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## Agreement in Khasi Relative Clauses

George Bedell, Ph.D.

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Khasi is a Mon-Khmer language primarily spoken in eastern Meghalaya State, India and adjoining areas in Assam and Bangladesh. The speaking population in India is 865,000, according to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009). The examples in this paper 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 Mathaios (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 fourth meeting of the Northeast Indian Linguistic Society (NEILS), hosted by North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, January 2009.

**Subordinate clauses.** Subordinate clauses in Khasi are most often marked with the particle *ba*, either alone or with another preceding particle prefixed. Clauses headed with *ba* may have a variety of interpretations: Roberts (1891; §244, pp. 205-6) mentions three. Sentences (1) to (3) illustrate a complement clause, a reason clause and a purpose clause.

(1) U Kpa jong phi uba ha bneng u tip [ba phi  
3SM father of youPL 3SM=C in sky 3SM know C 2PL  
donkam ia kine kiei kiei baroh]. (6:32)  
need OBJ 3PL=this 3PL=Q 3PL=Q all  
'your Father in heaven knows [(that) you need all these things]'

(2) Phi bakla, [ba phim tip ia ki jingthoh, lymne ia ka  
2PL wrong C 2PL=NEG know OBJ 3PL ACT=write or OBJ 3SF

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11 : 6 June 2011

George Bedell, Ph.D.

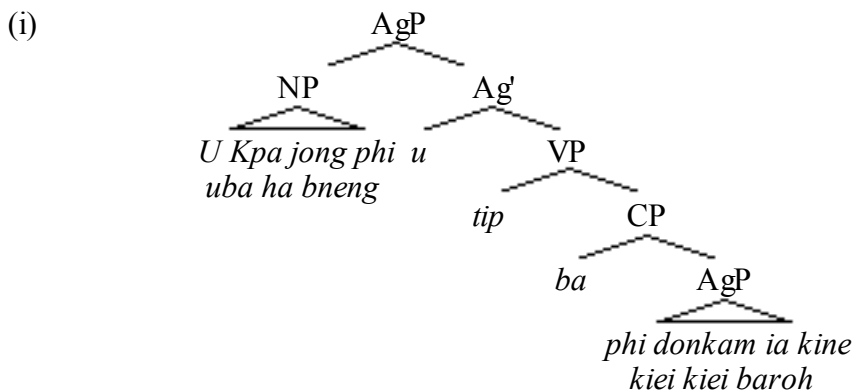
Agreement in Khasi Relative Clauses

*bor U Blei]. (22:29)*  
 power 3SM God  
 'you are wrong, [because you do not know the scriptures or God's power]'

(3) *ngan leh ia kaba bha aiu, [ba ngan ioh ia ka*  
 1S=FUT do OBJ 3SF=C good what C 1S=FUT get OBJ 3SF  
*jingim bymjukut]? (19:16)*  
 ACT=alive endless  
 'what good thing should I do [(in order) to get eternal life]?'

In sentence (1), the clause *ba phi donkam ia kine kiei kiei baroh* '(that) you need all these things' is an argument of the verb *tip* 'know'. This verb is transitive, and the clause serves as its object. In sentence (2), the clause *ba phim tip ia ki jingthoh, lymne ia ka bor U Blei* 'because you do not know the scriptures or God's power' is not an argument of the verb *bakla* 'be wrong'. This verb is intransitive and its subject is understood to be the addressees. In sentence (3) also, the clause *ba ngan ioh ia ka jingim bymjukut* '(in order) to get eternal life' is not an argument of the verb *leh* 'do'. This verb is transitive, its subject being understood to be the speaker and its object being *kaba bha aiu* 'what good thing'.

**Structures 1.** All three clauses begin with *ba*, and are located at the end of the sentence they belong to; there is no obvious marking of the particular semantic value of the clauses as there is in English with 'because' or the optional 'in order'. It is possible that the meaning of such clauses can be associated with different ways in which they are syntactically connected to the main sentences, but even if so, this has nothing to do with *ba*. We will assume that *ba* belongs to the syntactic category C (conjunction or complementizer) which takes a clause complement; it is a meaningless structural marker parallel to English 'that' in (1). The structure of the relevant portions of (1) will then be as in (i). The clauses are finite, as shown by the presence of agreement of the verb in each with its subject (absent in each case). The subject of sentence (1) is present: *U Kpa jong phi uba ha bneng* 'your Father in heaven', showing its syntactic position relative to the agreement marker. As argued in Bedell (2011a), the agreement marker belongs to the category Ag (agreement) and serves the syntactic head of the clause (AgP).



