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A grammar of the Thangmi language with an ethnolinguistic introduction to the speakers and their culture

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CHAPTER 4

MORPHOPHONOLOGY

The morphophonological regularities which are attested throughout the Thangmi language, or within a defined grammatical category, are the topic of this short chapter. While the actual realisations of specific morphemes are analysed in the following chapters of this grammar, they are discussed here only if their morphophonological forms are conditioned by factors which appear to be widespread throughout the Thangmi language. In line with established convention, morphemes and allomorphs are represented between morpheme brackets, as in <-si> (REF). Such a form is considered to be the underlying representation which may then undergo environmentally conditioned modifications. A phonetic form is represented in square brackets, as in [ʃi], and a phonologically correct representation is italicised with no brackets, as in *si*.

1. Remnants of a liquid-nasal alternation

Thangmi displays the remnants of what may be a defunct liquid-nasal alternation. Unlike Yamphu, which still attests an alternation of liquid initials in suffixes and auxiliary verbs (Rutgers 1998: 40), Thangmi retains a mere handful of examples of a system which may once have been more productive. The four instances of liquid-nasal variation attested in modern spoken Thangmi show an alternation between the voiced, apico-alveolar approximant /l/ [l] and the voiced, retroflex nasal continuant /ŋ/ [ŋ], as shown below:

<lyuŋ ~ liŋ ~ ŋiŋ>	stone, rock
<kili ~ kiŋi>	faeces, excrement, shit
<lukumbasya ~ ŋukumbasya>	behind, back
<lore ~ ŋoneŋ>	jackal

While the alternation of /l/ and /ŋ/ is most commonly heard in the forms shown above, older monolingual Thangmi speakers use /l/ and /ŋ/ interchangeably in scores of native Thangmi words. In particular, popular alternations include <lu ~ ŋu> ‘later, after’ and <lumsa ~ ŋumsa> ‘to sink into water’ (both Sindhupālcok dialect). These alternates are rejected by younger speakers.

2. Assimilation

Verb stems and nouns that end in a voiced, velar nasal [ŋ] are morphophonologically ‘weak’. This weakness entails that under certain conditions, the segment does not retain its regular phonological identity but assimilates to the segments that follow, bringing about a regular alternation in the verb stem or nominal final. Before a short, mid-open, unrounded front vowel /e/ [ɛ], a voiced, velar nasal final is subject to regressive assimilation for place of articulation. The result is a palatalised /ny/ [ɲ], as in the following five examples:

wany-eŋ-du they’re coming up from below
 [wɔŋɛŋɖu]
 <wɔŋ-eŋ-du>
 come.from.below-pAS-NPT

dany-eŋ-no they sought
 [ɖɔŋɛŋno]
 <ɖɔŋ-eŋ-no>
 seek-pAS-3→3/PT

lony-eŋ-ŋa-n they did [it] to me
 [loŋɛŋŋan]
 <loŋ-eŋ-ŋa-n>
 do-pAS-1s-PT

nany-e you (singular) (ERG)
 [nɔŋɛ]
 <nɔŋ-e>
 you(s)-ERG

su-bany-e who (plural) (ERG)
 [ʃubɔŋɛ]
 <su-bɔŋ-e>
 who-Pp-ERG

This assimilation is represented by the following rule:

$$\Sigma /ŋ/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ny/ \quad / \quad _ /e/$$

3. The morphophonology of intervocalic approximants

When followed by a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix, Thangmi open-stem verbs are realised with an intervocalic glide, either /h/, /y/ or /w/, an example of which is *amiy-Ø-an* (sleep-sAS-3S/PT) ‘he/she/it slept’, from *ami-sa* ‘to sleep’. The rules governing each vowel cluster combination are presented alongside illustrative examples below. The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with a short, open, unrounded, front vowel [a] is as follows:

$$\Sigma /a/ \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Sigma /ah/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \\ _ /o/ \\ _ /u/ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /ay/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /e/ \\ _ /i/ \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

