On the Bulang (Blang, Phang) Languages

Gérard DIFFLOTH
Cornell University

The following is a brief account of the Bulang subgroup of languages, one of the least known of the little-studied Palaungic branch of the Mon-Khmer family.

In a recent monograph on the Wa languages (Diffloth 1980), I have shown that the Waic group was divided historically into two branches: Wa-Lawa-La on the one hand, Samtau on the other. This was a revision of the scheme presented earlier in Ferlus 1974, which was based on lexical evidence. Since 1980, I have collected material from two Waic languages which were poorly represented in my monograph. The first is Phalok, otherwise called 'Khalo', following its first investigator (Flatz 1970).[1] This language, overlooked in Ferlus' thorough survey, now appears to be a distinct off-shoot of the Wa-Lawa-La sub-branch; the material is of sufficient quality and quantity for a full historical presentation which I am now preparing; only a few Phalok examples will be given here. The second is Phang, called 'Kien Ka Lawa' by its first investigator (Wenk 1965). It belongs to the Samtau branch of Waic, which I would now like to rename the 'Bulang' branch of Waic. I will first justify this change in terminology, before saying a few things about the Phang language itself.

The term Samtau, which was the first one used in the literature (Dodd 1923), is a Shan or Thai appellation for these people; no indication of their self-ethnonym had been given, either by Dodd or in the 'Samtau' tapes I was using for the monograph. A little before it went to press, too late to make corrections, I had a chance to visit a group of 'Samtau' speakers who were resettled near Mae Chan, in Chiang Rai province, Thailand.[2] They explained to me that their actual name was /plàŋ/, and that Samtau, /săam tâw/ (สำเต้า) was simply a geographic term referring to a mountainous area north of Keng Tung, Shan States, Burma, where three of their villages were built on mountain tops; they had come, some ten or twenty years before, from a region adjacent to the Bulang-speaking area of the People's Republic of China. Their speech was nearly identical to what I had referred to as Samtau in my 1980 monograph. This name, /plàŋ/, reconstructible to Proto-Waic **blaŋ* was said to mean 'mountain' by native speakers, in accordance with their conspicuous habit of placing pagodas and even villages on mountain tops, as Dodd mentions. I

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[1]I wish to express my gratitude to Theraphan L. Thongkum, Chulalongkorn University, for her essential cooperation in this project. When she had to return to Bangkok, and I had to continue on my own, the value of her became even more obvious. The project was funded, for my part, by a grant from the National Science Foundation, Washington D.C., entitled: 'A Mon-Khmer Etymological Lexicon'.

[2]Upon Suriya Ratanakul's suggestion, Ruengdet Pankhuenkhat accompanied me to this settlement, called Ban Huai Nam Khun (บ้านห้วยน้ำคุน), located 5 km east of Ban Huai Khrai (บ้านห้วยไคร้), itself about 20 km north of Mae Chan (แม่จัน), Chiang Rai Province. I wish to thank them here for their help.

concluded then that this Samtau-*plàŋ* and the Bulang National Minority of the PRC probably spoke dialects of the same language.

This guess was nicely confirmed when I read J.-O. Svantesson's 'Mon-Khmer languages in Yunnan' (1981). The six words from Blang (Bùlǎng, 布朗) given there, and collected by him from the Bùlǎngshān People's Commune, are nearly identical with the corresponding Samtau words of the monograph. These words had been chosen to exemplify certain vowel qualities typical of the Samtau branch. Even then, there are a few differences: the Bùlǎngshān dialect retains the old distiction between Proto-Waic final **-r* and **-l*, whereas 'Samtau' merges both to /-l/:

	Bùlǎngshān	*Samtau*	*Proto-Waic*
'ten'	kulˀ	kúl	*kol
'wind'	kɨxˀ	kúl	*kɨr

There is nothing archaic about this retention: other dialects of the Bulang subgroup, such as Phang, have preserved the **-r/*-l* contrast, but not the phonetic value [-l]: in Phang, **-r* > *-h*, and **-l* > *-y*, as we shall see. Otherwise, the Bùlǎngshān examples are identical to 'Samtau' of the monograph:

	Bùlǎngshān	*Samtau*	*Proto-Waic*
'water'	ʔumˀ	ʔúm	*rʔom
'climb'	huk	húk	*hok
'foot'	cuŋˬ	cùŋ	*joŋ
'hair'	hɨkˀ	huík	*hɨk

The name Blang, suggested by Svantesson, could be kept for the Bùlǎngshān form of Bulang. I will use Plang for designating the Samtau speaker of the monograph, and those I met near Mae Chan, and I would propose 'Bulang' for designating the entire sub-group, including: Blang, Plang, and the other forms of speech placed under 'Proto-Samtau' in the monograph: Kha Kem Dègne (Lefèvre Pontalis 1892), P'uman (Ferrell 1971), Tailoi (Scott 1900), and Kien Ka Lawa (Wenk 1965).

