

MOTHER TONGUE

JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE IN PREHISTORY



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ISSUE XII, 2007

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The language of the Shom Pen: a language isolate in the Nicobar islands

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1. Introduction

The Shom Pen are foragers inhabiting the centre of Great Nicobar, the principal island in the Nicobar chain west of Burma and north of Sumatra (Photo 1). The Nicobars were known to Ptolemy and the Arab geographers, but reliable information about them only began to filter out in the 18th century (Singh 2003). Admiral Steen Bille first contacted the Shom Pen in 1846 and De Roëpstorff made the first visit to them to record ethnographic and linguistic data in 1876 (Man 1886:432).

Photo 1. Shom Pen on Great Nicobar



The identity of the Shom Pen was the subject of much ill-informed speculation in early ethnological texts. Man (1886:429) observed;

For many years past a belief has been entertained by ethnologists that the inland tribe of the Nicobar Islands (known to the coast people as "*Shom Pen*") would be found to supply the seemingly missing and requisite link connecting the negritos of the Andaman Islands with the Semangs of the Malayan Peninsula.

However, the fact that the Shom Pen generally have straight hair, like the Nicobarese, brought an untimely end to these pleasant speculations. Occasional individuals, as in the above photograph may have wavy hair but it is as yet unclear whether this is genetic or merely unkempt.

For more than a century since Man's original description, only very little has been added to the stock of reliable information on the Shom Pen. Stampe (1966:393) even stated that the Shom Pen were 'possibly extinct'. Rizvi (1990) is a very abbreviated account, while the website <http://www.andaman.org/NICOBAR/text.htm> provides photographs and some useful information concerning the location of Shom Pen groups in the 1990s. The name 'Shom Pen' itself is Nicobarese. Man (1886:432) asserts that the people call themselves *Shab Daw'a*, although Chattopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay (2003) were unable to find any autonym. According to the Andamans and Nicobar website, 'The Shompen have no common name for themselves: those living on the western side of the island call themselves Kalay, those in the eastern part Keyet - with each group calling the other Buavela' and their numbers were estimated at 300 in 2001.

The identity of the Shom Pen has thus remained unresolved. The prohibitions on outside researchers in the Nicobar islands during the from Indian Independence until the present have probably only increased the uncertainty. Although hardly conclusive, given the high incidence of shipwrecks on the Nicobars and the prevalence of incoming strangers, even the issue of the straight hair has been questioned, with some populations apparently having wavy hair. Trivedi et al. (2006) present some genetic information on the Shom Pen, but without reaching any clear conclusions and certainly without substantiating their conclusion that these are 'descendants of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers'. No

archaeology of any significance has been conducted on the Nicobars and the time-depth of their settlement is unknown. The 2004 tsunami apparently affected the Shom Pen, but they have by and large survived. As a consequence, the affiliation of their language is clearly a question of some importance.

2. The Shom Pen Language

Until recently, the language of the Shom Pen had remained unknown apart from ca. 100 words recorded by De Roepstorff (1875), the scattered lexical items in Man (1886) and the comparative list in Man (1889). Although our knowledge of Nicobarese is imperfect there are several book-length sources for this group, for example Whitehead (1925), Das (1977) and Radakrishnan (1981). Although most reference books list Shom Pen as part of the Nicobarese group, evidence for this is slight. Apart from some numerals and body parts, the Shom Pen words of show no obvious relationship with other Nicobarese languages or other Mon-Khmer languages. The fragmentary evidence does not immediately suggest that the Shom Pen are Austroasiatic-speakers. Man (1886:436) says; 'of words in ordinary use there are very few in the Shom Pen dialect which bear any resemblance to the equivalents in the language of the coast people'. Man's Shom Pen data shows that numbers 1-5 are roughly cognate with Nicobarese but that above this they are quite different. Man (1886) also observes that there was substantial linguistic variation between Shom Pen settlements;

In noting down the words for common objects as spoken by these (*dakan-kat*) people I found that in most instances they differed from the equivalent used by the Shorn Pen of Lafal and Ganges Harbour.

A somewhat difficult to access publication, Chattopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay (2003), makes available a significant body of new data on the Shom Pen language. While not to modern standards of presentation and analysis, it is enough to make a more informed estimate of the affiliation of Shom Pen. The authors consider some of the possibilities and conclude that Shom Pen may be related to Polynesian [!]. This paper¹ sets out the extended dataset for Shom Pen and provides whatever etymologies are to hand, using lexical lists such as Grierson (1928) and Shorto (2006) as well as including citations from De Roepstorff (1875). §3. summarises the phonology of Shom Pen, as far as it can be gathered from the authors' presentation. Some of the English glosses are highly local, such as 'dismatting'. I have left these as in the original.

3. Shom Pen phonology

3.1 Vowels

Shom Pen has seven phonemic vowels:

¹ I would like to thank Laurie Reid for passing on this book, and IAS, Leiden for making available scanning facilities.

