



Tangkhul tangle (30 marks)

Tangkhul is a language spoken in the northernmost district of the Indian state of Manipur. Like Manipuri (or Meithei) and many other languages of Northeast India, Tangkhul is related to Tibetan and Burmese rather than to Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, or other major languages of India. Tangkhul words can be very long and quite complicated in their structure. Sometimes single words may have to be translated with whole sentences in English. Also, pronouns (words like *he*, *she*, *it*, and *they*) can be left out if their meanings can still be filled in from context.

Following is a list of sentences from Tangkhul and their English translations (*not* given in the same order). In the English translations, pronouns are enclosed in parenthesis when they are left out of the Tangkhul sentences. Tangkhul makes a distinction between “singular”, “dual” (indicating two) and “plural” (more than two), shown in the English translations as ‘sg’, ‘du’ or ‘pl’.

- a. a masikserra
- b. āni masakngarokey
- c. āthum masakngarokngāilā
- d. ini thāingarokei
- e. na thāilā
- f. ithum thāingāihāirara
- g. rāserhāira
- h. āni rāra
- i. nathum rāserhāiralā

The next list contains their English translations, but not in the same order:

- 1. Do they want to pinch each other?
- 2. Do you(sg) see it?
- 3. Have you(pl) all come?
- 4. He/She will pinch all of them.
- 5. (They) all have come.
- 6. They(du) pinched each other.
- 7. They(du) will come.
- 8. We(pl) will have wanted to see it.
- 9. We(du) saw each other.

6.1 (18 marks)

Match the Tangkhul sentences with their English translations.

6.2 (6 marks)

Translate the following sentences into Tangkhul:

- a. Do you(du) want to come?
- b. You(pl) have seen (it) all.
- c. We(pl) will want to see one another.

6.3 (6 marks)

Translate the following sentences into English:

- a. nathum masikserngāira
- b. āthum thāiei
- c. thāiserhāiralā



Answer sheet

6.1	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
6.2a									
b									
c									
6.3a									
b									
c									



Answers

6.1	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
	4	6	1	9	2	8	5	7	3
6.2a	nāni rāngāieilā Or: nāni rāeingāilā								
b	nāthum thāiserhāira								
c	ithum thāingarokngāira								
6.3a	You (pl) will want to pinch (them) all. [accept without brackets]								
b	They saw (it/him/them). [accept without brackets, and any of it, him, etc.]								
c	Has (he) seen (them) all? [accept without brackets, and any of he, she, etc.]								

Comment by David Mortensen

Note that all but one of the Tangkhul sentences (sentence g) consist of two words. The two words consist of recurring components. For the first word, these are i, na, ā, ni, and thum. For the second word, these are masik, thāi, rā, ser, ngāi, ngarok, hāira, ei, lā, and ra. The word in the one word sentence (g) is drawn from components in the second set. In exactly one of the English sentences (sentence 5), the pronoun standing for the person doing the action of the verb is enclosed in parenthesis, showing that it is not present in the Tangkhul original. From this we may infer that:

1. sentences g and 5 match.
2. the final word in each Tangkhul sentence is the verb.
3. The first words in each two-word Tangkhul sentence must be a pronoun.

The pronouns vary in person and number. First person includes the speaker (I, we), second person includes the one being addressed (you), and third person refers to some other entity (he, she, it, they).

	sg	dl	pl	tot
1st	0	1	1	2
2nd	1	0	1	2
3rd	1	2	1	4
tot	2	3	3	8

Exactly one of the Tangkhul pronouns occurs twice (āni, in b and h). This must be 3rd dual. Therefore, these sentences must match sentences 6 and 7. The component ā occurs four times, like third person; the component ni occurs three times, like dual. Working in this direction, it is possible to establish the following equivalences:



1st i
2nd na
3rd ā

sg (unmarked)
dl ni
pl thum

This establishes the following matches between the Tangkhul and English: a=4, c=1, d=9, e=2, f=8, i=3. Tangkhul sentences a and c both contain masak; the English equivalents both contain "pinch/pinched". d, e, and f all contain thāi; the English equivalents all contain "see/saw." Tangkhul sentences i and g both contain "rā"; the English equivalents both contain "come". Thus, the first part of the final word in the Tangkhul sentences is the verb root ("pinch", "see", or "come"). It follows that b=6 and h=7. Now that the sentences are matched, it is possible to determine the meanings of the verb suffixes:

ser all
ngarok reciprocal (X one another)
ngāi desiderative (want to X)
hāira perfective (have Xed)
ei past
ra future
lā interrogative

These are not problematic, except for ser. Transitive verbs are verbs which take object and intransitive verbs are verbs which do not. If ser is suffixed to the transitive verb masak "pinch", we get to "pinch all". That is, it quantifies over the object. However, if it is suffixed to the intransitive verb rā "see", we get "call come". That is, it quantifies over the subject. Given this observation, and the above equivalences, it is possible to provide the correct translations for G2 and G3.