**Relative clauses.** Examples (4) to (6) resemble (1) to (3) in containing subordinate clauses which begin with *ba*. However these clauses differ from the previous ones both syntactically and semantically.

- (4) *ki khynnah [ba ki iapyrta ha ka templ]*, (21:15)  
 3PL child C 3PL COLL=shout in 3SF temple  
 'the children [(who were) shouting in the temple]'
- (5) *kata ka sngi [ba U Noah u la leit hapoh kata ka  
 iing lieng]*; (24:38)  
 3SF=that 3SF day C 3SM Noah 3SM PAST go into 3SF=that 3SF  
 house boat  
 'the day [(that) Noah went into the ark]'
- (6) *kiei kiei ruh [ba ki iamudui ia me]* (27:13)  
 3PL=Q 3PL=Q even C 3PL COLL=accuse OBJ youSM  
 'things [(that) they accuse you of]'

As shown in (i), complement clauses belong to a verb phrase and function as arguments of its head verb. But relative clauses (the traditional term for those in (4) to (6)) belong to a noun phrase and function as modifiers of its head noun. Thus in (4) the clause *ba ki iapyrta ha ka templ* '(who were) shouting in the temple' restricts the reference of the head noun *ki khynnah* 'children' to those engaging in this activity. Similarly the reference of *ka sngi* 'day' in (5) and *kiei kiei* 'things' in (6) is restricted by the clauses which follow them. Relative clauses also differ from complement clauses in lacking a noun phrase which serves a semantic function with the clause. In (4) that absent noun phrase is the subject of the verb *iapyrta* 'shout' and is understood to be the same children referred to by the whole noun phrase (4). In (5) it is an adverbial modifier of the verb *leit* 'go' and understood to be the same day referred to by the whole noun phrase (5). And in (6) it is an object of the verb *iamudui* 'accuse' and understood to be the same things referred to by the whole noun phrase (6). For an overview of relative clauses in a variety of languages, see Keenan (1985).

The relative clauses in (4) to (6) are finite, as shown by the agreement markers *u* in (5) and *ki* in (4) and (6) which accompany the clause verbs. Examples (7) to (9) contain relative clauses which differ from those in (4) to (6) in not showing agreement with any clause subject.

- (7) *u briew [ba la kup ki jain bani]?* (11: 8)  
 3SM person C PAST wear 3PL clothes C=fine  
 'a man [(that was) wearing fine clothes]?'
- (8) *ki ktien baroh [ba mih noh na ka shyntur U Blei]*.  
 3PL word all C emerge away from 3SF mouth 3SM God  
 (4: 4)  
 'every word [that comes out of God's mouth]'
- (9) *ka jingmudui ia u [ba la thoh]*: (27:37)  
 3SF ACT=accuse OBJ him C PAST write  
 'the accusation against him [that said:]'

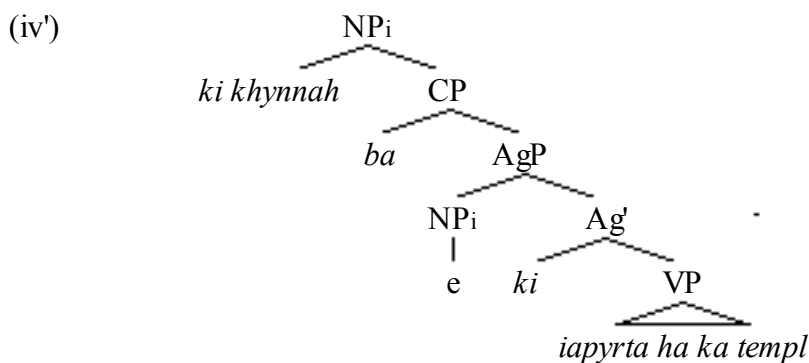
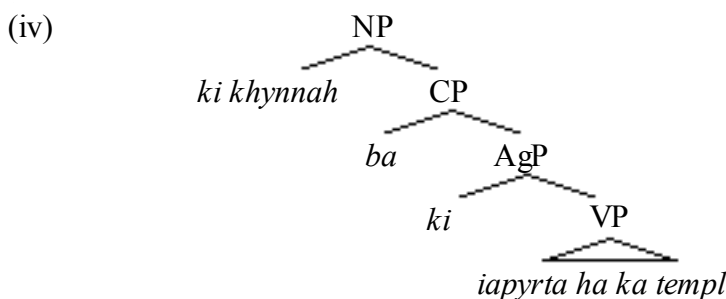
In (7) the clause verb *kup* 'wear' does not agree with its subject, understood to be the same person referred to by the whole noun phrase (7). In (8) the clause verb *mih* 'emerge' does not agree with its understood subject, the same words referred to by the whole noun phrase (7). And in (9) the clause

