

Assessing the language situation in Arunachal Pradesh and policy for developing scripts and their use in education

Museum

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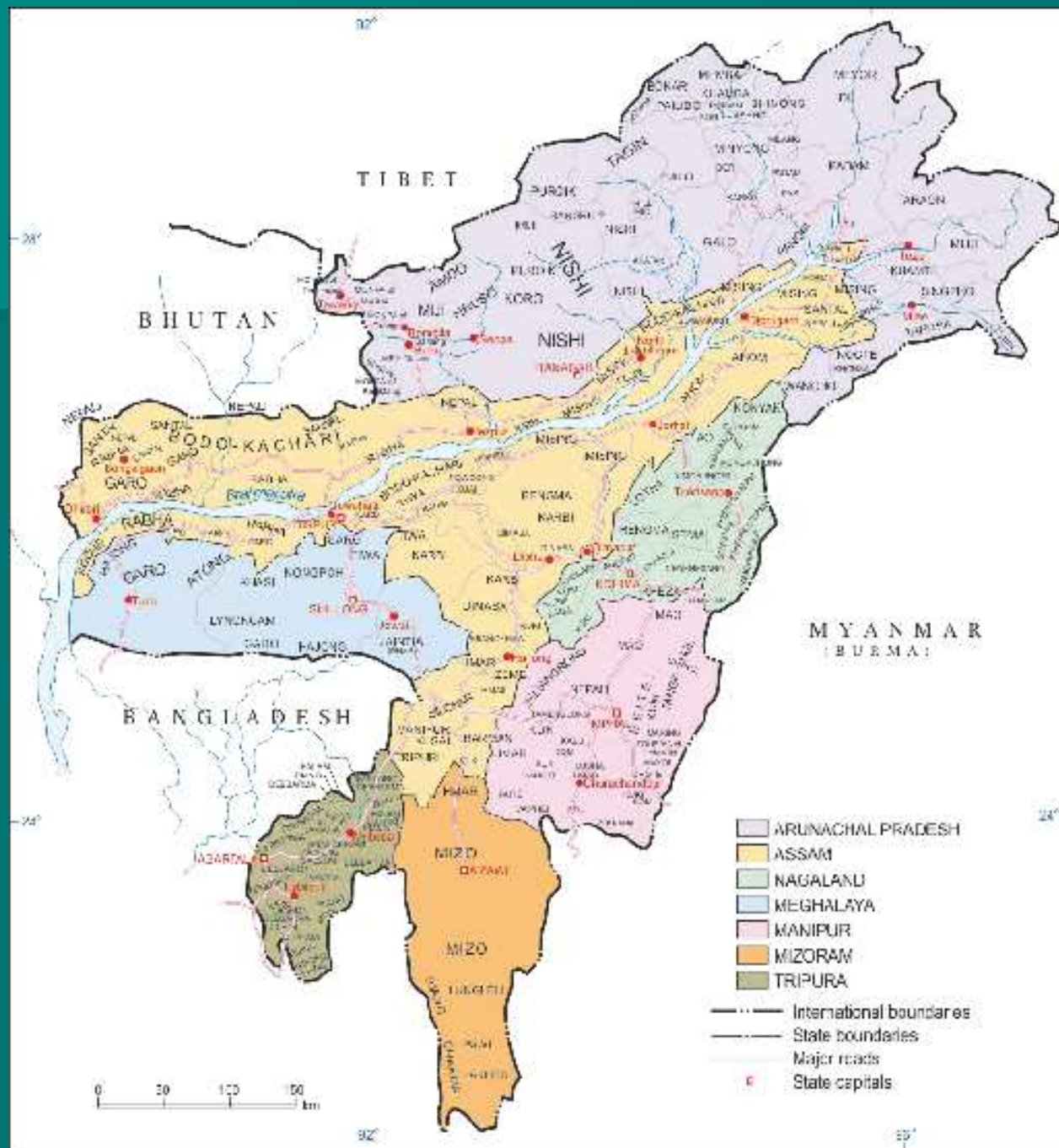
Academic Visitor, Museu Emilio Goeldi, Belem, Brazil

The language situation in Arunachal Pradesh

- Arunachal Pradesh has one of the richest linguistic heritages of any state in India
- There are many languages, and they are very different from one another
- Yet, surprisingly, we do not know how many languages there are, nor how many speakers they have, nor their level of competence
- It has been said that many of these languages are endangered.
- Who by? Well the UNESCO 2009 report, for one. But this was not based on a single day of field research, it was based on existing reports by the mission group SIL, as contained in the Ethnologue.
- Is this reliable? Well, SIL didn't do any fieldwork either.

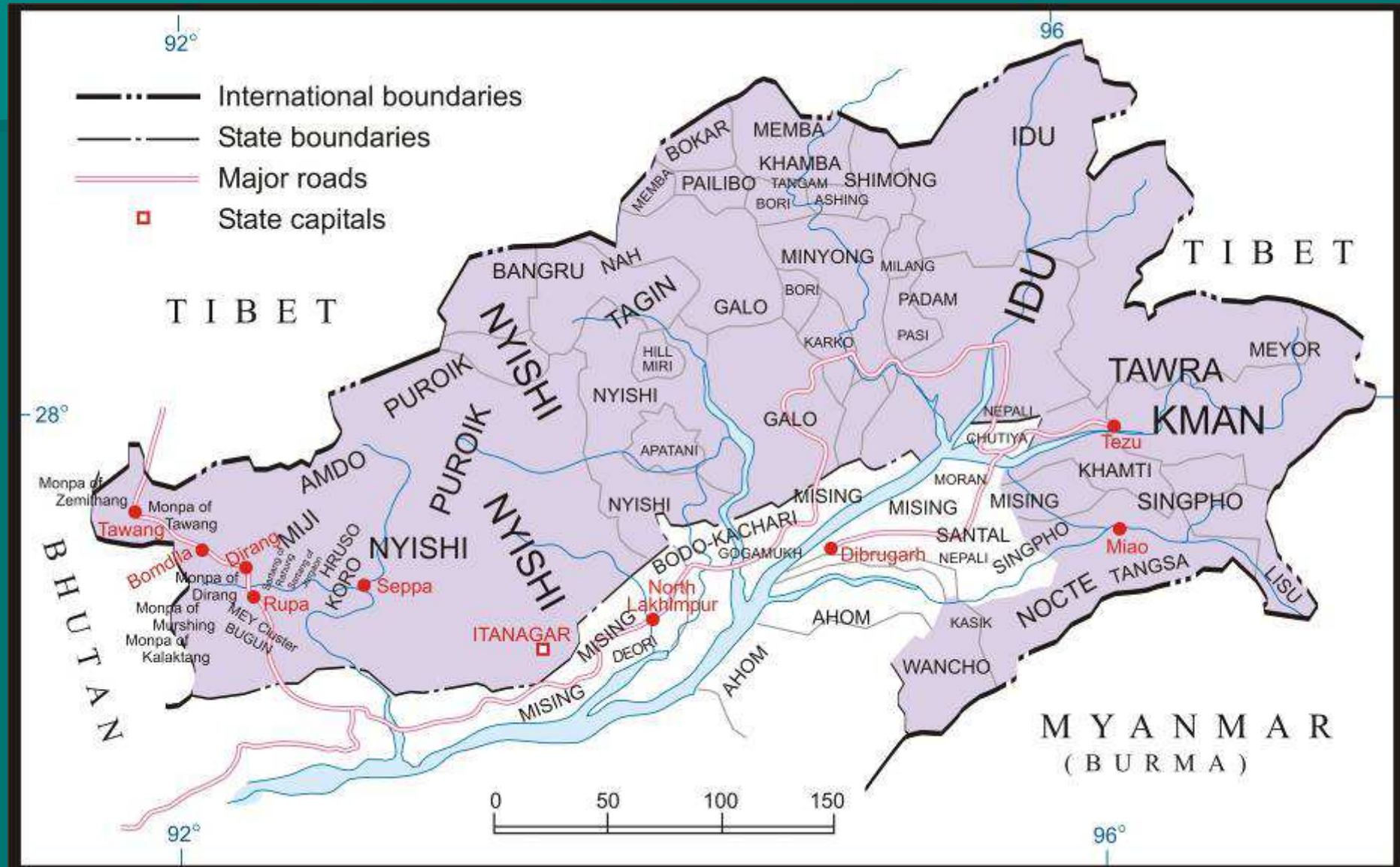
The language situation in Arunachal Pradesh II