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Close-Mid	e		o
Open-Mid	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

All vowels have a nasalised counterpart, but only the central vowel /a/ has a lengthened counterpart, \bar{a} , which can also be nasalised.

Strangely, Chattopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay (2003) transcribe geminated vowels for the other four cardinal vowels without explaining what makes these distinct from their 'long' central vowel. Most probably Shom Pen has systematic length contrast in vowels. Man (1889) only transcribes five vowels, but his macrons suggest he considered all had a lengthened counterpart.

3.2 Consonants

Shom Pen consonants are as follows:

	Bilabial	Alve- olar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b	t d	c j	k g	ʔ
Aspirate	p ^h b ^h	t ^h		k ^h g ^h	
Nasal	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	ɸ			x ɣ	h
Lateral		l			
Approximant					
Approximant	w		y		

Chattopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay (2003) represent many words with final diphthongs such as 'au' and 'ai'. It seems quite likely these are in fact final semi-vowels.

3.3 Orthographic conversions

Difficulties with fonts compelled Chattopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay to use makeshift conventions. The following conversions were made in the lexical list.

4. Annotated Shom Pen wordlist

In the following list, citations from De Roepstorff (1875) are marked R. and from Man (1886, 1889) M.

Table 1. Lexical data on the Shom Pen language

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
A			
Adam's apple	n.	hōy, yiʔuŋāi	
afterwards	adv.	duāg	
algae	n.	komheāu	
ankle	n.	nhiou / ieāo	M. <i>ang-hē·o</i> .
annoyed (to be)	v.	hehen / xeāxi	
ant	n.	kolheəb	
armpit	n.	ginoi	
arum	n.	pugou	
ash	n.	umeōi	
B			
back	n.	gikau	R. <i>tamnōi</i> . M. <i>hok-ō·a</i> . Some Mon-Khmer languages appear to have a related form. cf. Mụ̄ng <i>khau</i> . Shorto 1844.
back (side)	n.	coukou	
back (side)	n.	tāi	
back (unraised) side of canoe	n.	guou	
back legs (of animal)	n.	(na) kāieidn	
back of chopper	n.	aŋāine	
back of pig etc.	n.	ekhūāu	
bad	a.	phāi	M. <i>wu-à·hu</i> .
bag	n.	ukhuāg	
balancing arms joining a canoe to an outrigger	n.	(na) kānuāi	
bamboo	n.	ŋo / ŋoan	M. <i>ōē</i> .
banana	n.	omeoin	R. <i>mum</i> .
bangle (thick)	n.	koneŋ	
bangle (thin)	n.	gokuŋāu, koŋkoā	
bark	n.	nho	
bark	v.	kāokāo	
barkcloth	n.	wādou	
bark plate	n.	kūay /kocəŋ/mhonyāŋ	
basket	n.	teāu	R. <i>kantjema</i> .
bat	n.	okināu / kāināi / oiāy	
bathe	n.	puoihoəp / pugoihoəp	R. <i>hōhōm</i> .
bead necklace	n.	luou	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
beak	n.	wātām	
beam (horizontal)	n.	gināug	
beat	v.	kuāu / kougāu	R. <i>hæn-ei</i> .
bed	n.	xeāub	
bee	n.	uŋāu	R. <i>holoeŋg-wa</i> .
beehive	n.	komeāu	
belching	n.	geāu	
belly	n.	kāo	R. <i>kau</i> . M. <i>kāu</i> .
belt	n.	gitui	
bench	n.	koφeoi	
bend		kāu	
bent (to be)		jeoāin	
betel	n.	nou	
betel nut	n.	nāŋ / nyāŋ	M. <i>halaig-nāng</i> .
big	a.	ocuog / imeʔi / kāduoi	
big (as of tree)	a.	niŋāi	
bird	n.	kaiho	R. <i>sæ-tjo-a</i> . M. <i>sichū-a</i> .
bite	v.	kaidde / hekāb	R. <i>kenjt po</i> .
bitter	a.	heφuoi	R. <i>paka</i> .
black	a.	kaʔiug	R. <i>metj</i> . M. <i>mēt-kū</i> .
black hair (head)	a.	euaujuou	
blind	a.	ecoāu	
blood	n.	tiub / teub	R. <i>tjé-tjéng</i> . M. <i>dōb</i> .
blood vessel	n.	xeāin / (ko) xēāi	
blow (air)	v.	nephoāi	
blow (with fist)	v.	kouou	
blowing of nasal mucus		bāφoāg	
blue	a.	komeniaŋ	
blunt	a.	okād	
blunt part of chopper	n.	ukāi	
body	n.	kalhoy	
body ache	n.	xieināu, duoiʔetāi	
body of canoe	n.	māu	
boiling	a.	khoāg	
bone	n.	kāʔeem / kādoā	R. <i>ka-a-eng</i> .
bottle	n.	ūāu	
boy	n.	kekoāi / cugauʔe	M. <i>akau, kō-it</i> .
branch (of tree)	n.	kogāg	
break	v.	huoŋ / hekāu	
breast	n.	hūigimau	M. <i>tō-a</i> . Man's form agrees with common Nicobarese.
breathe	v.	hēāŋ	
bride	n.	ādiʔou / digeu	
bring	v.	ʔioāy	M. <i>yau-meñ</i> .
broom	n.	koleo	R. <i>mo-i dæt</i> .
brother	n.	muā	M. <i>chū-a</i> .