verb *thoh* 'write' does not agree with its understood subject, the accusation referred to by the whole noun phrase (9). The agreement markers would be *u* in (7), *ki* in (8) and *ka* in (9), located directly preceding the tense particle *la*, or the verb if there is no tense particle. The absence of subject-verb agreement seems possible only if it is the clause subject which is absent; but it is not necessary, as shown by (4). Agreement can be absent in other types of subordinate clauses as well, as in (10) which contains a complement clause.

- (10) *phi tip [ban bishar shisha ia ka khmat ka bneng]*,  
 2PL know C=FUT judge truly OBJ 3SF face 3SF sky  
 (16: 3)  
 'you know how to truly judge the weather'

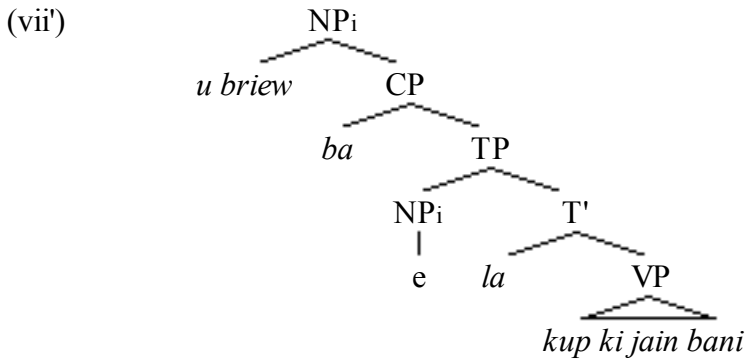
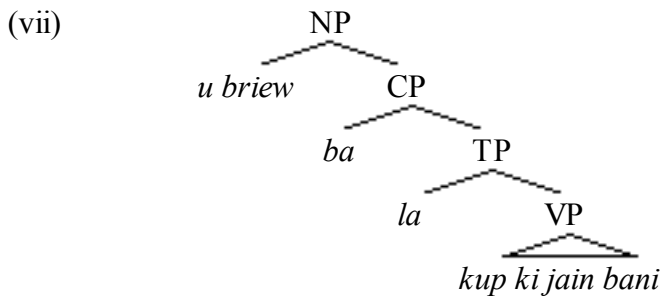
Here too, agreement can be absent only if the clause subject is not overt. Even though a tense marker may appear in clauses without subject-verb agreement, it may be appropriate to regard them as non-finite.

**Structures 2.** The structure of (4) will be something like (iv) or (iv').



In (4) the relative clause has no syntactic subject; in (iv) the syntactic subject structure is simply absent, while in (iv') there is a syntactically empty clause subject. (iv') allows the semantic relation between the clause subject and the head noun of the relative clause to be made explicit. The index *i* on the NPs indicates that the reference of the clause subject is identical to the reference of the NP headed by the head noun (which includes the clause).

Similarly, the structure of (7) will be something like (vii) or (vii').



(7) differs from (4) in the absence of subject verb agreement within the relative clause. In (vii) both the clause subject and agreement are syntactically absent, while in (vii') there is a co-indexed empty subject. The relation between (vii) and (vii') is parallel to that between (iv) and (iv').

**Complementizer agreement.** Khasi relative clauses may begin with *ba*, as in (4) through (9). But more often they begin with *uba*, *kaba* or *kiba*, which appear to be *ba* with a prefix showing agreement in gender and number. Agreement of Khasi verbs with their subjects is discussed in Bedell (2011a), and agreement of Khasi deictic modifiers with their head nouns is discussed in Bedell (2011b). Examples (11) to (14) illustrate plural *kiba*.

