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Author(s): David A. Peterson

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# On Khumi Verbal Pronominal Morphology

DAVID A. PETERSON

*Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology*

## 1. Introduction

A Tibeto-Burman language of the Kuki-Chin branch, the variety of Khumi described here is spoken by about two thousand people in two distinct but mutually intelligible dialects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of southeastern Bangladesh. The basis for the paper is material gathered during a total of about ten months of work with the language from 1999-2001.<sup>1</sup>

The Linguistic Survey of India (1904) judged Khumi to lack verbal pronominal morphology. Later studies (Shafer 1944, Löffler 1960) of various Khumi dialects also have not detected verbal pronominal marking.

The primary goal of this paper is to describe the distribution of verbal pronominal morphology for the variety of Khumi spoken in Bangladesh. A second goal will be to discuss the possible diachronic relevance of the Khumi phenomenon vis-à-vis verbal pronominal systems in other Kuki-Chin languages and in Tibeto-Burman languages generally.

The main claims of the paper are that verbal pronominal morphology in Bangladesh Khumi is an optional, loosely grammaticalized, speech-act participant coding device. While a full pronominal paradigm exists, and may be elicited directly, parts of it which do not refer to speech-act participants do not occur frequently in texts, and those which *do*, have a highly specialized function.

In addition, I will suggest that as a more loosely grammaticalized system than the systems of pronominal morphology usually attested in Kuki-Chin languages, the Khumi system is likely to be historically primary or an altogether independent development; other systems which resemble it are probably later grammaticalizations of idiosyncratic pronominal systems which developed after Kuki-Chin languages diverged from each other. However, at least parts of the *suffixal* system

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of agreement attested throughout the subgroup are likely to be shared retentions from the Proto-Kuki-Chin stage.

## 2. The verbal pronominal morphology in direct elicitation

In directly elicited material verbal pronominal morphology does not occur spontaneously, although it is possible to elicit full paradigms if it is made clear to consultants that it is pronominal prefixes which are of interest, or if elicitation is based on constructed examples judged for acceptability and interpretation. This section will not give extended illustrations of the use of the morphology in elicited data, but instead will simply summarize the generalizations concerning its distribution.

(1) gives the Khumi independent pronouns. Note that these exhibit a dual/plural distinction and an inclusive/exclusive distinction.

(1) Independent pronouns:

	1st person incl/exclusive	2nd person	3rd person
singular	<i>kaay</i>	<i>naang</i>	<i>ní</i>
dual	<i>ay-ni/kaay-ni</i>	<i>naang-ni</i>	<i>ní-ni</i>
plural	<i>a-cie/kaay-cie</i>	<i>naang-cie</i>	<i>ní-cie</i>

(2) contains a tabular representation of verbal pronominal markers for intransitive and transitive roots obtained through direct elicitation; the basic generalizations concerning verbal pronominal marking are given in (3). In the tables, contexts which do not involve verbal coding, including reflexives, are indicated by -. Parenthesized items in the tables only sometimes occur under direct elicitation, although we will see in the next section that there is evidence for their use in connected discourse.

(2) Tabular representation of verbal marking:

Intransitive:

S	1 exclusive	1 inclusive	2	3
	<i>ka(ng)-</i>	-	<i>ang-</i>	<i>ang-</i>

Transitive:

O/A	1 exclusive	1 inclusive	2	3
1 exclusive	-		<i>ang-</i>	<i>ang-</i>
1 inclusive		-		<i>ang-</i>
2	<i>ka(ng)-</i>		-	<i>(ang-)</i>
3	<i>ka(ng)-</i>	-	-	<i>(ang-)</i>

(2) Basic generalizations for verbal pronominal marking:

- Number (of S, A, or O) is irrelevant
- *ka(ng)-* ‘first person exclusive S/A’
- *ang-* ‘first person/second person O’ or ‘non-first person S’
- First person A marking takes precedence over second person O marking

Further generalizing over these observations, for transitives, verbal pronominal marking always involves speech-act participants. For intransitives, verbal pronominal marking may also involve exclusively non-speech-act participants.

### 3. The text-distribution of pronominal marking

In texts, verbal pronominal morphology occurs in three contexts. This finding is based on consideration of the distribution of verbal marking in fifteen texts (primarily narrative and conversation) of varying lengths, totaling approximately 4,500 clauses. In this corpus, there are about 100 examples of verbal pronominal marking, which should give some impression of the text-rarity of the phenomenon.

The first and most frequent context that verbal pronominal morphology occurs in is reported speech. In Khumi, as in other Kuki-Chin languages I am familiar with, reported speech is always directly quoted conversation. Some text examples of the use of verbal pronominal morphology in reported speech are given in (4).