- Numbers of language speakers are typically estimated from census data
- But this is highly unreliable, since it doesn't typically distinguish migrants from residents, competent from non-competent speakers
- And one ethnic identity may hide another, witness the Koro people hidden under the label 'Aka' and confused with the Hruso
- Comparing the Atlas accompanying the Census of India 2001, many villages known to exist are missing. Were they not counted? Counted but misplaced? Hard to tell.



Ethnolinguistic map of NE India

Ethnolinguistic map of Arunachal Pradesh



Endangered languages? Not necessarily

- There has been much talk of 'endangered languages' in Northeast India
- There are certainly many minority languages with a few thousand speakers
- But my observation is that few are seriously threatened, or if they are, it is by pidginization, i.e. people switching to Hindi and English in the middle of sentences, and they forget complex vocabulary
- Certainly none of this inflated rhetoric is actually backed up by serious census or sociolinguistic work
- We do need to know how many speakers of each language there are and their level of competence, certainly

Why develop scripts for minority languages?

- For millennia, languages survived purely orally. Since almost all languages were unwritten, they were transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth
- Writing first develops in Egypt (ca. 5000 BP), China (ca. 3500 BP) and Central America (ca. 3000 BP) independently. Originally it was to record religious matter, and soon after economic transactions
- But in much of the world, reading and writing did not spread until the twentieth century
- Very suddenly, from one generation to the next, writing became a necessary skill for all but the remotest communities.
- If people couldn't write their own language, pressure was put on them to use the dominant language, English, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi

Why develop scripts for minority languages? II

- But... language is identity. You start communicating in a dominant language and very rapidly you lose your own, and then your identity is lost
- More languages have been lost in North America and Australia than in any other continents due to the enforced use of English
- The danger is that Hindi will play this role in India
- So.. The race is on to develop scripts for minority languages, for use in schools, local publications, social media, so that the next generation will be fluent in writing their own language and proud of their associated identity
- Unfortunately the process to develop scripts in Arunachal Pradesh is not well developed and has not had government support

The way forward

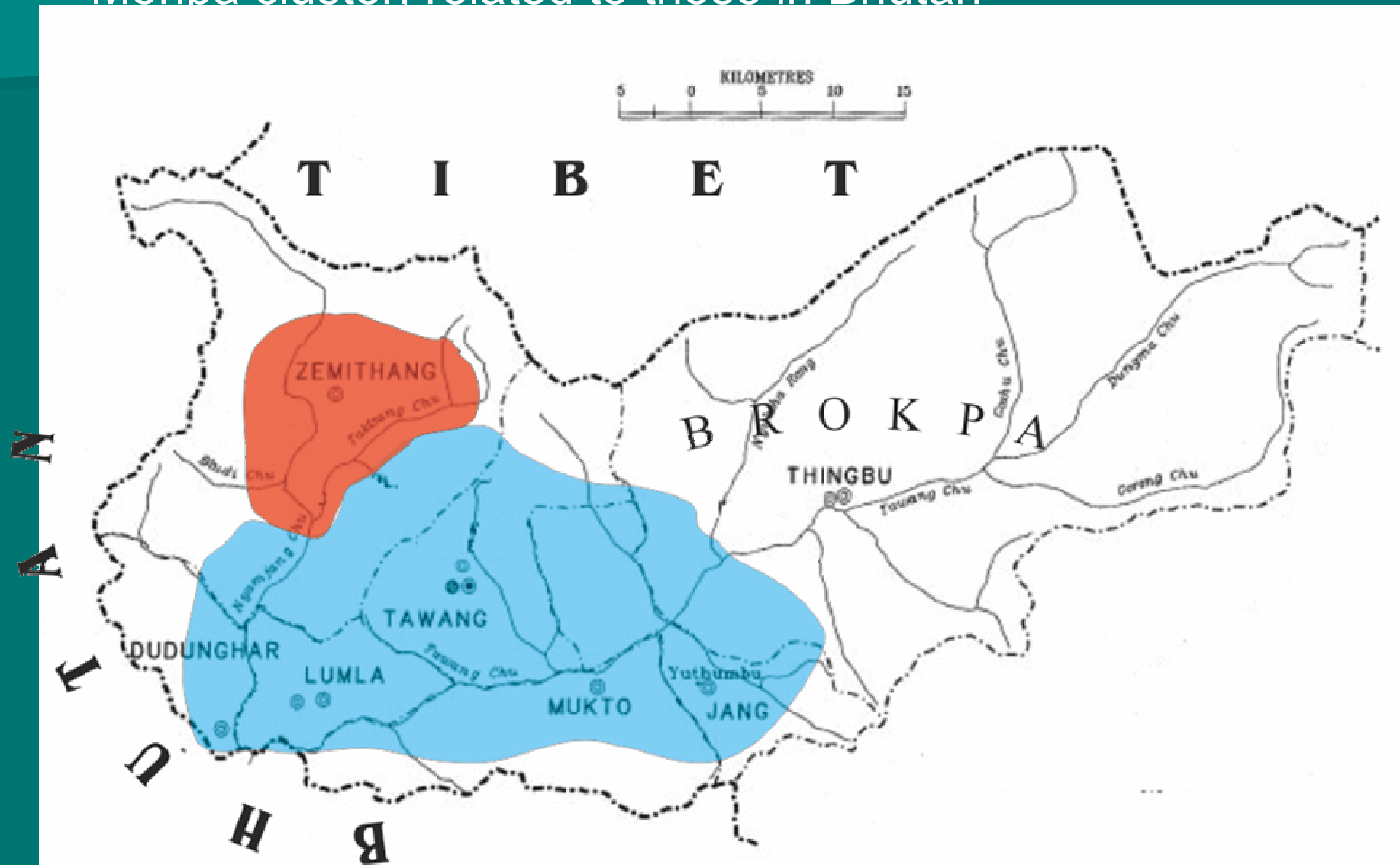
- Later in this talk I'll describe how we developed scripts for the Idu and Kman languages
- To act as a launching for the reading and writing book and alphabet chart, as well as the dictionaries and grammars
- But also as a call to act far more decisively for other Arunachal Pradesh languages
- And to call for partnership between universities, research departments, CBOs, external scholars and government to take the agenda forwards
- But first I want to look at what we know about the language situation in Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal, from West Kameng to Tirap

- Since 2010, time and travel permitting, I have tried to visit as many ethnolinguistic communities as possible
- And to collect basic linguistic and sociolinguistic data
- The following slides present some of the findings
- All this material is available on my website, in much greater detail
- So the survey begins in the extreme northwest on the border of Bhutan, centring on the famous monastery of Tawang

The Monpa cluster - North

- The languages of Tawang and Zemithang constitute a North Monpa cluster, related to those in Bhutan

