

Negation Marking in Khelma

K. Amrita Singha, Ph.D.

Assam University Silchar, 788011

kamritasingha02@gmail.com

kamritasingha@rediffmail.com

Contact No.- 7002385227

Abstract

The present paper “Negation marking in Khelma” discusses about the language spoken by Khelma people mainly settled in South Assam, particularly Hailakandi and Karimganj districts of Assam. Khelma also known as Sakachep is one of the old Kuki tribes of Northeastern India. According to native speakers, there are approx. 8000 Khelma speakers. There is no authentic report about the population of Khelma as the census report shows no data regarding the total population of the community. According to the policy of government of India, the number of speakers for those whose mother tongues are spoken by lesser than 10,000 persons is not published.

The present paper attempts to describe the various negation marking system in Khelma such as declarative, existential, possessive, locative, negative indefinite, negative strengthening, negative future tense, imperative negation, hortative negation, negation in interrogative clause, negative conditional and negative probability. The negative construction mentioned above will be further discussed in detailed in this paper.

Keywords: Khelma, Kuki-Chin, Tibeto-Burman, Negation.

1.0 Introduction

Khelma or Sakachep is among one of the old tribes of Kuki in Northeast India. They are originally known as Sakachep in other parts of Northeast India i.e., Barak Valley, Karbi Anglong of Assam, also in the neighbouring states like Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram, etc. The language is popularly known as ‘*Khelma*’ only in Dima-Hasao district of Assam, as it is to be believed that they were named by a Dimasa king. *Khelma/Sakachep* is the name of the language and the people. The current paper is mainly based on the Khelma speaking people residing in Barak Valley, particularly

Hailakandi and Karimganj districts of Assam. It is also one of the unexplored and under documented language like many other tribal languages of Northeast India.

The reason why Khelma or other Kuki-Chin languages is not included in UNESCO's list of endangered languages is that, these languages are hardly known to the outside world. Khelma people lack their own written literature and script, and are yet to be presented for academic exploration in the codified form. They use Roman script to write their language with notable changes.

Phonologically, one of the typical features of Kuki-Chin languages i.e., the presence of initial velar nasal η is present in the language. It has strong agreement system. Gender distinction is not grammatically marked in the language. Khelma has decimal type numeral system and it has dominant SOV word order. In Khelma, an inclusive-exclusive distinction is found in the preverbal system. The present paper attempts to explore the linguistic structure showing the negation marking system of Khelma of Barak Valley.

2.0 Negation in Khelma

In most of the Tibeto-Burman languages negation is expressed by means of affixation. Therefore, negation in Khelma is expressed by means of suffixation. The negative markers present in the language are */mu/* or */mæk/*, */no/*, */nok/* and */loi/*. All the negators are used in different construction in the language. Negative agreement particles can be seen in the language. For instance, the agreement particle η occurs with the 1st person along with the post-verbal particle *u* and *me* is attached post-verbally with the 1st person plural; *če* is attached with both the 2nd person singular and plural whereas *u* is prefixed with *če* for 2nd person negative construction. No such particle can be seen in 3rd person negative construction. The plural marker *ui* can be seen attached post-verbally along with the negative marker in the 3rd person negative plural. Since, vowel harmony is very common in the language, in every 1st person singular negative construction the negator */mæk/* is seen as */mu/* because of the postverbal particle *u*. Therefore, it is to be believed that the reduced version of */mæk/* i.e., *ma?* has been harmonized in the construction. The post-verbal negative construction which we will consider is post-verbal *mak* (or a reduced version such as *ma?*). This appears to be restricted to the Northwestern languages in Kuki-Chin,

although it is also present in some of the Naga languages. It is found in a variety of groups up and down throughout the Patkai Range. (Delancey, 2014).

2.1. Negator */-mək/*

The negator *-mək* in Khelma is used to negate both the verbal and non-verbal predicates which include declarative, existential, possessive, locative, negative indefinite, negative strengthening and negation in interrogative clause.

