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A Comparative Analysis of Pronominal Systems in War Khasi and War Jaiñtia: Varieties of Khasi

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative study of the pronominal systems in War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, two varieties of the Khasi language spoken in the War district of Meghalaya, India. The study aims to investigate the similarities and differences between the pronominal systems of the two varieties. We analyse the pronominal markers used in War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, their distribution across different sentence types and positions, and their pragmatic functions. Our findings reveal that War Khasi and War Jaiñtia share common pronominal features and can also function as subject clitics in addition to strong pronouns. Pronouns that occur in the object position are pure strong pronominals. When functioning as subject clitics, they are hosted by categories such as verbs and adjectives. Personal pronoun particles have significant grammatical roles and form a limited set of elements. These particles have syntactic functions as Person, Number, and Gender Agreement Markers (PNG Ag.) for agreement and concord in a sentence. There are also important differences, such as the use of different reflexive and reciprocal markers and varying pronominal forms across different sentence types. The implications of this study are: first, it contributes to the understanding of the pronominal systems of Khasi and related languages; and second, it has practical implications for language documentation and preservation efforts in the region. By highlighting the specific features and variations in the pronominal systems of War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, our research can inform language teaching and learning strategies and support efforts to maintain linguistic diversity in the region.

Keywords: Khasi, War-Khasi, War-Jaiñtia, comparative study, pronominals, pragmatic functions.

1. Introduction

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The Khasi language family, spoken in the northeast region of India, comprises of several closely related varieties with subtle variations in their linguistic systems. Two such varieties are War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, which are spoken in the East Khasi Hills district and the Jaiñtia district of Meghalaya. Although these varieties are related, they differ in terms of their pronominal systems. Pronominals, which include personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and others, play a crucial role in communication and help in conveying information about the subject and object of a sentence, gender, number, and other grammatical features.

In this comparative study, we examine the pronominal systems of War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, exploring their similarities and differences. Our research is motivated by the need to better understand the linguistic diversity and variation in the Khasi language family, and to shed light on the factors that shape pronominal systems in these varieties. Specifically, we analyse the pronominal markers used in these varieties, their distribution across different sentence types and positions, and their pragmatic functions. By comparing the pronominal systems of War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, we aim to contribute to the broader understanding of linguistic variation and change in Khasi and other related languages.

Our study builds on previous research on the Khasi language family, while also offering new insights into the specific pronominal systems of War Khasi and War Jaiñtia. Overall, our research aims to contribute to the understanding of pronominal systems in Khasi and related languages, as well as the broader study of linguistic variation and change.

2. Area of Study

In this study, we investigate two varieties of the Khasi language: War-Khasi, which comprises Mawlong and Umñiuh, and War-Jaiñtia, which includes Lamin and Trangblang. Mawlong is spoken in Mawlong village, which is found in the Shella Bholaganj Tehsil of the East Khasi Hills district near the Bangladesh border. The village is about 30 km away from the Shella Bholaganj sub-district headquarters and 83 km from the district headquarters in Shillong. Meanwhile, Umñiuh is spoken in Umñiuh-Tmar village, located in the Pynursla Tehsil of the East Khasi Hills district in Meghalaya, India. The village is approximately 31 km away from the Pynursla sub-district headquarters and 80 km from the Shillong district headquarters.

Moving on to the War-Jaiñtia language varieties, Lamin is spoken in Lamin village, which is situated in the Amlarem Block of the Jaiñtia Hills District. The village is approximately 24 km south of the district headquarters in Jowai and 44 km from the state capital, Shillong. It is worth noting that in this study, we will refer to Trangblang as it is known by the native speakers, instead of Tremblang, which is the name given to it in Daladier's (2007) classification of the War sub-dialect groups. Trangblang is spoken in Trangblang village, located in the Amlarem of Jaiñtia Hills District, approximately 25 km south of the district headquarters Jowai and 46 km from the state capital Shillong.