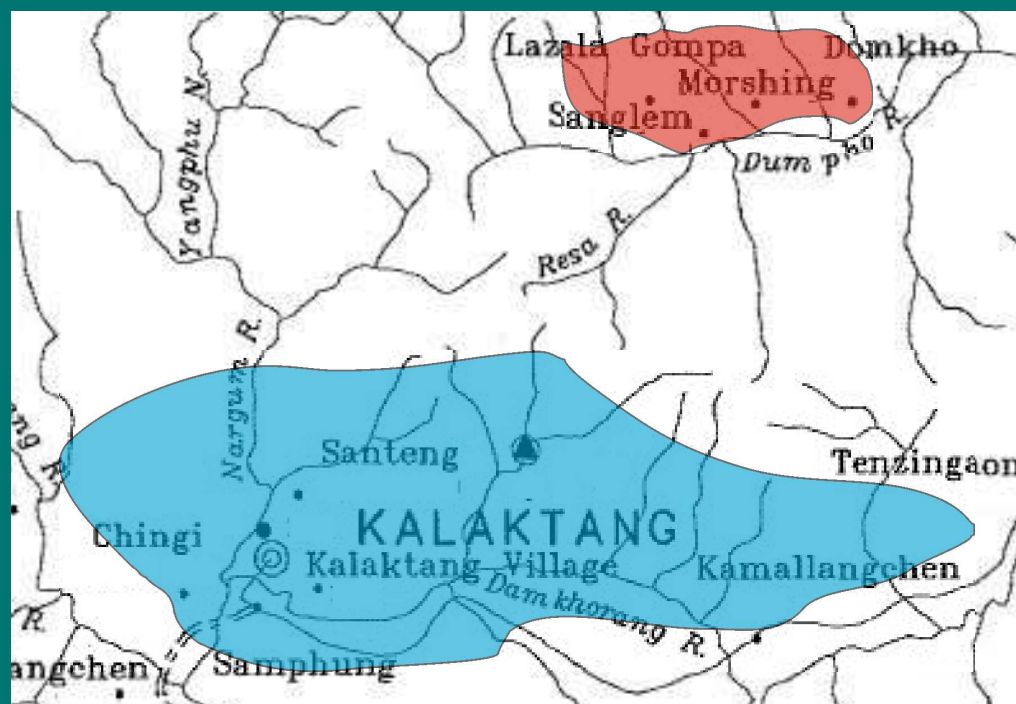
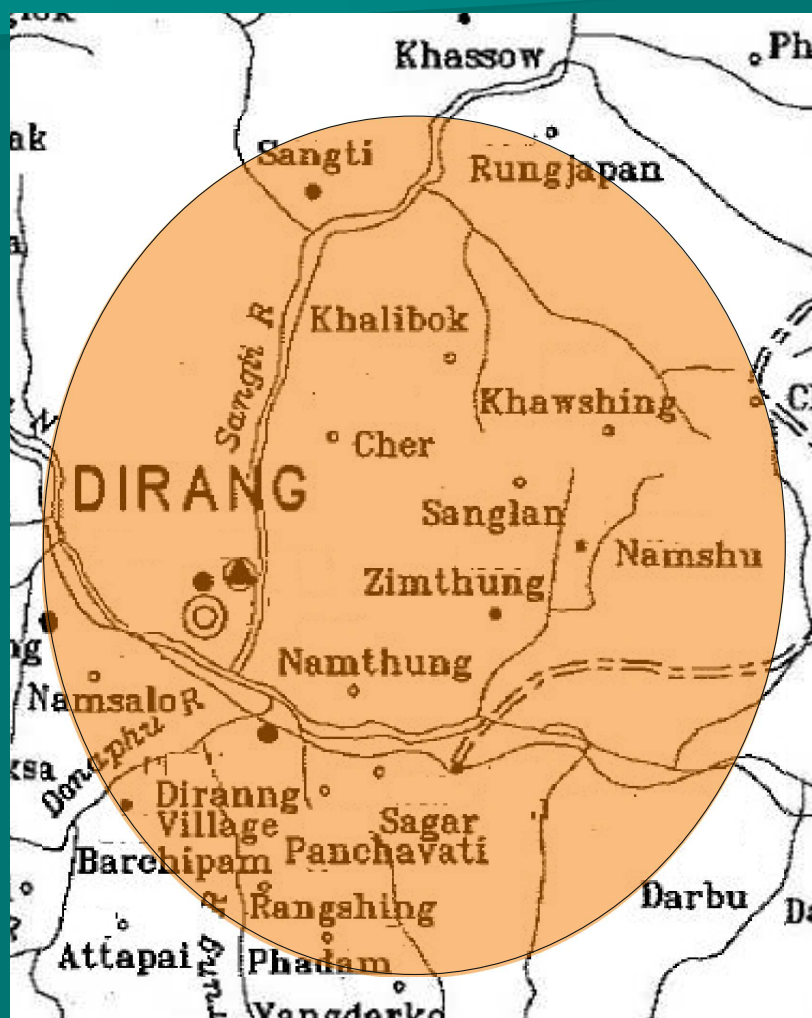