(4) Verbal pronominal morphology in reported speech:

a. First person A, second person O<sup>2</sup>

*nayboeloe vaay=loe aámcløeeyng kang-plaw-piee-bo noe=piee-te*  
 then now=TOP eagle 1S/A-call-BEN-PERF QUOT=say-EVID

‘Then she said to them, “Now I’ll call the eagles for you,”...’ (8.39)

<sup>2</sup> Note that the benefactive applicative marker in the verbal complex of the first verb is what makes this a case of first person A acting on second person O. For details on the morphosyntax of this construction, see Peterson 2001b.

- b. First person A, third person O

*amnáay=oo vayníí tbeewng lee-noe-ra=loe khúmii-coo*  
 friend=VOC today banana peel-NZR-NZR=TOP person-DIM

*kang-caa-noe-bo noe=thúy-te*  
1S/A-eat-NZR-PERF QUOT=tell-EVID

“Friend, today, where we were peeling banana trees, I ate (=caught) a human child,” he told (him).’ (3:50)

- c. Second person A, first person O

*naang o’á matimata kacáawy khaa ang-thúy-noe maá*  
 2S crow what.kind.of lie EMPH 1/2O-tell-NZR where

*khaa kaáy cniwcnaáw awng-noe kaáy cniwcnaáw=loe*  
 EMPH 1S.GEN daughter exist-NZR 1S.GEN daughter=TOP

*kewsii máng-noe doey-pawpang-bo-noe noe=te*  
 leprosy suffer=NZR die-MIMETIC-PERF-NZR QUOT=EVID

“You, Crow, what lie are you telling me? Where is my daughter living? My daughter was suffering from leprosy and has died,” she said.’ (1:73)

- d. Third person A, first person O

*kaaymóey=loe phayloeyng=moe ang-ke-tlaw-noe-te-ba*  
 1s eye=TOP ant=DEF 1/2O-bite-LARGEO-NZR-EVID-EVAL

*noe=piee-te*  
 QUOT=say-EVID

“The ant bit me in the eye!” he said to her.’ (1.104)

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- e. Third person A, second person O

*...naang=poe*      *toeéng-boeloe*      *ang-caa-noe-bo...*  
 2S=ALSO            arrive-CONN            1/2O-eat-NZR-PERF

*...naáng jvoó=loe*      *uymíw kung-noe-bo*      *noe=piee-te*  
 2S.GEN husband=TOP cannibal turn.into-NZR-PERF QUOT=say-EVID

‘‘...You also have come and he’s going to eat you... ...your husband’s turned into a cannibal!’’ it said to her.’ (3:28)

Face-to-face conversation is a second context in which verbal pronominal morphology occurs, though here it is also relatively infrequent. Some examples of this use of the morphology from a conversational text are given in (5).

(5) Verbal pronominal morphology in face-to-face conversation:

- a. First person A, second person O

*hini amoe-taeng=poe aka-a nay m hini kang-thúypiee-noe-to*  
 DEM REFL-OBL=also blame-FUT thus PART DEM 1S/A-say-NZR-EVAL

‘In this affair (they) may also blame you. Thus, uh, this is what I say to you.’ (9:84)

- b. Third person S

*aplaa-tlaa-boeloe*      *aplaa-a*      *cnaáw=poe*  
 revoke-OBLIG-CONN      revoke-FUT      child-ALSO

*ang-vaáwy-taeng-vuy-noe-tew-bo=ie...*  
3S/A-return-AGAIN-PAST-NZR-CONCESS-PERF=AND

‘If we have to revoke (our oath), we’ll revoke it, but the child has returned again, and...’ (9:85)

Finally, verbal pronominal morphology has what apparently would best be described as a perspective-shifting device. This use could be likened to the use of proximate-shifting for a similar effect described for Fox by Goddard 1990. Some instances of this use of the morphology are seen in the examples given in (6); in fact, (5b) also is probably an instance of the same use.