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Fig. 1: Map of Meghalaya showing War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia¹

3. Analysis

In this section, we will examine the different functions of pronominals in War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia to understand the grammatical structure of these varieties. According to Lyngdoh (2017), Khasi agreement markers not only serve as strong pronouns, but also function as subject clitics. Pronouns that appear in object position are considered pure, strong pronominals. When used as subject clitics, they are hosted by categories such as verbs and adjectives. Similarly, the personal pronouns of War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia play significant grammatical roles and comprise a limited set of elements. These particles have syntactic functions as Person, Number, and Gender Agreement Markers (PNG Ag.) to facilitate agreement and concord in a sentence. Additionally, Nagaraja (1985) refers to them as "pronominal markers."

3.1 Personal Pronouns of War-Khasi

Table 1 below shows the comparative list of the pronominal system in War-Khasi varieties.

Personal Pronouns of War- Khasi

Mawlong Variety (MV) Umñiuh-Tmar Variety (UV) Singular Plural Singular Plural Person 1st i 'we' i 'we' na T' na T' Person 2nd phi 'you/formal' phi 'you/formal' Person phi ro?maiñ phi baro? me 'you/M/informal' 'you/M/informal' 'you all' 'you all' pha 'you/F /informal' pha 'you/F /informal' 3rd 'Masculine' 'Masculine' 11 Person 'Feminine' ki 'they' 'Feminine' ki 'they' ni 'Honorific/Neuter 'Honorific/Neuter'

Table 1

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¹ Map from Reddy, B. M. et al. (2007). Austro- Asiatic tribes of Northeast India provide hitherto missing genetic link between South and Southeast Asia.

3.1.1 Personal Pronouns of War-Khasi in Sentences

In War-Khasi, in both MV and UV, the personal pronouns are distinguished for person, number and gender and are found to occur in the final position of the phrase following the head noun as exemplified in the following sentences 1(a) through 7(a).

War-Khasi

MV

- 1. (a) doN sa jia Na PROG eat rice 1SG 'I am eating food (rice)'
- 2. (a) doN sa jia i
 PROG eat rice 1PL
 'We are eating food (rice)'
- 3. (a) doN sa jia **pHi**PROG eat rice 2SG
 'You are eating food (rice)'

UV

- (b) doN bam ja Na PROG eat rice 1SG 'I am eating food (rice)'
- (b) doN bam ja **i**PROG eat rice 1PL
 'We are eating food (rice)'
- (b) doN bam ja **pHi**PROG eat rice 2SG
 'You are eating food (rice)'
- 4. (a) **pHi ro?mai**ñ hap boN ya lai pHi (b) **pHi baro**? hap ya le luit **pHi** 2PL everyone must INF CEM² go 2SG 2PL everyone must CEM go all 2PL 'You all must go' 'You all must go'
- 5. (a) sa jia **u**eat rice 3SG
 'He eats food (rice)'
- 6. (a) sa jia **ka**eat rice 3SG
 'She eats food (rice)'
- 7. (a) doN sa jia **ki**PROG eat rice 3PL
 'They are eating food (rice)'

- (b) bam ja **u**eat rice 3SG
 'He eats food (rice)'
- (b) bam ja **ka**eat rice 3SG

 'She eats food (rice)'
- (b) doN ya bam ja **ki**PROG CEM eat rice 3PL
 'They are eating food (rice)'

Sentences (8) and (9) below show the distinction where the verbal agreements are derived from personal pronouns, where in sentences 8(a) and (b) below /u/ operates as the agreement marker and /ka/ as the pronoun, and in sentences 9(a) and (b) below /ka/ operates as the agreement marker and /u/ as the pronoun, respectively. It can also be observed the verb 'sit' is expressed by the form $/\Sigma$ uoN/ in MV, whereas by $/\Sigma$ oN/ in UV. Also, the Dative and

² 'Collaborative effort marker' is used to achieve a common objective. (See Subbarao, 2012)

the Accusative Case marker is represented by /ya?/ in MV, whereas, by /ha/ in UV as seen below.

