

ABSTRACT

The present research work entitled "**The Comparative Phonology of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei**" is the study of the comparative phonology of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei, the three Tibeto-Burman languages mainly spoken in some parts of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland states in Northeast India. They belong to Tibeto-Burman family of languages. They are among the 34 recognized tribes of Manipur.

The present thesis is divided into six chapters: Introduction, Review of Literature, Overview of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei, Phonological Processes, Phonological correspondences and Conclusion.

Chapter I provides the introduction of the Zeliangrong group of languages namely Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei, such as language and people, their origin, migration and settlement, their linguistic affiliation, religion, script, status etc. and finally explains the methodology used in the thesis.

Chapter II provides an overview of literature on Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei. There are few linguistic work available in the language like the classification of the languages by G.A Grierson (1903) in his '*Linguistics survey of India*' and Geoffrey Edward Morrison (1967) in his thesis '*The Classification of the Naga Languages of North-East India*'. Some available books includes '***The History of the Zeliangrong Nagas***' published in the year 2004 that provides the historical background of the Zeliangrong tribes and some dictionaries.

Chapter III deals with the overview of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei. The overview includes a brief phonological description of the languages in terms of syllable structure, consonant inventory, description and distribution of consonants, vowel

inventory, description and distribution of vowels, segment inventory and tone. The possible syllable sharps in Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei are V, VV, CV, CVV, CVC and CVVC. There are thirty seven consonant phonemes in Zeme, thirty nine consonant phonemes in Liangmai and thirty five consonant phonemes in Rongmei. According to their place of articulation, their consonants can be categorized into bilabial, alveolar, palatal, velar and glottal. In terms of manner of articulation, they can be further categorized into thirteen types: stops, prenasalised stops, fricatives, Prenasalised Fricative, affricates, Prenasalised affricates, nasals, Prenasalised nasals, lateral, Prenasalised lateral, trill, Prenasalised trill, and semi-vowels. Zeme has twenty two stops i.e. /p, ^mp, p^h, ^mp^h, b, ^mb, t, ⁿt, t^h, ⁿt^h, d, ⁿd, č, ⁿč, z, ⁿz, k, ^ŋk, k^h, ^ŋk^h, g, ^ŋg, / two fricatives /s and h/, **two prenasalised fricatives /ⁿs and ⁿh/, three nasals /m, n and ŋ/, three prenasalised nasals /^mm, ⁿn and ^ŋŋ/, two liquids /l and r/ one prenasalised liquid /ⁿr/ and two semi-vowels /w and y/. Liangmai has twenty three stops i.e. /p, ^mp, p^h, ^mp^h, b, ^mb, t, ⁿt, t^h, ⁿt^h, d, ⁿd, č, ⁿč, z, ⁿz, k, ^ŋk, k^h, ^ŋk^h, g, ^ŋg, ?/ two fricatives /s and h/, **two prenasalised fricatives /ⁿs and ⁿh/, three nasals /m, n and ŋ/, three prenasalised nasals /^mm, ⁿn and ^ŋŋ/, two liquids /l and r/ two prenasalised liquid /ⁿl and ⁿr/ and two semi-vowels /w and y/. Rongmei has twenty three stops i.e. /p, ^mp, p^h, ^mp^h, b, ^mb, t, ⁿt, t^h, ⁿt^h, d, ⁿd, č, ⁿč, z, ⁿz, k, ^ŋk, k^h, ^ŋk^h, g, ^ŋg, ?/ two fricatives /s and h/, **one prenasalised fricatives /ⁿs/, three nasals /m, n and ŋ/, three prenasalised nasals /^mm, ⁿn and ^ŋŋ/, two liquids /l and r/ and two prenasalised liquid /ⁿl and ⁿr/. Regarding initial consonants, all languages share the voiceless aspirated and unaspirated stop series. Glottal stop [ʔ] is found in Liangmai and Rongmei but it is not found in Zeme so far. Semi vowels are found in both Zeme and Liangmai but it is absent in Rongmei. All the languages have glottal fricative [h]. All the languages have voiceless stop and nasal series in finals. They do not have liquid finals. It is interesting to note that these languages does have pre-nasalised counterpart of all the consonantal phonemes except glottal stop and semi vowels. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, aspiration is phonemic in the languages and the voicing is also one of distinctive features in the case of consonantal phonemes in Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei. Six cardinal vowels are common in all languages. The******

close mid front vowel /e/ is realized as an open mid front vowel [ɛ] in a closed syllable. Similarly, the closed mid back vowel /o/ is realized as an open mid back vowel [ɔ] in a closed syllable. The open front vowel /a/ is slightly different in its realization from [a] to [ɑ] in all the languages. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei is a tonal language. They have three contrastive tones: high, mid and low.

Chapter IV deals with the phonological processes within and across the languages. Within the languages, each language has assimilation, consonant deletion, vowel deletion or clusterization, epenthesis, and Monophthongization. Across the languages, there is consonant shifting from Liangmai /s/ to Rongmei /t^h/ conversely, Rongmei /s/ changed to Liangmai /t^h/. Likewise, consonant shifting from Liangmai /s/ to Zeme /č/, conversely Zeme /s/ changed to Liangmai /č/ etc. Vowel shifting is also prevalent across these three languages like the diphthong /iu/ of Liangmai becomes /eu/ in Zeme, the diphthong /iu/ of Liangmai becomes monophthong /u/ in Rongmei and the high front unrounded vowel /i/ of Liangmai becomes diphthong /ai/ in Rongmei.

Chapter V deals with phonological correspondences. It discusses the phonological correspondences of these three languages in order to reconstruct the proto-form of the language group. The reconstruction is based on the initial consonants, vowel nuclei, codas and prefix. Some of these correspondences are exceptionally regular and others seem to be less regular.

Chapter VI deals with the findings and summary.

There are two appendices in the thesis. The first appendix contains basic vocabulary of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei, second appendix is the comparative vocabulary of the three languages.