2.1.1. Negation in declarative clause

The declarative clause is unmarked morphologically in Khelma. The negator *-mək* is used to negate both verbal and non-verbal types of declarative clause in all the three persons, whereas in the 1st person constructions it is reduced as *ma?*, and then *mu* due to vowel harmony occurrence present in the language as given in example 2. In some languages the absence of final consonant can be seen, i.e., it is reported as having post-verbal *-ma*; in some instances this might just be a case of a final glottal stop not being able to transcribed, or it might indicate further phonological erosion *-mak> .ma?> -ma* (Delancey, 2015)

- | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| (1) | <i>keima</i> | <i>bu</i> | <i>ke-nek</i> | |
| | 1SG | rice | 1SG-eat | |
| | ‘I eat rice.’ | | | |
| (2) | <i>keima</i> | <i>bu</i> | <i>nek-mu-u-ŋ</i> | (verbal) |
| | 1SG | rice | eat-NEG-PV-1SG | |
| | ‘I don’t eat rice.’ | | | |
| (3) | <i>əma</i> | <i>sakačep</i> | <i>ə-ni</i> | |
| | 3SG | sakachep | 3SG-COP | |
| | ‘S/he is Sakachep.’ | | | |
| (4) | <i>əma</i> | <i>sakačep</i> | <i>ni-mək</i> | (non-verbal) |
| | 3SG | sakachep | COP-NEG | |
| | ‘S/he is not Sakachep.’ | | | |

2.1.2. Existential

In Khelma, the common negator *-mək* is used to negate the existential/ possessive/ locative construction. The negator *-mək* follows the existence morpheme *-om* for the existential construction clause as given in the below examples.

(5) *gilas-a tui om-mək*
 glass-LOC water EXIST-NEG
 ‘There is no water in the glass.’

(6) *ziri-a ŋa om-mək*
 pond-LOC fish EXIST-NEG
 ‘There is no fish in the pond.’

2.1.3. Possessive

In Khelma, the possessive morpheme *-don* followed by the common negator *-mək* is used to negate possessive construction as in examples 7-9.

(7) *keima sum don-mu-u-ŋ*
 1SG money have-NEG-PV-1SG
 ‘I don’t have money.’

(8) *nəŋma sum don-mək-čə*
 2SG money have-NEG-2SG
 ‘You don’t have money.’

(9) *əma sum don-mək*
 3SG money have-NEG
 ‘S/he doesn’t have money.’

From, the above examples, it can be seen that the negator *-mək* in example 7 (ma?/mu) is attached with the post verbal particle *u* followed by the particle *ŋ* (1SG) in the 1st person singular negative construction; *me* is attached for the 1st person plural; *čə* for both 2nd person singular and plural and for the 3rd person

singular and plural only the negator *-mək* can be seen without any person particle attached.

2.1.4. Locative

Similarly, the common negator *-mək* is used to negate the locative construction for all the three persons as given in the following examples 10 and 11.

(10) *nəŋma ronpur-a om-mək-čə*
 1PL ronpur-LOC EXIST-NEG-2

‘You are not in Ronpur.’

(11) *əma tlaŋpui-a om-mək*
 3SG tlangpui-LOC EXIST-NEG

‘S/he is not in Tlangpui.’

2.1.5. Negative Infinitive Pronoun

Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom (2005) stated that most of the languages of East and Southeast Asia typically lack indefinite pronouns. As Khelma lacks negative indefinite pronouns, it demonstrates the same grammatical traits as East and South Asian languages. The negative indefinite pronouns in Khelma are formed by negating the verb rather than pronominal forms. To negate such type of construction the general negator *-mək* is used in the language as shown below.

(12) *tu-te mi midit-mək-ŋei*
 who-even 1SG like-NEG-PL

‘Nobody likes me.’

(13) *ki-in-a tu-te hoŋ-mək-ŋei*
 1SG-home-LOC who-even come-NEG-PL

‘Nobody came to my home.’