(11) *ki jingthung baroh [kiba U Kpa jong nga uba ha*  
 3PL ACT=plant all 3PL=C 3SM father of me 3SM=C in  
*bneng um shym la thung]* (15:13)  
 heaven 3SM=NEG NEG PAST plant  
 'every plant [which my father in heaven did not plant]'

(12) *baroh [kat kiba ki la shem]*, (22:10)  
 all much 3PL=C 3PL PAST find  
 'everything [which they found]'

(13) *kiei kiei ruh [kiba phi iohsngew] bad [ba phi iohi] ruh:*  
 3PL=Q 3PL=Q even 3PL=C 2PL hear and C 2PL see also  
 (11: 4)  
 '[whatever you hear] and also [whatever you see]'

(14) *kiei kiei ruh [kat kiba phin teh ha ka*  
 3PL=Q 3PL=Q even much 3PL=C 2PL=FUT bind on 3SF  
*khyndew]* (18:18)

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11 : 6 June 2011

George Bedell, Ph.D.

Agreement in Khasi Relative Clauses

earth  
'[whatever you bind on earth]'

Comparing (11) with (8), the question arises: if *kiba* in (11) shows agreement, what does it agree with? The obvious answer would be the head noun of the relative clause, which it modifies: in (11) *kiba* agrees with *ki jingthung* 'plants'. However, there is not always an overt head noun, as in (12); here *kiba* cannot be agreeing with the head noun. *Baroh* is not a noun, and it can appear with singular as well as plural head nouns. For other examples of headless noun phrases with relative clauses, see below examples (23) to (26) and (31) to (34). Another possibility, if relative clauses contain an empty noun phrase as in (iv') or (vii'), is that *kiba* shows agreement with the head noun of that noun phrase. But that noun phrase is never overtly present, and its head noun can be identified only via identity with the larger head noun. There are circumstances in which *uba*, *kaba* or *kiba* are the only manifestation of the gender or number of the relativized noun phrase.

Examples (15) through (22) illustrate masculine singular *uba* and feminine singular *kaba*. (15) to (18) differ from (11) to (14) in not showing agreement between the clause subject and verb; as in (7) to (9), it is the clause subject which is missing.

(15) *u briew [uban sa leit jingleit sha kawei ka ri],*  
3SM person 3SM=C=FUT PROX go journey to 3SF=one 3SF country  
'a man [(who was) about to travel to another country]' (25:14)

(16) *jar [uba hap te halor une u maw],*  
whoever 3SM=C fall and on 3SM=this 3SM stone  
'[whoever falls on this stone]' (21:44)

(17) *ka briew [kaba la pang mihsnam khadar snem],*  
3SF person 3SF=C PAST sick emerge-blood twelve year  
'a woman [who suffered hemorrhages for twelve years]' (9:20)

(18) *[kaba mih noh na ka shyntur],*  
3SF=C emerge away from 3SF mouth  
'[what comes out of the mouth]' (15:11)

Thus in (15) and (17) the clause subject is understood to be the same *u briew* and *ka briew* which appear as head nouns. In (16), *jar* is an Indo-Aryan loanword which only occurs as the head noun of a relative clause. In (17), there is no head noun of the relative clause, which constitutes a noun phrase by itself.

(19) to (22) differ from (15) to (18) in showing agreement between the clause subject and verb; in these examples it is not the clause subject which is missing (though it may be omitted as in (20)).

(19) *u symbai tyrso, [ia uba u briew u la shim],*  
3SM seed mustard OBJ 3SM=C 3SM person 3SM PAST take  
(13:31)  
'a mustard seed, [which a man took]'

(20) *jar [ha uba un hap],* (21:44)

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11 : 6 June 2011

George Bedell, Ph.D.

Agreement in Khasi Relative Clauses

who on 3SM=C 3SM=FUT fall  
 '[whoever it falls on]'

(21) *ka jingai [ia kaba U Moses u la hukum]*, (8: 4)  
 3SF ACT=give OBJ 3SF=C 3SM Moses 3SM PAST order  
 'the gift [(which) Moses ordered]

