

## The Aoic languages in areal and typological perspective

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### Abstract

Aoic refers to a cluster of Tibeto-Burman languages spoken at the western extreme of the mainland Southeast Asia linguistic area and traditionally includes the major dialects of Ao (Chungli, Mongsen, Changki), the Lotha and Sangtam languages, and the various dialects of Yimkhiungrü (Langa, Tikhir, Wui, and possibly Makuri). These languages are typologically interesting for the fact that they demonstrate features characteristic of Southeast Asian languages (e.g. lexical tone systems, similar phonotactic constraints on syllable structure, rampant lexical compounding), but also show the heavy footprint of South Asian languages in their grammatical complexity (e.g. head-final features, non-finite clause chaining, tense marking, synthetic and agglutinative word formation, morphological causatives, relative-correlative constructions, *inter alia*). They are also significant for demonstrating a number of typological rarities, and thus have value for contributing to our understanding of the extent of linguistic diversity in the world's languages.

The multitude of tongues spoken in the mountains of the Indo-Burmese Arc has resulted in some notable contact effects, manifesting in the borrowing of grammatical morphemes and parts of pronominal paradigms that are generally considered to be highly resistant to borrowing, as well as structural convergence. Such developments are likely attributable historically to four influences: (i) the substratum influence of Indo-Aryan languages, such as Assamese and the closely related creole-like Nagamese; (ii) wholesale annexations by more powerful tribes migrating from the east and south, resulting in villages with separate populations speaking distinct native languages; (iii) the earlier practice of kidnapping women; and (iv), migrations of entire clans to other villages due to famine or intra-village conflicts. All of these factors may have contributed to the creation of bilingual villages and the resulting diffusion of features observed in the languages of the region.

The paper will compare phonological systems and aspects of morphology and syntax in the Aoic languages to assess the basis for their subgrouping, as well as their peculiarities that have relevance for typology. Particular attention will be given to discussing linguistic features that characterize the Aoic languages, and those that distinguish them from their Konyak neighbours on the one hand, and the Kuki-Chin and Angami-Pochuri languages of southern Nagaland and adjacent regions on the other.