

Numerals in Chen

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This paper provides an overview of the numeral system of Chen, a Tibeto-Burman language of India and Myanmar (see Konyak, 2021; Konyak and Mulder, 2022; Hoipo, forthcoming). Chen falls under the Konyak group, which in turn is part of the Northern Naga languages (see Bradley, 1997; Burling, 2003; French 1983; Marrison, 1967; Post and Burling, 2017). The Chen data on which this paper is based, have been collected from Hoipo Konyak, a native speaker from Phomchong Hoyat village in Myanmar. This description of Chen numerals aims to add to our knowledge of the linguistically diverse and still understudied Konyak language group, and to increase our knowledge of Tibeto-Burman numeral systems.

Chen exhibits a mixed decimal-vigesimal numeral system, and therefore can be counted among the Tibeto-Burman languages that have preserved elements of a vigesimal system (see Mazaudon, 2010). As in most languages, higher numerals are formed by multiplication and addition. As example (1) shows, Chen does this with an intermediate base *bən₃* ‘ten’ and two vigesimal bases, *ɿa₂* ‘twenty’ and *pɰ₂* ‘twenty’. The latter can be reduced to a minor syllable *pə₀-*, for example: *pɰ₂-li₃-bən₃* ~ *pə₀-li₃-bən₃* ‘ninety’.

| | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|-------------|
| (1) | <i>bən₃</i> | ‘ten’ | 10 |
| | <i>ɿa₂</i> | ‘twenty’ | 20 |
| | <i>ɿa₂-bən₃</i> | ‘thirty’ | 20 + 10 |
| | <i>pɰ₂-ɿi₃</i> | ‘forty’ | 20 * 2 |
| | <i>pɰ₂-ɿi₃-bən₃</i> | ‘fifty’ | 20 * 2 + 10 |
| | <i>pɰ₂-lim₂</i> | ‘sixty’ | 20 * 3 |
| | <i>pɰ₂-lim₂-bən₃</i> | ‘seventy’ | 20 * 3 + 10 |
| | <i>pɰ₂-li₃</i> | ‘eighty’ | 20 * 4 |
| | <i>pɰ₂-li₃-bən₃</i> | ‘ninety’ | 20 * 4 + 10 |

The multiformity of prefixes reconstructed by Benedict (1972, passim; repeated by Matisoff, 1997, p. 1) for Proto-Tibeto-Burman numerals below ten, *g- *b- *l- *d- and *s-, has been lost in Chen. While the numeral 1 remains without a prefix, the numerals 2-9 have undergone paradigm levelling and carry the same prefix, *ə₀-*, as is shown in (2).

| | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---------|------------------------|
| (2) | <i>tɛa₁</i> | ‘one’ | *it, *kat, *g-t(y)ik |
| | <i>ə₀-ɿi₃</i> | ‘two’ | *g-ni-s |
| | <i>ə₀-lim₂</i> | ‘three’ | *g-sum |
| | <i>ə₀-li₃</i> | ‘four’ | *b-liy, *b-ləy |
| | <i>ə₀-ga₃</i> | ‘five’ | *l-ŋa, *b-ŋa |
| | <i>ə₀-wək₂</i> | ‘six’ | *d-ruk |
| | <i>ə₀-nit₃</i> | ‘seven’ | *s-nis |
| | <i>ə₀-sət₂</i> | ‘eight’ | *b-r-gyat, *b-g-ryat |
| | <i>ə₀-kɰ₁</i> | ‘nine’ | *d-kuw, *d-gəw, *d-gaw |

The prefix *ə₀-* of the numerals 2-9 is present in most contexts, such as when the numeral occurs in isolation or when it modifies a noun, but is absent in the following cases: 1) after *pɰ₂* ‘twenty’ in compound numerals, 2) in certain idiomatic expressions, and 3) when expressing grammatical number, i.e. *-ɿi₃* ‘DUAL’ and *-lim₂* ‘PLURAL’, forms which derive from the numerals 2 and 3 respectively.

Keywords: numeral systems, vigesimal, Tibeto-Burman, Chen

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