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The Syntax of Agreement in Khasi

George Bedell, Ph. D.

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The examples in this paper illustrate subject-verb agreement in Khasi, a Mon-Khmer language primarily spoken in eastern Meghalaya State, Northeast India. They are taken from *Ka Khubor jong ka Jingieit* (2000), and given in the orthography used there, unless otherwise noted. The numbers indicate chapter and verse in *Ka Gospel U Mathias* (The Gospel According to Matthew). Although the edition cited is recent, the translation was done from the Authorized (King James) English version, sometime in the nineteenth century. Thus the Khasi investigated here differs from Khasi as either spoken or written at the present time. It is difficult for some modern Khasis to fully understand, but it remains in common use. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the third conference of the Northeast Indian Linguistic Society (NEILS), hosted by Gauhati University, Guwahati, January 2008.

Articles and Agreement. Verbs in Khasi show agreement with their subjects, as illustrated in (1) and (2).

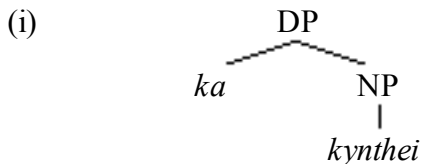
(1) *kata ka kynthei te ka la khiah naduh kata ka por*
3SF=that 3SF woman and 3SF PAST healed from 3SF=that 3SF time
'and that woman was healed from that time' (9:22)

(2) *uta u khynnah u la khiah naduh kata ka por*
3SM=that 3SM child 3SM PAST healed from 3SF=that 3SF time
'that boy was healed from that time' (17:18)

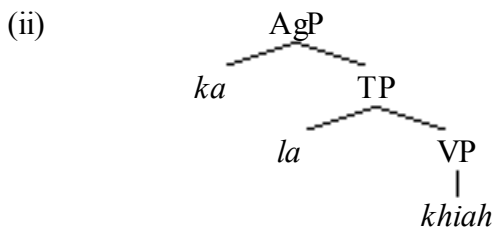
In (1), the underlined *ka* marks agreement of the verb *khiah* 'be healed' with its subject *kata ka kynthei* 'that woman'. The subject is third person singular feminine, which is also marked by the *ka* di-

rectly preceding the head noun *kynthei* 'woman'. The remaining *ka* marks the head noun *por* 'time' also as third person singular feminine. In (2), the subject *uta u khynnah* 'that boy' is third person singular masculine, and thus the first *ka* in (1) is replaced by *u*, the corresponding masculine marker. The underlined *ka* in (1) is also replaced by *u*, marking agreement with the subject. The variation between the demonstrative modifiers *kata* in (1) and *uta* in (2) is a related kind of agreement.

Following the literature, the markers *ka* and *u* when preceding a noun in (1) and (2) are referred to as 'articles', even though they differ from what are called articles in most European languages in not providing information about definiteness, but only gender and number. Articles in Khasi belong to a syntactic category D, and take a complement noun phrase (NP) as shown in (i).



What are referred to here as the 'agreement markers' *ka* and *u*, underlined in (1) and (2), are located before the verb, but possibly separated from it by other verbal markers (for example the past tense marker *la* in (1) and (2)). Agreement markers in Khasi belong to a syntactic category Ag, and take a complement tense phrase (TP) as shown in (ii).

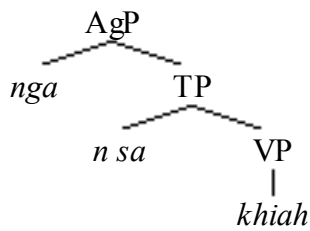


Pronouns. Sentence (3) differs from (1) and (2) in two respects. First it is future tense rather than past; *n sa* marks the proximate future with the *n* suffixed to *nga*. *Nga* belongs to the same class of Khasi particle as *ka* and *u*, marking agreement between the verb *khiah* and a first person singular subject.

