

## THE VERBAL MORPHOLOGY OF KULUNG

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### 1. KULUNG AND ITS DIALECTS

Kulung (autonym *kulu riŋ*) is a Rāi language spoken by an estimated 7,000 people in about ten villages along the upper reaches of the Hoŋgu river (a tributary of the Dudhkośi in Solu Khumbu District of Sagarmāthā Zone in eastern Nepal. Rāi languages belong together with Limbu and Yakkha to the Kiranti branch of the Tibeto-Burman language group. Kiranti languages are characterised by an elaborate system of verbal endings, which is said to have been the result of a historical process that traditionally has been called 'complex pronominalising', that is the incorporation of personal pronouns in the verb system. Kiranti languages have been provisionally divided into Eastern Kiranti languages, that is languages spoken east of the Sālpā pass, and the rest (van Driem 1990). Limbu is classified as an Eastern Kiranti language and the majority of the Rāi languages, with the exception of Lohorung, Yakkha and Yamphu, belong to the rest. A more detailed picture of Kiranti phylogeny is suggested by Michailovsky's (1994) Kiranti sound laws. The closest relative of Kulung appears to be Khaling (Khālīn).

The main Kulung-speaking villages are Chemsīn and Cheskām. According to Kulung oral tradition the ancestor of the Kulung, *k<sup>h</sup>əp*, had two sons, *c<sup>h</sup>emsi* and *tamsi*, who founded the settlements Chemsīn and Cheskām respectively. The language in those two villages is considered by the Kulung to be the most original form of the language. From there, the offspring of *c<sup>h</sup>emsi* and *tamsi* are said to have gone downstream at both sides of the Hoŋgu river to the villages that are now called Lujām, Gudel, Cācālun, Nāmlun, Pelmān, Buñ, Chekmā, and Sātđi.

The Kulung living in the village Sotān call their language *sottō riŋ* 'Sotān language', but consider themselves to be Kulung and easily understand the Kulung language spoken in Chemsīn and Cheskām. The dialect spoken in Sotān shows the result of historical phonological processes. For example the Kulung phoneme /u/, which has an allophone [ü] before the vowel /e/, was further fronted in the Sotān dialect to merge with the phoneme /i/, so that Kulung *tu-e* [tū-e] 'it is' has become *tī-e* in the Sotān dialect. Other processes include secondary vowel length as a result of consonant cluster reduction. As a dialect study will be part of my forthcoming *Grammar of Kulung*, I will provide only the above example. Further downstream in the village Hulu, people refer to themselves as Nachering, but their language may also be considered as a dialect of Kulung with further dialectal developments. It is interesting that the oral tradition of the migration of the Kulung people is supported by

linguistic evidence. The present study is based on research conducted in the Kulung-speaking area in the summer of 1993 in the village Cheskām.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. PHONOLOGY

The inventory of Kulung phonemes is given below. Vowel phonemes are described in terms of the distinctive features height, backness, rounding and length. A total of fourteen vowel phonemes are found.

### *Vowel phonemes*

	front unrounded	central unrounded	back rounded
high-close	<i>i/i:</i>		<i>u/u:</i>
mid-close	<i>e/e:</i>	<i>ə/ə:</i>	
mid-open			<i>ɔ/ɔ:</i>
low-open	<i>a/a:</i>		

Kulung distinguishes six places of articulation of consonant phonemes: glottal, dorso-velar, palatal, dental, and bilabial. These are produced by seven manners of articulation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1    | first person   |
| 2    | second person  |
| 3    | third person   |
| →    | indicates the direction of a transitive relationship |
| AG   | agent of a transitive verb                           |
| DU   | dual   |
| EXC  | exclusive  |
| INC  | inclusive  |
| N1SG | non-first personal singular                          |
| NEG  | negative   |
| NPT  | non-preterite  |
| NSG  | non-singular   |
| PAT  | patient of a transitive verb                         |
| PF   | prefixal slot  |
| PL   | plural   |
| PT   | preterite  |
| S    | subject of an intransitive verb                      |
| SF   | suffixal slot  |
| SG   | singular   |
| Vi   | intransitive verb                                    |
| Vtr  | transitive verb                                      |
| Σ    | verb stem  |

<sup>2</sup> The phoneme symbols /c/ and /j/ represent the affricates [tʃ ~ tʃ] and [dʒ ~ dʒ] respectively.