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
brother's son	n.	ŋiei	
bulb (electric)	n.	īuāi	
burn	v.	touoi	
burst	v.	bākuāo	
butterfly	n.	xěāo / okhěāo	
buttock	n.	ŋuināu	
C			
calf muscle	n.	neāu	
camera	n.	ākanyāu	
cane	n.	nāigee	
canoe	n.	toāy / bekuāu	R. <i>kehā</i> . M. <i>dō'ai, hō'a</i> . Man compares this to Nicobarese <i>du'e</i> .
carry	v.	kaiug kao	
carry (with wooden carrier)	v.	netoāu	
carry on back	v.	puggāi	
carry on chest (as child)	v.	naŋ mau	
carry on head	v.	toāgge koi	
carry on shoulder	v.	netoŋ	
cat	n.	koceŋ	R. <i>tjing</i> . < Malay <i>kucing</i>
catch	v.	laub na tai/laub ku gāo	
catch (s.t. falling)	v.	bāteāu / tha	
cement	n.	cemai	R. <i>pamain</i> .
centipede	n.	eab	
chair	n.	ohāu	
cheek	n.	neāu / toŋeāum	M. <i>ngē-am</i> .
chest	n.	gimau	M. <i>maiŋ-ta-aŋ</i> .
chest pain	n.	tāimethuō	
chew	v.	heŋāinhe / ŋāiŋom	
chicken	n.	kagai toŋēo	
child (female)	n.	kagai	M. <i>akau</i> .
child (male)	n.	ugābeāu / kagai	
chili	n.	ceu	R. <i>kóa</i> .
chin	n.	wāŋāi	R. <i>mjen te tjean</i> . M. <i>kō-id</i> .
chopper	n.	giu	
clap		thā ki tai	
clean (mouth)	v.	gilāonuām	
clean (with water)	v.	hoŋ	
climb	v.	hecāu	
close (bag etc.)	v.	niŋam	
close (bottle etc.)	v.	hāub	
close (window etc.)	v.	tougāy	
closed		tougāy	
cloth	n.	loe	R. <i>holōn</i> . M. <i>lō'e</i> . also

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
cloud	n.	kāyāb	Nicobarese <i>lō`e</i> . R. <i>gnó-e</i> .
cock	n.	khekhoāi	
cockroach	n.	peāg	
coconut	n.	leāu /guiāo/ taub/nou	R. <i>katel, húa</i> . M. <i>kalē·al</i> . The <i>nou</i> term could be related to widespread Austronesian * <i>niuR</i> .
coconut kernel	n.	jāg / lubiāu	
coconut shell	n.	kā?eun / bheu	R. <i>hint-jeng</i> .
cold (s.t. not hot)	a.	kāytāi	
cold (weather)	a.	didem	M. <i>dām</i> .
collarbone	n.	hoŋuāg	
collect	v.	muou	
comb	n.	gigai	R. <i>wén, kutta</i> .
come	v.	hecāg	
construct	v.	khijāy	
container	n.	doāo / kauŋ	
cook	n.	tii	
corner	n.	ouŋāy	
corner of chopper	n.	kokoi	
corner points of a rectangle	n.	teuŋ	
cough	v.	heiaghe	
cough	v.	φeiāghe	R. <i>o-ong</i> . M. <i>ō·ah</i> .
count	v.	geāide	R. <i>panne</i> . M. <i>yiad</i> .
cover	v.	toākou	
crab	n.	jiāu / huŋāb	
crawl	v.	teoai	
creeper	n.	niāin	
creeper sp.	n.	nou nephoāu	
crocodile	n.	kōuāu	M. <i>āyō</i> .
crown of head	n.	thāi	
curve (concave)	n.	tīōu	
curve (convex)	n.	kōiāide	
cut	v.	gehōy	R. <i>kadenji</i> .
cut (as of animal)	v.	heiŋāu	
cut (fruit etc.)	v.	hetogaub	
cut (grass etc.)	v.	phoāo	
cut (into small pieces)	v.	tainhō	? cf. Bahnaric e.g. Stieng <i>tah</i> 'to cut up'. Shorto A191.
cut (leaves etc.)	v.	kugai	
cut (wood etc.)	v.	kagau/ kaitohe/heφeo	
cut hair	v.	hāug ko juou	