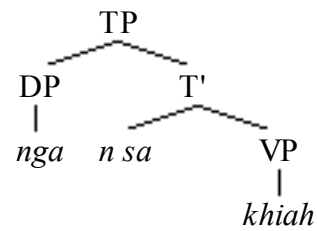
- (3) *ngan sa khiah*
 1S=FUT PROX healed
 'I will be healed.' (9:21)

The second difference is that in (3), if *nga* is an agreement marker, no first person singular subject appears. It is often assumed (see Appendix I for references) that *nga* in such a sentence is a pronoun and the subject. If that were so, sentences like (3) would lack subject agreement. The primary claim of this paper is that this *nga* is a subject agreement marker and that it need not co-occur with any overt subject. The structure of (3) will thus be (iii) and not (iii').

(iii)



(iii')



The verb *khiah* 'be healed' in (1), (2) and (3) is intransitive, taking only a subject argument. The related causative verb *pynkhiah* 'heal' is transitive, taking an object argument as well as a subject.

(4) *ka jinggeit jong pha ka la pynkhiah ia pha*
 3SF faith of youSF 3SF PAST heal OBJ youSF
 'Your faith has healed you.' (9:22)

(5) *u da pynkhiah ia ka jingpang baroh*
 3SM SUBJ heal OBJ 3SF disease all
 'for him to heal every disease' (9:35)

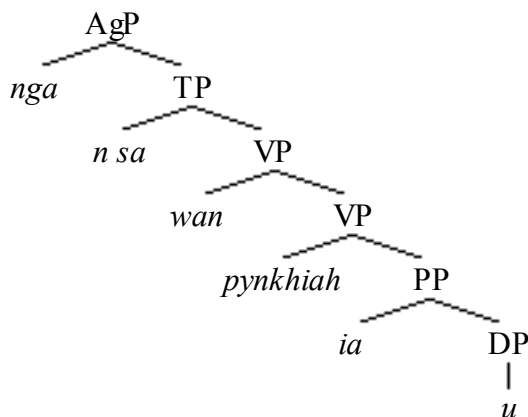
In (4) the subject is *ka jinggeit jong pha* 'your faith', marked as third person singular feminine by *ka*, both article and subject agreement. In (5) the object is *ka jingpang baroh* 'every disease', also marked as third person singular feminine by the article *ka*. An object in Khasi is marked by the preposition *ia*. In (4) the object is *pha* 'you (singular feminine)', which also occurs in the genitive *jong pha* 'your (singular feminine)'. *Pha* belongs to the same class of Khasi particle as *ka*, *u* and *nga*. Here it can be neither an article nor an agreement marker; it is a pronoun since it occupies a noun phrase position.

Sentence (6) is to be compared with (3).

(6) *ngan sa wan pynkhiah ia u*
 1S=FUT PROX come heal OBJ him
 'I will come and heal him.' (8: 7)

We take the structure of (6) to be as in (vi). Just as in (3), *nga* in (6) is an agreement marker and not a pronoun subject. However *u* 'him' is the object of *pynkhiah* and this *u* is a pronoun.

(vi)



The Khasi particles which behave like *ka*, *u*, *nga* and *pha* are displayed in (7), a total of nine.

(7)		sg	pl
	1st	<i>nga</i>	<i>ngi</i>
	2nd	masc <i>me</i>	<i>phi</i>
		fem <i>pha</i>	
	3rd	masc <i>u</i>	<i>ki</i>
		fem <i>ka</i>	
		dim <i>i</i>	

We will refer to these as 'pronominal clitics'. They may serve as pronouns, articles or agreement markers as illustrated in (1) through (6). The only restriction is that first or second person clitics do not appear as articles. This is because articles must be followed by a noun, and all Khasi nouns are third person. Pronouns can be regarded as a special case of articles which lack a noun complement, as *u* in (vi) above. In our examples, Khasi pronouns are glossed with English pronouns: 'I', 'you', 'he' ..., while Khasi articles or agreement markers are glossed with their lexical properties: '1S', '2PL', '3SF' For a similar analysis of the relation between English pronouns and articles, see Postal (1966).

