David E. Watters. 2002. *A Grammar of Kham*. (Cambridge Grammatical Descriptions). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xxv + 477 pages.

by Michael Noonan

The excellent grammar under review here, David Watters' *A Grammar of Kham*, is a description of the Takale dialect of the Kham language of Nepal, though numerous references are made to other Kham dialects. The book contains a 417 page grammar, 23 pages of transcribed texts, a 14 page dictionary, two maps, and a detailed topic index. The final chapter of the grammar is devoted to a discussion of the Kham verb in historical perspective.

Watters' work is the best grammar yet published of a Nepalese language and one of the best available for any language in the Sino-Tibetan family. *The Grammar of Kham* is an important work that will be of great interest to those working in Tibeto-Burman linguistics as well as to typologists, who will appreciate its clear prose, logical organization, broad coverage, copious illustrations, lack of intrusive theoretical apparatus, and reasonably detailed index.

Kham is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Rukum, Rolpa, and Baglung districts of Nepal. Its closest relatives are Magar and Chepang. These languages are conventionally placed together in one subgrouping of a rather amorphous assemblage called 'Himalayish', in which the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal which are not Bodish[1] are conventionally placed.[2] Whether this assemblage proves to be a genetic unit remains to be seen, but the languages so identified clearly

interacted over a long period and came to share a number of distinctive features (Noonan 2003a), though their typological similarity has lessened over the last thousand years with intensifying influences from Indo-European and, to a lesser extent, Bodish.

Kham was not among the languages counted in the 2001 census. Instead, in that and in earlier censuses, speakers of Kham were lumped together with speakers of Magar. Even though Kham and Magar are related, they are not mutually intelligible and in the conventional way of measuring such things, *e.g.* by the Swadesh or Matisoff lexicostatistical lists, they do not share a large number of cognates: 38% and 33%, respectively, for the two lists. This assignment of the Khams to Magar ethnicity is an interesting phenomenon discussed briefly in Noonan (*to appear*). Suffice it say that for various reasons Magar and Gurung ethnic identities were attractive to others and were assumed by various groups despite differences in language, customs, origin myths, and so on. Besides the Kham people, Chantyals, Kaikes, Kusundas, Rautes, and Rajis claimed Magar identities, though most of these people have in recent times demanded and achieved official recognition as separate ethnicities.

The Kham language consists of a set of dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible. There may be as many as 50,000 speakers, though this is only an estimate. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal, it should be regarded as a threatened language as the economic,

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1. The Bodish languages of Nepal include a few in the Tibetan Complex [e.g. Sherpa, Baragaunle, Jirel], the Tamangic languages [Chantyal, Gurung, Manange, Nar-Phu, Tamang, Tangbe, Thakali], Ghale, and a few others.
2. Typically, Himalayish is taken to consist of the Kiranti languages [the Rai languages and Limbu], the Newar languages, Kham, Magar, Chepang, and Hayu.

demographic, and political problems of Nepal are driving many people to the national language, Nepali.

The grammar consists of seventeen chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the language and the Kham people. Of the remainder, one is devoted to segmental phonology, one to tone, thirteen to morpho-syntax, and one to an historical description of the polymorphemic Kham verb. I'll summarize the main features of Kham grammar in the next few paragraphs.

Kham retains most of the presumed features of the Himalayish speech area (Noonan 2003a). The main feature distinguishing Kham from the other Himalayish languages is the presence of a tone system, otherwise lacking in languages of this group. Whether this is a retention or an innovation is not clear, but in either case its location next to tonal languages of the Bodish group may account for the retention or development of the feature. Like the Tamangic languages, Kham has a four-tone system, two of which are distinguished by a murmured or breathy voice quality. However, unlike the Tamangic languages where stem tone is spread to affixes (Mazaudon 1973, 1978a, 1978b), affixes in Kham regularly have independent tone.

Kham contrasts three points of articulation in consonants [bilabial, alveolar, and velar] and in the Takale dialect has a vowel system more typical of the Tibetan complex and languages on the literal of Tibet in having front rounded vowels.

