



# TGIF: The NTU Linguist Chatroom

**Join us! Friday, 22 March 2019, 3.30pm  
@ HSS Conference Room (HSS-05-57)**

## The Aoic languages in areal and typological perspective by Alec Coupe

Aoic refers to a subgrouping 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 Yimkhungrü (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 diffusion of features and the replication of structures variously observed in the languages of the region.

The paper will compare phonological systems and aspects of morphology and syntax in the Aoic languages in order to establish 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 as a genetic unit, and those that distinguish it from its Konyak neighbours on the one hand, and the Kuki-Chin and Angami-Pochuri languages of southern Nagaland on the other.

### Speaker



**Alexander (Alec) Coupe** is an Associate Professor in the Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies, an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow, and a former editor of *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*. For the past two decades his research has focused on the recording, analysis and documentation of the languages of Northeast India; more recently he has begun collaborations with minority language communities to develop orthographies, children's reading books and dictionaries that will help to maintain their languages in an increasingly globalized world. As a field linguist he has interests in phonetics, phonology, tone systems, morphology, morphosyntax, syntactic structure, pragmatics and semantics, and he has published research in all of these fields. His work collectively feeds a higher interest: to better appreciate the extent of diversity in human languages, and how this can inform linguistic theory.

The TGIF seminar series is organised by  
the Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies, HSS