The last mentioned name, Kien Ka Lawa, is again a misnomer. In April 1981 I was able, with help of Theraphan L. Thongkum, to find speakers of this language which had been discovered by Wenk 1965, and which I had referred to as 'KK' in the Etymological Lexicon of the monograph. In the village of Khiang Kha (เคียงคา) itself, about 25 km north-east of Chiang Mai, 8 km north of Doi Saket, we did not find any speakers of the language. But 5 km further north, at Ban Pa Sak Ngam (บ้านป่าสักงาม), we found three speakers, aged between 60 and 80, of what local Thais call Kham Doi, the 'hill language', and is called /phaŋ/ by the speakers themselves. They recalled the time, in their childhood, when everyone spoke Phang in this village, which had 20 to 30 houses at the time. Their grandparents were born there, and nothing was known about their possibly having come from somewhere else. The language also used to be spoken in Khiang Kha, but the last speaker had died a few years ago. Linguistically, this was the very language recorded by Wenk some 20 years before, and labelled 'Kien Ka Lawa'.

A few months afterwards, while trying to reach a Phalok village in the rainy season, I discovered another Phang speaker, a 69 year old woman, in Ban Don Chiang (บ้านดอนเชียง), Amphoe Mae Taeng (อ.แม่แตง), 35 km north of Chiang Mai. She had never been to the other Phang speaking area, about 30 km away as the crow flies, but she recalled her parents saying that they had gone there on a visit, and had been very surprised to find and understand Phang speakers there. Her parents were born in Don Chiang, but her grandparents had come from the area of Keng Tung and had settled in Don Chiang. She did not quite know where this Keng Tung was. No one else seems to speak Phang in the area, besides her ethnic-Chinese husband, an insistent self-taught speaker, but audibly not a native one.

With the help of this additional data, it now seems possible to divide the Bulang subgroup into two sections:

– Plang section: 'Samtau', Tailoi, Kha Kem Dègne.
– Phang section: Phang of Pa Sak Ngam and Don Chiang, P'uman (Ferrell).

As for the Bùlǎngshān dialect, we do not have, at present, the few test words needed for deciding where it should be placed.

There are a number of systematic differences between the two sections of the Bulang subgroup, mostly innovations on the part of the Phang section.

The treatment of **-l-* after initial stops is characteristic: in Phang, the Proto-Waic **kl-, *gl-, *pl-, *bl-* clusters turn into aspirated stops; in Plang, the liquids are preserved. The self-ethnonym is a typical example of this:

P. Waic **blaŋ*. Plang: /plàŋ/, Tailoi: *plāng;* vs. Phang: /phaŋ/[3]

See also:

P. Waic **klɤŋ*. 'fat (N.)' (Ñ15):[4] Plang: /klə́ŋ/, Tailoi: *kling*; vs. Phang: /khɯŋ/
P. Waic **klɔŋ*. 'river' (NÆ76): Plang: /klóŋ/, Tailoi: *klŏng;* vs. Phang: /khoŋ/
P. Waic **play*. 'liquor' (Y28): Plang: /pláy/; vs. Phang: /phay/

Equally characteristic is the evolution of Proto-Waic **r*; in Phang, **r* becomes /h/, as Ferlus 1974 had noticed from the Kien Ka data, but not in every position: in words beginning with Proto-Waic **rmp-, *r-* becomes /kh-/ in Phang, and is lost in Plang:

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[3]For Phang, I noted two registers, Clear voice: V̲, and Breathy voice V̤. But there are also pitch correlates to these two phonation types. Whether Phang should be considered a tone or a register language should be left undecided for the moment. My impression was that register was more audible in Phang, whereas tone was clearly present in Samtau; but this may be due to the fact that I was immersed in the study of Mon, clearly a register language, at the time I recovered the Phang data.

[4]Number and letters such as (K39) refer to entries in the Waic Etymotogical Lexicon included in Diffloth 1980.