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
D			
dance	v.	geāu	M. <i>fū·aha</i> .
dark		cuou	
daughter	n.	meāu	M. <i>kō·at·apàu</i> .
daughter's son	n.	teāug	
deaf	a.	okheāŋ	
death	n.	badgam	R. <i>bá-e</i> 'dead'.
defecate	v.	hekkao	
descend	v.	heφuog	
dew	n.	komeu	
dig (soil)	v.	φeāy	M. <i>wī·ai(d)</i> .
dismatting [?]	v.n.	yiāi igoki	
dog	n.	kāb	R. <i>kūp</i> .
door	n.	hēāub	
drag	v.	hetogāu	
dragonfly	n.	kohlāi	
draw (water from well)	v.	nacuo	
draw by hair of head	v.	toākoāi	
drop	v.	kagai nuŋāo / kekoāug	
dry	a.	kuijāg	
dry (fruit)	a.	nuoi	
dry (leaf)	a.	la?goeāi	
dumb	a.	muŋou	
dust	n.	lokujāi	
E			
eagle	n.	iuan / taφeū	
ear	n.	nāŋ / nyāŋ	R. <i>gñā</i> . But cf. general Nicobarese <i>nang</i> .
earache	n.	tāi ki nāŋ, geāu hi nāŋ	
ear-ring	n.	lāi nāŋ	
earwax	n.	komeu	
east	n.	uhāφuou	
eat	v.	nuām, bhiau, tāoāggūφeg	
egg	n.	tagai to hō	
eight	num.	thugāy	R. <i>taw-we</i> . ? cf. Palaungic e.g. Palaung <i>tā</i> . Not in Nicobarese
elbow	n.	wākai jaun	
embrace		neφuou	
empty		kheāi	
empty belly		khoāg kāo	
eradicate	v.	kōwāin-āi	
estop [?]	v.	sue tāu · thākinoāh	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
extinguish	v.	neāub / φ̄āy	
eye	n.	meāin	roots with m- are found throughout the region, Austronesian forms with <i>mat-</i> , Tibeto-Burman with <i>mit-</i> , <i>mik-</i> , Karenic with <i>mai-</i> , Miao <i>mai</i> .
eyeball	n.	ŋu meāin	
eyebrow	n.	eou / eiou	
eyelash	n.	(na) bhēy	
F			
face	n.	kheigimāŋ	
fall	v.	betiāu	
far		tatag	
farn [? fern]	n.	wāφo	
fast		koi	
fat (as person)		neāu	
father	n.	eem / eam	
father's brother	n.	kokeo	
father's father		koai / koāu	
father's mother		kāj	
feather		okhoāo	
feed	v.	kaugāi	
fever		theguo	
fight	v.	iou	
file (for rubbing)		kaijāb	
finger		(heinuŋ) nuŋāi	
finish	v.	neān	
fire	n.	job	
fireplace	n.	mooijob	
firewood	n.	ŋoug	
fish sp.	n.	kāug	
fish sp.	n.	(ko) leub	
fish sp.	n.	(ko) huŋ āi	
fish sp.	n.	teāb	
fish sp.	n.	kāuāu	
fish-hook	n.	koāin	
fist	n.	laub	
five		tēy	R. <i>tein</i> .
flame	n.	φeāŋ job	
flank	n.	noam	
flat (as of nose)		pēāb	
flesh	n.	kogāo	
floor of hut	n.	kopheōi	
flower	n.	φijou	
fly	v.	kojāi	
fog	n.	koneāu	
fold	v.	niŋam	