Tawang monastery

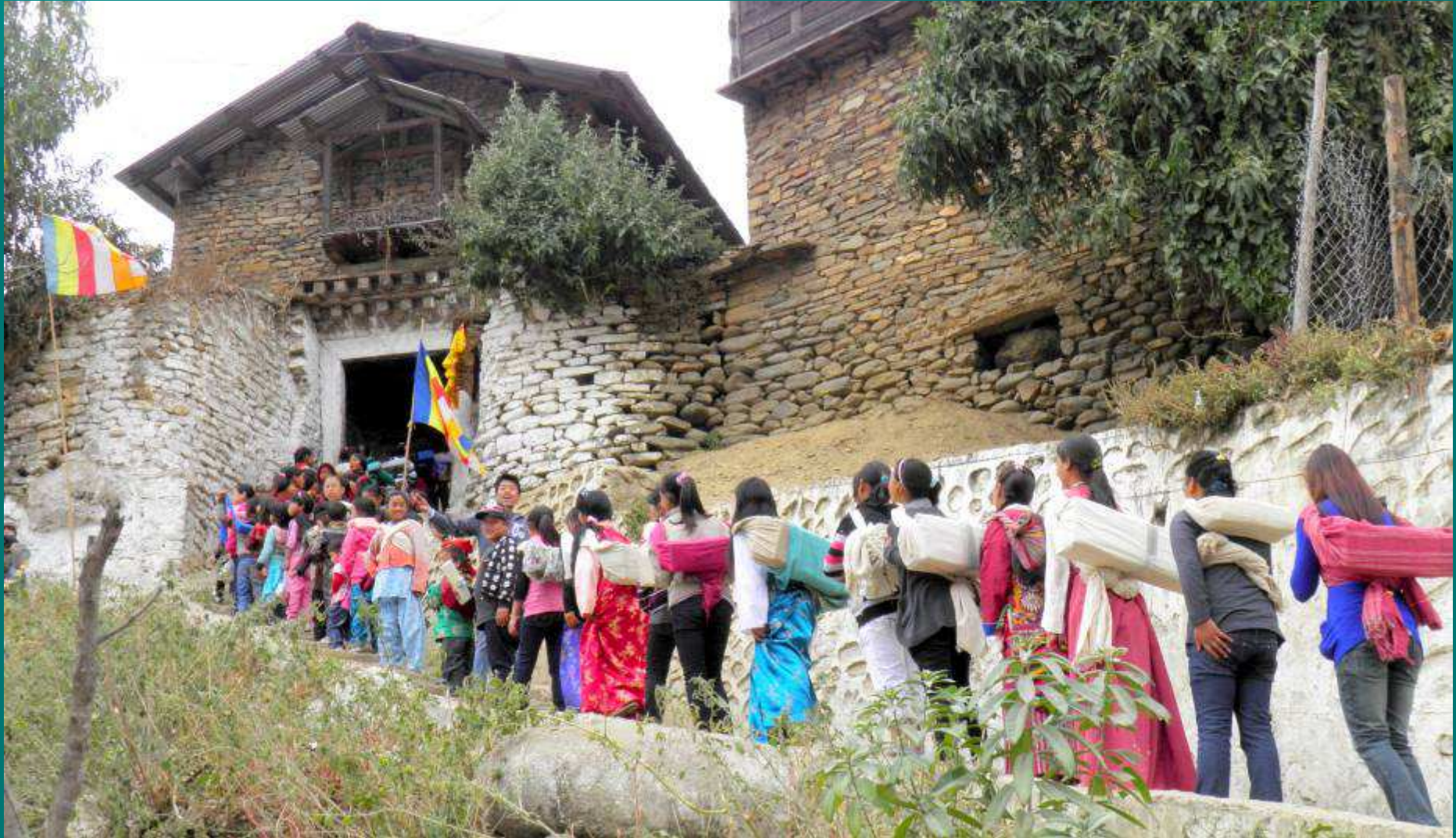


The Monpa cluster - South

- Dirang, Kalaktang and Murshing (previously unreported) are related to Tsarchok in Bhutan, not Tawang



Old Dirang



Monpa of Mursing



The Brokeh cluster

- The language of the Brokpa herders, Brokeh, has some outliers in the settled villages of Senge and Nyukmadung

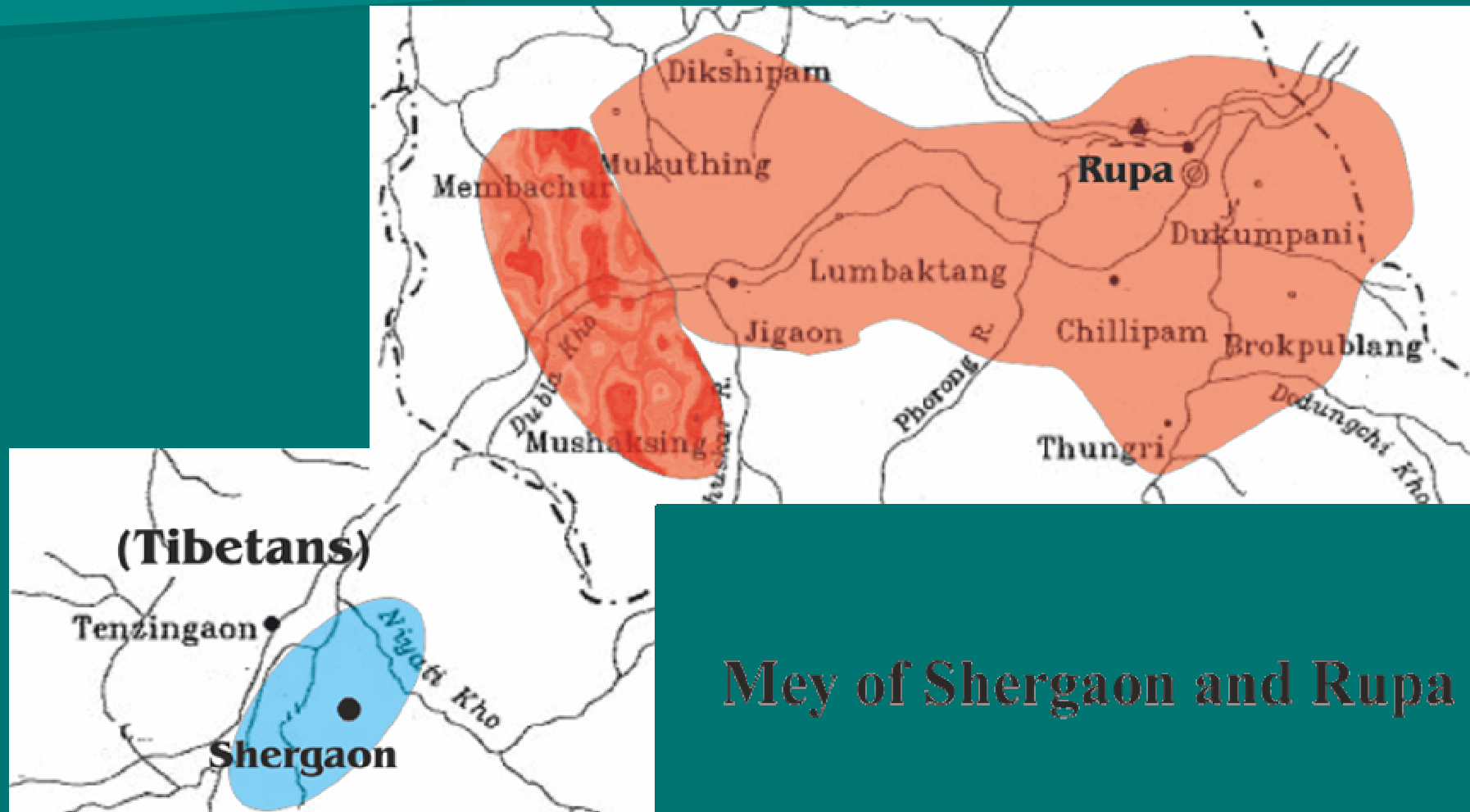


Senge



The Mey cluster (Sherdukpen)

- The Mey cluster includes Shergaon, Rupa, Sartang, Lish and Chug



Mey of Shergaon and Rupa

The Mey of Rupa: Khiksaba



The Khispi/Duhumbi and Sartang languages

Mey cluster languages



Mey of Chug and Lish



Sartang



The Sartang of Rahung



The Bangru

- The Bangru language is almost unknown, yet highly threatened by language shift to Nyishi
- Mrs. Chera Mekia Mili kindly consented to record extensive material on her language which is presently being transcribed
- Work on Bangru is a high priority



Languages west of Tani (?24)

- Monpa of Tawang (2~3) inc. Dakpa
- Monpa of Dirang (1)
- Monpa of Kalaktang and Murshing (2)
- Brokeh cluster (3?) inc. Senge and Nyakmadung
- Bugun (1)
- Mey cluster (including Shergaon, Sartang, Lish, Chug) (5)
- Puroik cluster (2?)
- Miji (East and West) (2)
- Bangru (1)
- Hruso (1)
- Koro (1)
- Memba (1)
- Khamba (1)