War-Khasi

MV

- (a) u lam pha? ΣuoN u ya? ka
 3SM Lam ask sit 3SM DAT her
 'Lam asked her to sit'
- 9. (a) **ka** mary eid **ka** ya? **u**3SF Mary love 3SF ACC him
 'Mary loves him'

UV

- (b) **u** lam pha? ΣoN **u** ha **ka** 3SM Lam ask sit 3SM DAT her 'Lam asked her to sit'
- (b) **ka** mary eid **ka** ha **u**3SF Mary love 3SF ACC him
 'Mary loves him'

3.2 Personal Pronouns of War-Jaiñtia

Table 2 below shows the comparative list of the pronominal system in War-Jaiñtia varieties.

Personal Pronouns of War- Jaiñtia

	Lamin Variety (LV)				Trangblang Variety (TV)		
Person	Singular		Plural		Singular		Plural
1 st Person	pre-verbal post-verbal		iye 'we'		pre- verbal	post- verbal	ei 'we'
	nie 'I'	ŋe/o 'I'			nio T,	o T	1
2 nd Person	ei 'formal'		pre- verbal	post- verbal	pi 'formal' em 'you/M/informal' p		pi bero?
	pre-verbal iyam 'you/M', yahə: 'you/F'	post-verbal im 'you/M' hiya 'you/F'	iyehi bero? 'you all'	hi 'you'	po <i>'you</i> /	F /informal'	'you all'
3 rd Person	u 'Masculine' ke 'Feminine' i 'Honorific/neuter'		i 'ti	hey'	ko <i>'Fe</i>	asculine' minine' rific/Neuter'	ki 'they'

Table 2

3.2.1 To Account for the Phonological Changes of Agreement in the Syntax of the War-Jaiñtia Varieties

The effect on the interface between Phonology and Syntax in Agreement of the War-Jaiñtia varieties is evident in the alternations of the pre- and post-verbal elements in both LV and TV. This phonological alternation is conditioned by the syntax and not by the phonological environment of the language. In LV, the phonological alternations are exhibited in the First Person Singular pre and post-verbal /nie/ and /Ne/, the Second Person Singular pre and post-verbal Masculine /iyam/ and /im/ and the Second Person Singular pre and post-verbal Feminine /yah \iff \text{:/} and /hiya/, whereas, in TV, the phonological alternations is

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exhibited only in the First Person Singular pre and post-verbal /nio/ and /o/ as shown in the table 3 below. This phenomenon, however, is absent in both the varieties of War-Khasi, i.e. MV and UV.

	LV		TV	
	Pre-verbal	Post-verbal	Pre-verbal	Post-verbal
First Person Singular	/nie/	/Ne/	/nio/	/o/
Second Person Singular/M	/iyam/	/im/	-	-
Second Person Singular/F	/yah ↔ :/	/hiya/	-	-

Table 3

3.2.2 Personal Pronouns of War-Jaiñtia in Sentences

same sentence as exemplified in 11(a) and (b).

In War-Jaiñtia, there are two sets of pronominals for the First-person singular and Second-Person Singular personal pronouns in LV, namely pre-verbal and post-verbal. However, in TV, only the First Singular Pronoun has a pre-verbal and a post-verbal pronoun, and the other personal pronouns in TV follow the pattern of the pronominals of the War-Khasi varieties where they appear at the end of the phrase or sentence after the head noun. The First Singular Pronoun in both LV and TV comprises a pre-verbal and a post-verbal pronoun as exemplified in 10(a) and (b) below. The First-Person Plural /iye/ in LV is placed at the beginning of the sentence, as compared to TV, where /ei/ is placed at the end for the

$\mathbf{L}\mathbf{V}$	TV
10. (a) nie daN biu jie N e	(b) nio daN ba ji o
1SG PROG eat rice 1SG	1SG PROG eat rice 1SG
'I am eating food (rice)'	'I am eating food (rice)'
11. (a) iye daN biu jie	(b) daN ba ji ei
1PL PROG eat rice	PROG eat rice 1PL
'We are eating food (rice)'	'We are eating food (rice)'

The Second Person Singular in LV exhibits gender-specific markers comprising both pre-verbal and post-verbal distinguished for Masculine and Feminine. Whereas in contrast to TV where this phenomenon is also present but consists only of post-verbal markers placed at the end of the sentence as exemplified in 12(a) and (b) below.

