Relativization in Kurtoep:
Preliminary Notes

Christopher Doty
University of Oregon
cdoty@uoregon.edu

The current work seeks to add to the literature on Tibeto-Burman relative clauses by providing a preliminary overview of the structure and function of relativization in Kurtoep, a language of the East Bodish branch of the Bodic group, spoken by about 10,000 people in the Lhuntshi (Lhuntse) province of Bhutan.

Kurtoep relative clause structures and relativizing morphemes are clearly cognate with other languages of the family, and as in many other languages, the morphemes can also be used to form more general nominalizations. The Kurtoep relative clause system has expanded the relativizer and nominalizer *khan*—cognate with Lhasa Tibetan *mkhan*, which in that language is used only to mark agents—to function with heads which are co-referential with subjects, objects, locations, instruments and recipients. Examples of subject and object relative clauses are given below.

(1) mi   wo   [kó   phí   -khan] khépo
     man   DEM   door   open   REL   TOP
     'that man who is opening/opened the door'

(2) táa   [mi   -i   sút   -khan] khépo
     tiger man   ERG   kill   REL   TOP
     'the tiger that the man killed/is killing'

However, we can still see traces of the previously more complex system. One additional relativizing morpheme, *sa*—cognate with Lhasa Tibetan *sa*, used as a locative relativizer—has survived the simplification of the system to some extent, and is still used in Kurtoep to mark locative relative clauses. In all of these situations, however, *sa* can alternate freely with *khan*.

In addition, Kurtoep preserves some semblance of an aspect distinction found in Classical Tibetan relative clauses, which had distinct perfect, imperfect and future forms. The perfect and imperfect clauses have merged in Kurtoep, as shown in (1) and (2) above, with the future clauses having a distinct structure: the lexical verb is marked for the future while a second verb, *ngak*, 'do' carries the relativizing morpheme. The future relative clause structure in Kurtoep is clearly an innovation, however, and not a preservation of the older system, as can be seen by comparing the main clause in (3) with the relative clause in (4), below.

(3) nga   -i   table   chó   -male
     table 1SG   ERG   make   FUT
     'I will make a table'

(4) table [nga   -i   chó   -male nga   -khan] khépo
     table 1SG   ERG   make   FUT   do   REL   TOP
     'The table that I will make'