*Consonant phonemes*

	bilabial	dental	palatal	dorso-velar	labial-velar	glottal
STOPS AND AFFRICATES						
voiceless unaspirated	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>k</i>		ʔ
voiceless aspirated	<i>p<sup>h</sup></i>	<i>t<sup>h</sup></i>	<i>c<sup>h</sup></i>	<i>k<sup>h</sup></i>		
voiced unaspirated	<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>g</i>		
FRICATIVES						
voiceless grooved		<i>s</i>				
NASALS						
voiced	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>		<i>ŋ</i>		
VIBRANTS						
voiced trill		<i>r</i>				
LATERAL APPROXIMANTS						
voiced		<i>l</i>				
CENTRAL APPROXIMANTS						
voiced		<i>y</i>			<i>w</i>	<i>h</i>

## 3. VERBAL MORPHOLOGY

An inflected verb form in Kulung consists of a verb stem to which affixes are attached, which express person and number agreement with one or two actants. According to the fixed pattern of paradigmatic verb stem alternation a number of different conjugation types can be identified. Up to now I have postulated four different conjugation types for both intransitive and transitive verbs. The number of verb stems found in each of the conjugation types varies from one to seven. The different verb stems do not have any meaning, but are the result of historical phonological processes. Personal pronouns may be added to verb forms for emphasis, but are not compulsory. Kulung distinguishes ten pronominal categories. Unlike most of the Kiranti languages, Kulung makes no formal distinction between a third person dual and plural. Instead it has a third person non-singular category. The personal pronouns are given below:

I	1SG	<i>kəŋ</i>
we	1DU.INC	<i>kas</i>
we	1DU.EXC	<i>kaska</i>
we	1PL.INC	<i>ke:</i>
we	1PL.EXC	<i>ke:ka</i>
you	2SG	<i>an</i>
you	2DU	<i>anci</i>
you	2PL	<i>anni</i>
s/he, it (here)	3SG	<i>ŋkə</i>
s/he, it (a little distant)	3SG	<i>na:kə</i>
s/he, it (distant)	3SG	<i>muŋkə</i>
s/he, it (down)	3SG	<i>nu:kə</i>
s/he, it (up)	3SG	<i>tə:kə</i>
they (here)	3NSG	<i>ŋkəs</i>
they (a little distant)	3NSG	<i>na:kəs</i>
they (distant)	3NSG	<i>muŋkəs</i>
they (down)	3NSG	<i>nu:kəs</i>
they (up)	3NSG	<i>tə:kəs</i>

The third person pronouns are demonstrative pronouns that have geography-dependent meaning. The pronouns *ŋkə* 's/he, it (here)' and *ŋkəs* 'they (here)' have proximal meaning, while the pronouns *na:kə* 's/he, it (a little distant)' and *na:kəs* 'they (a little distant)' have medio-distal meaning. The pronouns *muŋkə* 's/he, it (distant)' and *muŋkəs* 'they (distant)' have distal meaning. The pronouns *nu:kə* 's/he, it (down)' with the corresponding non-singular form *nu:kəs* 'they (down)' and *tə:kə* 's/he, it (up)' with the corresponding non-singular form *tə:kəs* 'they (up)' are elevation-dependent, meaning respectively 'at a lower altitude than the reference point' and 'at a higher altitude than the reference point'. Patients of transitive verbs and subjects of intransitive verbs appear in the absolutive case marked by  $\emptyset$ , and agents of transitive verbs occur in the ergative case marked -a. A fixed set of personal endings is found for the intransitive, transitive and reflexive paradigms in both preterite and non-preterite tenses. An overview of the affixes of the intransitive and transitive conjugation is given below.

### 3.1 INTRANSITIVE CONJUGATION

Below the personal affixes are given of the intransitive conjugation of the intransitive verb *imma* (stem *ims-* ~ *im-*) 'to sleep'. The verb has two different stems. The stem *im-* occurs in negative preterite forms, and the stem *ims-* appears elsewhere. The endings of the intransitive and transitive paradigms are also shown diagrammatically in Tables 1 and 2.