

The verbal agreement system of four Khām languages

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In this paper a morphemic analysis is given of the verbal agreement systems of four Khām languages¹. Khām (Nepali: *Khām Kurā*) belongs with Kiranti (Nepali: *Kirāntī*) and Newari (Nepali: *Nevārī*) to the Himalayan subgroup of the Bodic division of Tibeto-Burman. Khām is spoken in the Dhavalāgiri, Rāptī and Karnālī Zones of western Nepal by between 30,000 and 40,000 speakers of the 'Bhuda', 'Gharti' and 'Rokha' subtribes. The 'Pun' subtribe once also spoke Khām, but have long since lost their command of the language and nowadays speak Nepali (Watters & Watters 1973). The area where Khām is spoken lies between the Naudāṇḍā Lekh in the north, the Dhaulāgiri in the east, the Hiūchuli Pātan in the west and the Jaljalā-Nisāṇe Dhuri in the south. The villages are mainly found in the valleys of the Uttar Ganga and the Sānu Bheri (Oppitz 1981:260).

The Khām-speaking people call themselves Māgar and their language Khām, but the relationship between Khām and the Māgar language is not a very close one (van Driem 1993). Like many other small minorities in Nepal, the speakers of Khām identify themselves with a larger and stronger ethnic group to gain in status, in this case with the Māgar, who rank relatively high in the caste hierarchy of Nepal (van Driem 1991b). Oppitz calls them 'Northern Magar' or 'Kham speaking Magar' (Oppitz 1981:260).

Their centre of habitation is the village of 'Taka' (Nepali: *Takā*) in Bāgluṅ district of Dhaulāgiri Zone. Takā is mainly inhabited by members of the 'Bhuda' subtribe. Their language, Takāle Khām, is the most prestigious of all Khām languages and reportedly all speakers of Khām are proficient in it (Watters & Watters 1973). Takāle Khām is also spoken in the 'Sera' village, also in Bāgluṅ district (Watters 1973). There are several other Khām languages, 'Gamale' (Nepali: *Gamāle*) and 'Sheshi'. Some smaller dialect groups are reported, of which 'Mhai', 'Maikot' and 'Nisi-Bhuji' are the most important. Nisi-Bhuji is said to be a descendant of Takāle Khām.

Traditionally the Kham are a pastoral people migrating with their large flocks of sheep and goats. It seems that only recently have they begun growing crops, mainly potatoes and maize (Oppitz 1981: 261-2). According to De Sales (1984), the Kham-Magar still practice transhumance (seasonal movement of livestock).

¹ If only rough transcriptions of ethnonyms from the Nepali are known, they are given in quotation marks when they first appear, e.g. 'Sheshi'. If a more accurate transcription is known, this is given between parentheses, e.g. (Nepali: *Takāle*).

Until recently the Kham-Magar possessed a shamanistic tradition, in which however the chants were sung in Nepali (De Sales 1984). Michael Oppitz (1981) has also researched the shamanistic traditions of the Kham Magars in the late seventies. Watters, too, has published a paper on Kham shamanism (Watters 1975b), pointing to resemblances between Siberian and Tibeto-Burman shamanistic traditions.

Watters (1991) reports that these languages are all mutually unintelligible. Each community has its own language, and even within the same language group, going from one village to the next means a change of dialect. The most important differences between the languages are found in their verbal systems. There also seems to be a dichotomy between the south-western group of dialects and the rest, in that south-western dialects, such as Mhai Khām, do not have lexical tone, while other dialects, such as Takāle, have lexical tone. In the tonal dialects, tone is an important indication of the cohesiveness and age of the affixes. However, only for Takāle Khām have the tonal characteristics of the verbal morphology been described, while it is not certain that Mhai Khām is indeed an atonal language (Watters 1975a: 67). Some languages (e.g. Maikot Khām) are phonologically much more innovative than the other languages (e.g. Bhuji Khām) (Watters 1975a:50), as is shown, for instance, in the degree of assimilation of the dual number suffixes to the free pronouns.

A detailed morphemic analysis of the Khām conjugations makes a tentative reconstruction of the verbal morphology of proto-Khām possible. This reconstruction can then be compared to similar reconstructions made for Kiranti and other Tibeto-Burman languages.