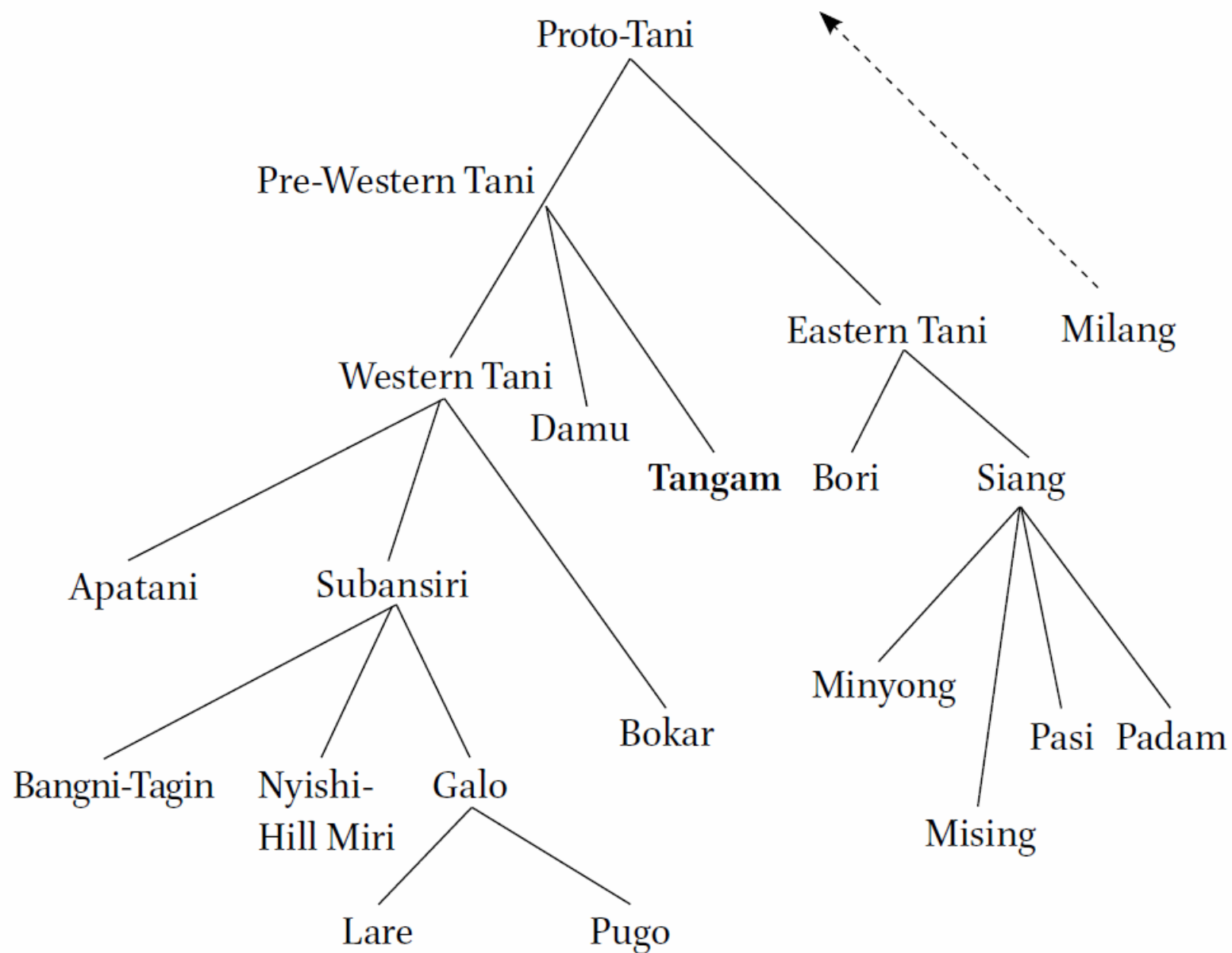
Tani

- The Tani languages are the most well-known, and constitute the largest number of speakers. They are closely related, compared with the other languages, and some have now developed effective scripts
- Arguments as to what a term like Adi includes confuse ethnicity with language
- For example, Tangam has been said to be an 'Adi' language, but linguistic data clearly indicates it is distinct
- Milang falls inside Padam in terms of cultural identity, but may not even be a Tani language

Tani Languages (~17)

- Adi (cover term)
- Apatani
- Aashing (Adi)
- Bokar
- Bori
- Damu
- Galo
- Karko
- Minyong
- Mising (Assam)
- Nah
- Nyishi
- Padam
- Pailibo
- Pasi
- Ramo
- Tagin
- Tangam
- Milang ? Tani

Classification of Tani languages



Languages east of Tani (12)

- Idu (1)
- Tawra [=Digaru] (1)
- Kman [=Miju] (1)
- Meyor (1)
- Singpho (1)
- Khamti (1)
- Nocte (1)
- Kasik (1)
- Wancho (1)
- Tutsa (1)
- Tangsa cluster (?)
- Lisu (1)

Total

- Approximately fifty-three indigenous languages of Arunachal Pradesh
- Potentially in need of study and development
- How many are critically endangered?
- We only know of Meyor and Tangam
- But others have low number of speakers. Bangru are switching to Nyishi and language threatened by heavy borrowing

Migrants

- Nepali
 - Gurung
 - Santal
-
- Plus major Indo-Aryan languages

Affiliation of Arunachal Pradesh languages

- Arunachal Pradesh languages are mostly Tibeto-Burman
- Some languages are hard to place, such as Hruso and Idu, which has very few related words to other languages
- Khamti is Tai-Kadai
- Lisu is Tibeto-Burman, but from a branch otherwise not found in India

SURVEY METHODS I

- From a base in the area where the language is spoken, list all the settlements, in conjunction with local collaborators
- As far as possible visit the villages, mark with GPS, and confirm at least the number of households
- If possible, count in small settlements.
- Develop sample interview schedule to determine language(s) spoken by household, indigenous and Language of Wider Communication (LWC)
- With particular attention to intergenerational transmission (i.e. are the children speaking it)
- What are the locations where the indigenous language is spoken (home, school, market, church etc.)
- If language is being lost, what are the factors?

SURVEY METHODS II

- Focus groups/interviews with community leaders to establish;
- What attempts to write the language exist so far?
- What are the community's aspirations to write their language?
- Is the language used in media, including radio, television, social media such as Facebook and Wasapp?
- **From this information, a language development strategy can be proposed, in collaboration with the local CBO, and priority assigned to the project**

Tibetan/Bhotia: a competing script

- A number of language communities in the west of Arunachal Pradesh, notably the Monpa groups and Mey cluster are of broadly Buddhist affiliation
- They regard Tibetan/Bhotia script as the sacred script of their religion and therefore do not give high priority to developing a script for their own language (which may be quite unrelated)
- Evidently, continuing research on these languages remains a priority, but it will be difficult to force the issue on script development



Tai and Lisu scripts

- The Khamti use a Tai script similar to those in Myanmar
- The Lisu elsewhere have their own script, but whether this is in use in Arunachal Pradesh is unclear

- Lisu Bible in the Fraser script



Script development: linguistics plays a crucial role

- Arunachal Pradesh languages have the following features;
- With very few exceptions, they are undescribed *in terms of modern linguistics*
- They are tone languages, similar to those in Southeast Asia, but **UNLIKE INDO-ARYAN LANGUAGES**
- As such there is virtually no training programme in India equipped to deal with these languages
- In addition, most have highly complex phonology, with multiple consonants and elaborate vowel systems
- A language like Hruso (Aka) has one of the most complex systems in the world
- This offers challenges even to professional linguists

The consonants and vowel of Hruso

Table 1. Hruso consonants

	Bilabial	Labial - dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato- alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvula r	Glottal
Plosive	p p ^y p ^h b b ^y			t t ^h d		c ɕ ʃ ʃ ^j	k k ^w g g ^y k ^{h(y)}		
Nasal vd	m m ^j			n		ɲ ɲ ^w	ŋ		
Fricative		f v (v ^j)		s (s̄) z (z̄)	ʃ (ʃ̄) ʒ	z	x ɣ	ʁ	h h ^j
Affricate				ts (t̄s) dʒ	tʃ dʒ	tɕ tɕ ^w			
Flapped				ɾ ɾ ^h					
Lateral				l		ʎ			
Approximant				ɹ		y	w		

Vowels	Front	Central	Back
Close	i ĩ		u uu ũ
Close-Mid	e ĕ	ə, ɐ	
Open-Mid			ɔ õ
Open		a ă	

The first thing, then..