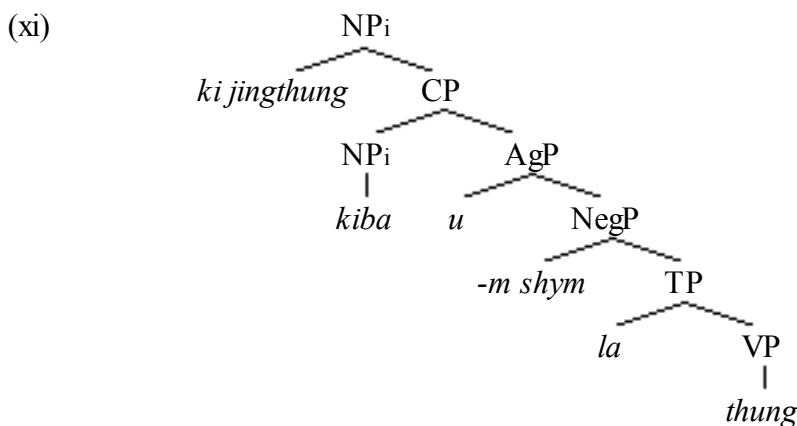
(22) *[sha kaba ki nongtuh ki pynpei, ki tuh ruh]*; (6:19)  
 into 3SF=C 3PL AGT=steal 3PL CAUS=penetrate 3PL steal also  
 [where thieves break in and also steal]

In these examples, a noun phrase is missing which is not the clause subject, and the object marker *ia* or preposition which would accompany that missing noun phrase appears before *uba*, *kaba* or *kiba*. This raises a second important question concerning these words: what is their syntactic status? The presence of *ia* or a preposition before *uba*, *kaba* or *kiba* shows that these words cannot be complementizers like *ba*; rather they must be noun phrases consisting only of a head noun. This is consistent with the presence of an agreement prefix and with the traditional idea that they are relative pronouns.

Roberts (1891; §49-51, pp. 41-42, and §188-91, pp. 167-70) classifies *uba*, *kaba* and *kiba* as relative pronouns, composed of *ba* after an article. Rabel (1961) does not recognize relative pronouns or explicitly discuss *uba*, *kaba* and *kiba*. When her texts contain such a form (e. g. *kiba* on p. 150) *ba* is annotated as a relative conjunction preceded by an article. Nagaraja (1985) also does not recognize relative pronouns. In his section on subordinate clauses (8.2.8 (4), pp. 96-97) he says that when *ba* is used as a relativizer, the pronominal markers can occur optionally with it. There is a fourth such pronoun *iba* marking diminutive, as illustrated in the following phrase.

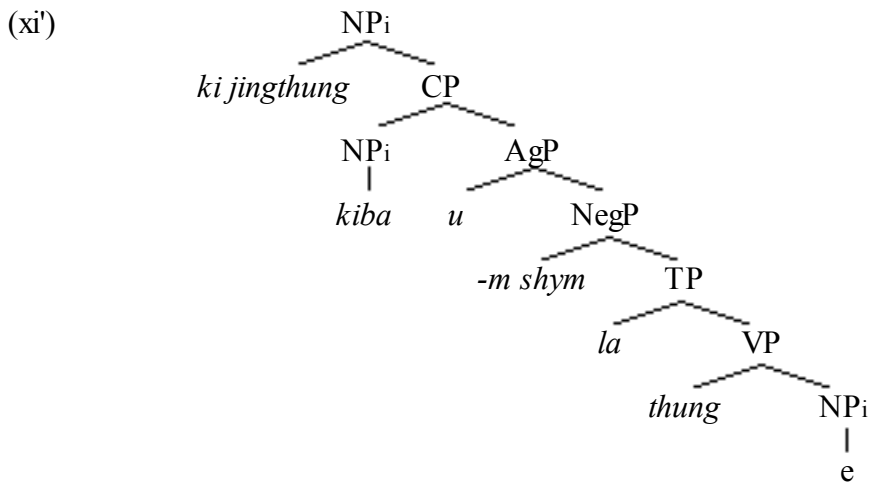
*ita [iba la pun ha ka]* (1:20)  
 DIM=that DIM=C PAST conceive in her  
 'that which is conceived in her'

