

## **A COMPARISON BETWEEN KHASI AND MANIPURI WORD ORDER**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Manipuri (Meithei) and Khasi are languages spoken in Manipur and Meghalaya, two northeastern states of India. A number of Manipuri speakers are also found in neighboring states like Assam and Tripura and outside the country in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Manipuri belongs to the Kuki-Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, and Khasi to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austroasiatic family. The population of Khasi speakers is about half a million, while that of Manipuri is about a million as a mother tongue in Manipur state alone. Both Khasi and Manipuri are recognized as official languages in their respective states. At the national level, Manipuri is included as one of the scheduled languages in the Indian constitution. It is interesting to note that Khasi forms a linguistic island amid the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan speakers in the northeastern region of India. From the viewpoint of social organization, the Khasi and the Manipuri communities show highly diversified systems, the former matriarchal and the latter patriarchal. Since the languages belong to different families but are spoken in the same geographical area, comparison between the two is interesting.

In general, word order is defined as the sequential arrangement of words. There are six logically possible types of word order: SOV, SVO, VSO, VOS, OVS, and OSV (Greenberg 1963). Some languages, such as Latin, have a relatively free word order, while others, such as English, have a fixed one (Comrie 1981). If a language has a number of grammatically possible word orders in different types of constructions, it is questionable which one of them should be regarded as the basic word order. However, there is always an order which is dominant over the others in the natural speech of a language, and it is this order that is accepted as its basic word order. In the body of this paper, Greenberg's word order universals are referred to as necessary.

Khasi and Manipuri have different word orders with respect to basic constituent structure. Khasi has an SVO word order, whereas Manipuri has an SOV order. The latter language therefore agrees with Greenberg's Universal 4, i.e., that languages with normal SOV order are postpositional:

*Khasi:*<sup>1</sup>

- (1) u la a:y ya ka kot  
 he PAST give ACC PM book  
 'He gave (someone) a book.'

- (2) ka briew ka-n sa thya?  
 GA human being GA-FUT FUT.DEF sleep  
 'The woman will sleep.'

*Manipuri:*

- (3) mi pumnəmək kəythel-də cət-li  
 human-being all market-LOC go-NFUT  
 'All the people went to the market.'

- (4) jon-nə sən-du-bu cəy-nə kəl-li  
 John-NOM. cow-DET-ACC stick-INST whip-NFUT  
 'John whipped the cow with a stick.'

Manipuri agrees with Greenberg's Universal 7, according to which the only alternative of a dominant SOV order would be OSV, and all the adverbial modifiers of a verb likewise precede the verb, as in the following examples:

- (5) tom-nə phi-si ləy (SOV)  
 Tom-NOM cloth-DET buy  
 'Tom buys this cloth.'

- (6) phi-si tom-nə ləy (OSV)  
 cloth-DET Tom-NOM buy  
 'Tom buys this cloth.'

Example number (6) is the only alternative ordering to example (5).

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<sup>1</sup> ACC	accusative	INST	instrumental
ADV	adverb	LOC	locative
DEF	definite	NFUT	non-future
DET	determiner	NOM	nominative
DS	distal	PAST	past tense
FUT	future	PERF	perfective
GA	gender article	PROG	progressive
INF	infinitive	REL	relative

The following examples show the positions of adverbial modifiers:

*Manipuri:*

(7) məhak          təpnə                  cət-li  
 he                  slowly (ADV)          go-NFUT  
 'He went slowly.'

(8) məhak          thunə                  lak-kəni  
 he                  quickly (ADV)          come-FUT  
 'He will come quickly.'

*Khasi:*

(9) u          la                  leyt          suki  
 he          PAST          go          slowly (ADV)  
 'He went slowly.'

(10) ka-n                  wan                  klo:y  
 she-FUT          come                  quickly (ADV)  
 'She will come quickly.'

It is clear from the above examples that adverbs follow verbs in Khasi while they precede verbs in Manipuri.

