	–
	<i>blam</i> - ‘scold (v.)’	–
m + r	<i>mrat</i> ‘pimples’	<i>mrek</i> - ‘cling (v.)’
m + l	<i>mluŋ</i> ‘source’	–

In addition to the phonotactic possibilities of the syllable onset, Bjokapakha diverges from Tshangla in that Bjokapakha allows consonant clusters also in the syllable coda, see Table 5.

<sup>2</sup> No instance of /khl/ has been recorded, but this might be an accidental gap in my corpus.

<sup>3</sup> The onset clusters in Dirang Tshangla are noteworthy in this context. As far as it is possible to state from the existing literature, the possible onset clusters are the rhotic clusters /kr, khr, gr, tr, dr, pr, phr, br/ and two additional clusters /hr/ and /ps/ (cf. Bodt 2012: 234; Das Gupta 1968). The combination of dentals and rhotics is a peculiarity of Dirang not found in the other varieties.

Table 5: Bjokapakha coda clusters

/ŋk/	<i>jaŋk-</i> ‘pull (v.)’
	<i>laŋk-</i> ‘suffice (v.)’
/rt/	<i>girt-</i> ‘turn (v.)’
/nt/	<i>rant-</i> ‘be time for’
	<i>gant-</i> ‘become old’
/mp/	<i>kamp-</i> ‘be closed’
	<i>lamp-</i> ‘learn (v.)’
/rp/	<i>sorp-</i> ‘change (v.)’
	<i>curp-</i> ‘be salty’

This topic is intertwined with the morphophonological verbal classes, since the coda consonant defines the selection of the relevant verbal suffix. Some morphophonological classes are organised differently in Bjokapakha than in Tshangla, e.g. the Tshangla past marker *-pa* ~ *-pha* ~ *-ba* ~ *-wa* ~ *-ma* vs. the Bjokapakha past of personal knowledge *-pan* ~ *-ban* ~ *-man*. While Tshangla makes a five-way distinction treating verb stems ending in stops, /p/, nasals, liquids and vowels differently, Bjokapakha does not distinguish between different kinds of stops and treats liquids and vowels similarly in the allomorphy of the past marker. Table 8 presents cognate verbs marked with the different allomorphs of the past markers.

Table 6: Morphophonology compared

	<b>Bjokapakha</b>	<b>Tshangla</b>	
after stops	<i>cit-pan</i>	<i>chot-pa</i>	‘prepared’
after /p/	<i>yip-pan</i>	<i>yip-pha</i>	‘slept’
after nasals	<i>chu-man</i>	<i>chum-ma</i>	‘finished’
after liquids	<i>shor-ban</i>	<i>shor-ba</i>	‘lost’
after vowels	<i>cho-ban</i>	<i>cho-wa</i>	‘stayed’

The most important insight from Bjokapakha consonant clusters in the coda concerns apparently irregular allomorph assignments in Tshangla. Some Tshangla verbs seem to take the ‘wrong’ allomorphs, e.g. *sor-pa* ‘exchanged’ (expected *sor-ba*), *lam-pa* ‘learned’ (expected *lam-ma*), *jaŋ-pa* ‘pulled’ (expected *jaŋ-ma*) or *laŋ-pa* ‘sufficed’ (expected *laŋ-ma*). This was already observed in Andvik (2010). Corresponding data from Bjokapakha show that these apparent irregularities in the allomorph assignment are in fact due to a reduced consonant cluster in the coda.

Table 7 contrasts verb stems with complex codas in Bjokapakha with the corresponding verbs with reduced codas in Tshangla.

Table 7: Past forms of verbs with complex codas in Bjokapakha compared

	Bjokapakha past	Tshangla past
‘change (v.)’	<i>sorp-pan</i>	<i>sor-pa</i>
‘send (v.)’	<i>kunt-pan</i>	<i>ke-ba</i>
‘be about to’	<i>camp-pan</i>	<i>cam-pa</i>
‘learn (v.)’	<i>lamp-pan</i>	<i>lam-pa</i>
‘be closed’	<i>damp-pan</i>	<i>dam-pa</i>
‘be soft’	<i>jamp-pan</i>	<i>(jam-pu)</i>
‘pull (v.)’	<i>jaŋk-pan</i>	<i>jaŋ-pa</i>
‘find (v.)’	<i>noŋk-pan</i>	<i>nyong-pa</i>
‘suffice (v.)’	<i>laŋk-pan</i>	<i>laŋ-pa</i>