Doubled Clitics. In addition to single pronominal clitics showing subject agreement as in (3), (5) and (6), Khasi has clauses in which two identical clitics appear.

(8) *ka khuri na kaba nga nga sa dih*
 3SF cup from 3SF=which I 1S FUT drink
 'the cup which I will drink from' (20:22)

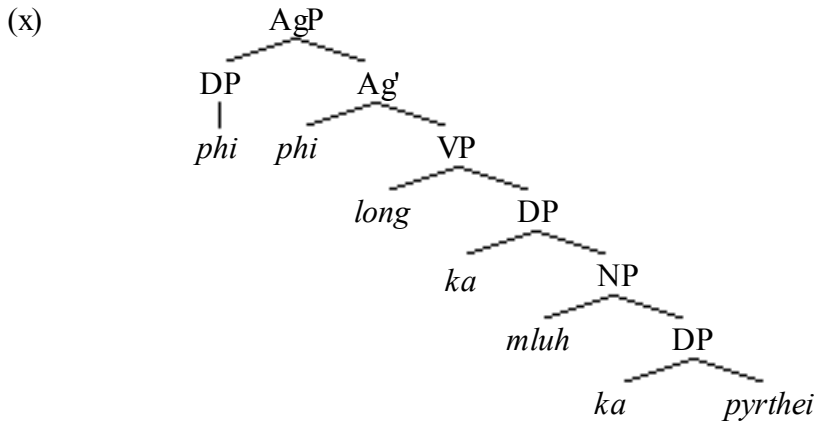
(9) *ngi ngim shym la beh noh ia ki ksuid ha ka kyrteng jong me?*
 we 1PL=NEG NEG PAST expel away OBJ3pl demon in 3SF name of youSM
 'didn't we cast out demons in your name? (7:22)

(10) *phi phi long ka mluh ka pyrthei*
 youPL 2PL be 3SF salt 3SF world
 'you are the salt of the earth' (5:13)

(11) *hynrei ba u un shakri*
 but that he 3SM=FUT serve
 'but for him to serve' (20:28)

(12) *hynrei ki kim da suid ñiew*
 but they 3PL=NEG SUBJ demon count
 'but they did not care' (22: 5)

These reiterated pronominal clitics appear only as subject, so it is reasonable to assume that the first of the two is a pronoun in the subject position while the second is the corresponding subject agreement marker. That is, the structure of (10) is something like (x).



As shown in (x), the subject position is a DP (noun phrase); when a pronominal clitic appears there, it is a pronoun and might be replaced by a full noun phrase as in (1), (2) or (4). The agreement position by contrast is the head of AgP (agreement phrase), and can only be filled by an Ag, that is, by a pronominal clitic.

Ma Pronouns. Aside from the use of pronominal clitics as pronouns, Khasi has an additional set of pronouns formed by prefixing *ma* to a pronominal clitic, as displayed in (13). In *Ka Khubor jong ka Jingieit* (2000), these pronouns are written as two words without hyphen.

(13)		sg	pl
	1st	ma-nga	ma-ngi
	2nd	masc ma-me	ma-phi
		fem ma-pha	
	3rd	masc ma-u	ma-ki
		fem ma-ka	
		dim ma-i	

As illustrated in (14) to (19), these pronouns do not seem to appear with prepositions. They occur in imperative sentences like (14) and (15) emphasizing the subject, though such sentences often do not show subject agreement.

(14) *kumta to leh ma-phi ruh ha ki*
 that-way IMP do youPL also to them
 'you do that way also to them' (7:12)

(15) *kumjuh ma-phi ruh, haba phin iohi ia kine kiei-kiei baroh,*
 likewise youPL also when 2PL-FUT see OBJ 3PL=these 3PL=what all
to tip ba ka long hajan, ha ki jingkhang
 IMP know that 3SFbe near at 3PL door
 'likewise you too, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors'
 (24:33)

They also appear as complements in equational sentences like (16) and (17), where again no subject agreement is necessary.

