

Morphological complexity and hierarchical agreement in Anal (Tibeto-Burman, Manipur, India)

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The Kuki-Chin branch of Tibeto-Burman languages, spoken on both sides of the Indo-Myanmar border, has been recently discussed in the literature in the context of morphological complexity and hierarchical agreement (DeLancey 2013, 2015). Many of these languages have remarkably elaborate systems of verbal argument indexation, and especially *hierarchical alignment*, whereby the verbal forms mark only Speech Acts Participants (SAP) and ignore third person referents (“SAP>3”-hierarchy). If the SAP has the patient-like role against the presumable hierarchy, disambiguation of the semantic roles is performed by an ‘inverse’ marker. Moreover, one of the functional proposals for the development of such a system is sociopragmatic effects of the importance of SAP in discourse. An additional support for this view comes from the variety of diachronic sources for frequently irregular SAP markers in ‘local’ scenarios (1-person > 2-person or vice versa) that involve avoidance/politeness strategies: SAP singular forms in Kuki-Chin are often traced to originally 1-person inclusive forms or impersonal constructions. This study presents new data for this phenomenon from an undocumented endangered language Anal, spoken in Manipur (India).

Transitive paradigms show both the archaic suffixal person marking, traced to Proto-Tibeto-Burman, and the prefixal indexes, traced to Proto-Kuki-Chin innovation of nominalising constructions. Some of the tenses have hierarchical alignment with prefixal SAP marking only in SAP:Patient-forms, and the archaic suffixes marking SAP:Agents in 3:Patient-forms (1). However, most of the tenses use a purely prefixal paradigm, while the peculiar inverse marker is the vowel length of the prefixal person index (2). ‘Local’ SAP-scenarios have double indexation (thus, there is no straightforward hierarchy between the SAP’s), whereby the P-argument is marked by the prefixal index, and the A-argument is indexed by a suffixal form (3). In addition, SAP-forms present another complexity: in some paradigms these forms lose the indexing suffixes, leaving behind a trace of vowel length and a rising tone on the stem (4). These verbal paradigms offer previously undocumented scenarios of morphological complexity and hierarchical alignment, contributing to the typology of hierarchical systems and suggesting a possibility of diachronic expansion of the relevant markers across paradigms (cf. the archaic Tibeto-Burman suffix in (1a) vs. the innovative Kuki-Chin prefix (2a)).

Finally, personal prefixes suggest intriguing scenarios of relation between sociopragmatic effects and the development of SAP markers. Prefixal person-markers in Anal verbs are cognates with other Kuki-Chin prefixal indexing forms, reconstructed to Proto-Kuki-Chin (VanBik 2009) (Table 1) (noticeably, the 1 inclusive dual/plural forms show a remarkable variability across the branch, suggesting diverse sources with different sociopragmatic scenarios).

	Proto-Kuki-	Anal
1	*ka	ka
1DL	?	na
2	*na	a
3	*a	va

Table 1

However, except of the first person prefix *ka-*, the parallel Anal forms have a different indexation compared to the proto-forms: *na-* – 1DL.INCL; *a-* – 2; and innovative *va-* – 3. This suggests a development of *na-* as ‘*2 > 1DL.INCL’ (opposite to the development of ‘plural/dual inclusive > SAP singular’, found in other Kuki-Chin languages (DeLancey 2013)) and of *a-* ‘*3 > 2’. Both scenarios appear to be related to politeness/avoidance strategies.

Examples

(a)	(b)
(1) <i>tʰiː-siː -nú</i> see-1DL-PAST ‘We (both) saw him.’	<i>nàː-tʰiː nú</i> 1DL/INV-see-PAST ‘He saw us (both).’
(2) <i>nàː-tʰiː vəl</i> 1DL.INCL-see-PERF ‘We (both) have seen him’	<i>nàː-tʰiː vəl</i> 1DL.INCL/INV-see-PERF ‘He has seen us (both)’
(3) <i>kaː-tʰiː-vəl-tiː</i> 1/INV-see-PERF-2 ‘You see me.’	<i>àː-tʰiː-vəl-niː</i> 2/INV-see-PERF-1 ‘I see you.’
(4) <i>àː-tʰiː-nú</i> 2/INV-see/1-PAST ‘I saw you.’	<i>àː-tʰiː nú</i> 2/INV-see-PAST ‘He saw you.’

References

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