In Dirang we find parallel evidence of original consonant clusters. For example the lexemes *lamp-* ‘read, learn (v.)’ or *laŋk-* ‘ride (v.)’ are also attested with a final consonant cluster. Note that in both Bjokapakha and Dirang, the coda clusters consist of a sonorant element as C<sub>1</sub>, either a nasal or the rhotic tap, and a voiceless plosive as C<sub>2</sub>. There is a tendency that the sonorant and the plosive are homorganic, but see also the violation of this tendency in the Bjokapakha verbs *sorp-* ‘change (v.)’ and *curp-* ‘be salty / sour’.<sup>4</sup> The same explanation for the irregular allomorphs in Tshangla was suggested in Bodt (2012) based on Dirang data.

The insights gained from a comparison of the syllable structures of Bjokapakha and Tshangla are the following:

- Complex clusters are likely to represent conservative structures which have been merged or reduced in more innovative Tshangla varieties.
- A wider attestation of these complex clusters may show us what is to be reconstructed for Proto-Tshangla.
- Both Bjokapakha and Dirang retain coda clusters which help to explain the irregularities in allomorph assignment found in more innovative varieties.

### 2.3 Possessive pronouns and case

Possessive pronouns are formed in several varieties of the Tshangla clusters in combining the personal pronouns with the locative case marker *-ga* (~ *-ha*), e.g. Tshangla *jaŋ* 1SG > *ja-ga* ‘my, mine’ or *nan* 2SG > *na-ga* ‘your’.

In Bjokapakha, a specific set of possessive pronouns is attested for the singular pronouns which is not derived from (productive) case markers, i.e. *jaŋ* 1SG > *jo* ‘my, mine’, *nan* 2SG > *no* ‘your’ and *dan* 3SG > *do* ‘his/her’, see Table 8. This non-transparent set of possessive forms is also attested for the marked third person pronoun *dan* (as opposed to the innovative neutral pronoun *rok*), which probably constitutes the original third person pronoun of the Tshangla cluster, but which has acquired pragmatically marked function (cf. Wangdi 2004; Andvik 2010). Note that both Bjokapakha and

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that the complex codas originally arose from pre-nasalised oral stops /k, t, p/ which developed homorganic nasals, as Tim Bodt (p.c.) believes, but not all Bjokapakha clusters can be explained in this way, i.e. /rp/ and /rt/.



Tshangla share the same basic personal pronouns, i.e. *jaŋ* 1SG, *nan* 2SG, *rok* 3SG and *dan* ‘marked’ 3SG.

Table 8: Possessive pronouns compared

	Bjokapakha	Tshangla
1SG	<i>jo</i>	<i>jaga</i>
2SG	<i>no</i>	<i>naga</i>
3SG	<i>do</i>	?

Irregular forms like *jo*, *no* and *do* can be interpreted as being older than the more transparent forms *jaga* and *naga*. It is not clear where these irregular forms come from, but a possible explanation would be that the forms *jo*, *no* and *do* are derived from an older locative *-gu* found in some non-standard varieties (Andvik 2010) in upper and lower Trashigang (Tim Bodt, p.c.), i.e. that the development was something like *jaŋ-gu* > *jã-gu* > *jã-hu* > *jãu* > *jo* for the first person singular pronoun. This, however, remains speculative. In any case, Bjokapakha exhibits a paradigm of possessive forms not attested in any other described Tshangla variety and which may yield insights for reconstructing the cases of Proto-Tshangla.

## 2.4 Non-finite complements

In Bjokapakha non-finite complements of modal verbs are marked with the morpheme *-ki* ~ *-khi* ~ *-la*<sup>5</sup>, while other non-finite complements are marked with the nominalising intention marker *-Pe*.

The following examples (1)–(3) illustrate the complement marker *-ki* ~ *-khi* ~ *-la* in Bjokapakha.

- (1) *thamja raŋ θiŋkhaŋ = ga baŋ-khi khi-di*  
 all EMPH back=LOC carry-CMPL must-HYP

‘Everything had to be carried on the back.’

- (2) *phicurba = gi thola apple duŋ-khi røy-mala*  
 rat=AGT up.there apple pick.up-CMPL can-PT.NPK

‘The rat was able to pick up the apple up there.’