## (6) Perspective-shifting use of verbal pronominal morphology:

## a. Third person S

*ewkuu tkhoeýng-noe khang khang khang noe =boeloe*  
 trough tap-NZR tap tap tap QUOT=CONN

*huni ang-jeew-noe-tlaa*  
 DEM 3SA-come-NZR-OBLIG

‘She beat on the trough, tap, tap, tap, and they (the eagles) had to come.’ (8:41)

## b. Third person S

*nay’ie rekheeng khúmii awng-ra amceng;*  
 so Arakan Khumi exist-NZR small.place

*acié pree=ma ang-jeew*  
 1PINCL.GEN country=LOC 3S/A-come

‘So, where the Arakan Khumi live is a small place; they’re coming over to our country.’ (9:88)

## c. Third person S

*doey akhrang-cie=loe nay’ie amoe naybo mayyuung*  
 die custom-PL=TOP so someone if ash

*thiw-khoekhoe-boeloe ang-thew khaá=poe tlaáng=a*  
 mark-TRULY-CONN 3S/A-come.out time=ALSO body=GOAL

*kamnuung thiw-doe-noe anáy=hawy ang-thew-boeloe*  
 black.thing mark-some-NZR like=COM 3S/A-come.out-CONN

*neé-khoekhoe nay noe =piee oem-nay-tlaa hini*  
 true-TRULY thus QUOT=say believe-thus-OBLIG this

‘Regarding death customs, so, if someone is marked with ashes and when they come out, when they come out with a little mark like that on the body, we have to believe that it’s really true (that they are truly a reincarnation of the dead person who was marked with ashes).’ (12:44)

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- d. Third person A, third person O

*vaydúeeng=ma kaay=loe húu ii-bie-noe-te noe=piee-te*  
 tonight=LOC 1s=TOP there sleep-AGAIN-NZR-EVID QUOT=say-EVID

“‘Tonight I’ll sleep there again,’ she told him.’ (1:37)

*nayboeloe ang-khieeng-bie-bo dúeeng=ma bo-noe-boeloe*  
 then 3S/A-look.for-AGAIN-PERF night=LOC PERF-NZR-CONN  
 ‘Then he came to look for (her) again, when it became night.’ (1:38)

- e. Third person A, second person O

*...pree m’roe=a kola liee ang-ee-yo-noe*  
 country city=GOAL Bangali paddy 3S/A-shit-AWAY-NZR

*pnóe-a vaay nga’ay=loe ang-ee-yo-bo-noe*  
 know.NEG-INTERROG now father=TOP 3S/A-shit-AWAY-PERF-NZR

*pnóe-a noe =piee-te-ho*  
 know.NEG-INTERROG QUOT=say-EVID-EVAL

“‘...they were going to shit you out over the land, over the city, and in the Bangali rice fields, don’t you know? Now they’ve already shit out father (=grandfather), don’t you know?’” he said to them.’ (9:182)

In (6a), for instance, the understood agent of the first clause is a snail, who is summoning two eagles to fight with some humans who have come to avenge the killing of their father. In the second clause, the use of the person marker apparently adds to the vividness of the scene, and it is as if the listener personally witnesses the sudden arrival of the eagles.

In summary, when it occurs at all in texts, verbal pronominal marking primarily codes speech act participants. Only in some of the cases in (6) does pronominal morphology clearly refer *only* to a non-speech-act participant. My suggestion for such cases is that here it is really marking the entrance into the discourse of a (relatively) salient third person participant, or a shift from the perspective of that of an objective narrator to that of the speaker or hearer.

#### 4. Comparative aspects of Khumi verbal pronominal morphology

While it bears formal resemblance to systems found elsewhere in Kuki-Chin, Khumi’s system of pronominal morphology is distinct from the ones found in other Kuki-Chin languages in a number of respects. Consider, for instance, the system of verbal and independent pronominal morphology attested in Hakha Lai

(spoken in Chin State, Burma;  $\Sigma$  indicates the position of the verb stem with respect to pronominal markers):

(7) Lai pronominal morphology:

	Verbal A/S	Verbal O	Independent pronoun root
1s	$ka-\Sigma$	$-ka-\Sigma$	$kay$
2s	$na-\Sigma$	$-n-\Sigma\sim\text{?}in-\Sigma$	$na\eta$
3s	$a-\Sigma$	$-\varnothing-\Sigma$	$\text{?}a$
1p	$ka-n-\Sigma$	$-ka-n-\Sigma$	$kan$
2p	$na-n-\Sigma$	$-n-\Sigma-hnaa\sim\text{?}in-\Sigma-hnaa$	$nan$
3p	$\text{?}a-n-\Sigma$	$-\varnothing-\Sigma-hnaa$	$\text{?}an$

First, the Khumi system differs from other attested systems in terms of its formal simplicity: two markers vs. several (Lai) or many (K'cho, discussed by Bedell 2000, Daai, discussed by Hartmann 2000, and Hyow, discussed by Peterson 2001). Second, there is a lower degree of resemblance between the verbal pronominal elements and independent pronouns in Khumi than there is in other languages (cf. the highly transparent relationship between the verbal and independent pronominal morphology in Lai). Finally, unlike the highly grammaticalized, obligatory *agreement* systems found in languages like Lai, Mizo, Hyow, K'cho, Daai, and Tedim, the Khumi verbal pronominal morphology is an essentially optional speech-participant coding device.