2.1.6. Negative strengthening

In Khelma, the negative strengthening is formed by intensifier *-ηai* post-verbally followed by the negator *-mək*, followed by the particles as in examples 14 and 15.

- (14) *keima t^hei sək-ηai-mu-u-η*
 1SG fruit eat-INTS-NEG-PV-1SG
 ‘I never eat fruit.’

- (15) *əma sək-ηai-mək*
 3SG eat-INTS-NEG
 ‘S/he doesn’t eat at all.’

2.1.7. Negation in Interrogative clause

The general negator *-mək* is used to negate the interrogative clause in Khelma. The negator *-mək* is attached post-verbally along with the agreement particle followed by the question particle *-mo* as shown in the followings examples 16-18.

- (16) *nəŋma k^helma ni-mək-čə-mo*
 2SG Khelma COP-NEG-2SG-Q
 ‘Aren’t you Khelma?’

- (17) *əma mu-mək-čə-mo*
 2SG see-NEG-2SG-Q
 ‘Don’t you see him/her?’

- (18) *əma ralte ni-mək-mo*
 3SG ralte COP-NEG-Q
 ‘Isn’t he Ralte?’

2.2. The negator *-no*

The negative marker *-no* can be seen in future, imperative and hortative constructions in Khelma.

2.2.1. Negative Future tense

In negative future construction, the negator *-no* is attached post-verbally, followed by the future *-ni* and the agreement particle. The particle *η* occurs with the 1st person singular, *me* with the 1st person plural, *ti* occurs with the 2nd person singular and plural, no such particle are seen attached with the negator *-no* and future *-ni* for 3rd person constructions as shown in examples 19-23.

(19) *keima sək-no-ni-η*

1SG eat-NEG-FUT-1SG

‘I will not eat.’

(20) *keini se-no-ti-ni-me*

1PL go-NEG-1SG-FUT-1PL

‘We (EXCL) will not go.’

(21) *nəηma nek-no-ti-ni*

2SG nek-NEG-2SG-FUT

‘You will not drink.’

(22) *nəηni nek-no-ti-ni-ui*

2SG drink-NEG-2SG-FUT-2PL

‘You (PL) will not drink.’

(23) *əma hoη-no-ni*

3SG come-NEG-FUT

‘S/he will not come.’

2.2.2. Imperative Negation

In imperative construction the negative marker **-no** is attached post-verbally followed by the imperative marker **-ro** as shown in examples 24 and 25.

- (24) *innui-no-ro*
 laugh-NEG-IMP
 ‘Don’t laugh’
- (25) *ŋa sək-no-ro*
 fish eat-NEG-IMP
 ‘Don’t eat fish.’

2.2.3. Hortative Negation

A negative hortative construction in Khelma is expressed by suffixing the negator **no** to the root verb along with the hortative marker **-rase** as shown in examples 26 and 27.

- (26) *əma se-no-rase*
 3SG se-NEG-HORT
 ‘Let him/her not go.’
- (27) *əma t^hi-no-rase*
 3SG die-NEG-HORT
 ‘Let him/her not die.’

2.3. Negative Conditional /-nok/

In the negative conditional construction, the negator **-nok** is used to negate the sentence as given in examples 28 and 29. The negator **-nok** is seen attached with the conditional **-ten**, followed by the focus marker **-ču**.

- (28) *kei ke-nek nok-ten-ču nəŋ lei-nek-ro*
 1SG 1SG-eat NEG-COND-FOC 2SG PERM-eat-IMP
 ‘If I don’t drink than you drink.’

- (29) *no-hoŋ* *nok-ten-ču* *kei* *se-ki-ti*
 2SG-go NEG-COND-FOC 1SG go-1SG-FUT

‘If you don’t come than I will go.’

2.4. Negative marker *-loi*

2.4.1. Negative probability

The negative probability is expressed by the negative marker *-loi* in Khelma which is attached to the verb root, followed by the probability *-hom*, followed by the capability *-t^hei* as given in the following examples 30 and 31.