<sup>5</sup> The allomorphic distribution of the allomorphs is the following: *-ki* after obstruent-final verb stems, *-khi* after liquid and nasal-final stems and *-la* after vowel-final verb stems. Note that the modal complement marker *-ki* ~ *-khi* ~ *-la* exhibits a peculiar allomorphy which suggests that the allomorph *-la* may have come from another morpheme and was ‘borrowed’ into the allomorphy of the velar-initial allomorphs *-ki* ~ *-khi*. A potential origin of the allomorph *-la* is the existential copula and the allomorph after vowel-final verb stems of the nominaliser *-Pa*. An internal reconstruction of the Bjokapakha verbal morphology is provided in Grollmann (under review).

- (3) miŋ tek-tegai lai = ga di-la khi-di  
eye open-SQ work = LOC go-CMPL must-HYP

‘After dawning [lit. opening the eyes], [one] would have to go to work.’

In Tshangla, only the cognate morpheme with non-past, infinitive function *-pe ~ -phe ~ -be ~ -me ~ -le* is used for parallel constructions, see examples (4) taken from Wangdi (2004).

- (4) *Tshangla complements (Wangdi 2004: 173)*

- a. nan oma zhonmu-ga pecha lam-pe-khele  
2SG now young-LOC study do-NPAST-AUX

‘You should study now while you are young’

- b. ja-ga mewaktsa-gi chai phe-le-rebe  
1SG-LOC woman-ERG swim do-NPAST-AUX

‘My wife can swim.’

The modal complement marker *-ki ~ -khi ~ -la* is not attested as a productive morpheme in Tshangla, but mentioned by Andvik (2010) as a rarely occurring infinitive form *-khi ~ -khe* of some dialects. By contrast, Dirang Tshangla exhibits a cognate morpheme *-ki ~ -gi ~ -li*, which is not restricted to modal contexts, but expresses purpose in general. The following example is taken from Das Gupta (1968).

- (5) *Dirang complements (Das Gupta 1968: 23)*

- lamp-ki di-n-ji  
read-CMPL go-SE-PT.PERS

‘[She] went to read.’

Bjokapakha and Dirang are located at the geographical periphery of the Tshangla cluster so that this similarity cannot be attributed to a contact situation. Moreover, since the rare infinitive form *-khi ~ -khe* reported by Andvik (2010) occurs in non-standard varieties, this morpheme is likely to be a conservative feature within the Tshangla cluster, lost in most varieties, but retained in Bjokapakha and Dirang.

## 2.5 Equative copulas

The equative copulas of Bjokapakha are *gi-* and *ai*. While *gi-* has a clear cognate in the Tshangla equative copula *gi-*, *ai* is not attested in the available descriptions of Tshangla. The contrast between the two Bjokapakha copulas concerns the epistemic notion of assimilated knowledge. The copula *ai* is used to express inherent facts and knowledge which is deeply ingrained in the speaker’s mind and belongs to the personal experience and knowledge of the speaker. Following from this function, the copula *ai* has a strong tendency to occur with first person subjects, since in most circumstances the speaker will have the most inherent access to his or her own knowledge. Examples (6) and (7) illustrate the copula *ai*.

- (6) jo            ðuk   ðimbu ai  
1SG.POSS body small COP.EQTV  
‘I’m a short person. [lit. my body is small]’

- (7) jaŋ   ata            chilu raŋ   ai  
1SG elder.brother big EMPH COP.EQTV  
‘I’m the oldest son [lit. brother] (in the family).’

By contrast, the copula root *gi-* is epistemically neutral, but changes its epistemic function according to the verbal suffix it is combined with. A frequent combination is the form *gila* containing the factual marker *-la*. The copula *gila* expresses a generic identity and objective fact which does not relate to the state of knowledge in the speaker’s mind. As a consequence, *gila* can never be used for statements which are intimately known to the speaker. If this reading is intended, the copula *ai* has to be used, compare examples (8) and (9).

- (8) jaŋ   nan = gai   ŋiŋ   ðimbu gi-la  
1SG 2SG = ABL year small COP.EQTV-FACT  
‘I am younger than you [as I just found out].’

- (9) jaŋ   nan = gai   ŋiŋ   ðimbu ai  
1SG 2SG = ABL year small COP.EQTV  
‘I am younger than you [as I’ve always known].’

Comparing the Bjokapakha equative copulas to Tshangla, a clear functional difference between the cognate copulas can be observed. The Tshangla copula *gila* does not differentiate in epistemic terms between assimilated and personal knowledge vs. objective knowledge and thus can also be used to express intimately known facts, see example (10).