- Is to analyse all the sounds of the languages and write them first in the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)
- Then to undertake a phonemic analysis to see which sounds are genuinely contrastive
- NB. If the sound system looks like Hindi, it is definitely incorrect
- Then we need to see how these underlying sounds can be written in a practical system ('script')
- The proposed script needs to be discussed thoroughly with the community
- It should be put to the relevant CBO in open meetings
- **This is not something a linguist can do;** this is social and political as much as purely linguistic
- And it is unlikely you'll get it right first time, because scripts need to be tested in the community

Language analysis *in the community*

- All too often, language analysis is done outside the community, maybe even in Assam
- This can be very misleading, as out-of-context speakers can sometimes produce adapted phonology, making their language seem more like Hindi etc.
- Grammar recorded in this context, or sentences created for the purpose of Bible translation is often distorted
- As far as possible, language analysis should be **within the community**

Can Arunachal languages be written in Devanagari?

- It has been suggested that the indigenous languages could be written in Devanagari
- However, Devanagari is poorly adapted to these languages, as it has no signs for many complex consonants, tone-marks, no conventions for nasalisation, no marks for retracted vowels and no long vowels
- If an *entirely new* Devanagari alphabet were developed to include all these possibilities then things would be different
- Which would require emended operating systems on computers, teaching, adaptations to Unicode and so on
- This presently seems highly unlikely
- Roman script is the best option for the future

Immediate goals

- The immediate goals for script development are;
 - ❖ A reading and writing book to teach consonants and vowels
 - ❖ An alphabet chart which illustrates visually the letters and ways of writing them with culturally appropriate pictures
- These have to be prepared in conjunction with;
 - ❖ A dictionary – which gives you an idea of all the possible combinations of sounds
 - ❖ A grammar – which shows you how words should be analysed, whether split up or written together

And then..

- The dictionary and grammar should not be published in a hurry, they can be distributed in in small xerox editions for community comment
- But they are there to *backstop the literacy process*
- In particular the grammar is there to help educationists put together a graded course of teaching, if the language is adopted in the school system
- The education departments in the universities, for example at RGU, have played little or no role in this debate
- But they should focus on this new question and release tired old topics

Idu and Kman script development

- A script was developed for these languages, based on a detailed phonological analysis
- The script was proposed to the relevant CBOs and a series of community presentations were made
- The script has now been approved and alphabet charts and Reading and Writing books printed
- These have been launched at the annual festivals, Rẽ and TamlaDũ

IDU ALPHABET CHART

VOWELS

<p>A, a</p>  <p>A child</p>	<p>Ä, ä</p>  <p>Ääri bag</p>	<p>E, e</p>  <p>Ehketi lips</p>	<p>E, e</p>  <p>Ehka gourd</p>	<p>a, o</p>  <p>Agren gun</p>	<p>Ä, z</p>  <p>Äähtien zämsäbo, zämsä</p>	<p>O, o</p>  <p>Ohtähtä ant</p>
<p>Ö</p>  <p>Pökki ömergillar</p>	<p>I</p>  <p>Ihvi sun</p>	<p>I</p>  <p>Ihvi push</p>	<p>O</p>  <p>Omerp orange</p>	<p>O</p>  <p>Ohtähtä boat</p>	<p>U</p>  <p>Uhtähtä prick</p>	<p>U</p>  <p>Uhtähtä ru</p>

CONSONANTS

P, p 	Ph, ph 	B, b 	T, t 	Th, th 	D, d 	Ts, ts 
Pra - bird	Phu - Cooking Pot	Bambu - gackal	Tambu - tooth	Thu - thistle	Dru - kettle	Tsya - tea bag
K, k 	Kh, kh 	G, g 	H, h 	S, s 	Sh, sh 	C, c 
Kulu - rice	Khlo - belly	Gasi - potato	huu - ten	Se - snake	Shu - red	Cifu - cat
Ch, ch 	L, l 	Z, z 	M, m 	N, n 	Ny, ny 	Ng, ng 
Chada - monkey	Jami - yak	Zu - zebra	Mekari - cat	Napa - leaf	Nyogu - bra	Ngaha - snake
R, r 	Rh, rh 	L, l 	Lh, lh 	Y, y 	W, w 	
Ro - boat	Rhapi - drain for rain	Lo - white	Lhapi - white cloth	Ya - yucca plant	Wayi - lake	

IDU LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

ROING 2018

Idu reading and writing book

Reading and writing Idu

A book of letters

Idu Azobra



**Idu Language
Development Committee**

Roing 2018

Young Idu readers



First Idu readers




Presentation of Idu charts







Kman alphabet chart

KMAN ALPHABET CHART

VOWELS

A, a आ  ara saw	Ā, ā  ām mango	E, e ए  ep tim	Ə, ə  ənik sun	I, i इ  ing ear	O, o ओ  oed bronze vessel	U, u उ  ung bark	Ü, ü  bui house
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CONSONANTS

P, p प  popra pumpkin	Ph, ph फ  phachung butterfly	Pv, pv  pvəs onion	Phy, phy  phyudu brinjal	Pr, pr  rül kobra cobra	Pl, pl  pla leg	Phr, phr  phrat tear
Phl, phl  pela lightning	B, b ब  be maize	By, by  byup hoof	Br, br  brang rope	Bl, bl  blong road	T, t त  tenga orange	Th, th थ  tho loom
Thy, thy  thyin to fold	Ty, ty  katyung wild cat	D, d द  du telephone	Dy, dy  udyu peacock	Z, z  za claw	Ch, ch च  chat mithun	Chh, chh छ  chhan bangle
Ts, ts  tsahm shoe	Tsh, tsh  montshu cow	J, j ज  jami cat	S, s स  sop nest	Sh, sh श  shabrē sword	Shy, shy  shyam hair	K, k क  katom granary
Kh, kh ख  khil nail	Khy, khy  khyom takin	Kr, kr  kre chicken	Kl, kl  klo rope-bridge	Khr, khr  khrap invitation cord	Khl, khl  khlung wing	Kw, kw  kwi dog
G, g ग  gal snail	Gr, gr  gra knife	Gl, gl  glang saw flying squirrel	N, n न 7 nin seven	Ng, ng ङ  nga'peng snail	Ny, ny ञ  nyup tong	M, m म  mambhu fox
R, r र  rang boat	L, l ल  lay moon	Ly, ly  lyanga frying pan	Y, y य  yue wasp	W, w व  wa bamboo	H, h ह  hawan winnowing tray	' , ' अः  da'ow squirrel