- (30) *keima* *ke-se-loi-hom-t^hei*
 1SG 1SG-eat-NEG-PROB-CAP

‘I may not go.’

- (31) *ənni-ŋei* *ən-hoŋ-loi-hom-t^hei*
 3PL-PL 3PL-come-NEG-PROB-CAP

‘They may not come.’

The negative marker *-loi* is also used to negate some of the adjective words as shown in the following examples.

Khelma	Gloss	Khelma	Gloss
<i>var</i>	‘wise’	<i>var-loi</i>	‘unwise’
<i>int^hik</i>	‘certain’	<i>int^hik-loi</i>	‘uncertain’
<i>mut^hei</i>	‘visible’	<i>mut^hei-loi</i>	‘invisible’
<i>nit^hei</i>	‘possible’	<i>nit^hei-loi</i>	‘impossible’

3.0 Conclusion

From the above analysis the following conclusions can be drawn. Negation in Khelma is expressed by means of suffixation. The negative markers present in the language are /*mu*/ or /*mək*/, /*no*/, /*nok*/ and /*loi*/. The common negative marker is /*mək*/ or /*mu*/ which is used to negate the declarative (verbal and non-verbal), existential, possessive, locative, negative strengthening and negative interrogative constructions. The negative agreement particles which are attached along with the negative marker *-mək* are: *ŋ* for 1st person singular, *me* for 1st person plural; *če* for 2nd person singular and plural whereas no such particle is seen attached in the case of 3rd person singular or plural. The second negative marker *-no* occurs in future, imperative and hortative constructions. In the future negative construction, the negative agreement particles are seen such as: *ŋ* for 1st person singular, *me* for 1st person plural; *ti* for 2nd person singular and plural whereas no such particle is seen attached in the case of 3rd person singular or plural. The third negator *-nok* is only used to negate the conditional construction. The fourth negative marker *-loi* is used to negate the probability construction and also to negate some of the adjective words as mentioned above. All the negative markers occur post-verbally in the language.

Furthermore, more thorough investigation is needed in terms of nominalised clause, relative clause, double negation construction etc, in negation marking system of Khelma.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person

CAP	capability
COND	conditional
COP	copula
EXCL	exclusive
EXIST	existential
FOC	focus
FUT	future
HORT	hortative
IMP	imperative
INCL	inclusive
INTS	intensifier
NEG	negative
PROB	probability
PL	plural
PV	post-verbal
SG	singular
QP	question particle

Reference

- Daimai, Kailadbou and Singha, Kh. Dhiren. 2020. *Expressing Negative Meaning in Liangmai*. Journal of Linguistics of Tibeto-Burman Area, 43(1): 124-146.
- Delancey, Scott. 2014. *The Origins of Post Verbal Negation in Kuki-Chin*. 8th International Conference of the North East India Linguistic Society, Guwahati, Assam.
- Delancey, Scott. 2015. *The Origins of Post Verbal Negation in Kuki-Chin*. Journal of North East Indian Linguistics 7 (NEILS7), p. 203-212.
- Haokip, Pauthang. 2012. *Negation in Thadou*. Journal of Himalayan Linguistics, Vol 11(2).

- Haokip, Pauthang. 2018. *The agreement system of the Kuki-Chin of Barak valley*.
Journal of South Asian Languages & Linguistics, 5(2), 159-210.
- Lalsim, Ramdina. 2005. *Tribes of N. C. Hills*. Haflong: N. C. Hills Autonomous
Council.
- Singh, Ch. Yashwanta. 2010. *Koireng Grammar*. Akansha Publishing House, New
Delhi.
- Soppitt, C. A. 2007. *A Short Account of The Kuki-Lushai Tribes on The North East
Frontier with An Outline Grammer of The Rangkhoh-Kuki-Lushai Language*.
Kolkata: Kreativmind.
- VanBik, Kenneth. (2009). *Proto-Kuki-Chin: A Reconstructed Ancestor of the
KukiChin Languages*. University of California, Berkeley. STEDT Monograph
Series Volume 8.