P. Waic **rmpɤn.* 'woman' (N12): Plang: */ʔəŋpə́n/*, Tailoi: *en-pun,* Kem Dègne: *beune*; vs. Phang: /khəpɯ̲n/, P'uman (Ferrell): *kă˗pu·n˗* (cf. Drage's Wa: *rabun,* Umphai Lawa: *rapən,* quoted in the monograph)
P. Waic **rmpik.* 'bridge' (K25): Plang: */ʔəŋ* púk/; vs. Phang: /khəpɯ̲k/ (cf. Drage's Wa: *rapaük,* Umphai Lawa: *rapaïk*)

In Proto-Waic **rm* and **rw* initials, **r-* also becomes /kh-/ in Phang, but goes to /k-/ in Plang, and is retained as /r-/ in Kha Kem Dègne:

P. Waic **rwaŋ.* 'thigh' (NÆ50): Plang: /kəvàŋ/, Kem Dègne: *rewang,* (Tailoi: *ma-wang*); vs. Phang: /khəvạŋ/
P. Waic **rway.* 'tiger' (Y13): (Plang: /vày/), Kem Dègne: *rewe;* vs. P'uman (Ferrell): *(ka)vay˗*, Phang: /khəvạy/
P. Waic **rmoʔ.* 'dream' (ʔ66): Plang: /kəmùʔ/, Tailoi: *l'mo*; vs. Phang: /khəmụ̲ʔ/

Otherwise, **r* goes to /h/ in Phang, and is retained in Plang:

P. Waic **rok.* 'toad' (K43): Plang: */ʔ*a-rùk/; vs. Phang /họ̲k/
P. Waic **ʔrɒŋ.* 'house pole' (Ñ57): Plang: /rɔ́ŋ/; vs. Phang: /hɒŋ/
P. Waic **mrɒŋ.* 'horse' (Ñ28): Plang: */ʔ*əŋrɔ̀ŋ/, Tailoi: *n'rang*, Kem Dègne: *progne*; vs. P'uman (Ferrell): *(ň)˗hɔŋ˗*, Phang: */ʔ*əŋhɒ̲ŋ/
P. Waic **rep.* 'grass' (P10): Plang: */ʔ*a-rèp/, Tailoi: *rip*; vs. P'uman (Ferrell): *he·p˗*, Phang: /hɛ̲p/.

And, as mentioned above, final **-r* goes to /-h/ in Phang, but merges with /-l/ in Plang; it is retained in Tailoi:

P. Waic **ʔɛr.* 'fowl' (R1): Plang: */ʔ*ɛ́l/, Tailoi: *err*, Kem Dègne: *ea;* vs. P'uman (Ferrell): **ʔɛh˗*, Phang: */ʔ*ɛh/
P. Waic **kɨr.* 'wind' (R5): Plang: /kʉ́l/, Tailoi: *kurr*; vs. Phang: /kɯ̲h/ (cf. Bùlǎngshān: *kɨxʔ*)

Thus, the evolution of Proto-Waic **r* to /kh-/ in Phang, in some environments, suggests [x] as an intermediate phonetic value between **r* and /h/, a suggestion confirmed by the Bùlǎngshān reflex /x/.

But the most important differences are to be found in the vowel systems: in Phang, all three high vowels of Proto-Waic have two reflexes each, regardless of tone, register, or final consonant:

P. Waic **i* > Phang /i/ and /ɛ/
P. Waic **ɨ* > Phang /ɯ/ and /ʌ/
P. Waic **o* > Phang /u/ and /ɔ/.

By contrast, the Plang reflexes are uniformly /i/, /ɯ/ and /u/ respectively:

a) P. Waic **i* > Phang /i/:

		Phang	*Plang*
**khiʔ.*	'firewood' (ʔ104)	/khiʔ/	(irregular)
**siʔ.*	'louse' (ʔ96)	/siʔ/	/síʔ)/
**ʔiŋ.*	'return' (Ñ1)	/ʔi̲ŋ/	/ʔíŋ/

*sin.	'cooked' (N21)	/si̱n/	/sín/
*gis.	'salt' (S6)	/ki̱h/	/cìh/

P.Waic *i > Phang /ɛ/:

*ŋri?.	'pestle' (?75)	/ŋhɛ̱?/	/ŋrì?/[5]
*lik.	'pig' (K45)	/lɛ̱k/	/lìk/
*ntiŋ.	'wall' (N21)	/ntɛ̱ŋ/	[6]
*hril.	'thin' (L21)	/hɛ̱h/[7]	/lhíl/
*kris.	'bear (N.)' (S22)	/khɛ̱h/	/k̊hríh/
*krih.	'young woman' (H19)	/khɛ̱h/	/khríh/

b) P. Waic *i > Phang /ɯ/:

*ɲi?.	'to drink' (?24)	/ɲɯ̱?/	/ɲɯ̀?/
*rmpik.	'bridge' (K25)	/khəpɯ̱k/	/?əŋpúk/
*hik.	'hair' (K61)	/hɯ̱k/	/húk/
*kiŋ.	'field, country' (N10)	/kɯ̱ŋ/	/kúŋ/
*gic.	'burn (tr.)' (C5)	/kɯ̱c/	/kùc/
*hit.	'smell (tr.)' (T26)	/hɯ̱t/	/hút/
*him.	'bathe' (M48)	/hɯ̱m/	/húm/
*kir.	'wind' (R5)	/kɯ̱h/	/kúl/
*gim.	'winnow'	/kɯ̱m/	[8]
*mis.	'nose' (S18)	/mɯ̱h/	/mɯ̀h/

P. Waic *i > Phang /ʌ/ (sometimes /ə/, perhaps my mistake for /ʌ/):

*?ri?.	'deep' (?85)	/hʌ̱?/	/rúʔ/
*ti?.	'vegetables' (?31)	/tʌ̱?/	/túʔ/
*knti?.	'hole' (?33)	/kətʌ̱?/	/kətúʔ/
*hlit.	'deaf' (T21)	/lʌ̱t/	/?əŋ-l̥hút/
*kdim.	'ripe' (M18)	/kətʌ̱m/	/kətṳ̀m/
*diy.	'bring, buy' (Y15)	/tʌ̱y/	
*tis.	'breast' (S11)	/tʌ̱h/	/túh/

c) P. Waic *o > Phang /u/:

*ŋko?.	'rice (grain)' (?8)	/kṳ̱?/	/ŋkú?/
*?mo?.	'rope' (?65)	/mṳ̱?/	/m̥hú?/
*kho?.	'wood' (?108)	/khṳ̱?/	/k̊hú?/
*hok.	'climb' (K60)	/hṳ̱k/	/húk/

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[5]Some of the Phang forms given here are not to be found (under Samtau) in Diffloth 1980; these were collected later, from the Mae Chan area.

[6]This reconstruction *ntiŋ, labelled 'uncertain' in the monograph, was later fully confirmed by Phalok: /dɯ̱ŋ/ 'wall'; no Plang reflex has been recorded.

[7]Plang final -h would suggest to Proto-Waic final *-r.

[8]No Plang cognate was recorded. The reconstruction of Proto-Waic *gim is based on the evidence of Phalok; /gɣm/, Drags's Wa: *khöm*, and Lawa (Pap): *ghïm*. The *g- initial is well attested in Mon-Khmer: cf. Gold-Palaung: *gum*, Khmu (Xieng-khuang): *guum*, Proto-Semai (Diffloth 1977): *$gvv^{b}m$* all meaning: 'to winnow'.

*joŋ.	'foot' (N18)	/cu̱ŋ/	/cùŋ/
*khoc.	'wash' (C20)	/khu̱c/	/khúc/
*koc.	'hot' (C3)	/ku̱c/	/kúc/
*ɲom.	'delicious' (M7a)	/ɲu̱m/	/ɲùm/
*ryol.	'gibbon' (L24)	/kəyu̱y/	
*bor.	'evening' (R12)	/pu̱h/	/-pùl/
*mor.	'crawl' (R14)	/mu̱h/	/mùl/

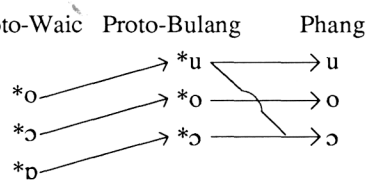
P. Waic *o > Phang /ɔ/ (rarely /ʌ/):

*croʔ.	'new' (?83)	/sɔ̱ʔ/	/súʔ/
*toʔ.	'smoke (N.)' (?29)	/tʌ̱ʔ/	/túʔ/
*-rok.	'frog' (K43).	/hɔ̱k/	/ʔa-rùk/
*sŋroŋ.	'knee-cap' (N61)	/səkhɔ̱ŋ/	
*kroŋ.	'throat'	/khɔ̱ŋ/	/khrúŋ/
*hloŋ.	'high' (N77)	/lɔ̱ŋ/	/l̥húŋ/