Conventions in this paper

The SIL orthography used in Watters (1973) for the description of Takāle Khām is adapted in this paper to his later transcription. The digraph *ng* is replaced by *ŋ*. The symbol *x* for schwa is replaced by *ə*. The translations of the examples have been taken directly from the sources.

Abbreviations

Σ	verb stem
sf	suffixal slot
pf	prefixal slot
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
s	singular
d	dual
ns	non-singular (<i>more than one</i>)

np	non-plural (<i>less than three</i>)
p	plural (<i>more than two</i>)
e	exclusive
i	inclusive
S	subject of an intransitive verb
A	agent of a transitive verb
P	patient of a transitive verb
T	place of the tense/aspect marker
M	place of the mood/aspect marker
FUT	future
IMP	impending aspect
IMPV1	first imperative
IMPV2	second imperative
N-INC	non-inceptive
NPT	non-past
POT	potential mood
PPT	prior past
PRS	present
PT	past
REF	reflexive
TRM	terminate past
→, ↔	indicates the direction of a transitive relationship
Q	question marker
NEG	negation
ERG	ergative
GEN	genitive
LOC	locative
COM	comitative
MRK	marked scenario
GER	gerundive
POSS	possessive

1. DATA

Descriptions were available of the north-western language Takāle Khām (Watters 1973 and 1991, Watters & Watters 1973, Hale 1973), of Gamāle Khām (Watters 1991), Sheshi Khām (also Watters 1991) and of the south-western language Mhai Khām (Watters 1975). The verbal agreement system of Takāle Khām has been analysed before by Watters (1973), Weidert (1985) and van Driem (1993). Mhai Khām has previously been analysed by Watters (1975a) and DeLancey (1988). Most of the third person forms of the Mhai Khām transitive paradigm are missing from Watters (1975a), while DeLancey (1988) only gives singular forms, and in two instances incorrect ones. The data presented in Watters (1991) for Takāle Khām differ from the data on the same

language given in Watters (1973). In the description of Gamāle and Takāle, given in Watters (1991), dual patient forms are not given.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KHĀM VERB

Although there are many differences between the verbal systems of the four Khām languages discussed in this paper, some similarities stand out. The most important is the distinction between two modes which is made in all Khām languages. These two modes are variously labelled 'active' and 'passive' (Watters 1973), 'finite' and 'participial' (Watters 1975), 'response elicitation' and 'orientation' (Watters 1978) or 'narrative' and 'parenthetic' (Watters 1991). In this paper, for the sake of consistency, the terms 'narrative mode' and 'parenthetic mode' have been used everywhere, but in view of the use and meaning of this verb form a better name for the parenthetic mode would perhaps be 'participle in -o' or 'relative participle' or 'nominalised finite verb'.

In Khām languages, the basic form of the parenthetic verb has preterite time reference. The parenthetic mode shows fewer tense distinctions than the narrative mode. Parenthetic mode is always indicated by the affixation of a form of the special parenthetic marker <-o> or <-u>, which in all Khām languages is homophonous with the third person singular agent affix. In some cases the parenthetic mode is further indicated by a re-ordering of the agreement affixes.

The parenthetic verb functions as a relative participle. Its semantics seem to be comparable to those of the Nepalese participle in <-eko>, the Hayu participle in <-ji> or Limbu nominalised conjugated simplicia with the suffix <-pa>. The semantic value of the Khām parenthetic mode verb form has not yet been described adequately, however, and it is not at all clear whether the parenthetic mode verb has the same range of uses in all languages of Khām.

Watters (1975a:60) notes some tendencies for the Takāle parenthetic mode verb. It seems that if the parenthetic verb is prefixed by a possessive pronoun its antecedent is an object, otherwise a subject. The prefixed possessive pronoun correlates with the subject. From this description (Watters 1975a) it would appear that parenthetic mode verbs exist both with and without prefixes, although this is mentioned nowhere else.

(Watters 1975a:60, Takāle Khām)

- (1) o-poh-o (that) which he struck, 'that of his striking'
- (2) poh-o (he) who struck it

If the antecedent of the participle is an object, the action stands in a genitive relation to the agent, which is indicated by the possessive pronoun. This use of possessive pronouns indicates the nominal nature of the parenthetic verb form. The object of such a possessed parenthetic verb form occurs at the beginning of the whole clause, giving the impression of a passive