The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

George Bedell, Ph. D.

==

Khasi is a Mon-Khmer language spoken primarily 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 discussion are taken from *Ka Khubor jong ka Jingieit* (The Message of Love: the New Testament in Khasi, 2000) and cited in the orthography used there, unless otherwise noted. The numbers following examples 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 nineteenth meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society (SEALS), hosted by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, May 2009.

Gender/Number Particles

Khasi nouns are categorized according to gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural). These categories are marked by particles which precede a noun, called in traditional Khasi grammar 'articles'.

(1)   *u khynnah*
         'boy'

(2)   *ka kynthei*

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   154
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

'woman'

(3)   *ki sngi*
         'days'

In (1), *u* indicates that the noun *khynnah* is masculine singular; in (2), *ka* indicates that the noun *kynthei* is feminine singular; and in (3), *ki* indicates that the noun *sngi* is plural. Gender is sometimes a lexical property of the noun: *kynthei* is inherently feminine, as is *sngi*. But other nouns are not inherently masculine or feminine: *khynnah* 'child' can be marked masculine or feminine by *u* or *ka*. Gender is not distinguished for plurals, which are marked by *ki*. The Khasi system of gender/number particles is shown in (a).

(a)

	Masc	Fem
Sing	*u*	*ka*
Pl	*ki*	

Comparison with French

Peculiarities such as gender agreement in the singular but not the plural are not uncommon. The Khasi system in (a) is reminiscent of the system of articles in Standard French, shown in (b).

(b)

	Masc	Fem
Sing	*le*	*la*
Pl	*les*	

Like the Khasi particles in (a), French articles distinguish gender only in the singular. But French differs from Khasi in at least two important respects. First, the French articles in (b) are definite articles and are used only when the noun they accompany has definite reference. The Khasi particles in (a) are not necessarily definite and are used regardless of whether the reference of the noun they accompany is definite. Second, the gender and number of a French noun are sometimes marked by affixes attached to it, though this is less extensive in spoken French than in written French. Khasi nouns lack any marking of gender or number in the noun itself. Thus it seems that the Khasi particles correspond not to the French articles, but rather to the morphological markers of gender and number in French nouns. It is appropriate to say that in French, the definite articles agree with the nouns they modify; but in Khasi, the particles do not agree with the nouns they modify, since they do not function as modifiers but rather as markers of noun categories.

Structures 1

We will assume that the internal structure of phrases like (1) to (3) is as shown in (i).

(i)

```
              N
           ___/\___
          /        \
        u         NStem
                    |
                 khynnah
```

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   155
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

That is, the gender/number marker is a kind of prefix which serves as the morphological head of a noun (N). It is attached to a following noun stem (NStem). This structure takes the combination of prefix and stem to be an independent lexical item. Khasi gender/number particles are homophonous with third person pronouns; the masculine singular pronoun *u* 'he, it' will have the structure in (i').

(i')   DP
          |
          u

Here DP stands for 'deictic phrase'; Khasi third person pronouns are always definite. In this paper, Khasi pronouns are glossed using English pronouns, while (homophonous) gender/number particles and agreement markers accompanying verbs are glossed with person, gender and number features. See Bedell (2011) for details. Structure (i') suggests that a syntactic analysis of the gender/number particles as in (i") would allow a more direct relationship with the pronouns: they would be identical in their external syntax, differing only in that the pronouns lack an overt noun phrase complement.

(i")   DP
")   ╱‾‾╲
        u   NP
                 |
              khynnah
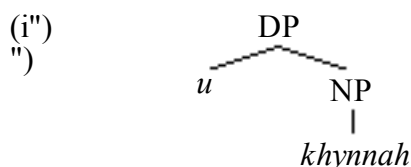
This alternative analysis is rejected for several reasons: first, noun stems are virtually always used with gender/number markers (Khasi noun stems are occasionally used as adjectives, as classifiers, or in compounds; in these cases they are not accompanied by gender/number particles). Second, virtually nothing can come between the two. Third, to accept a syntactic structure like (i") would entail a distinct syntactic category for deictics as exemplified below. Finally, it would fail to account for the semantic/pragmatic difference between pronouns and gender/number markers.

Deixis

Khasi deictic modifiers appear preceding the gender/number marker as shown in (4), (5) and (6).