For the rule

$$\Sigma /a/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ah/ \quad / \quad _ /a/$$

examples include:

thah-an he/she/it became
 [tʰafian]
 <tha-Ø-an>
 be-sAS-3S/PT

cawah-an he/she/it walked
 [tsawafian]
 <cawa-Ø-an>
 walk-sAS-3S/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /a/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ah/ \quad / \quad _ /o/$$

examples include:

ηah-o! say it!
 [ηaɦio]
 <ηa-o>
 say-s→3/IMP

tortah-o! leave it!
 [tɔɾtaɦio]
 <torta-o>
 leave-s→3/IMP

For the rule

$$\Sigma /a/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ah/ \quad / \quad _ /u/$$

examples include:

ηah-u-n-uη I said
 [ηaɦunuη]
 <ηa-u-n-uη>
 say-3P-1s→3-1s→3/PT

cyah-u-no he/she/it ate
 [tsjaɦuno]
 <cya-∅-u-no>
 eat-sAS-3P-3→3/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /a/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ay/ \quad / \quad _ /e/$$

examples include:

ηay-eη-du they say
 [ηajɛŋdu]
 <ηa-eη-du>
 say-pAS-NPT

usyay-eη-an he/she/it danced
 [uʂjajɛŋan]
 <usya-eη-an>
 dance-pAS-3S/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /e/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ey/ \quad / \quad _ /e/$$

an example is:

<i>ney-eη-to-le</i>	having ground
[nɛjɛŋtɔle]	
<ne-eη-to-le>	
grind-pAS-TPP-PCL	

For the rule

$$\Sigma /e/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ey/ \quad / \quad _ /i/$$

an example is:

<i>ney-i-n</i>	you/he/they beat us
[nɛjm]	
<ne-i-n>	
beat-1pPS-PT	

For the rule

$$\Sigma /e/ \rightarrow \Sigma /eh/ \quad / \quad _ /u/$$

an example is:

<i>koṭeh-u-du</i>	he/she/it cuts
[koṭɛfiuḁu]	
<koṭe-Ø-u-du>	
cut-sAS-3P-NPT	

For the rule

$$\Sigma /e/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ew/ \quad / \quad _ /o/$$

an example is:

<i>sew-o!</i>	taste it!
[sɛwo]	
<se-o>	
taste-s→3/IMP	

The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with a short, unrounded, high front vowel [i] is shown below:

$$\Sigma /i/ \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Sigma /iy/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \\ _ /e/ \\ _ /i/ \\ _ /o/ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /ih \sim iy/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /u/ \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

For the rule

$$\Sigma /i/ \rightarrow \Sigma /iy/ \quad / \quad _ /a/$$

an example is:

amiy-an he/she/it slept
 [amijan]
 <ami-Ø-an>
 sleep-sAS-3S/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /i/ \rightarrow \Sigma /iy/ \quad / \quad _ /e/$$

an example is:

piy-eη-no they gave
 [pijeηno]
 <pi-eη-no>
 give-pAS-3→3/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /i/ \rightarrow \Sigma /iy/ \quad / \quad _ /i/$$

an example is:

ariy-i-n we were afraid
 [arijn]
 <ari-i-n>
 be.afraid-1pPS-PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /i/ \rightarrow \Sigma /iy/ \quad / \quad _ /o/$$

an example is:

ciy-o! throw it away!
 [tsijo]
 <ci-o>
 throw.away-s→3/IMP

For the following rule, the glides /ih/ and /iy/ exist in free variation, and are both equally attested in open-stem verb forms in allegro Thangmi speech. For the rule

$$\Sigma /i/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ih \sim iy/ \quad / \quad _ /u/$$

Examples include:

nih-u-n-uŋ ~ niy-u-n-uŋ I saw
 [nifunuf ~ nijunuf]
 <ni-u-n-uŋ>
 see-3P-1s→3-1s→3/PT

pih-Ø-u-no ~ piy-Ø-u-no he/she/it gave
 [pifuno ~ pijuno]
 <pi-Ø-u-no>
 give-sAS-3P-3→3/PT

The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with a short, mid-closed, rounded, back vowel [o] is shown on the following page:

$$\Sigma /o/ \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Sigma /oy/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /e/ \\ _ /i/ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /oh/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /o/ \\ _ /u/ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /ow/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

