

Convergences in Khumi and Marma morphosyntax

Rikker Dockum, *Dartmouth College*
rikker.dockum@dartmouth.edu

It is widely recognized that Marma and other varieties of Arakanese exert strong lexical borrowing pressure on varieties of Khumi spoken in southeastern Bangladesh and Burma. However, little attention has been devoted to the influence of Marma on Khumi morphosyntax. This talk, based on materials for Marma and Khumi collected from speakers of both languages in Bangladesh, will focus on such morphosyntactic convergences.

Some of the most salient convergences the talk will consider include:

Nominative-accusative case marking: basic clausal relations in Khumi and their similarity to those of Marma are striking given the overwhelming predominance of ergative case-marking in Kuki-Chin languages

Topic marker: like Marma, Khumi makes use of a topic marker in addition to its general nominative accusative system; other KC languages typically have deictic elements which have comparable functions, but Khumi makes use of these apparently for more purely spatial designation, with a dedicated topic marker comparable to that of Marma.

khaa subordinate construction: one of the most frequent subordinate clause constructions (specifying a sort of temporal converbial or 'when' clause) appears to be straightforwardly relatable to a similar high-frequency construction in Marma.

maa locative/ablative marker: has no clear cognates in other KC languages, comparable to a high-frequency *maa* locative marker in Marma.

Individually, these convergences do not seem that extreme. Khumi is clearly a member of the Kuki-Chin subgroup, as demonstrated by diagnostic sound changes, reflexes of a once presumably productive system of verbal stem alternation like that seen in other languages of the subgroup, and a system of prefixal verbal participant coding reminiscent of that seen elsewhere in closely related languages. However, taken together, these convergences with Marma result in a Kuki-Chin language with a highly divergent structure from the rest of the family.