Kham is highly agglutinative and makes extensive use of both prefixes and suffixes. Verbs are inflected for agreement with two argu-

ments, for TAM, and for transitivity [causative and detransitive (or middle)]. There are five prefixal positions and seven suffixal ones, yielding a very complex verbal morphology. Nouns have three numbers [singular, dual, and plural] and are accompanied by a rich inventory of locative and grammatical case markers.

Kham expresses the areally familiar syncretism of nominalization and attribution (Noonan 1997). There are very few true adjectives, most descriptive expressions being deverbal. Like other languages in the region, Kham has a large class of 'expressive adverbs', which are used to express manner, motive, etc. Also consistent with areal patterns is the presence of a significant number of spatial deictics and locative nouns, which, with locative case clitics and the nominalizing/ attributive affix, are used in combination to create hundreds of locative expressions denoting notions like *this/that/yonder*, *up/down*, *front/back*, *left/right*, *side-of-mountain*, *side-of-valley*, etc. Independent demonstratives 'this' and 'that' are complex expressions built from these primitive elements.

Kham exhibits ergativity and primary object marking (Dryer 1986, LaPolla 1992a, the latter calling the phenomenon 'anti-ergative'). The ergative marking is split according to person: only third person subjects are given ergative marking and the marking is fairly consistent, *i.e.* not subject to pragmatic factors (*cf* Genetti 1988). Unlike in other TB languages (Bickel 2003, LaPolla 2003), S/A/O roles are relatively well-motivated in Kham in the sense that there are a number of important grammatical processes in the language that make reference to these grammatical roles. The more common pattern in TB is that case mark-

ing, where it exists, marks semantic, not grammatical roles and that pivots and controllers, where they exist, are likewise semantic.

Kham word order is head-final, but noun phrases exhibit relative freedom in word order with the single restriction that demonstratives must precede their heads.

Subordinate clauses, save for direct quotes, are non-finite. This is typical of Bodic languages generally, though the Kiranti languages, also placed in the Himalayish group, employ finite subordination extensively (Ebert 1994). Postpositions function as markers of subordination with nominalizations and bare verbal stems (*cf* Genetti 1991).

Unlike some Bodic languages, categories of evidentiality, such as witnessed *vs* non-witnessed (*cf* Noonan 2003b) and conjunct *vs* disjunct (Hargreaves 2003) are not obligatorily expressed as categories of the verbal system, though clause-final particles with evidential senses are common.

With regard to the controversies surrounding the issue of whether modern Tibeto-Burman argument-verb agreement systems can be traced to a common ancestor or arose independently in several branches, Watters comes down on the side of those maintaining that there was a Proto-Tibeto-Burman agreement system that has been preserved in a number of branches of the family.[3] The evidence he brings to the controversy includes data from some Kham dialects whose

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3. See DeLancey 1989 and van Driem 1991 for arguments favoring this position, and LaPolla 1992b and Caughley 1982 for the opposing view.

agreement systems appear to share idiosyncrasies with those of other Tibeto-Burman languages, including some which are only distantly related: Kiranti, Qiangic, and Kuki-Chin.

The book is remarkably free of typographic and editing errors. I noticed only a few worth mentioning: in a couple of places we are asked to 'recall' some facts which had not yet been presented [p23, 41], and I have no idea what difference is being signaled by the use of the characters #, =, and ≡ [Watters, personal communication: # indicates a word boundary, = indicates that the entity has the same phonetic realization as..., and ≡ indicates there is there is no discernible difference.

In a more substantive vein, I would have wished that the phonology sections had more phonetic data, in particular instrumental data. This would have been especially useful in the discussions of tone and murmur. We are seldom provided with minimal pairs in the discussion of segmental distinctions. Further, the dictionary is not arranged alphabetically, but rather into fourteen semantic classes. This serves little useful function and needlessly complicates finding lexical items.

My only other concern is the familiar one of the high price of the volume — US$120 — which will doubtless limit the dissemination of the contents, an unfortunate result.

In sum, this is a fine grammar, one that can be held up as a model to prospective grammar writers and one that should be on the shelf of anyone interested in Tibeto-Burman linguistics.

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