

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

Which variety, Yòlmo or Standard Spoken Tibetan, is closer to Kyirong in the selected areas of the lexicon, pronunciation, grammar, and semantics?

#### 4.1 Lexicon

In selected areas of the lexicon, the primary indicators of closeness are:

- **100 core words:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer lexically than Kyirong and SST, and Yòlmo and SST. This conclusion has been based on the count of exact matches and lexically similar words in the 100 core word list
- **Non-core words:** beyond the core list, there are a large number of Kyirong-Yòlmo lexical matches, both nouns and verbs, which differ only by pronunciation.

In summary with respect to these two selected areas of the lexicon, Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer.

#### 4.2 Pronunciation

In selected areas of the pronunciation, the primary indicators of closeness are:

- **Word-initial consonant cluster inventory:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because both varieties preserve the initial consonant cluster which is composed of a labial and subscripts -j and -r.
- **Word-initial nasal:** Kyirong and SST are closer because both Kyirong and SST have word-initial palatal nasal consonants, while Yòlmo has velar, alveolar, and palatalized velar word-initial consonants only.
- **Nasal assimilation:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer with respect to nasal assimilation because speakers of both varieties fairly consistently assimilate adjacent consonants in two-syllable words, while there is a tendency of SST speakers not to assimilate.
- **Vowel inventory (rounding):** Kyirong and SST are closer because Kyirong and SST both have the high close and mid-close front rounded vowels -y and -ø, and the mid-open front unrounded vowel -ɛ, while the Yòlmo vowel inventory does

not include these sounds. The Yòlmo speaker substitutes the front rounded vowels with the following: the front unrounded (-i, -e), low open central (-a), or back rounded (-o, -u) vowels, and hence, Yòlmo words often have multiple accepted pronunciations, all varying by vowel quality.

- **Vowel inventory (lengthening):** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because speakers of those two varieties, more consistently than SST speakers, lengthen the vowel, and do so in compensation for coda deletion.
- **Syllable structure inventory:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer with respect to syllable structure because, while SST has a predominance of CVC syllable structure words, speakers of Kyirong and Yòlmo preserve the initial WT consonant cluster and more consistently delete the coda, in particular the velar coda, resulting in a predominance of CV syllable structure words and a number of CCV syllable structure words. Of the three varieties, Kyirong speakers most consistently delete the coda, and therefore Kyirong has the highest number of CV words of the three varieties, and is therefore the least conservative with respect to pronunciation of the coda.
- **Tone inventory:** Yòlmo and SST are closer in their tone systems, differing only by a single contour tone. Neither variety has the mid-tone which Kyirong has, and which is a tonal peculiarity historically. Kyirong mid-tone words are consistently pronounced by SST speakers with a low level tone and by Yòlmo speakers with a mid-falling or low level tone.

In summary, with respect to these selected areas of the pronunciation, Kyirong and SST are closer in two (word-initial nasal pronunciation and vowel rounding), Yòlmo and SST are closer in one (tone inventory), and Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer in four (consonant cluster inventory, nasal assimilation, vowel lengthening, syllable structure inventory).

### 4.3 Grammar

In selected areas of the grammar, the primary indicators of closeness are:

- **Morphology:** Kyirong and SST are closer in their morphology, permitting both fused and unfused case markers, while Yòlmo has only unfused case markers. This distinction likely relates to post-17th century vowel deletions from the Yòlmo inventory, specifically the loss of certain front rounded vowels which are required for marker fusion pronunciation.

- **Word order:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer with respect to determiner and noun because the Kyirong and Yòlmo determiner is prenominal while the SST determiner is post-nominal.
- **Genitive and dative marking systems:** Kyirong and SST are closer in the genitive and dative marker categories because the speakers of both Kyirong and SST use the same genitive marker (SST *-ki*, KD *-ge*) and the same dative marker *-la*, while Yòlmo speakers at some point introduced a different marker *-ti* which they use in genitive and dative (direct argument) contexts. Whether *-ti* was introduced by the Yòlmo, or was an Old Tibetan marker, is unknown. This subject requires further study in order to determine if the Yòlmo attributive possession marker is equivalent to the Kyirong absolute possession marker, which is used specifically as a possessive pronoun suffix (Huber 2002:82-83). If in fact the Yòlmo attributive possession marker and the Kyirong absolute possession markers are cognate, then the conclusions will be different, that is, it may then be concluded that Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer in this area. More data is required (see Section 4.6).
- **Ergative marking system:** Yòlmo and SST are closer because, while all three varieties use the ergative marker in past-perfective contexts, Kyirong speakers use the marker in that context primarily as an emphatic marker, in which case it is omitted when emphasis is not required.
- **Negation system:** the negation systems for Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because the choice of negation marker depends on tense, and because the negation marker does not infix into the T-A sequence because there is no such sequence. The choice of negation marker in SST depends not on tense but rather on the type of auxiliary used.
- **Number marker:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because both speech varieties have the plurality marker *-ja*, while SST has the marker *-tsó*. However, there is cross-dialect variation between Kyirong and Yòlmo with respect to animacy of the referent, and conditions of omission of the marker.
- **Reported speech/quotation marker:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because both have the marker *-lo*.
- **Pronouns:** statements of closeness can be made with respect to several pronoun categories: 1) dual personal pronouns: Yòlmo and SST have the dual personal pronouns distinction for all persons, while Kyirong has only a third person dual pronoun. Thus, in this category, Yòlmo and SST are closer, 2) inclusive-exclusive distinction: Kyirong and Yòlmo have the inclusive-exclusive distinction on first