For the rule

$$\Sigma /o/ \rightarrow \Sigma /oy/ \quad / \quad _ /e/$$

an example is:

yoy-ey-no they looked at [something]
 [jojeɲno]
 <yo-ey-no>
 look.at-pAS-3→3/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /o/ \rightarrow \Sigma /oy/ \quad / \quad _ /i/$$

an example is:

poj-i-n you/he/they chased us
 [pojɪn]
 <po-i-n>
 chase-1pPS-PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /o/ \rightarrow \Sigma /oh/ \quad / \quad _ /o/$$

an example is:

toh-o! dig!
 [toɦo]
 <to-o>
 dig-s→3/IMP

For the rule

$$\Sigma /o/ \rightarrow \Sigma /oh/ \quad / \quad _ /u/$$

an example is:

yoh-u-du he/she/it looks at [something]
 [joɦuɖu]
 <yo-Ø-u-du>
 look.at-SAS-3P-NPT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /o/ \rightarrow \Sigma /ow/ \quad / \quad _ /a/$$

an example is:

mow-an he/she/it survived
 [mowan]
 <mo-Ø-an>
 survive-SAS-3S/PT

The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with a short, closed, rounded high back vowel [u] is shown below:

$$\Sigma /u/ \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Sigma /uy/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /e/ \\ _ /i/ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /uw/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \\ _ /o/ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /uh/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /u/ \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

For the rule

$$\Sigma /u/ \rightarrow \Sigma /uy/ \quad / \quad _ /e/$$

an example is:

cabuy-eŋ-du they carry
 [tsabujeŋɖu]
 <cabu-eŋ-du>
 carry-pAS-NPT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /u/ \rightarrow \Sigma /uy/ \quad / \quad _ /i/$$

an example is:

nuy-i-n we laughed
 [nujm]
 <nu-i-n>
 laugh-1pPS-PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /u/ \rightarrow \Sigma /uw/ \quad / \quad _ /a/$$

an example is:

yuw-an he/she/it came from above
 [juwan]
 <ju-Ø-an>
 come.from.above-sAS-3S/PT

For the rule

$$\Sigma /u/ \rightarrow \Sigma /uw/ \quad / \quad _ /o/$$

an example is:

chyuw-o! tie it up!
 [ts^hjuwo]
 <chyu-o>
 tie-s→3/IMP

For the rule

$$\Sigma /u/ \rightarrow \Sigma /uh/ \quad / \quad _ /u/$$

an example is:

ɖapuh-u-du he/she/it spies
 [ɖapuhɔdu]
 <ɖapu-Ø-u-du>
 spy-sAS-3P-NPT

Verb stems ending in a diphthong also take an intervocalic glide when followed by a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix. The examples I have collected are represented by the rules below. The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with the diphthong /äi/ is as follows:

$$\Sigma/\text{äi}/ \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Sigma/\text{äiy}/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \\ _ /e/ \\ _ /i/ \\ _ /o/ \\ _ /u/ \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

Examples include:

mäiy-an he/she/it must [preterite tense]
 [maɪjan]
 <mäi-Ø-an>
 must-sAS-3S/PT

säiy-eŋ-no they knew
 [ʃaɪjeŋno]
 <säi-eŋ-no>
 know-pAS-3→3/PT

karäiy-i-n we feel [hungry]
 [kaɪɪm]
 <karäi-i-n>
 shout-1pPS-PT

nasäiy-o! listen!
 [naʃaɪjo]
 <nasäi-o>
 hear-s→3/IMP

kăiy-u-du he/she/it removes
 [kaijuɖu]
 <kăi-Ø-u-du>
 remove-SAS-3P-NPT

The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with the diphthong /ei/ is as follows:

$$\Sigma /ei/ \rightarrow \left\{ \Sigma /eiy/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \\ _ /u/ \end{array} \right\} \right\}$$