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
fold in front of loincloth	v.	koithoāŋ	
fold of cloth at the waist	v.	toāϕuggāi	
foliage	n.	tātāŋ	
foot	n.	(ko) ceog	
footprint	n.	komeu	
forehead	n.	kumheāŋ /komeāin/bheāu	
forest	n.	gipē	
four		phugāi	R. <i>fu et.</i> ? P-Austroasiatic <i>*pun?</i> , <i>*pan.</i> Shorto 1166.
fracture	n.	mātāt	
frog	n.	gōāŋ (non edible) kwāo (edible)	
front	n.	comeāin / okāt	
front legs (of animal)	n.	wākāijāuŋ / (nε) kugāu	
fruit sp.	n.	kāi	
fruit sp.	n.	touϕiug	
fruit sp.	n.	tiāu	
full		kāduoi / peii	
full belly		nuo e kāo	
G			
get up		ikheāu	
girl		kohāt	
give		hetauag / toāgitai	
give (imp)		tāo	
glass		taiag juou	
go		kaiug	
go away		koāug	
goitre		uŋāgāi	
good		āu?e/au/ε?au	
grass		khougāu / (ko) khugāu	
grass sp.		keb	
grasshopper		okāi	
gravel		kheug	
green (colour)		kā?oōi	
green (fruit etc.)		kōhōoi	
green (leaf)		xineāuŋ	
green (raw)		tameāu	
green coconut		ϕijou/ije?ādheiāi/goāubiou	
greet with folded hands		nuāoktai	
grey hair		taiag juou	
groom		nākāu	
grow		calhoāg	
grumbling		gocuāg	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
grumbling (as a boar)		goʔlau	
guava		koneāu	
gulp		gāokheuŋai	
gum of tooth		iāo-gi-tām	
gum of tree		toāi	
H			
hair (other than head)		okhoāo	
hair of head		juou	
half		lahāi/ŋā	
hammer		diāi	
hand		kougāu	
hand (left)		(ko) tiāug	
hand (right)		(ko) kaug /gokou	
handle		nehāg	
hang		hetoag	
hard		cūoi	
head		koi/φiāu/hagupeāuŋ	<i>koi</i> is standard Nicobarese and a widespread Austroasiatic root.
head of spear		moāi	
headache		tatāuŋ koi/ tɔŋ koi	
heart		meāŋ no hoy	
heavy		cuoid	
heel		wādeoceog / deāu	
hem of loincloth		wāguou	
hanging behind			
hen		taφēou/ toφēo	
here		inhō	
hiccough		mānheāg	
hide (one self)		keuglāo	
hide (something)		coāu	
high		heleun / cuoid	
his		onā	
hole		kohāŋ	
hole of ear		haguinaŋ	
honey		(ne) puŋ ou	
horn		nyeŋ	
hot (s.t.)		tāi	
hot (weather)		phoai/icigad	
hot sun		tixiug	
husk		kouāu	
husk of wood		khohāu	
hut		hagupē / niāi	
I			
I		iō / ihō	
incense		(na) tiom	
insect of rice		eidwaŋ ke adoai	
insect sp.		gūiāu	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
insert (nail etc.)		kougy	
iron		kātooi	
itch		khiu / gikoāi	
J			
jaw		ŋāi, kāʔiuŋ	
jerk		heheu / tēou	
joint of bamboo		poāugge	
jump		hēkōu/ lauuŋ	
K			
kernel (as in guava)		koimuŋ	
kerosene		puoi job	
kick		tauŋhe	
kiss		toɔb	
knee		guāg	
knife		katooi	
knot		pein	
knot		na pein	
kumba (edible plant sp.)		kūāi	
L			
ladder (of hut)		igāy	
lame		ēcag	
land		gihou	
lap		ɣimeāiŋ	
lap of loincloth		kāduoid	
laugh		hāu	
leach		leɔb	
leaf		loi / wā	
leaf of mushroom		bho	
leaf stalk		koāuŋ	
leaf-bud		kooi	
lean		ūoy	
left (side)		hein hāi	
leg		ŋuiāuŋ	
leg ornament		pein	
lemon		toāi	
lice		kokoy	
lick		eāu	
lie down		heidigoug/ tounoϕeg/ ningopoāuŋ	
lie on back		heidigoug	
lie on chest		hehugāb	
lie on side		heteiuŋ	
lift		poēā	
light (in weight)		ākāiϕēi	
light (torch etc.)		gouduekhæg	
lime		ϕijou	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
lines of palm		ŋhā tha tai	
lip		tōi	
lip (upper)		kotoōi	
listen		gitāgināŋ	
little (a)		ijeʔā	
lizard (child)		kagai kãi	
lizard (house)		kãi	
long		kocuoug	
loose		γināo	
loud		kāduoi	
low		heʔugāo / touāg	
low (tree etc.)		heou	
low (voice)		ekeiē	
lower side of a leaf		(na) nuou	
M			
make		khijāy	
make fire		tāb	
make fire		tāb	
male		ameā kāu	
man		koleāg / oleāu	
many		guice	
marriage		puggāi	
matchstick		kāicōi	
measure of four fingers		tyāug nuḡāi	
measure of full span		ϕewāi	
measure of one hand		ϕewāi e kugāu	
measure of two hands		ϕewāi e tugēb	
medicine		tāŋ	
molar tooth		ŋa / niāu	
mole		konāu	
monkey		nihāi / coāi	
moon		houou	
mosquito		opugāi	
mosquito net		juou	
mother		diei	
mother's brother		kokeo	
mother's father		koāi	
mother's mother		kāj	
mouth		tameauŋ, eguϕeg/ komeou	
move		hēin	
much		imeʔi /duoi/ kāduoi/badāi	
mud		hoŋāu	
mushroom		kōtho	
my		ca	
N			
nail		giob	