#### 4.1. Kuki-Chin prefixal pronominal morphology as innovative

In this last respect (looseness of grammaticalization), the Khumi system resembles what LaPolla 1992 has argued is usual for Tibeto-Burman pronominal morphology systems; LaPolla further suggests (contra those who wish to reconstruct such a system to Proto-Tibeto-Burman, like DeLancey 1989) that such systems form a functionally transitional stage between Chinese/Lolo-Burmese-type languages without agreement and the classic “pronominalized” languages like those of the Himalayish and Kuki-Chin subgroups.

We might hypothesize, then, as LaPolla does for Tangut, that the relatively loosely grammaticalized system of verbal pronominal morphology in Khumi represents a stage more closely approximating Proto-Kuki-Chin. On such an account, other, invariably more complex systems found elsewhere in this branch of Tibeto-Burman would involve (often independent) grammaticalizations and paradigmatic reshuffling of more recent pronominal systems.

Finally, I should note that there is another, functionally distinct affix in Khumi which is formally identical to the first person S/A marker, a nominalizer  $ka(ng)$ :

(8) *ka(ng)*- nominalizer in Khumi:

<i>láawng</i>	‘enough, sufficient’	<i>ka(ng)láawng</i>	‘sufficient amount’
<i>vang</i>	‘brighten, become light’	<i>ka(ng)vang</i>	‘light, brightness’
<i>láng</i>	‘dance’	<i>ka(ng)láng</i>	‘dance’
<i>hóeyng</i>	‘alive’	<i>ka(ng)hóeyng</i>	‘living thing’
<i>oem</i>	‘believe’	<i>ka(ng)oem</i>	‘belief, trust’
<i>asaáng</i>	‘high’	<i>ka(ng)sang</i>	‘summit, high point’
<i>pvuy</i>	‘drunk’	<i>ka(ng)vuy</i>	‘intoxication’
<i>ptha</i>	‘itchy’	<i>kamtha</i>	‘itchiness’
<i>pnuung</i>	‘blacken’	<i>kamnuung</i>	‘black thing’
<i>pthuú</i>	‘crazy’	<i>kamthú</i>	‘crazy person’
<i>psieng</i>	‘reddden’	<i>kamsieng</i>	‘red thing’

In light of this highly similar morphology, I would speculate that the Khumi first person S/A marker perhaps actually comes from this nominalizer, and not, as might otherwise be suspected, from the *kaay* first person pronominal element.

On this account, the original element in Khumi, and in other Kuki-Chin languages by extension, would have been from this nominalizer, and not from the first person independent pronoun. This initial grammaticalization was followed by reanalysis in other Kuki-Chin languages of the marker as originating in the first person independent pronoun, which was formally quite similar; thereafter, other languages added agreement markers based on other pronominal elements (a development which never occurred in Khumi).

Alternatively, as Scott DeLancey suggested at the conference, Khumi could have undergone a development of the sort described here, but in other languages the first person marker could have come from the normal grammaticalization source for first person verbal pronominal morphology, the independent first person pronoun. Thus, while the languages would end up with fairly similar looking first person verbal morphology, the grammaticalization sources for the one in Khumi and the ones found elsewhere in the family would be different.

#### **4.2. Kuki-Chin suffixal pronominal morphology as archaic**

On the other hand, there are indications that much of the suffixal agreement morphology that occurs in Kuki-Chin is archaic. It does appear possible to reconstruct this morphology to Proto-Kuki-Chin.

Consider, for instance, the suffixal agreement found in colloquial style contexts in Tedim, as seen in Henderson’s sketch of the language:

- (9) Suffixal agreement in Tedim (Henderson 1965:109-111):  
 -ij '1st singular'    -uj '1st pl excl'    -haj '1st pl incl'  
 -teʔ '2nd singular'    -ueʔteʔ '2nd plural'  
 -(i/?)'3rd singular'    -uʔ '3rd plural'

Generalizations which should be taken away from this paradigm include the following: -ij marks first person, -teʔ marks second person, and -ʔu(?) marks plural. A highly similar system is seen in (10) for closely related Sizang.