Examples include:

kheiy-an it spilled
 [k^hɛɪjan]
 <khei-Ø-an>
 spill-SAS-3S/PT

kheiy-u-no he/she/it poured
 [k^hɛɪjuno]
 <khei-Ø-u-no>
 pour-SAS-3P-3→3/PT

The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with the diphthong /ui/ is as follows:

$$\Sigma /ui/ \rightarrow \Sigma /uiy/ \quad / \quad _ /a/$$

an example of which is:

nuiy-an he/she/it laughed
 [nuijan]
 <nui-Ø-an>
 laugh-SAS-3S/PT

The rule governing a vowel-initial verbal agreement suffix following an open-stem verb ending with the diphthong /ou/ is as follows:

$$\Sigma /ou/ \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \Sigma /ouw/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /a/ \\ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /ouy/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /i/ \\ \end{array} \right\} \\ \Sigma /ouh/ \left\{ \begin{array}{l} _ /u/ \\ \end{array} \right\} \end{array} \right\}$$

Examples include:

aghyouw-an he/she/it cried out
 [ag^hjɔuwan]
 <aghyou-Ø-an>
 cry.out-sAS-3S/PT

urouy-i-n you/he/they called us
 [urɔujm]
 <urou-i-n>
 call-1pPS-PT

urouh-u-du he/she/it calls
 [urɔufiɒdu]
 <urou-Ø-u-du>
 call-sAS-3P-NPT

Younger Thangmi speakers of the Dolakhā dialect with increasing fluency in Nepali sometimes disregard the morphophonology of open verb stems when the initial of the following verbal agreement suffix is the same vowel as the verb stem. In such cases, younger speakers may lengthen the vowel of the verb stem, as shown in the examples below:

tha-an he/she/it became
 [t^ha:n] rather than [t^hafian]
 <tha-Ø-an>
 be-sAS-3S/PT

<i>ne-eŋ-to-le</i> [ne:ŋtole] rather than [nejeŋtole] <ne-eŋ-to-le> grind-pAS-TPP-PCL	having ground
<i>ari-i-n</i> [ari:n] rather than [arijin] <ari-i-n> be.afraid-1pPS-PT	we were afraid
<i>to-o!</i> [to:] rather than [tofo] <to-o> dig-s→3/IMP	dig!
<i>ɖapu-u-du</i> [ɖapu:ɖu] rather than [ɖapufiɖu] <ɖapu-Ø-u-du> spy-sAS-3P-NPT	he/she/it spies

Thangmi speakers from the village of Piskar in Sindhupālcok district insert a glottal stop in the place of a glide. This intervocalic hiatus prevents diphthongisation. The phenomenon of a hiatus is not attested elsewhere in Sindhupālcok, and is also rejected by speakers of the Dolakhā dialect of Thangmi. The following three examples demonstrate this glottalisation:

<i>thaʔ-an</i> [tʰaʔan] rather than [tʰafian] <tha-Ø-an> be-sAS-3S/PT	he/she/it became
<i>toʔ-o!</i> [toʔo] rather than [tofo] <to-o> dig-s→3/IMP	dig!
<i>yuʔ-an</i> [juʔan] <ju-Ø-an> come.from.above-sAS-3S/PT	he/she/it came from above

4. Syncope

Syncope is internal deletion involving the omission of sounds from within a word. In Thangmi, vowel syncope is a feature of both the Dolakhā and Sindhupālcok dialects when a verb stem has the following structure:

C V /r/ V

In such instances, as shown in the examples below, the first vowel may be syncopated. While both vowel syncope and vowel retention are attested, the rate of omission increases with connected or flowing natural speech:¹

dorok-an ~ *drok-an* he/she/it ran
[dɔrɔkan ~ drɔkan]
<dorok-Ø-an>
run-sAS-3S/PT

tarak-an ~ *trak-an* he/she/it made him/her/it-self present/felt
[tarakan ~ trakan]
<tarak-Ø-an>
make.itself.present-sAS-3S/PT

serek-an ~ *srek-an* he/she/it got up
[ʃerɛkan ~ ʃrɛkan]
<serek-Ø-an>
arise-sAS-3S/PT

¹ The same is true in English, in which certain cases of syncope are conventions which speed up or simplify speech patterns, as in ['sekɾɪtɹɪ] rather than ['sekɾɪtɛrɪ] 'secretary'.