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
nail		kouã̃y	
nasal mucus		hã̃i	
navel		φuoij	
near		neojeci	
neck		kupeãuŋ	
necklace		luou	
needle		itaub	
new moon		puoŋlã̃i	
night		cuou	
nine		niŋai	R. <i>nog-in</i> .
nipple		methou	
north		uhã̃kã̃peo	
north wind		(ne) tã̃g	
nose		mhou	R. <i>monk</i> . cf. Nicobarese <i>moah</i> .
nostril		gumhou	
not		mheã̃ŋ	R. <i>unã̃ng</i> .
O			
oil		puoi	
old man		micimã̃u / kã̃minã̃u	
old woman		ã̃dioug / (WO) kã̃mineg	
one		heiaŋ	R. <i>hing</i> . cf. Nancowry <i>hẽaŋ</i> .
onion		wã̃ coã̃n	
open		ghuã̃u	
open (bag etc.)		lã̃uŋ	R. <i>wã̃nde</i> .
open (bottle etc.)		miou	
open (cloth)		uŋã̃i kedhõ	
open (door etc.)		ghuã̃u	
open (eyes)		meaigi, thõ/kã̃tã̃yat/ghõy	
open mouth		tameã̃uŋ	
outrigger		cã̃o	
outsider		tamiã̃u	
owl		kaiho φuŋã̃o	
P			
pain		tã̃i / tã̃ŋ	
pain in belly		tã̃i-ike-kã̃o	
pain in chest		tã̃i gimã̃u	
pain in hand		teŋkugã̃u	
pain in leg		geã̃u tameã̃n/heiugwã̃i	
		gineã̃	
palm of hand		hagug tha tai/tha tai	
pandanus		hlã̃/buggai	
papaya		babai	
parrot		kaiho kã̃iã̃i	
peel		khẽã̃i gekoi	
penis		tã̃ub' tugã̃o/egoã̃i/goã̃i	
pierce		tuŋã̃o	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
piercing of thorn pig		wādākāi (na) lau	R. <i>noñg</i> . wild pig <i>alæv</i> . perhaps cf. Mon-Khmer. Palaung <i>le?</i> , Luang <i>læic</i> .
pigeon		ohãum	
piglet		kagai lau	
pile up		muou	
pillar		keuŋ	
pinch		guggāi igoki	
plant		kwāe / kouglāy	
plant sp.		pūā	
plant sp.		geāi	
plant sp.		neug	
plant sp.		meuŋ	
plant sp.		nibbhōi	
plant sp.		kāie	
plant sp.		tei	
plant sp.		nekuā	
plant sp.		theāg	
plant sp.		binoi	
plant sp.		nekugāo	
plant sp.		netiāu	
plant sp.		huāug	
plant sp. (<i>cyathea?</i>)		tāi	
plant sp. (<i>dillenia?</i>)		ϕugāu	
plant sp. (<i>Dinochloa?</i>)		kagou	
plant sp. (<i>dinochloa?</i>)		khougou	
plant sp. (<i>dinochloa?</i>)		bāgue	
plant sp. (<i>gleichenia?</i>)		guāu	
plant sp. (<i>tinospora?</i>)		neϕoāu	
plate (of bark)		kūāy	
pluck flower		tāoϕijou	
poke		tauŋ	
pole		togīāi/ koteū	
pork		tāb	
pot		tyāug/tōā	R. <i>awæk</i> .
potato		ālu/ kokuāu	<i>ālu</i> < Hindi.
pour		gigou	
prawn		okeoɔb	R. <i>bo-it</i> .
prepare		khijāy	
press		hēineitāo/leitāŋ	
pull		touay/ tao	R. <i>gno-en</i> .
push		ghuou	
put		touāug/ tapeāg	
put off (candle etc.)		neāub	
python		miŋāi	

Q

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
quarter		teāŋ	
R			
rain		pĩ ãi	
rat		niŋãi	
rectangular		kũiou /uŋãine	
red		kãteob	
remainder of fruit etc. after chewing		egãnmε	
rest		kãcãm	
rib		tanuãy	
ribbon		gõiajhe	
rice		aduoi	
ridge of palm		koaŋ tai	
right (side)		anikã	
ripe (fruit etc.)		toãu	
ripe (fruit)		toãu	
road		kauãu / kaiuŋhã	
roast		oŋãn	
roll (thread etc.) in the fingers		uŋain	
roof		neteãi	
root		(ko) ghiãu	
rope		nãi	
rough		xeãidão	
round		tĩẽu/nijãg/eião	
rub		hejãoginou	
run		Ɔeãu ghãu	
S			
salt		kãdãb	
salty		kumeoin	
sand		moiunãu/ komeoigo	
sapling		Ɔẽãu/pũi	
scale of fish		thẽãu	
scar		kopeŋãi	
scatter		naphooi	
scorpion		tiãu/kokugãu	
sea		(ko) cuãg-i	
seat of canoe		tigei/dεo	
see		kãiãy	
seed		koŋuõu	
semicircular pieces of wood fixed on the front and rear of a hut		tãi	
roof of hut			
seven		ãin	R. oin.
sew		ghõãu	
sexual intercourse		hecεŋ	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
shadow		kau	
shake hand		tāo tai egakayuk	
sharp		kāi	
sharpen		neodām	
shave		φeaj	
shell		tēāin	
shoe		tεceog	
shoot		koijaug	
short (as of a tree)		heaou	
short (person)		kāgāu	
shoulder		kokogeu	
shout		tāo/nhāb	
shut (door etc)		goiāu	
shut eyes		meumeāin/pheāg/hāub	
shut off (as of radio)		neāub	
sing		yugāi igoki	R. <i>ejū</i> .
singlet (inner garment)		nakāijoi	
sip		eφoāi	
sister		iā	
sit		kākoāy	R. <i>gñidé</i> .
six		ugāo	R. <i>læv-ve</i> .
skin		kouāo / kouāu	
skin disease sp.		kāi	
skin disease sp.		kolāu	
skin of coconut		kouāu leāu	
skull		kā?eem koi / tomeāpeāuŋ	
sky		ginhāu/eiōu	
slap		hāneφeāg	
sleep		bātāiāg	
slippery		waijaid	
slope of hill	n.	hlāid	
slow		okoy	
small (in quantity)		uduāi	
small (in size)		kāgujāg	
smell		heiei	
smoke		phonāu	
smooth		taijaid	
snail		hōāum	
snake	n.	kāiāu/nuŋāi/giāo	
snake (green)	n.	leāk	
sneeze		tāo	
snore		hācuāg/ khēāin	
soft		kāpuāu	
soil		uri~o	
sole of foot		tha ceog	
son		āteāg	