person plural personal pronoun while SST does not. Thus, in this category, Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer, 3) dedicated personal pronouns: Kyirong and Yòlmo have dedicated 1PL and 2PL personal pronouns (SST suffixes *-tsó* to the singular personal pronouns). Thus, in this category, Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer, 4) Kyirong and Yòlmo have distinct forms for basic interrogative pronouns. Thus, in this category, Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer, 5) in the mid-level honorific category, all three varieties have gender distinction only in the third person. However, Kyirong is distinct from Yòlmo and SST because Kyirong has gender distinction in the second person singular low and high level honorific categories. Thus, in this category, Yòlmo and SST are closer. Thus, in the pronoun category, Yòlmo and SST are closer in two areas while Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer in three areas.

- **Essential and existential copulas:** Kyirong and SST are closer with respect to the existential copula *-tu?* (SST) / *-nu* (KD). Though the form and pronunciation of the SST and Kyirong existential copulas are different, the functions are essentially the same, being used in existential sentences only while Yòlmo *-dú* is both an essential and existential copula. However, the basic Kyirong and Yòlmo essential and existential copulas have a high degree of similarity in the areas of copula categories, form, emphatic capability, tense-indicating capability, and person marking capability (none). Significantly, the Kyirong and Yòlmo copulas are restricted in the sense that they function as evidential markers only, and do not mark person, while the SST copulas have both the evidential and person-marking functions.
- **Verb agreement (person marking):** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because there is an absence of person marking on the Kyirong and Yòlmo copulas and finite verbs, while SST, as part of the Central Tibetan family, has a person marking system which was enabled by the copula *-re?*, a later innovation developed for marking second and third persons. Kyirong however has limited person marking with respect to a) *-pa* (AOR.VOL), b) *-tɕɛ* (FUT.VOL), c) *-sin* and *-te*.
- **Verb form:** the verb *-sin* (serial verb KD Accompl, Yòlmo n.PST); conditions of use vary between Kyirong and Yòlmo. This is a very significant verb form given its frequent use in spoken Kyirong and Yòlmo, and in the colloquial Yòlmo text. Though there is Kyirong-Yòlmo cross-dialect variation with respect to the use of this verb, nonetheless, the fact that it does not exist in SST and is commonly used in Kyirong and Yòlmo is a strong indicator of Kyirong-Yòlmo closeness.
- **Verb forms:** certain other significant Kyirong and Yòlmo verb forms either do not exist in SST, or exist in a different form: a) the tense-aspect verb *-té* (KD

AOR.GENER, Yòlmo e.e.PST) does not exist in SST, b) the tense-aspect verb *-ken* (KD IPFV.GENER and FUT.GENER, Yòlmo IPFV.GENER and int.PRS) does not exist as a verb in SST, c) the perfect form of the verb ‘to go’, *kal*, has the equivalent SST form *tç<sup>h</sup>ún*, d) the secondary auxiliary verb *k<sup>h</sup>u*, ‘to be able to do’, has the equivalent SST form *t<sup>h</sup>úp*, e) the verb *ma*, ‘to say’, has the equivalent SST form *làb*.

- **Distal-range demonstrative:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer with the distal-range demonstrative *o*.
- **Honorific system:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer because neither variety has a developed honorific system, while SST does.
- **Coordinating conjunction:** Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer with the conjunction *o le* (though Yòlmo speakers use it more frequently than the Rasuwa Kyirong).

In summary, with respect to these selected areas of the grammar, Kyirong and SST are closer in three (morphology, genitive marking system, copula *-du*), Yòlmo and SST are closer in one (ergative marking system), and Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer in eleven (determiner and noun word order, negation system, number marker, reported speech/quotation marker, the majority of primary indicators in the area of the pronouns, the majority of essential and existential copulas categories, verb agreement, verb forms, distal-range determiner, honorific system, coordinating conjunctions).