Before finding the conditioning factor for these changes, I had to consider the possibility that Phang may have retained here a vowel distinction which could have been lost in Proto-Waic. This would require a drastic revision of the classification of Phang in Waic, perhaps even placing it outside Waic altogether, in spite of its complete agreement with Plang in other respects. There was cause to worry, because Proto-Waic *o is the result of a merger of two earlier, Proto-Palaungic vowels, *əə and *oo. However, the Phang reflexes do not match with the Proto-Palaungic forms: in the set of examples with Phang /u/, one finds both Proto-Palaungic *əə and *oo represented: *ŋkooʔ 'rice', *khəəʔ 'wood', *hook 'to climb', *jəəŋ 'foot', *khooc ' to wash', *ɲəəm 'delicious', and the same thing is true of the set of examples with Phang /ɔ/: *rook 'frog', *krooŋ 'throat', *hləəŋ 'high'. If the Phang reflexes are not ancient, they are the result of a split, but neither tones nor registers, nor final consonants, the usual conditioning factors for vowel change in Palaungic languages, are the cause of the Phang splits.

Actually, the conditioning factor is simple, though unusual for these languages: Proto-Waic *i, *ɨ and *o are lowered to /ɛ/, /ʌ/, and /ɔ/ when immediately preceded by alveolars (*t-, *d-, *n-, *r-, *l-). This is a major innovation which distinguishes Phang from the rest of the Bulang sub-group, but does not require a revision in the classification of Phang. Yet, it is a fairly old innovation: it had to take place before the Phang merger of *r- and *h- to /h-/ was completed: as the examples show, Phang /h-/ accompanies vowel lowering only if it is a reflex of *r- (cf. *ŋriʔ, *hril, *kris, *krih, *ʔriʔ, *rok, *sŋroŋ, *kroŋ), otherwise, the vowel remains high (cf. *khiʔ, *hik, *hit, *him, *khoʔ, *hok, *khoc).

One of the intriguing aspects of this innovation is that it occurred in a vowel system which is already fairly full, but it did not affect other vowels which might have been obstructing the path: when *o goes to /ɔ/, it merges with the reflex of Proto-Waic *ɒ (> ɔ), and has to jump over the reflex of Proto-Waic *ɔ (> o):



For this to be realistic, we have to postulate a stage where at least one of these vowels became a diphthong, and could thus overtake the other without collision. The fact that there is no phonetic trace left of such diphthongisation is another sign that the split of **o* into Phang /u/ and /ɔ/ is fairly old. Phang and Plang may, after all be distinct languages.

There are several other innovations affecting the remaining proto-vowels except **a*, but their conditioning is not clear to me at the moment, e.g. Proto-Waic **kɔn.* 'child': Plang: /kɔ́n/, Tailoi: *kŏn*, vs. P'uman (Ferrell): *kun*⁻, Phang: /kṵn/.[9] The net result is that very few words ever have the same vowel in Phang and in Plang. It would be surprising, in these conditions, that the two would be mutually intelligible.

There are also a few phonological differences which are restricted to particular etyma. The Bulang forms for 'two' for instance, appear to be irregular: in the monograph, I reconstructed Proto-Waic **l?ar* (R2):

> Plang: /lə?ál/, Tailoi: *la-al,* Kem Dègne: *la*, vs. P'uman (Ferrell): *lay*⁻, Phang: /la̱y/.

The only other example of a loss of *-?-* in the Phang group which I can find is in the word for 'three', also with a **l?-* initial cluster:

> P. Waic **l?ɔy.* (Y1): Plang: /lə?ɔ́ʲy/, Tailoi: *la-oi,* Kem Dègne: *loye*; vs. P'uman (Ferrell): *luy*⁻, Phang: /lṵy/.

We could say that, in Proto-Waic initial **l?-* clusters, **-?-* disappears in Phang, leaving behind a high register vowel. This would explain the evolution of 'three' quite well, but for 'two' there are difficulties: a Proto-Waic initial **l?* in this word is supported by the evidence of Lawa: /lə?a/ (all dialects), and of Phalok: /lə?a̱/, but all varieties of Wa (under Proto-Wa in the monograph, p. 14), and even La (Davies 1909), and En (Scott 1900), have an *r-* initial in the word for 'two': cf. Va (Wă, 佤) /rá/ 'two'; the K'ala form (Harding 1927) *gha* 'two', indicates something similar.