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
song		yugāi	R. <i>kó-et</i> .
son's son		teāug	
sound		teteiu	
sound of sour taste		diāu	
south		uhāgoāu	
south wind		niāŋ	
spade		pata-u	
spear (with cut marks)		guhāi	
spear (with three or five barbs)	n.	bekugāi	R. <i>kakang</i> .
spear type	n.	yugāb	
spear type	n.	bākugou	
spider	n.	juāg /jugēb	
spider web	n.	komhōin/niāijugēb	
spine	n.	kāiŋkeāb	
spit		phoāi / dei /heidei	
split		φēāy	
spoon for stirring rice	n.	uhāu	
sputum	n.	phoāi	
squeeze		uiōu	
squirrel	n.	koāg	
stalk of coconut	n.	nehāg	
stand		naigicām	
star	n.	gekhāŋ	
startling		konheāu	
stay		kācām	
steal		wāi igoki	
steam		kotoōi	
stem		neāu / māu	
stem of mushroom		ei	
stick		nāidōŋ	
stick of canoe used as handle		ekhuoi	
sticks connecting the two semicircular planks on the roof of a hut		kāub	
stir (rice etc.)		kuou	
stone		kheu/(nā) ŋoāin	
stool		okaet	
storm		ŋāii	
straight line		tugou	
strain off (water from rice)		gigou	
strangle		kanuoi	
stream		ˈcuāg	
strike		φēāo	

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
submerge		touŋ	
suck		betuāu	
sugar		cini	
sun		xiug	
sunlight		xiug	
sun rays		xiug tem	
sunrise		kācāug	
sunset		diguoxiug	
swallow		gao xeuŋāo	
sweat		komeu/oŋeoi	
sweep		hoɔp tehā	
sweep (water)		napīāi/ŋiāoggoi	
sweet		yiŋiu	
swim		ijaug goi	
T			
table		koŋeoi	
tail		guou	
take		hetāo/ tāogheu/ tauag	
tall (person)		hacugāu	
tall (tree etc)		niŋāi	
tasteful		āo-e-bhiu	
tasteless		na poāi	
tear (as of grass)		ghuou	
tear (paper etc.)		iāy	
tears		nheāu	
ten		tai	R. <i>te</i> . ? cf. Burmic languages which have <i>ta</i> or similar.
testicle		ŋuouŋ/gugāug	
theft		wāi	
there		tanhāi	
thick		tāu/duoi/getāo	
thick (as thread)		kāduoidāug	
thigh		(hethānā) lau/ gau	
thin		hāub/thaāgge	
thin (as thread)		ije?ā	
this		eihō	
thorn		teāg	
thread		nāin/ wānāŋ	
three		ugai	R. <i>luge</i> . cf. Central Nicobar <i>luue</i> . Also Palaung <i>uəy</i> and Khasian. Shorto 1437a.
throat		phiŋuāin	
throw		hekoāug	
tie		pein	
tight		diteo/ gikkai	
tired		cichāi	

English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
tobacco	n.	mhoy	R. <i>henk tjerōin</i> .
tomorrow	adv.	jābhu	
tongue	n.	hijāo	
tooth	n.	tām	
toothless	n.	tai tām	
toothache	n.	tāitaām/ nacioggutām	
toothbrush	n.	iāi pi tām	
top		koi	
touch		tāulaŋ	
touch-me-not (a plant)		neteāg/nāinteāg	
tree		kouāŋ/kuŋāy/uŋāi/(ko) hāu	
triangular		kuiou	
trousers		kaināg	
tuber ¹ (sp. edible)		komhāt	
turtle		kouŋāu	
tusk of boar		(ne) tāi	
two		eo/duo	R. <i>ā</i> . cf. Nancowry <i>ṛā</i> , Central Nicobar <i>ā</i> :. Also Palaungic & Khasian. Shorto 1562. <i>duo</i> is a loan from Indo-Aryan.
U			
unfold		lāuŋ	
untie knot		bhijāy	
upper lip		koṭōoi	
upper side of leaf		(na) hougou	
urine		bātoē	
utensil for cooking food		tiāu	
V			
vagina		ipudāo/ugāu/totoghāb	
vomit		okheāg	
W			
waist		noam/ kulā/ gigāb	
walk		kaiāg	
walk in bending posture		gitoōi	
wall		(ko) towāg	
wash		hoop/gikoāi	
wasp		kouāu	
water		puoi	R. <i>dūi</i> (fresh), <i>le-it</i> (salt).
water of boiled rice		moāi	
water of coconut		lāhāi	
water of green		puoinou	

¹ It actually means creeper. Since it is used for sewing also hence the name.