(16) *ia uba ngan doh, uta long ma-u*
OBJ 3SM=who 1S=FUT kiss 3SM=that be him
'the one I kiss, that is him' (26:48)

(17) *naba ym dei ma-phi kiba kren*
because NEG be youPL who3P speak
'because it is not you who speak' (10:20)

They also appear emphasizing ordinary subjects as in (18) or as bare pronouns as in (19).

(18) *pynban ym kumba nga mon ma-nga hynrei tang kumba me mon*
nevertheless NEG as 1S wish me but only as 2SM wish
'nevertheless, not as I wish, but only as you wish' (26:39)

(19) *ma-nga, ko Trai?*
Me o lord
'(is it) me, Lord?' (26:22)

Yet, with the possible exception of (15), these pronouns do not appear in subject position.

Te. (20) to (24) differ from (8) to (12) in that the word *te* intervenes between the subject pronoun and the subject agreement marker. *Te* is a conjunction which can be equivalent to English 'and' or 'but'. It may occur at the beginning of a clause, but is often found following the subject.

(20) *nga te ngan ym thut lano-lano ruh*
I and 1S=FUTNEG forsake ever even
'but I will never forsake (you)' (26:33)

(21) *phi te phi ong ba nga long uei?*
youPL and 2PL say that 1S be 3SM=who
'and who do you say that I am?' (16:15)

(22) *u te u la iathuh ha ki*
he and 3SM PAST tell to them
'and he said to them' (13:28)

(23) *ka te ka la iathuh*
she and 3SF PAST tell
'and she said' (15:27)

(24) *ki te kim treh ban wan*
they and 3PL=NEG consent that=FUT come
'but they would not come' (22: 3)

An example of *te* following a non-pronominal subject appears in (1) above, and an example of clause-initial *te* appears as (36) below. *Te* may not appear following the subject agreement marker.

(22') **(u) u te la iathuh ha ki*

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Ruh. (25) to (29) similarly differ from (8) to (12) in that the word *ruh* intervenes between the subject pronoun and the subject agreement marker. *Ruh* is an adverb which can be equivalent to English 'also' or 'even'. It follows a noun phrase (DP) or occasionally other types of phrases.

- (25) *lada nga ruh nga beh noh ia ki ksuid da u Belsebul*
 if I also 1S expel away OBJ 3PL demon by 3SM Beelzebub
 'if I cast out demons by Beelzebub' (12:27)
- (26) *kam dei ba me ruh men isynei ia u para shakri jong*
 3SF-NEG proper that youSM also 2SM-FUT have-mercy OBJ 3SM fellow servant of
me?
 youSM
 'shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant?' (18:33)
- (27) *phi ruh phin shong ha ki khadar ki khet*
 youPL also 2PL-FUT sit on 3PL twelve 3PL throne
 'you will sit on twelve thrones' (19:28)
- (28) *u ruh u la mih noh na u*
 he also 3SM PAST rise away from him
 'he came out of him' (17:18)
- (29) *ka ruh ka la leit lam ha ka kmie jong ka*
 she also 3SF PAST go bring to 3SF mother of her
 'she brought it to her mother' (14:11)

Ruh may not appear following the subject agreement marker.

- (27') **(phi) phi ruh yn shong ha ki khadar ki khet*

Baroh. (30) and (31) similarly differ from (8) to (12) in that the word *baroh* intervenes between the subject pronoun and the subject agreement marker. *Baroh* is an adverb which can be equivalent to English 'all'. It follows a plural noun phrase (DP).

- (30) *phi baroh phin thut na nga ha kane ka miet*
 youPL all 2PL-FUT forsake from me on 3SF=this 3SF night
 'you will all forsake me tonight' (26:31)
- (31) *lada ki baroh kin thut na me*
 if they all 3PL=FUT forsake from youSM
 'if they all forsake you' (26:33)

Baroh too may not appear following the subject agreement marker.