KMAN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
TEZU, 2018

Kman reading and writing book

Reading and writing Kman



Kman tasay tapuri pit

Kman Language Development Committee

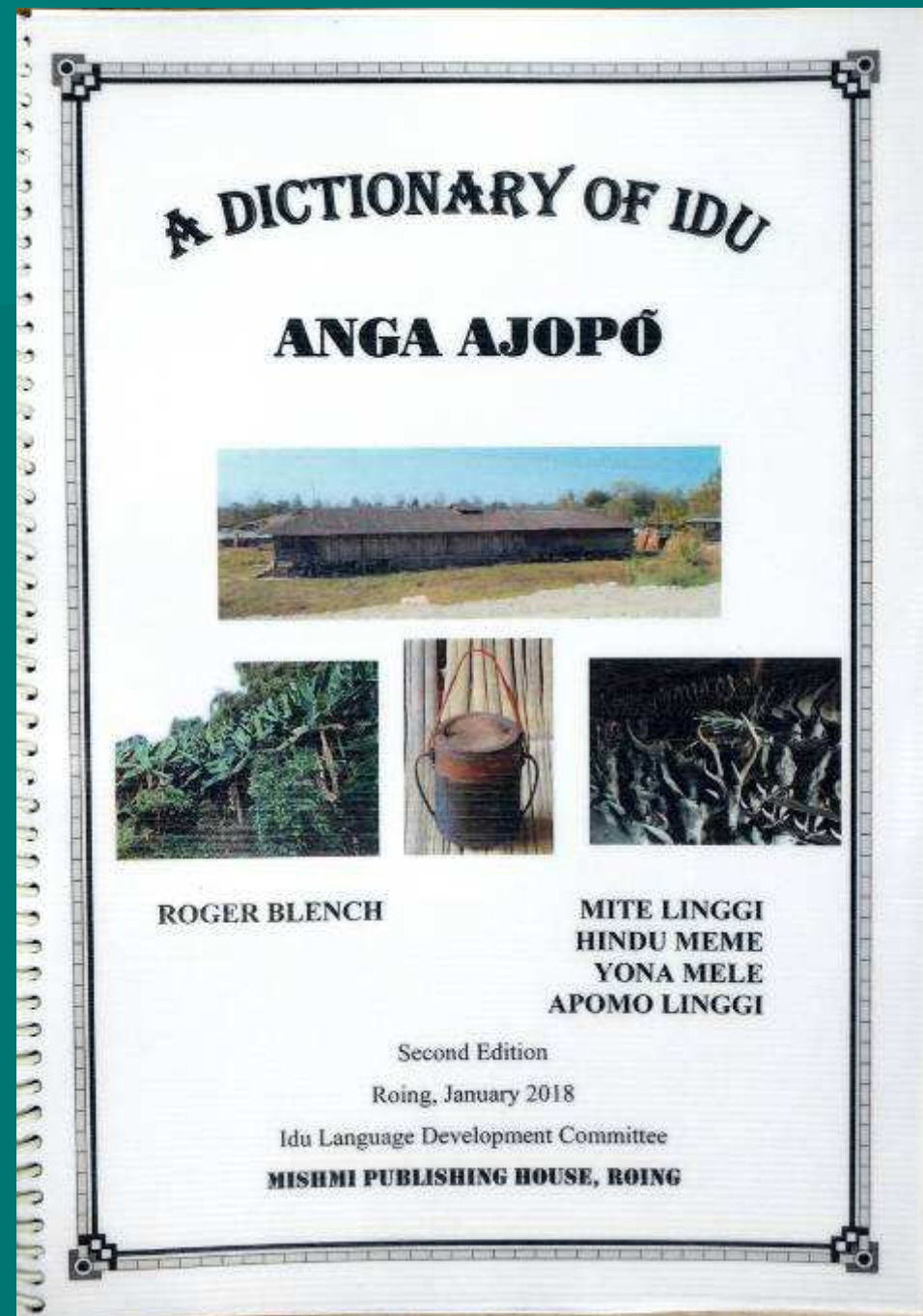
Presentation of Kman charts



What has been done on dictionaries of Idu and Kman

- Work from 2015 to 2018 has resulted in preliminary dictionaries of the Idu and Kman languages, of which some copies have been made and circulated.
- They have the following features;
 - ❖ Use a correct description of the sound system
 - ❖ Include tones marked throughout
 - ❖ Include accurate descriptions of parts of speech
 - ❖ Accompanied by example sentences
 - ❖ Identify plants and animals with scientific names
 - ❖ Include words from the special shaman (*kambring*) and hunting registers
 - ❖ Illustrated with photographs of Idu crafts
 - ❖ English-Idu/Kman index

Idu dictionary 2018



Kman dictionary 2018

A DICTIONARY OF KMAN

KMAN LAY KƏTƏM



ROGER BLENCH

SOKHEP KRI

Trial Edition

Tezu, February 2018

MISHMI PUBLISHING HOUSE, TEZU

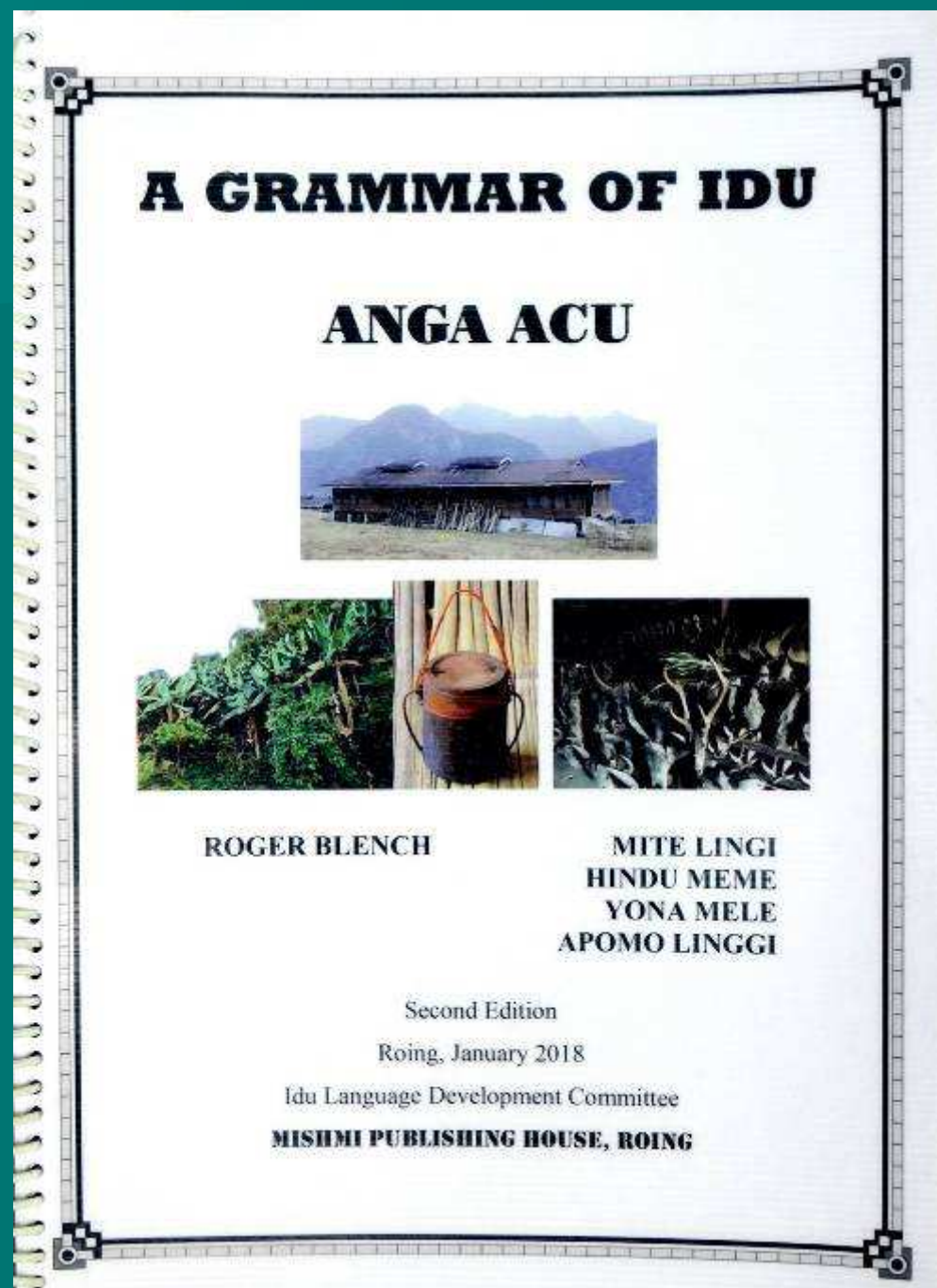
Further plans for the dictionaries

- The dictionaries are currently word-processed files, suitable for book publication
- However, it would be unrealistic not to assume that many people would want to consult a dictionary on their phone rather than a physical book
- In the coming year I hope to convert the existing files to Flex, a dictionary database software, which in turn can be converted to a format for Android phones
- This should give the widest possible circulation to the dictionaries and can also be continuously updated
- Sound files can be added, as well as images and video
- And subsets, such as a children's dictionary can be made

Where next: a grammar?