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English gloss	PoS	Shom Pen	Commentary
coconut			
wavy line		kakhōu	
we (1st person dual excl.)		emāu	
we (1st person dual incl.)		εo	
wear		goāu haggau	
weep		mɛd-hēu	
well		hākhlan	
west		uhāguo	
wet		meu	
whisper		gihijāg/tēhi jāog	
whistle		ϕōāugge	
white		kagijāu	
whole		nɛnɛu/ɣimāu	
wife		apāo	
wind		kāhooi	
wings		(nɛ/ko) nuṅāi	
woman		tijog	R. oju.
wood		hāu	
wooden carrier		(nɛ) toāu	
wooden nails for fixing outrigger		koteug/pein	
work		kākukhō/moykho	
worm-eaten		coug/hecoug	
wound		goiāub / (ko) ceo/kopeṅāi	
wrestling		helein/ tākuioi/ duṅān/tāϕu	
wrinkle		(ko) ṅhād	
wrist		wākāijāuṅ	
wrist wrestling		buo kugāu	
Y			
yawn		nāϕe	
yellow		kaʔugāo	
yellow leaf		laʔōōy	

Phrases	English translation	Comment
cuāg juou	long hair	
kāgūjāg juou	short hair	
uduai jhopri	small hut	<i>jhōpṛī</i> < Hindi
ulgai lau	three pigs	
phugāi loe	four cloths	
ije?ā aduoi	a little rice	
duoi khānā	much food	<i>khānā</i> < Hindi
giob nuṅāceog	nail of finger of leg	
giob nuṅā tai	nail of finger of hand	
aduoi huṅāi	big snake	
kāujāg mhou	small nose	
ije?ā uduāi nie	small hut	
cuā(g) mhou	big nose	
mionṅ meāin	closed eye	
thōāku meāin	open eye	
ceog ca	my leg (coastal speech)	
waganhā ca	my trousers (coastal speech)	
kāduoi jhopri	big house	<i>(jhōpṛī</i> < Hindi)
Sentences		
nā tiou	cook food (imperative)	
nā kaiug	colne (imperative)	
kaiug ūā	go there	
nā tuoid khānā	bring food	
nā taijaid	clean (imperative)	
umheāṅ khānā	(there is) no food	
mheāṅ apāo	wife (is) not	
noānce kaiug	I shall not go to nanbe (Campbell Bay)	
nānbe		
mheā kāog nibu	Nibu has not come	
nākāiou nāṅ	cut betel (imperative)	
nā hoop	clean (imperative)	
nā φeāo	split (imperative)	
utāg digu	Digu has not come	
mheāṅ phagu	Phagu (is) not (there)	
kāiugghe oihō	go there	
nuām ceo	I shall eat	
o kāiāggi nānbeo	I shall not go to Campbell Bay	
o bheāg	I shall not eat	
yeai khans	Didi will bring food	
mheāṅ giu	giu (chopper) (is) not	
kaiug tiug nānbeo	I shall go to Campbell Bay	
nhoāṅhe	come here	
cahāk jābhu te iṅe	I shall go home tomorrow (coastal speech)	

5. The classification of the Shom Pen language

Two observations can be made at once; not only is the relationship between Shom Pen and Nicobarese minimal, consisting of some lower numerals and a couple of body parts, but Shom Pen shows no obvious resemblance to any other language family. However, even stranger, the only resemblances between the Shom Pen of De Roepstorff and that of Chattopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay are these same words. Man (1889) mostly resembles Chattopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay, occasionally De Roepstorff and also introduces some new lexemes. Otherwise, even allowing for transcription differences, the two languages are clearly unrelated. The circumstances for elicitation in De Roepstorff's case were less than ideal and errors can be supposed; but it is unlikely the errors would be so thoroughgoing and systematic as to result in such a complete mismatch. The alternative explanation is thus, as Man hints, that the languages spoken among the Shom Pen are so different from one another as to be mutually unintelligible and perhaps only related in the way Andamanese languages are related. The quality of data on Shom Pen groups and particularly earlier materials is such that this cannot be asserted with confidence, but it is one explanation.

This situation makes work on the languages of the Shom Pen even more imperative. Shom Pen joins the select club of language isolates in Eurasia, along with Burushaski, Nahali, Basque and Kusunda. Obscure prohibitions make it impossible for the sort of detailed work necessary to ensure quality data to be collected. Clearly, further genetic and archaeological work on the Nicobars remains a high priority. As with the Andamans, the possibility that the Shom Pen also represent a relic of early human expansion around the rim of the Indian Ocean should be seriously considered.

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