**Structures 3.** The structure of (11) will be something like (xi).



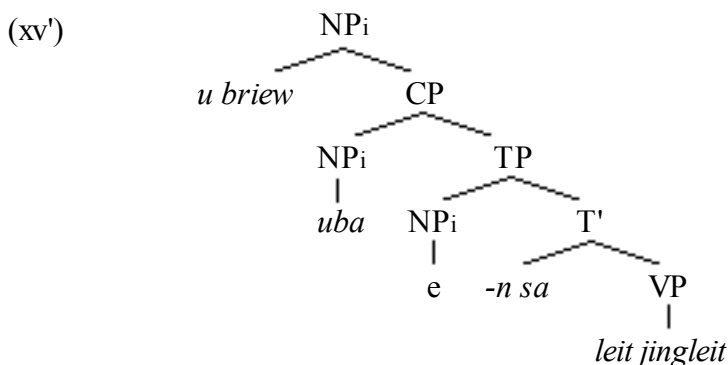
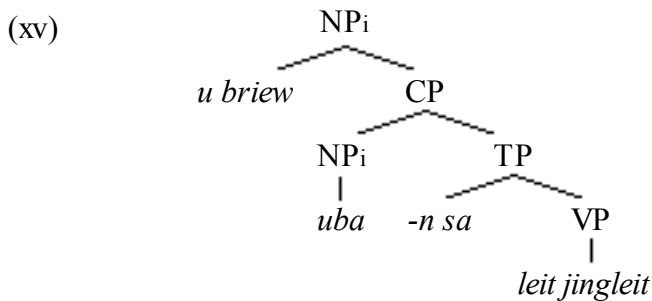
In (xi) *kiba* is represented as a noun phrase heading the relative clause. This representation suggests a parallel between Khasi *ba* versus *uba*, *kaba* or *kiba* on the one hand and English 'that' versus rela-

tive pronouns on the other. In both cases the complementizers (*ba* or 'that') are not restricted to relative clauses while the relative pronouns (*uba*, *kaba*, *kiba* or *who*, *which*) do not appear with other clause types and may be accompanied by prepositions. (xi') is an alternative with a syntactically empty clause object.



Note that (xi') has no advantage over (xi) in making its meaning explicit since the relative pronoun *kiba* is present. The modifier *baroh* and the clause subject have been omitted in (xi) and (xi') to simplify the structure. As given, the meaning would be: 'plants [(that) he did not plant]'

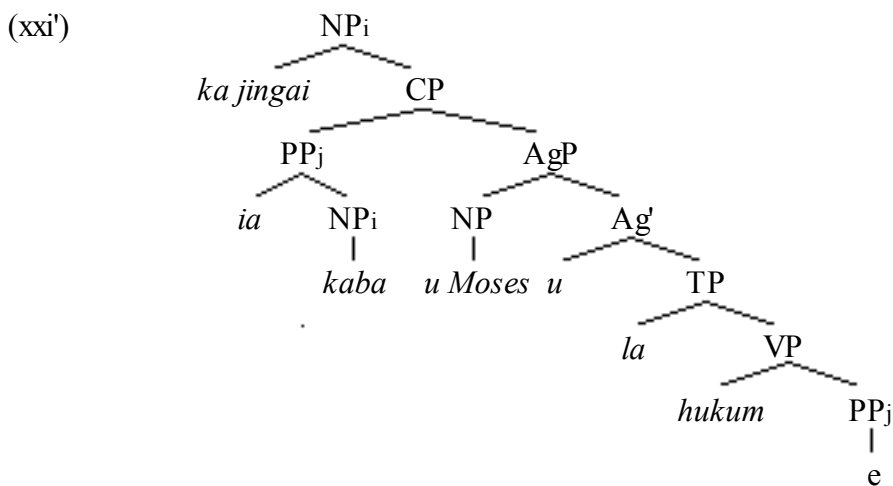
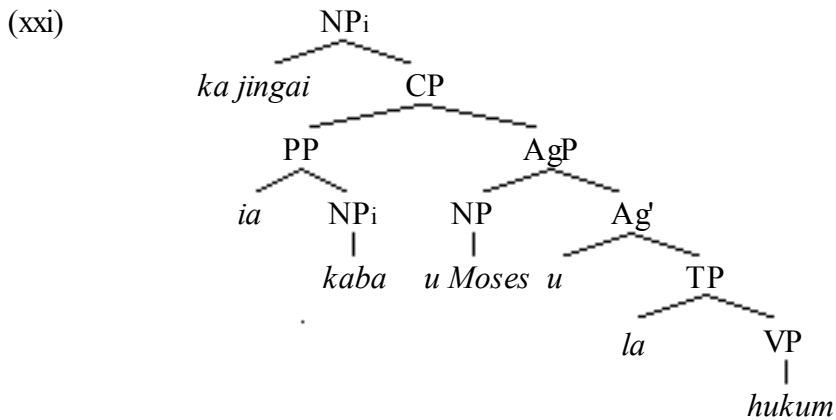
The structure of (15) will be as in (xv). (xv) differs from (xv') in containing a syntactically empty clause subject.