12.

LV

(a). (i) iyam daN biu jie im

2SG(M) PROG eat rice 2SG

'You are eating food (rice)'

(ii) yah↔: daN biu jie hiya

TV

(b). (i) daN ba ji em

PROG eat rice 2SG

'You are eating food (rice)'

(ii) daN ba ji po

2SG(F) PROG eat rice 2SG 'You are eating food (rice)'

PROG eat rice 2SG 'You are eating food (rice)'

The Second Person Plural /iyehi bero?/ in LV and /pi bero?/ in TV are placed at the beginning of the sentence as, shown in sentence 13(a) and (b) below. LV exhibits the postverbal /hi/ corresponding to the pre-verbal /iyehi/ as exemplified in sentence 13(a). TV, however, uses the formal Second Person Singular /pi/ after the verb at the end of the sentence.

13.

LV

(a) **iyehi** bero? hi jiu lia **hi**2PL everyone must FUT go 2PL
'You all must go'

TV

(b) **pi** bero? to? ju ya? lea **pi** 2SG everyone must FUT CEM go 2PL 'You all must go'

Bresnan and Mchombo (1987) proposed that the subject agreement marker on the verb in War-Jaiñtia has a dual behaviour. When the overt subject argument is present, the Subject Agreement Marker (SAM) /e/ in LV seen in sentences 14(a), 15(a), and 16(a) behaves as a grammatical agreement marker. Otherwise, it acts as an incorporated pronoun, which is an argument of the verb itself, and this is referred to as anaphoric agreement. According to Lyngdoh and War (2017), the SAM /e/ in LV occurs only with Third Singular and Third Plural Personal Pronouns and is by default Third Person. It does not mark number or gender. The SAM /e/ is placed at the beginning of each sentence, while the third singular and plural pronouns are at the end of the sentence following the head nouns, as shown in sentences 14(a), 15(a), and 16(a). In contrast, in TV, the Third Singular and Third Plural Personal Pronouns follow the pattern of the War-Khasi varieties. The pronominals occur at the end of the sentence following the head noun, as shown in sentences 14(b), 15(b), and 16(b).

LV 14. (a) e biu jie u SAM eat rice 3SG 'He eats food (rice)' 15. (a) e biu jie ke SAM eat rice 3SG 'She eats food (rice)' 16. (a) e daN biu jie i

SAM PROG eat rice 3PL 'They are eating food (rice)'

TV

(b) ba ji u
eat rice 3SG
'He eats food (rice)'
(b) ba ji ko
eat rice 3SG
'She eats food (rice)'

(b) daN ba ji **ki**PROG eat rice 3PL
'They are eating food (rice)'

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Sentences (17) and (18) show the distinction where the verbal agreements derived from personal pronouns. In War- Jaiñtia, in both LV and TV /u/ functions as the agreement marker, and /ke/ in LV and /ko/ in TV functions as the pronoun as shown in sentences 17(a) and 17(b). The Subject Agreement Marker /e/ occurs after the head noun in LV in both sentences 17(a) and 18(a).

17.

LV

(a) **u** lam e pha? skiaw (he) **ke**3SM Lam SAM ask sit ACC her
'Lam asked her to sit'

TV

(b) **u** lam pha? ske **u** (ho) **ko**3SM Lam ask sit 3SM ACC her
'Lam asked her to sit'

In sentences 18(a) and 18(b), /ke/ in LV and /ko/ in TV functions as the agreement marker, and /yaw/ in LV and /ew/ in TV functions as the pronoun.

18.

