

## *A Grammar of Lepcha*

The thesis is a descriptive study of the Lepcha language, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Sikkim, Darjeeling district in West Bengal in India, in Ilām district in Nepal, and in a few villages of Samtse district in south-western Bhutan. The data for this study were collected during several sojourns amongst the Lepcha people in Kalimpong and Sikkim between 1994 and 1998. The grammar includes chapters on phonology, morphology, derivation and sentence particles, as well as morphologically analysed example sentences and texts, a bilingual glossary and an index.

The English name ‘Lepcha’ derives from Nepali *lāpce* or *lāpcā*, which originally had the derogatory connotation of ‘inarticulate speech’. Nowadays, the term ‘Lepcha’ is widely used without this connotation. The Lepcha call themselves རྩེད་ལོ་ལྷ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ *mítuncí róngkup rumpkup* ‘children of the Róng and of God’, or simply རྩེད་ལོ་ལྷོ་ *róngkup* ‘children of the Róng’. The Lepcha are believed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim and most of the areas in which Lepcha is spoken today were once Sikkimese territory. Today the Lepcha people constitute a minority of the population of modern Sikkim, which has been flooded by immigrants from Nepal.

Lepcha has no elaborate conjugational morphology. Nouns lack a grammatical gender distinction and show no agreement with articles, adjectives or verbs. There is no verbal agreement morphology and actants are not morphologically indexed in the verb. Tense, mood, aspect and other meanings of the verb are expressed by the use of postpositions and auxiliary verbs. Although Lepcha is unmistakably a Tibeto-Burman language, its exact position within Tibeto-Burman is still unclear. Whilst Lepcha may lack the formal complexity of some Himalayan languages, the interest of Lepcha morphology lies in the semantics of the grammatical categories expressed by the Lepcha repertoire of endings and auxiliaries. A number of Lepcha morphemes index grammatical categories which can be combined with constituents of different syntactic status, i.e. with nouns, with verbs and with entire clauses. The apparent difference in sense expressed by such morphemes is a straightforward function of the difference in syntactic status of the constituent which they modify.

The grammar will be published by Brill Academic Publishers in the series 'Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region. Brill's Tibetan Studies Library'.