#### 4.4 Semantics

In selected areas of semantics, the primary indicators of closeness are:

- **Grammaticalization of the lexical verb *zin-pa*:** grammaticalization is the most extensive form of semantic broadening and shift in the three varieties. However, semantic cross-dialect variation relating to grammaticalization exists only at the word level, e.g., the lexical verb *zin-pa* grammaticalized into the Kyirong and Yòlmo verb *-sin*, but did not grammaticalize in SST. Therefore, according to available data, grammaticalization does not function in any significant way to indicate closeness or distance.
- **Semantic narrowing of the copula *-du/-nu*:** Kyirong and SST are closer

In summary, with respect to these selected areas of the semantics, Kyirong and Yòlmo are closer in the area of grammaticalization, and Kyirong and SST are closer because of limitations of the copula *-du/-nu*. On the whole, semantic cross-dialect variation which has been identified does not seem as significant as cross-dialect variations identified in the areas of the lexicon, pronunciation, and grammar.

## 4.5 Final conclusion

It appears that all primary indicators of closeness which have been documented in this study of cross-dialect variation fall into one of three categories: 1) a preserved linguistic feature from Old Tibetan, e.g., initial cluster preservation,<sup>230</sup> 2) a loss of an Old Tibetan feature, e.g., loss of the coda, or 3) a new innovation, e.g., SST person-marking *re?* (རེ). These primary indicators, and in particular, lexical, pronunciation, and grammatical indicators, point to a strong Kyirong-Yòlmo relationship, confirm the thesis hypothesis, and support the classification described in the Introduction (though not without anomalies), a classification which puts Standard Spoken Tibetan into a different dialect group than Kyirong and Yòlmo. Clearly, ancestors of the Kyirong and Yòlmo speech communities inhabited the Kyirong region following a breakoff from the larger Old Tibetan speech community, a breakoff which occurred in ancient times. Today, it can be seen that the Kyirong and Yòlmo speech varieties, though having become distinct in many ways with several hundred years of separation between them, are still closely related varieties. And while Standard Spoken Tibetan is used globally as the lingua franca of the Central Tibetan world, Kyirong and Yòlmo are spoken regionally, and cannot be used easily as systems of oral communication beyond the homeland of their particular speech communities, and cannot be used at all beyond the regions or satellite communities of the Kyirong, Yòlmo, Lende, Langtang, Kagate, and Tsum.

## 4.6 Future Research

Through the research process, it became clear that there are a number of areas of the analysis that could develop into future projects. On the larger scale of research projects, this present investigation of linguistic relationships could be extended to include the Langtang and Tsum speech varieties. Some of the smaller research projects could include: 1) an investigation of the relationship between noun classes of the different varieties (a study of nouns was not included in this research), 2) further study of the Kyirong and Yòlmo verbs *-sin* and *-te* with respect to person marking, and a confirmation of the person-marking hypothesis stated in Section 3.3.5.4.1.3, 3) further study of *-sin* with respect to ergative marking: why is Kyirong ergative marking never allowed with verb forms containing *-sin*, while Yòlmo ergative marking is allowed with verb forms containing *-sin*, 4) further comparative study of emphatic markers and mechanisms in the three varieties, 5) further study of the Kyirong emphatic copulas *-jimbā:* and *-jōbā:*, commonly-used copulas which have not been discussed by Huber, 6) further study of the role of the Kyirong ergative marker as an emphatic marker vs. case marker, 7) classifiers in Kyirong, Yòlmo, and SST, beginning with the Yòlmo emphatic

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<sup>230</sup> Category 1) could involve degrees of semantic broadening and narrowing of the OT feature.

number marker, *tʰəl*, 8) redundancy and omission of markers, with a focus on a particular marker category, 9) study and development of the basic forms of the tense-aspect auxiliaries (aorist, perfect, imperfect, and future) from which all other forms in the three varieties are derived, 10) a study to determine the reasons for similarities between RWT, Kyirong, and Yòlmo, 11) a study of the anomalies, for example, anomalies relating to Yòlmo distinctions, e.g., pronunciation: nasal initial pronunciations and front vowel rounding, or grammar: the attributive possession marker *-ti*, 12) a comparative study of the Yòlmo attributive possession marker *-ti*, which is used in most genitive and dative (direct object) constructions, the Kyirong absolute possession marker *-de*, which is used on possessive pronouns, and the MC marker *-da* which is also used on pronouns in the context of possession,<sup>231</sup> 13) a historical comparative analysis to determine which of the three varieties, Kyirong, Yòlmo, or SST, is the most and which is the least conservative with reference to Old Tibetan, in the area of the grammar. This study would initially involve the development of a basic description of Old Tibetan so that preserved OT features, lost OT features, and new innovations in the three focus varieties could be determined, 14) a comparative historical-linguistic study of Kyirong and Jiarong. Jiarong is a language spoken in Sichuan.

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<sup>231</sup> The MC marker, *-da*, appears to function syntactically and semantically in a similar way to the Yòlmo attributive and Kyirong absolute possessive. It is possible that these markers are cognate, that the marker was an Old Tibetan marker, and that SST in fact is distinct from Kyirong and Yòlmo because the marker does not exist in SST. If this is the case, the marker may have undergone semantic narrowing in Kyirong and MC, while remaining, in Yòlmo, in a function similar to that in OT.