- (10) *Tshangla copula gila (Wangdi 2004: 147)*

ja-ga    ming Pema gila  
1SG-LOC name Pema COP  
‘My name is Pema.’

The equivalent construction in Bjokapakha uses *ai* as in example (11). The usage of *gila* in (12) would yield the strange meaning that the speaker has only just found out what his name was.

- (11) *Bjokapakha copula ai*  
jo            miŋ   Tenđiŋ ai  
1SG.POSS name Tenzin COP.EQTV  
‘My name is Tenzin.’

(12) *Bjokapakha copula gila*

jo miŋ Tenđiŋ gila  
1SG.POSS name Tenzin COP.EQTV-FACT

‘My name is Tenzin [as I have found out now].’

Further examples of this functional differences are given in (13)–(15) below.

(13) *Tshangla copula gila (Wangdi 2004: 148)*

jang Druk-kai gila  
1SG Bhutan-ABL COP

‘I am from Bhutan.’

(14) *Bjokapakha copula ai*

jaŋ Bjoka geok = ga Dali dak-khan = gai ai  
1SG Bjoka block = LOC Dali call-NMLS.ACT = ABL COP.EQTV

‘I am from the so called Dali in the Bjoka block.’

(15) *Bjokapakha copula gila*

jaŋ Bjoka = gai gi-la  
1SG Bjoka = ABL COP.EQTV-FACT

‘I am from Bjoka [as I was just informed].’

In the Tshangla cluster, the copula *ai* is so far only attested in Bjokapakha. However, the form can be found in older sources on Tshangla, where it is listed as *haie* for ‘yes’ (Campbell 1874: 145). Dirang Tshangla exhibits a pragmatic particle *ai* which expresses emphasis, but does not have copula function, see example (16) below (my own data).

(16) *Dirang pragmatic particle ai*

jam-sho ai!  
drink-IMP PTC

‘Please, drink!’

Comparative evidence suggests that the Bjokapakha copula *ai* reflects an older form, which has been preserved in the peripheral varieties Bjokapakha and Dirang, but which was lost elsewhere. Thus, we might reconstruct *\*ai* to Proto-Tshangla. The conservative nature of *ai* is further confirmed by Tshangla-external evidence, since *ai* most likely constitutes a reflex of a Proto-Tibeto-Burman root *\*way* ~ *\*ray*, reconstructed by Matisoff (2003).

### **3 Conclusion**

Bjokapakha exhibits several linguistic structures which are not attested or which have different functions in other Tshangla varieties. In many cases, the linguistic forms of Bjokapakha constitute retained older and conservative structures which are relevant for the reconstruction of Proto-Tshangla. Bjokapakha presents evidence for the reconstruction of the lax vowel /ɪ/, several consonant clusters and some verbal markers. Irregular paradigms and allomorphies such as the possessive pronouns and the modal complement marker provide relevant information for the internal reconstruction of grammaticalisation processes. Furthermore, areal influence from Gongduk sheds light on the contact history of Gongduk and Tshangla in general.

In sum, we can go deeper into the (ethno-)linguistic history of the Tshangla cluster and reconstruction of Proto-Tshangla, if we take into account all the varieties. We can also find explanations in the conservative structures of these varieties for some non-transparent or irregular structures in more innovative Tshangla languages, such as the mismatch of some verb stem codas and the past allomorphs in standard Tshangla. Finally, additional interesting linguistic structures which have not been attested for the Tshangla cluster yet and which enrich the areal-typological knowledge on these languages and the languages in Bhutan in general can be made available in paying more attention to the internal diversity of Tshangla.

#### **Abbreviations**

ABL ‘ablative’, ACT ‘action’, AGT ‘agentive’, AUX ‘auxiliary’, CMPL ‘complement’, COP ‘copula’, EMPH ‘emphasis’, EQTV ‘equative’, ERG ‘ergative’, FACT ‘factual’, HYP ‘hypothesis’, IMP ‘imperative’, LOC ‘locative’, NMLS ‘nominaliser’, NPAST ‘non-past’, NPK ‘non-personal knowledge’, PERS ‘personal knowledge’, POSS ‘possessive’, PT ‘past’, PTC ‘particle’, SE ‘stem-extender’, SG ‘singular’ and SQ ‘sequential’.

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