- (30') **(phi) phi baroh yn thut na nga ha kane ka miet*

Other Phrases. (32) to (36) are additional examples in which various types of phrases are found between a pronominal clitic serving as a subject pronoun and another marking agreement with that subject. In (32) and (33), this phrase is an adverb or adverbial prepositional phrase.

(32) *phi ruh katta phim pat sngewthuh?*
 youPL also so much 2PL=NEG again understand
 'and do you still not understand?' (15:16)

(33) *kumta phi ruh, na shabar phi pynpaw kum kiba hok ha ki briew*
 that=way youPL also on outside 2PL appear as ones righteous to 3PL people
 'so on the outside you appear righteous to people' (23:28)

In (34), it is a vocative noun phrase (DP).

(34) *pha ruh ka Bethlehem, ka ri Judia, pham long iba*
 youSF also 3SF Bethlehem 3SF land Judah 2SF=NEG be DIM=which
rit tam hapdeng ki syiem Judia
 small most among 3PL king Judah
 'and you, Bethlehem, of the land of Judah, are not least among the kings of Judah' (2: 6)

In (35), it is an adverbial clause.

(35) *ka ruh, haba ka la suh buit ka kmie jong ka, ka la ong*
 she also as 3SF PAST make plot 3SF mother of her 3SF PAST say
 'as her mother had plotted, she said' (14: 8)

And in (36), it is a modifier of *baroh*.

(36) *te ki baroh arngut kin ialong kawei ka doh*
 and they all two=people 3PL=FUT become 3SF=one 3SF flesh
 'and the two of them will become one flesh' (19: 5)

None of these phrases could intervene between a subject agreement marker and the verb it marks.

Conclusion. We see in (20) through (36) a number of words or phrases which can follow the subject of a clause, including pronominal clitics serving as subject pronouns, but cannot follow pronominal clitics serving as subject agreement markers. In clauses like (3), (5) and (6), in which a single pronominal clitic precedes the verb, the clitic and the verb cannot be separated by such words or phrases (and such clauses are far more numerous than those like (20) to (36)). This shows quite clearly that the single clitics in clauses like (3), (5) and (6) are not serving as subjects, but rather as subject agreement markers, as shown in (iii) above. Agreement markers can be separated from the verb they mark by a small number of words and suffixes, including the tense markers *la* and *n (sa)*, the mood marker *da*, and the negative marker *m (shym)*. Together with the subject agreement clitics, these words and suffixes form a set of verbal markers which precede the verb and are strictly ordered among themselves. The agreement clitic (if present) is the first of these markers.

It follows that in clauses like (3), (5) and (6) there is no overt subject noun phrase (DP). This is a common pattern in languages with agreement: when agreement adequately identifies the phrase agreed with (in Khasi, always the subject) then there need be no overt realization of that phrase.

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Subject agreement is not found in every Khasi clause; it was noted above that it is not always found in imperatives or equational clauses. Still, subject agreement in Khasi is much more regular and obligatory than the use of pronoun subjects. The alternative analysis, to regard single preverbal pronominal clitics as pronoun subjects, as shown in (iii) above, would entail that such clauses lack subject agreement, something rarely if ever seen in other languages. Not only is this analysis precluded by the distributional facts given above, but it renders Khasi an exception to the usual organization of agreement. Our analysis avoids this result, but Khasi remains unusual in that its agreement markers are duplicates of its pronouns and articles.