This evidence may force us to reconstruct a form like P. Waic **lr?ar* [lər?ar] for 'two'. But note that the final *-y* found in the Phang forms indicates a Proto-Waic **-l*, not an **-r*. The Plang evidence is mute on this point since **-r* and **-l* merge to

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[9]Note the change of Proto-Waic **ɔ* to /u/ in Phang only, while Plang keeps the original /ɔ/, as in **kɔn* 'child'.

-l, but the Tailoi form *la-al* confirms a final **-l*, and so does the La form (Davies 1909): *a* 'two' (in La, **-r* would give *-n*). These had been noted as exceptions in my monograph (pp. 19 and 20); but the new evidence of Phalok: /lə?a̱/ fully agrees (in Phalok, **-r* would give *-h*): we must reconstruct a final **-l* in the word for 'two' for the entire Waic branch. This **-l* is certainly the result of a Proto-Waic innovation which affected this particular word, starting from a Pre-Waic form in **-ʔar*; cognates throughout the family suggest **-aar* for Proto-Mon-Khmer 'two' (cf. Proto-Semai **ʔ-n-aar*). This Proto-Waic innovation may have something to do with the unusually complex initial found in this etymon: a Pre-Waic form **lrʔar* (cf. Proto-Lamet **lʔaar*) could explain the change of final **-r* to **-l* in Proto-Waic, as a way of avoiding two neighbouring /r/'s. We should thus reconstruct Proto-Waic **lrʔal* instead of **lʔar*. The complex initial **lrʔ-*, which explains the initial /r-/ of Wa, could contain a morphological element: there are many traces in Palaungic languages of an infixation process which inserts a copy of the final consonant, here Pre-Waic **-r*, between two initial consonants; this would require the following sequence of events:

Proto-East-Palaungic (Lamet + Waic): **lʔaar* > Pre-Waic: **l-r-ʔar* (with final-copy infixation) > Proto-Waic **lrʔal* (dissimilation of neighbouring *r*'s) > Proto-Bulang: **lʔál* > Proto-Phang: **la̱l* > Phang: /la̱y/ 'two'.

The etymon for 'charcoal' also sets Plang and Phang apart: Plang: /kəsɔ́h/ vs. Phang: /kəŋɔh/ (P'uman: **kă-nyoh⁻*). In 1980, I disregarded Ferrell's notation for "P'uman," and reconstructed **ksɒs* (S32) 'charcoal'. But Phang /kəŋɔh/ definitely establishes the presence of a nasal, a fact which is confirmed, for Waic, by the newly recorded Phalok forms: /ʔaŋsə̱ɣ̊/ ~ /taŋsə̱ɣ̊/ 'charcoal'. We should thus reconstruct **knsɒs* for Proto-Waic. This is puzzling because the other Palaungic languages would rather suggest a **krs-* initial in this etymon: cf. Riang: *krtsās*, Lamet: /kxsás/. Only Khmu: /knsah/ provides an *-n* for the Northern Division of Mon-Khmer. The Eastern and Southern Divisions generally give **kcah*. But Chong (Pearic, Thailand) does have: /khəŋá̱h/ and Aslian languages (Malaysia) also provide evidence for a nasal: Temiar: /cɛŋkah/, Semai (W, NW): /jŋkah/, (E, C, S): /ɲŋkah/ < Proto-Senoic **cŋkah*, a Senoic metathesis from an earlier **kɲcah*. Semelai (South Aslian): /kələhcah/ confirms a Proto-Aslian **k-cah*, but has innovated an infix (*-l-*, plus final-copy infixation) on its own. We probably have to reconstruct a Proto-Mon-Khmer **krɲcaɕ* (for Proto-Mon-Khmer **-ɕ*, see Diffloth 1976), with an **-rn-* infix, common in instrument nouns.

We can see here that even obscure dialects of little known languages can provide evidence for reconstructions going back perhaps three thousand years, to Proto-Mon-Khmer, even when their phonology appears to have been much eroded in the course of time, as in the case of Phang. Each dialect loses, but also retains, bits of information about the past. Each has its word to contribute.

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Received: Helsingør revised

Dept. of Modern Language,
Cornell University, Ithaca,
NY 14850, USA