LV

(a) **ke** mary e meyue **ke** he **yaw** 3SF Mary SAM love 3SF ACC him 'Mary loves him'

TV

(b) **ko** mary maya **ko** ha **ew**3SF Mary love 3SF ACC him
'Mary loves him'

3.3 Number and Gender Distinction

Nagaraja (2000) argues that in Standard Khasi 'Number and Gender are marked by the same elements, namely u and ka are in the singular and ki in the plural; u is masculine, ka feminine and ki neutral, i.e., common for both genders. Similarly, War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia also follow the pattern of the Standard Khasi as exemplified in the following sentences below.

War-Khasi

MV	$\mathbf{U}\mathbf{V}$		
19. a) u kHyndia?	b) u boit		
3SM child	3SM child		
'Boy'	'Boy'		

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20. a) ka kHyndia?	b) ka boit		
3SF child	3SF child		
'Girl'	'Girl'		
21. a) ki kHyndia?	b) ki boit		
3PL child	3PL child		
'Children'	'Children'		

War-Jaiñtia

$\mathbf{L}\mathbf{V}$	TV
22. a) u hymbo	b) u hymbo
3SM child	3SM child
'Boy'	'Boy'
23. a) ke hymbo	b) ko hymbo
3SF child	3SF child
'Girl'	'Girl'
24. a) i hymbo	b) ki hymbo
3PL child	3PL child
'Children'	'Children'

3.4 Determiners

Determiners are an integral part in both the varieties of War- Khasi i.e. MV and UV, and War- Jaiñtia i.e. LV and TV. Determiners are used in the context of articles and only provide information regarding gender and number, but not about definiteness (Bedell, 2011). They are placed before the head noun serving as a pre-modifier in the noun phrase as exemplified in sentences (25) and (26) below.

War-Khasi

'The hill'

MV	UV		
25. a) u lu:m	b) u lu:m		
DET hill	DET hill		
'The hill'	'The hill'		
War-Jaiñtia			
$\mathbf{L}\mathbf{V}$	MV		
26. a) u pdeN	b) u pdeN		
DET hill	DET hill		

'The hill'

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3.5 Reflexives and Reciprocals

In this section, we will explore how reflexives and reciprocals are utilized in War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia to convey pragmatic significance and information. Reflexives and reciprocals serve as language tools to express self-reference and mutual reference, respectively. Gaining a deeper understanding of how these devices are employed in War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia can offer valuable insights into the cultural values and social norms of these communities.

3.5.1 Reflexives

Referring to Subbarao (2012), War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia like the Standard Khasi exhibit both nominal and verbal reflexives. In War-Khasi, the nominal reflexive in MV is /da-lade ya? -lade/ 'INST-self ACC-self', and in UV is /di-lade ha-lade/ 'INST-self ACC-self'. Whereas, in War-Jaiñtia, the nominal reflexive in LV is Σ omen/ 'alone' as compared to TV, which has two nominal reflexives viz. /so?men/ 'self/alone' and /pna/ 'self'.

Following Subbarao (2012), War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia also have the monomorphemic Verbal /hi/ in MV and /hi?/ in UV, whereas /he?/ in LV and /hei/ in TV which are optional and occurs to the right of the verb.

In both War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia, except for TV, the nominal reflexives follow the verbal reflexives, which immediately come after the verb. This can be seen in the following examples: 27(a) and (b), and 28(a). In TV, however, the nominal reflexive comes first after the verb, and the verbal reflexive /hei/ is placed after the Accusative '/ew/' in sentence 28(b). It is worth noting that when occurring with the nominal reflexives, the verbal reflexives in both War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia are optional, as shown in sentences (27) and (28).

War-Khasi

27.

MV

(a) u lam_i le? (hi) u **da-lade ya? -lade**i 3SM Lam do VR 3SM INST-self ACC-self 'Lam did (this) to himself (by himself)'

UV

(b) u lam_i le? (hi?) u **di-lade ha-lade**i 3SM Lam do VR 3SM INST-self ACC-self 'Lam did (this) to himself (by himself)'

28.