(4)   *uta*   *u*   *khynnah* (17:18)
        3SM-that   3SM   child
        'that boy'

(5)   *kata*   *ka*   *kynthei* (9:22)
        3SF-that   3SF   woman
        'that woman'

(6)   *kita*   *ki*   *sngi* (3: 1)
        3PL-that   3PL   day
        'those days'

The words *uta*, *kata* and *kita* consist of a deictic stem *-ta* preceded by a prefix *u-*, *ka-* or *ki-* which shows agreement in gender and number with the modified noun. The agreement prefixes are iden-

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   156
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

tical with the gender/number particles in (a). There is a fourth gender/number particle, *i*. It is singular and diminutive, often expressing either intimacy or contempt. Since it is rare in our text, it is not regularly included in the examples; see (39) below for one instance. A parallel set of words with a different deictic stem -*ne* are shown in (7) to (9).

(7)   *une*   *u*   *briew* (12:24)
          3SM-this   3SM man
          'this man'

(8)   *kane*   *ka*   *ktien* (15:12)
          3SF-this   3SF   saying
          'this saying'

(9)   *kine*   *ki*   *ktien* (7:28)
          3PL-this   3PL   saying
          'these sayings'

The noun *briew* 'person' in (7), like *khynnah* 'child' in (1) and (4), can be either masculine or feminine; while *ktien* 'mouth, word' in (8) and (9), like *kynthei* 'woman' in (2) and (5), is inherently feminine.

The Khasi deictic modifiers in (4) through (7) may be arranged in paradigms parallel to the markers in (a), as shown in (c) and (d).

(c)

	Masc	Fem
Sing	*uta*	*kata*
Pl	*kita*	

(d)

	Masc	Fem
Sing	*une*	*kane*
Pl	*kine*	

In addition to -*ta* and -*ne*, Khasi has a number of other deictic stems, including -*tai*, -*to*, -*tei* and -*thie*. According to Nagaraja (1985, p. 11), -*ne* is 'proximate' and the rest 'remote'. -*ta* is in addition 'invisible'; -*tai* is in addition 'far'; -*to* is in addition 'not very far', -*tei* is in addition 'up'; and -*thie* is in addition 'down'. There are few examples in our text of -*tai*, -*to*, -*tei* or -*thie*. (10) and (11) illustrate -*tai* and -*to*, but -*tei* and -*thie* are not found. This may in part be due to the fact that our text is a translation from English.

(10)   *katai*   *ka*   *shnong* (21: 2)
         3SF-that   3SF village
         'that village (over there)'

(11)   *kato*   *ka*   *diengphna* (27:40)
         3SF-that   3SF cross
         'that cross (there)'

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   157
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

These are reminiscent of the corresponding deictic modifiers in Standard French, shown in (e). In both languages these modifiers agree in gender and number with the modified noun, but gender agreement appears only in the singular.
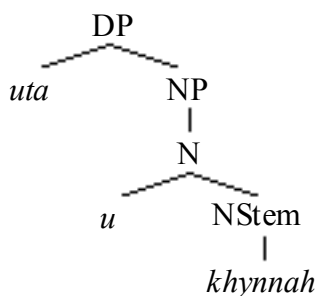
(e)

	Masc	Fem
Sing	*ce(t)*	*cette*
Pl	*ces*	

The French system also differs from Khasi in at least two respects. First, it does not distinguish distance directly as Khasi (and English) do: *-ta* 'that' versus *-ne* 'this'. Rather, it uses locative pronouns suffixed to the modified noun: *-ci* 'here' and *-là* 'there'. And second, though the French deictic modifiers in (e) agree in the same pattern as Khasi modifiers in (c) and (d), the morphology of the agreement resembles that in the articles in (b) less closely than in Khasi.

Structures 2

The internal structure of noun phrases like (4) to (9) which contain deictic modifiers will then be as in (iv).

(iv)

```
              DP
           /      \
        uta        NP
                    |
                    N
                  /    \
                 u      NStem
                          |
                       khynnah
```

In French (or in English) articles and deictic modifiers belong to the same syntactic category and cannot therefore co-occur in the same noun phrase. In Khasi the gender/number markers are not syntactically present; the deictic modifiers belong to the category D (deictic or demonstrative); and the phrase headed by them which takes a noun phrase (NP) complement is DP (deictic phrase). Since Khasi lacks definite articles, deictic modifiers may be used as an equivalent, and are so glossed. Khasi deictic modifiers also commonly occur without complements as shown in (iv').