In both the languages, in general, a subordinate clause precedes the main clause:

*Khasi:*

(11) katba    u    la          da          thya?    ki    la          leyt    hanjay  
 while    he    PAST    PROG    sleep    they    PAST    go    there  
 'They went there while he was sleeping.'

(12) inda    ka    la          kepba:m    depdi?    ka    la          šim    ya          ka  
 when    she    PAST    eating          complete    she    PAST    take    ACC    PM

šəŋkwa:y          ban          ba:m          kwa:y  
 betel basket          INF          eat          betelnut

'When she finished eating she took the betel-basket to eat betelnut.'

*Manipuri:*

- (13) məhak-nə tum-liŋəydə məkehoy cət-khi  
 he-NOM sleep-while they go-PERF  
 'They had gone while he was sleeping.'

- (14) tombə-nə skul cət-pədə layrik ləy-rək-i  
 Tomba-NOM school go-when book buy-DS-NFUT  
 'When Tomba went to school (he) bought book(s) from there.'

Both the languages agree with what is said in Greenberg's Universal 14, namely, that the conditional clause (protasis) precedes the main clause (apodosis):

*Khasi:*

- (15) lada ŋi leyt ki-n wan  
 if we go they-FUT come  
 'If we go, they will come.'

- (16) əykhoy cət-ləbədi məkhoy lak-kəni  
 we go-if they come-FUT  
 'If we go, they will come.'

Discussion of word order within a noun phrase begins by observing the relation between an adjective and a noun. Khasi adjectives are found by looking for the relativizer **ba** with a noun; this construction always results in a clause-like structure. From the syntactic viewpoint, Khasi relative clauses are of two types: (1) a relative clause with an adjective, or (2) a relative clause with a verb. For convenience, however, a relative clause with an adjective will here be called simply an "adjective," and a relative clause with a verb will be called a "relative clause."

In Khasi, the adjective follows the noun, while it precedes or follows the noun in Manipuri:

*Khasi:*

- (17) ka miej ba yoŋ (noun + adjective)  
 PM table REL black  
 'black table'

(18) u        briew                ba        jroŋ                (noun + adjective)  
 PM    human being    REL    tall  
 'tall man'

(19) ka        kse?                ba        sa:w                (noun + adjective)  
 PM    pinewood        REL    red  
 'red pinewood'

*Manipuri:*

(20) əcəwbə        tebəl                                (adjective + noun)  
 big                table

*or*

tebəl əcəwbə                        (noun + adjective)  
 table                big  
 'big table'

(21) əmubə        huy                                (adjective + noun)  
 black                dog

*or*

huy                əmubə                                (noun + adjective)  
 dog                black  
 'black dog'

In Khasi, the descriptive adjective follows the noun while the demonstrative and the numeral precede it. But in Manipuri, the descriptive adjective precedes or follows the noun while the demonstrative and the numeral rigidly follow the noun. Neither language (considering for Manipuri the order in which the descriptive adjective precedes the noun) agrees with Greenberg's Universal 18, which says that when the descriptive adjective precedes the noun, the demonstrative and the numeral do likewise. In this situation, the position of demonstrative and numeral is determined by that of the descriptive adjective. Therefore, Universal 18 may have an alternative version: when the descriptive adjective follows the noun, the demonstrative and the numeral do likewise. Since the descriptive adjective in Manipuri has the potential to follow the noun, this language might be considered to have agreed with Greenberg's Universal 18 indirectly. Consider the following examples:

*Khasi:*

- (22) a:rɲut      ki      kinthey      (numeral + noun)  
 two      PM      woman  
 'two women'
- (23) kine      ki      kinthey      (demonstrative + noun)  
 these      PM      woman  
 'these women'

*Manipuri:*

- (24) nupi      əni      (noun + numeral)  
 woman      two  
 'two women'
- (25) nupi      əmi      (noun + demonstrative)  
 woman      this  
 'this woman'