- The companion volume to a dictionary is a grammar, a guide to how and why Idu puts together its sentences
- This is much harder to write than a dictionary, as we don't know the rules and speakers have no innate perception
- Everyone speaks grammatically, but does not necessarily know the rules of grammar
- ***But a grammar is essential if teaching materials are to be prepared***
- A grammar has been drafted and circulation versions are ready

Idu grammar 2018



Kman grammar 2018

A GRAMMAR OF KMAN



ROGER BLENCH

SOKHEP KRI

Trial Edition

Tezu, February 2018

MISHMI PUBLISHING HOUSE, TEZU

Multiple language systems

- Idu, Tawra, Kman and Meyor all share a system of multiple language registers
- These are;
 - a) ordinary speech
 - b) speech of hunters
 - c) speech of priests/shamans
 - d) poetic/lyrical register (? not in Idu)
 - e) mediation register (only in Idu?)
 - f) babytalk register

Kman words in hunting register

food	shya ^ᵐ t	mūk k ^h wī (monkey faeces)
chili	bìtʃí	kəsa ^ᵐ y
garlic	təmàʔ	māʔkāw
salt	təmí ^ᵐ n	bla ^ᵐ y kə̀.pà
ginger	dīʔìŋ	yēlkā
rice	hākù	dəp kàmbīʔ
maize	bo ^ᵐ	kāwyūŋ
millet	dərò	kāŋgra ^ᵐ w
meat	s ^h îŋ	lüm
wine, beer	s ^h î	sh ^h û kàmbònŋ

Can such writing systems succeed in Arunachal Pradesh?

- It might be easy to conclude that such writing systems can never be successful in Arunachal Pradesh
- However, we can look at the Tani languages for a good example of how this can work
- Adi, Nyishi and other languages are now regularly used for both publications and all sorts of notices and informal communication
- The writing systems are not perfect, but they are good enough to communicate
- And they get people excited about their language so that it can develop for modern communications, texting, Facebook and so on

Script development has to be an open process

- Peoples of Arunachal Pradesh are very open to different religions and indigenous faith remains strong
- But..the development of script in Northeast India has all too often been associated with Christianity
- There is a fear of working directly in Arunachal Pradesh, so quite often, translators have been transported to Assam and have worked in conditions of semi-secrecy
- As is the case with Tawra at the moment
- This should absolutely be condemned. Reading and writing is for everyone, whatever their beliefs
- And the script should be developed within the community
- Because only that way it will be accepted

Another proposed step: a Mishmi publishing house

- The existing publications have been attributed to a 'Mishmi Publishing House' though no such entity exists
- But why not create one?
- To publish quality work which relates to the three Mishmi peoples and to republish older work
- To this end a preliminary meeting was held in Tezu on the 15th of February with representatives of all three communities
- A memorandum of understanding was signed jointly and is being forwarded to the Mishmi Welfare Society, CALSOM and other representative bodies for approval

MPH preliminary meeting



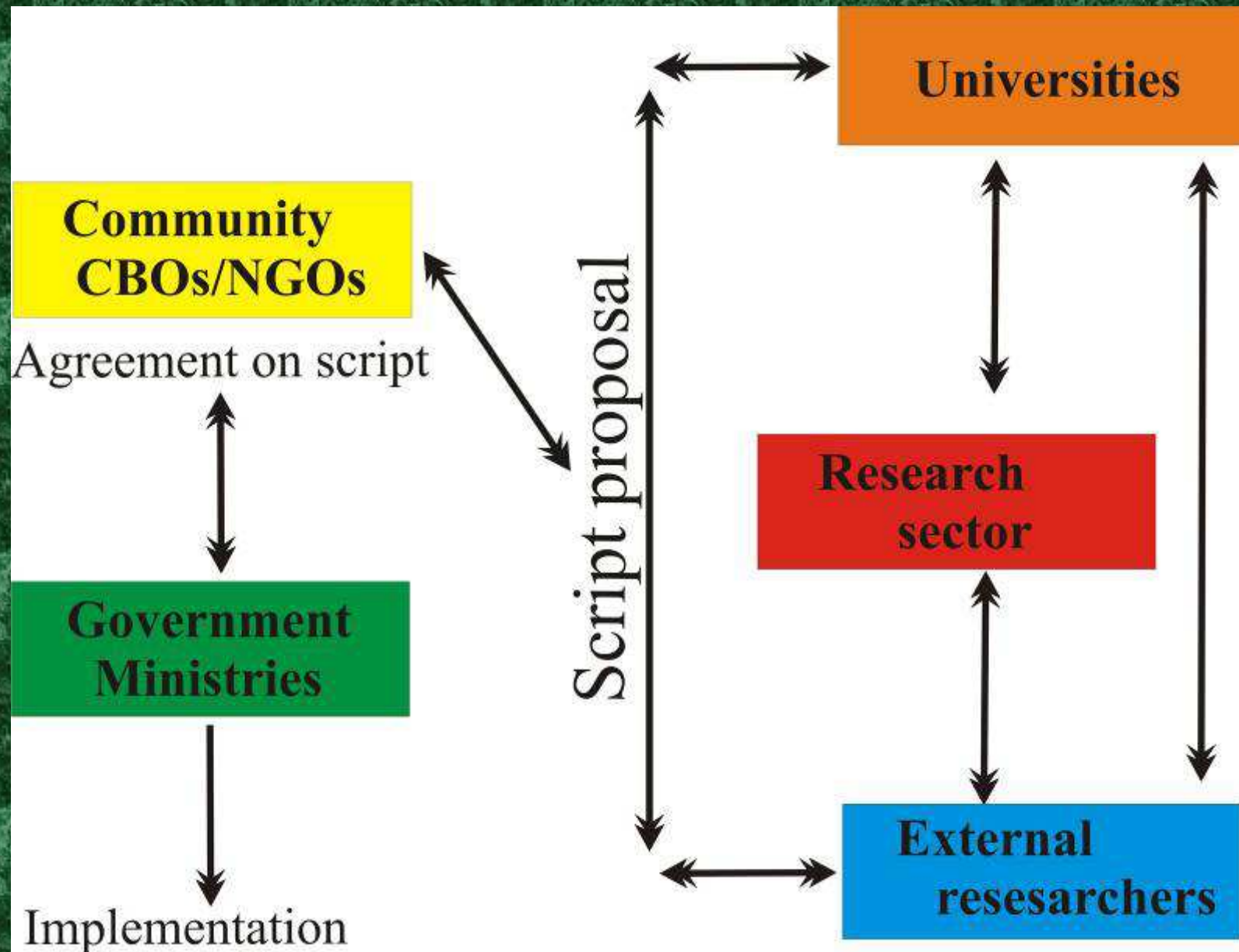
OK, we have a script, where next?

- Once the initial materials are printed, we need campaigns to bring initial awareness of the script
- But most of all we aim towards the use of the indigenous languages in school, as part of the 'third language'
- This can only happen with the *support of the Ministry of Education*
- For this, people need an expert in educational materials who can use the grammar to write graded teaching textbooks
- This requires collaboration between multiple institutions

And for Arunachal as a whole?

- Many languages in Arunachal Pradesh which need similar development
- Some Tani languages, Adi, Apatani, Galo, Tagin are advanced in this area though not with good teaching materials
- But for many others, there's nothing at all
- The next generation will come from speakers of those languages, students at RGU, in collaboration with experts, and (hopefully) State Government
- To develop the rich heritage of the State

Pathways of collaboration



THANKS

- ❖ To the many individuals and institutions who helped in the field over the years
- ❖ To the Honourable Minister for the invitation to speak at this gathering