In neither alternative is agreement of the clause subject and verb present. Structures (xv) and (xv') have been simplified by omitting the prepositional phrase *sha kawei ka ri* 'to another country'.

The structure of (21) will then be as in (xxi). In (xxi) *ia kiba* is represented as a prepositional phrase heading the relative clause. (xxi') is an alternative with a syntactically empty clause object.



As with (xv'), (xxi') is not relevant to the issue of representing relative clause semantics, but it does help to account for why *ia* or prepositions cannot precede *ba*.

**Empty heads.** In example (12) there is no head noun of the relative clause, only the modifier *baroh*, and in examples (18) and (22), the relative clause makes up the entire noun phrase. (23) to (26) are parallel cases.

(23) [uba ialeh bad me], (5:25)  
 3SM=C oppose with youSM  
 'one [who opposes you]'

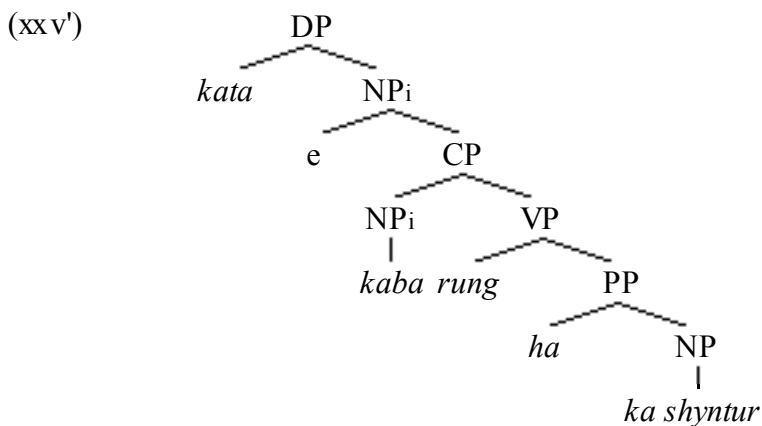
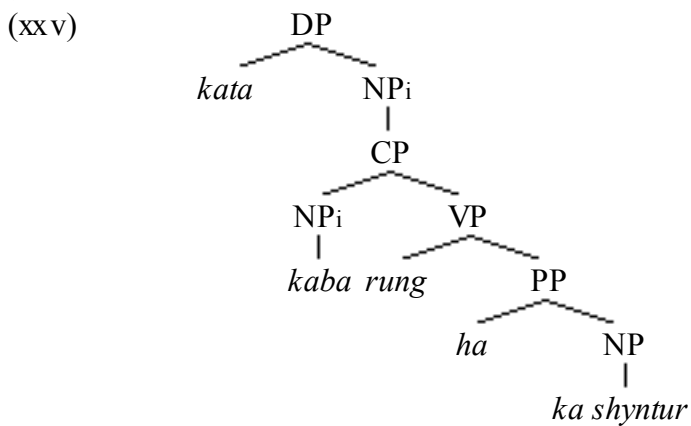
(24) [uba don bor], (7:29)  
 3SM=C have power  
 'one [who has power]'

(25) (*Ym dei*) *kata* [*kaba rung ha ka shyntur*], (15:11)  
 NEG be that 3SF=C enter into 3SF mouth  
 '(is not) that [which goes into the mouth]'

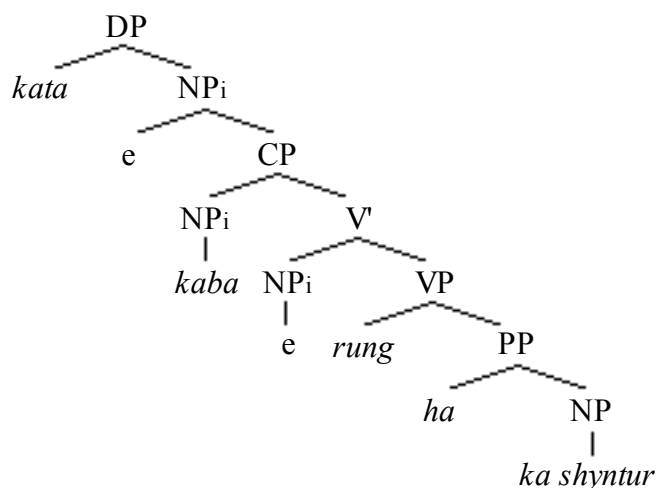
(26) [*kaba pyntngit ia u briew*], (15:11)  
 3SF=C CAUS=dirty OBJ 3SM man  
 'what makes a man dirty'

In (23) and (24), there is no head noun or modifier associated with it; unlike (18) or (22), these noun phrases are indefinite, a distinction marked in English but not in Khasi. In (25), there is the modifier *kata* 'that' with which *kaba* agrees. (26) is the (postposed) subject of (25) in the original context.