- (10) Suffixal agreement in Sizang (Stern 1963:264):  
 bo-ɣ 'I not'    bua-u-ɣ 'we not'  
 bua-te' 'you not'    bua-u-te' 'y'all not'  
 bo/bua 'he/they not'

In (11), notice that much of the morphology present in Tedim and Sizang is also present in the negative agreement paradigm in Hyow, like Khumi, spoken in southeastern Bangladesh, and a language which is usually thought to be a relatively remote sister to northerly Chin languages.<sup>3</sup>

- (11) Suffixal agreement in Hyow:

affirmative:		negative:	
singular			
<i>ka-kap</i>	'I cry'	<i>kap-ŋa</i>	'I don't cry'
<i>na-kap</i>	'you cry'	<i>kap-ti</i>	'you don't cry'
<i>ʔa-kap</i>	'she cries'	<i>kap-aʔ</i>	'she doesn't cry'
dual			
<i>kihni-kap</i>	'we two cry'	<i>kap-hniʔ-ŋa</i>	'we two don't cry'
<i>ni-kap</i>	'we (incl) two cry'	<i>kap-pu</i>	'we (incl) two don't cry'
<i>hni-hni-kap</i>	'you two cry'	<i>kap-hniʔ-ti</i>	'you two don't cry'
<i>hni-kap</i>	'they two cry'	<i>kap-huʔy</i>	'they two don't cry'
plural			
<i>kini-kap</i>	'we cry'	<i>kap-ʔu-ŋa</i>	'we don't cry'
<i>nini-kap</i>	'y'all cry'	<i>kap-cu</i>	'y'all don't cry'
<i>ni-kap</i>	'they cry'	<i>kap-ʔu</i>	'they don't cry'

<sup>3</sup> Actually, I have argued elsewhere that traditionally Northern Chin languages, like Tedim and Sizang, and at least some of the traditionally Southern Chin languages, like Hyow, should be subgrouped together based on shared phonological and morphosyntactic innovations, in contradistinction to Central Chin languages like Lai and Mizo (Peterson 2000). However, even with this scenario, the suffixal agreement paradigm is viewed as a shared retention, for reasons outlined in what follows.

There are a number of reasons to think that much of this morphology is archaic.

To begin with, the *ŋa* first person element is clearly from the reconstructed Proto-Tibeto-Burman root for first person. The antiquity of this highly grammaticalized *ŋa* element would indicate that it existed in this agreement use already at the Proto-Kuki-Chin stage: once the *kaay* first person element was innovated, which clearly had happened by the Proto-Kuki-Chin stage since the element occurs in virtually every language in this use, it would be hard to explain a subsequent grammaticalization of a *ŋa* element (though it is feasible that these could have been two concurrent first person formatives at some stage).

Second, there are (sometimes obscure) traces of many of these pronominal elements in Central Chin languages and in Khumi. There is a first person *-ŋ* formative found in Lai singular cohortatives. The second person person *-tV* element is probably reflected in the Mizo *-te?* imperative marker (Chhange 1993:105). In addition, there is a plural marker *-u* in dual and plural cohortatives and imperatives in Lai. Khumi also has this element in plural imperatives, and rarely as a plural agreement marker in certain subordinate clause types (for older speakers), as shown in (12).

- (12) *acie*                      *khúmii-loe*      *vay-ktí=ya*                      *reng-u-pyaáw*  
 1P.INCL                      Khumi=TOP      now-future=GOAL                      hold.festival-PL-POT  
*khaá=poe*                      *tmang-u-noe*                      *alang-cie=moe*                      *thúy-noe*  
 time=ALSO                      err-PL-NZR                      other-PL=DEF                      say-NZR  
*pree=ya*                                      *yaáng-noe*  
 country=GOAL                      spread-NZR  
 ‘We Khumi, in the future, if we’re able to hold a festival and we make a mistake, others will talk about it (negatively).’ (13:42)

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, while I cannot at this point extend my observations to varieties of Khumi which are spoken in adjacent areas of Burma, Khumi as spoken in Bangladesh clearly *does* have verbal pronominal marking. The system is optional and primarily codes speech act participants.

These properties suggest that in comparison to the more highly grammaticalized agreement systems found elsewhere in the family, this system is likely to be archaic or an independent development. If either assumption is accepted, the prefixal agreement systems seen in Kuki-Chin are probably not demonstrable retentions from Proto-Kuki-Chin, although portions of the suffixal systems found in Kuki-Chin almost certainly are.

Future work in this area will have to focus on further description of agreement systems in the family. In addition, the next step will have to be an attempt to do a

genuine morphological reconstruction, using established methodology, of prefixal morphology, which I expect will be possible for certain subgroups, but will prove elusive for Kuki-Chin as a whole.

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Department of Linguistics  
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology  
Inselstrasse 22  
D-04103 Leipzig, Germany  
peterson@eva.mpg.de