In addition, the adjective in both languages always forms the final constituent in the compound word that results from the combination of noun and adjective:

*Khasi:*

- (26) u      briew      ba      bha      >      briewbha      'good man'  
 PM      human being      REL      good

*Manipuri:*

- (27) əcəwbə      huy /      huy      əcəwbə      >      huyjaw      'big dog'  
 big      dog      dog      big
- but not*      >      \*jawhuy      (adjective-noun)

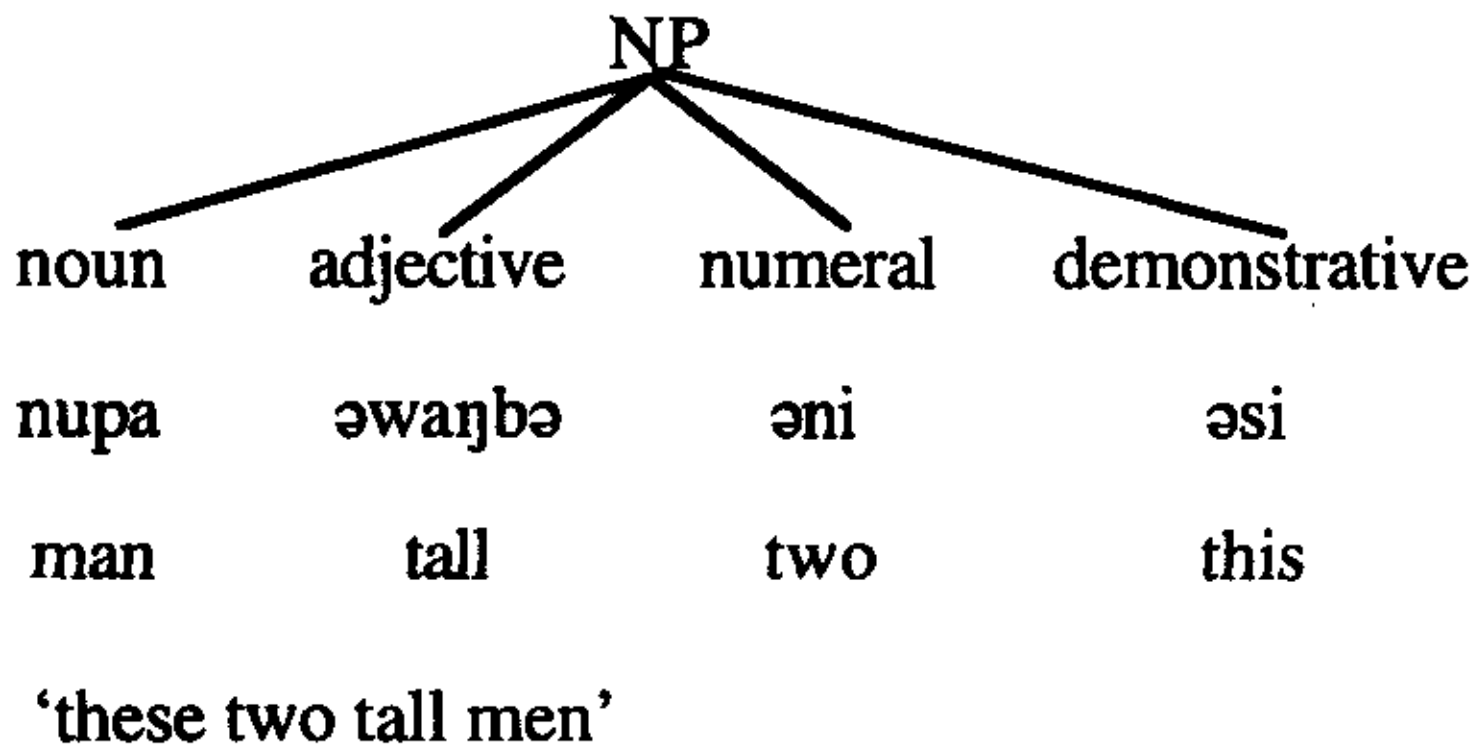
With respect to Khasi example (26), it has been noted that the descriptive adjective forms a final constituent in the compound word and this reveals a uniformity with the order that exists between the noun and the adjective in a noun phrase (i.e., the adjective follows the noun). In the case of Manipuri, although the descriptive adjective may either precede or follow the noun, the adjective always forms the final constituent in a compound word of noun and adjective; it then provides clear evidence that there are limitations for the