LV

(a) u lam_i lia? (hih) he yow Σomen_i-Σomen_i u
 3SM Lam do VR ACC him self - self 3SM 'Lam did (this) to himself (by himself)'

TV

(b) u lam_i le? u **pna**_i ew ho ew (hei) 3SM Lam do 3SM self him ACC him VR 'Lam did (this) to himself (by himself)'

However, when the subject *u ban* is stressed and emphasized, the verbal reflexives can occur without the nominal reflexives as exemplified in the following sentences (29) and (30). In War-Khasi, in both MV and UV, the agreement marker /u/ 'Third Person Singular' post-verbal and is placed after the verbal reflexives in the final position of the sentence, whereas, in War-Jaiñtia, in LV, the SAM /e/ is placed before the verb, as compared to TV, /u/ 'Third Person Singular' is also post-verbal but placed before the verbal reflexive /hei/ as shown in 29 (a) and (b), and 30 (a) and (b).

War-Khasi

29.

MV

(a) u ban_i bam ja **hi**_i u

3SM Ban eat rice VR 3SM

'Ban is eating (by himself)'

UV

(b) u ban_i bam ja **hi**?_i u 3SM Ban eat rice VR 3SM 'Ban is eating (by himself)'

War-Jaiñtia

30.

LV

(a) u ban_i e biu jie **he**?_i 3SM Ban SAM eat rice VR 'Ban is eating (by himself)'

TV

(b) u ban_i ba ji u **he**i_i

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3SM Ban eat rice 3SM VR 'Ban is eating (by himself)'

3.5.2 Reciprocals

Reciprocals in War-Khasi and War-Jaiñtia can be categorized into two types: nominal and verbal reciprocals. In War-Khasi, the nominal reciprocal appears as /wia ya?iwia/ 'each other' in MV and /wei ha iwei/ 'each other' in UV. Meanwhile, in War-Jaiñtia, the nominal reciprocal is expressed as /mi hi kimi/ 'each other' in LV and /mi hi mi/ 'each other' in TV. In both languages, the nominal reciprocals take on a discontinuous reduplicated form with the Accusative case marker placed in between the discontinuous reduplicated form, and they occur after the verb. On the other hand, the verbal reciprocal appears before the verb and after the subject. Unlike the verbal reflexive, the verbal reciprocal / ya?/ in MV and LV and /ya/ in UV and TV is not optional and must co-occur with the nominal reciprocal, as exemplified in sentences (31) and (32) below.

War-Khasi

MV

31. (i) ki miaw ya? eid ki wia ya? i-wia
3PL cat VREC love 3PL one ACC DIM -one
'The cats love each other'

UV

(ii) ki miaw ya eid ki **wia ha Ni-wia** 3PL cat VREC love 3PL one ACC DIM -one 'The cats love each other'

War-Jaiñtia

LV

32. (i) i miew e ya? meyue laN ki **mi hi ki-mi** 3PL cat SAM VREC love together DIM one ACC DIM-one 'The cats love each other'

TV

(ii) ki miew ya maya ki **i mi hi mi**3PL cat VREC love 3PL DIM one ACC one
'The cats love each other'

4. Conclusion

To summarize, this paper compares the pronominal systems of War Khasi and War Jaiñtia, two varieties of the Khasi language spoken in the War district of Meghalaya, India. The study identifies similarities and differences between the pronominal systems of the two varieties, such as shared features and distinct reflexive markers, as well as variations in pronominal forms across different sentence types. The paper highlights the importance of

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personal pronoun particles in indicating agreement and concord in a sentence. Additionally, it examines the effect on the interface between phonology and syntax of the agreement of the War-Jaiñtia varieties, which is evident in the alternations of the pre- and post-verbal elements in both LV and TV but is absent in the War-Khasi varieties. This study not only improves our understanding of Khasi and related languages but also has practical implications for language documentation and preservation efforts in the region. The results can be useful for language teaching and learning strategies and for promoting linguistic diversity in the area.

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