

**Bhutan's Endangered Languages Documentation Programme**  
**under the Dzongkha Development Commission:**  
**The Three Rare Gems**

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The Dzongkha Development Commission is an autonomous organ of the Royal Government of Bhutan dedicated to the advancement of the national language and the study and documentation of the kingdom's diverse linguistic heritage, covering both major regional languages and endangered minority languages. Major activities of the Commission include the description of Dzongkha, the codification of a Bhutanese orthographic standard in dBu-can script, the graded promulgation of a phonological system of romanisation known as Roman Dzongkha, the integration and release of Dzongkha in the Microsoft Windows program, the compilation of English-Dzongkha dictionaries, the documentation of the three most endangered languages of the country and the publication of an ethnolinguistic history of Bhutan.

In the past three years, the Dzongkha Development Commission has undertaken to document the three most endangered languages of the kingdom. These are Gongduk, Lhokpu and Black Mountain. These three languages also happen to be the most intriguing from the comparative and historical linguistic point of view because of the key positions which they occupy within the Tibeto-Burman language family and because of what these three languages can tell us about Bhutan's past and about the prehistory of the entire greater Himalayan region.