**Structures 4.** The structure of the noun phrase which contains the relative clause in (25) will be as in (xxv). (xxv) contains a headless noun phrase consisting only of a subordinate clause. It also contains a co-indexing of that noun phrase with the relative pronoun in the clause, marking the clause as relative. (xxv') differs from (xxv) in representing a syntactic head of the larger noun phrase. And (xxv'') represents both an empty head noun and an empty clause subject.



(xxv")



**Verbless clauses.** If Khasi *uba*, *kaba* and *kiba* are similar to English relative pronouns in some ways, they are also different in others. Examples (27) to (30) illustrate phrases which are headed by Khasi relative pronouns, but which contain no verb.

(27) *uno u briew [uba na phi]* (12:11)  
3SM=Q 3SM man 3SM=C from youPL  
'what man (who is) among you'

(28) *U Trai [uba U Blei jong me]* (4: 7)  
3SM lord 3SM=C 3SM God of youPL  
'the Lord [(who is) your God]'

(29) *ka jingkad [kaba kham khraw]* (9:16)  
3SF ACT=tear 3SF=C more big  
'a tear [which is bigger]'

(30) *ka hukum [kaba nyngkong]* (11:24)  
3SF order 3SF=C first  
'the commandment [which is first]'

In (27) *uba* is followed by a prepositional phrase and in (28) by a noun phrase. In (29) and (30), *kaba* is followed by an adjective phrase. These can be glossed with English relative pronouns followed by a form of the verb 'be'. But the relative pronoun, unlike Khasi *uba* or *kaba*, cannot remain without a verb, and the verbless phrases would not be syntactic relative clauses. In (29) and (30) the word order must be reversed: 'a bigger tear', 'the first commandment'.

The examples in (31) to (34) are similar, except that here there is no head noun of the clause as well.

(31) *[kiba khadduh]* (20:16)  
3PL=C last  
'those [(who are) last]'

(32) *[kiba hangta]* (26:71)

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11 : 6 June 2011

George Bedell, Ph.D.

Agreement in Khasi Relative Clauses

3PL=C    LOC=that  
'those [(who were) there]'

(33)    [*kiba    ha   ka   Judia*] (24:16)  
3PL=C    in    3SF    Judia  
those [(who are) in Judea]'

(34)    [*kiba    ki   nongtrei*] (20: 2)  
3PL=C    3PL    AGT=work  
'those [who were workers]'

Here too there is no Khasi verb accompanying *kiba*. In the English glosses a relative clause with a relative pronoun may be used, but if there is no verb, there cannot be any relative pronoun (*who* in these examples). Most of the Khasi phrases in (27) to (34) correspond to relative clauses containing the verb *long* 'be'. Compare (35) with (27) and (29).

(35)    *uta           uba           long kham khraw           na phi*, (23:11)  
3SM=that    3SM=C    be    most great           from youPL  
'the one [(who is the) greatest among you]' (23:11)

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## Abbreviations

1S	first person singular
1PL	first person plural
2SM	second person masculine singular
2SF	second person feminine singular
2PL	second person plural
3D	third person diminutive
3SM	third person masculine singular
3SF	third person feminine singular
3PL	third person plural
ACT	action nominalizer
AGT	agent nominalizer
C	complementizer
CAUS	causativizer
CLASS	classifier
COLL	collective
DIM	diminutive
EMPH	emphatic
FUT	future tense
IMP	imperative
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
OBJ	object marker
Q	interrogative
PAST	past tense

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11 : 6 June 2011

George Bedell, Ph.D.

Agreement in Khasi Relative Clauses

PROX	proximate
SUBJ	subjunctive
VOC	vocative
youSM	you (singular masculine)
youSF	you (singular feminine)
youPL	you (plural)

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George Bedell, Ph. D.  
 Lecturer, Department of Linguistics  
 Payap University  
 Chiang Mai 50000  
 Thailand  
 gdbedell@gmail.com