The unity of the Khasi pronominal clitics as given in (7) lies in the association of phonological form and lexical properties: person, number and gender. 'Lexical' could be replaced by 'semantic' but for gender, which is partly semantic (as in *ka kynthei* 'woman' in (1) or *u khynnah* 'boy' in (2)), but also partly grammatical (as in *ka por* 'time' in (1) and (2), or *ka jingpang* 'disease' in (5)). Notions like 'article', 'agreement marker' and 'pronoun' are not semantic (or lexical) but rather syntactic (or possibly morphological). Confusion about how to apply these notions to the Khasi pronominal clitics is rooted in confusion between semantic (or lexical) structure and morphosyntactic structure, which need not always be parallel. The erroneous idea that single preverbal pronominal clitics are pronouns rather than agreement markers may reflect the salience of pronouns as a morphosyntactic category (all languages have pronouns, but not all have agreement), or possibly the influence of English and English grammar.

Appendix I

Roberts (1891) calls the words in (7) 'personal pronouns'. He also says: 'There are four articles in Khassi': §15 (p. 9) and 'the third personal pronoun is the article *u*, *ka*, *ki*, used alone': §48 (p. 40). 'The article is therefore *generally* used before the nominative, and again repeated before the verb': §107 (p. 132). 'When the articles *u*, *ka* and *ki* are used alone in a sentence, they are strictly personal pronouns': §173 (p. 160).

Rabel (1961) also calls the words in (7) 'personal pronouns'. 'Personal pronouns occur in all places where nouns occur (subject and object positions) and they precede almost every verbal construction, regardless of the presence or absence of a subject expressed by a nominal': 241 (p. 66). 'The gender article which precedes almost all nouns is identical with the forms of the third person personal pronoun: 242 (p. 66).

Nagaraja (1995) also seems to regard the words in (7) as personal pronouns. 'Khasi (Standard) has a feature of concordial agreement, in that the pronominal marker which occurs in the subject (NP) gets repeated in the verb (VP). Here the pronominal agreement marker occurs preceding the nominal elements; and in the verbal part these agreement markers occur preceding the verbal elements. In this language the pronominal markers are nothing but the third person personal pronouns': (p. 271).

B. War (2007) calls the words in (7) '(pronominal) clitics', 'that are sometimes referential pronouns with argument functions and sometimes have purely grammatical functions.' (p. 1) 'It is important to note here that the third person clitics also occur pre-nominally as articles, pre-verbally ... as agreement markers': (p. 1)

Appendix II

It was suggested following the presentation of this paper at NEILS 3, and independently following a subsequent presentation at Payap University, that our assumption that the first of two identical pronominal clitics in examples like (8) to (12) occupies the subject position of the clause whose verb agrees with it is weak. In particular it could be a kind of topic and the second clitic an anaphoric pronoun bound by that topic. That is, an example like (10) ought to be glossed, 'you, you are the salt of the earth'. There are several serious problems with this proposal.

First, the phenomenon is not restricted to main clauses; an example like (8) could hardly be glossed *'the cup which me, I will drink from'. Second, while there is a consistent contrastive context in (8) to (12), so that for example (8) implies 'me (and not others)', there is no clear sense of topic, and no reason to think that topics occupy a distinct syntactic position in Khasi. Third, a topic interpretation can clearly not be extended to the examples in (20) to (36). The subject pronominal clitics appear in these examples for syntactic rather than semantic reasons. There is no reason to analyze them as superordinate to the clause containing the agreeing verb.

The primary claim of this paper is that single pronominal clitics like those in examples (3), (5) and (6) are dependent on the verb and morphosyntactically equivalent to those clitics with an overt preceding noun phrase subject as in (1), (2) or (4), regardless of person, gender or number. Exactly what the semantic or pragmatic status of these 'agreement markers' is does not really affect this claim, though it may ameliorate some of our criticism of more traditional analyses.

Abbreviations

1S	first person singular
1PL	first person plural
2SM	second person masculine singular
2SF	second person feminine singular
2PL	second person plural
3SM	third person masculine singular
3SF	third person feminine singular
3PL	third person plural
DIM	diminutive
FUT	future
IMP	imperative
NEG	negative
OBJ	object
PROX	proximate
SUBJ	subjunctive
youSM	you (singular masculine)
youSF	you (singular feminine)
youPL	you (plural)

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