occurrence of the order in which the descriptive adjective precedes the noun. The Manipuri example in (27) supports this, also.

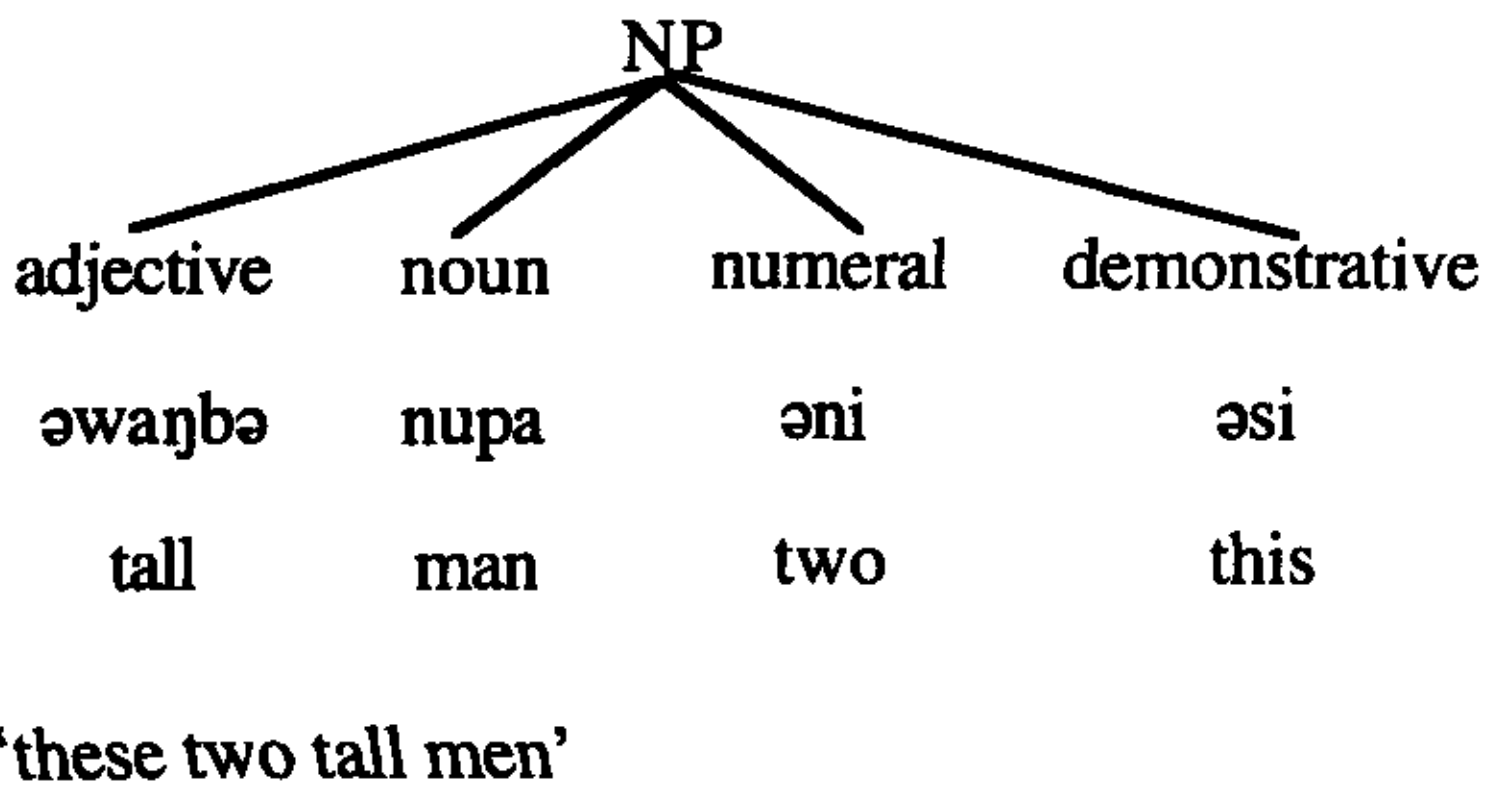
When all three modifiers—demonstrative, numeral, and descriptive adjective—are present in the noun phrase in Manipuri, there are two possible orders: (1) when the adjective follows the noun, the order is NOUN-ADJECTIVE-NUMERAL-DEMONSTRATIVE; (2) when the adjective precedes the noun, the order is ADJECTIVE-NOUN-NUMERAL-DEMONSTRATIVE. In the case of Khasi, the order is DEMONSTRATIVE-NUMERAL-NOUN-ADJECTIVE. The second order in Manipuri is the mirror image of the order in Khasi. Consider the following examples:

Manipuri:

(28a)

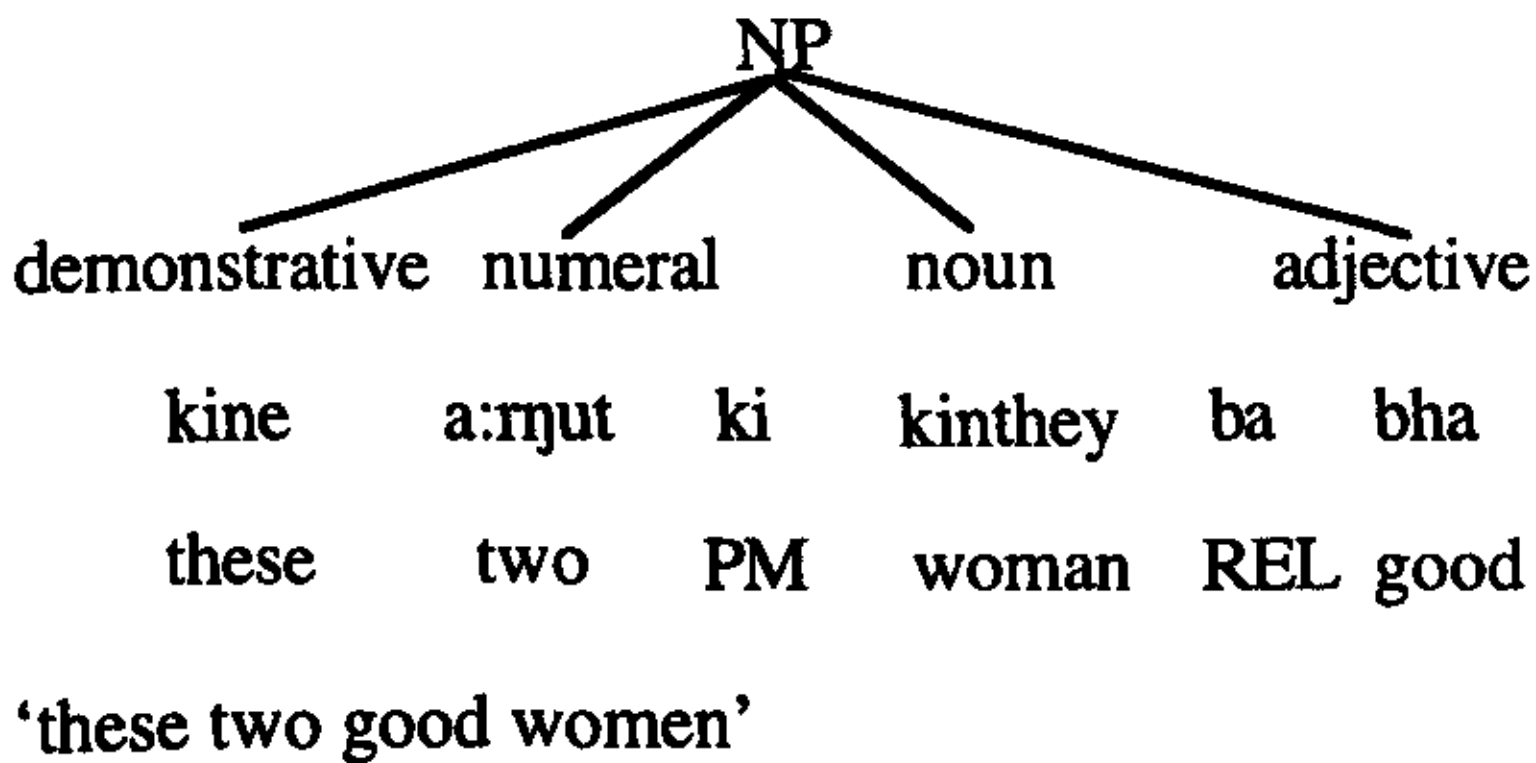


(28b)



Khasi:

(29)



In Khasi, the relational expression follows the noun and does not accord with Greenberg's Universal 24. On the other hand, Manipuri is a postpositional language as well as one where the adjective precedes the noun. Thus, Manipuri is one of the languages supporting Greenberg's Universal 24:

*Khasi:*

(30) u            brieu                            u        ba        wan        (noun + relational expression)

PM        human being        PM        REL        come  
'the man who comes'

(31) ka            brieu                            ka        ba        leyt        (noun + relational expression)

PM        human being        PM        REL        go  
'the woman who goes'

*Manipuri:*

(32) məphəm-si-də            lak-pə            nupa        (relational expression + noun)

place-DAT.-LOC.    come-REL.    man  
'the man who comes here'

(33) huy-nə            cik-pə            nupa        (relational expression + noun)

dog-NOM.        bite-REL.        man  
'the man whom a dog bites'

Khasi is a language with prepositions in which the genitive follows the governing noun, while Manipuri is a language with postpositions in which the genitive precedes the governing noun. The following provide examples:

*Khasi:*

(34) ka        iyeŋ        joŋ        u        jon        (noun + genitive)

PM.        house        GEN.        PM.        John  
'John's house' ('the house of John')

(35) ka        kot        joŋ        ŋa        (noun + genitive)

PM.        book        GEN.        I  
'my book'



*Manipuri:*

(36) tomba-gi                      yum    (genitive-noun)  
       Tomba-GEN.                house  
       'Tomba's house'

(37) əy-gi                         phurit                                      (genitive-noun)  
       I-GEN.                        shirt  
       'my shirt'

Both the languages can be seen as agreeing with Greenberg's Universal 2, i.e., that in prepositional languages the genitive follows the governing noun, while in postpositional languages the genitive precedes the governing noun.

**CONCLUSION**

It has been shown that both Khasi and Manipuri agree with most of Greenberg's universals; even when one of the languages seems to violate a particular universal, the other one satisfies it. As in other languages, having prepositions in Khasi is consistent with its basic word order, that is, SVO, and having postpositions in Manipuri is consistent with its basic word order, namely SOV. In Khasi, the descriptive adjective does not determine the positions of demonstrative and numeral, but this does in fact appear to be the case in Manipuri. In both languages, the position of the adjective determines the particular order between noun and relational expression.

In general, these two languages show more differences than similarities. The word order characteristics of these languages can be summarized as follows:

(38) Khasi:                      SVO / Pr / NG / NA / DN / Num N  
       Manipuri:                SOV / Po / GN / NA (AN) / ND / N Num

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