(iv')

```
        DP
        |
       uta
```

This is parallel to what are called 'demonstrative pronouns' in French (or English).

Deictic Pronouns

Examples of such Khasi deictic pronouns are shown in (10) through (15). In (10) and (11), *uta* and *kine* serve as subjects with which the verb agrees (as marked by *u* and *ki*, respectively). For details on Khasi subject-verb agreement, see Bedell (2011).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com 158
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

(10)   uta   *kein*   u*n*   *pynbaptis* *ia* *phi* (3:11)
       3SM-that   EMPH   3SM-FUT   baptize   OBJ   you
       'he will baptize you'

(11)   Kine   ki*n*   *leit* *noh* *te*   *sha* *ka*   *shitom*   *bymjukut,* (25:46)
       3PL-this   3PL-FUT   go   away and   to   3SF   trouble   eternal
       'they will go off to eternal punishment'

In (12) and (13), they serve as objects of the verb as shown by the preposition (or case marker) *ia*.

(12)   *ia*   uta   *te*   *yn*   *khot* *uba*   *khraw*   *ha*   *ka*   *hima*   *ki*
       OBJ   3SM-that   and   FUT   call   3SM-C   great   in   3SF   kingdom   3PL
       bneng (5:19)
       heaven
       'and he will be called great in the kingdom of heaven'

(13)   *ka*   *la*   *dei* *kein* *ia*   *phi*   *ban*   *leh*   *ia*   kine (23:23)
       3SF   PAST   right EMPH   OBJ   you   C-FUT   perform   OBJ   3PL-this
       'it was right for you to perform them'

In (14), *uta* is a genitive modifier of the noun *ïing* 'house'; and in (15), *kine* is a predicate nominal.

(14)   *ha*   *ka*   *ïing*   uta, (9:10)
       in   3SF   house   3SM-that
       'in his house'

(15)   *Ki*   *kyrteng*   *jong* *kita*   *ki*   *khadar*   *ngut*   *ki*   *apostol*   *te*
       3PL   name   of   3PL-that   3PL   twelve   CLASS   3PL   apostle   and
       ki *la* *long*   kine: (10: 2)
       3PL   PAST be   3PL-this
       'and the names of the twelve apostles were these:'

Numeral Modifiers

In addition to the head noun, Khasi noun phrases may contain various types of modifiers. Of some interest are numerals, which are most often found between the deictic modifier and the head noun. Some examples are (16) through (20). In (16) and (17), the position of *arngut* 'two (people)' and *khadar ngut* 'twelve (people)' is clear.

(16)   kine   *arngut*   *ki*   *khun jong nga* (20:21)
       3PL-this   two-CLASS   3PL   son   of   me
       'these two sons of mine'

(17)   kita   *ki*   *khadar*   *ngut*   *ki*   *apostol* (10: 2)
       3PL-that   3PL   twelve   CLASS   3PL   apostle
       'the twelve apostles'

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   159
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

The position of the modifier preceding the gender/number particle is evidence which favors our morphological analysis of such particles. Numeral modifiers may also be preceded by gender/number particles, which must agree with the head noun. In (18) to (20), no overt head noun appears.
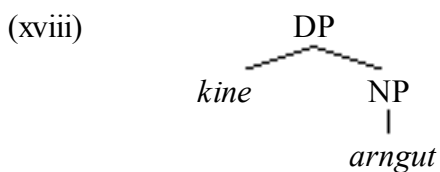
(18) *Uno   na*   kine   *arngut   uba*   *la   leh   ia   ka   mon   u*
      3SM-which from   3PL-this two-CLASS 3SM-C   PAST do   OBJ 3SF will 3SM
      kpa? (21:31)
      father
      'which of the two did the will of the father?'

(19) *Ia*   kine   *ki*   *khadar   ngut*   *U   Jisu   u*   *la   phah noh* (10: 5)
      OBJ   3PL-this 3PL   twelve   CLASS   3SM Jesus 3SM PAST send away
      'Jesus sent these twelve out'

(20) *kan   long ka   tnga jongno   na*   kine   *ki*   *hynñiew   ngut?*
      3SF-FUT   be   3SF   wife of-which   from 3PL-this 3PL   seven   CLASS
      (22:28)
      'whose wife of these seven will she be?'

Structures 3

An example like (16) will have a structure as in (xvi).

(xvi)
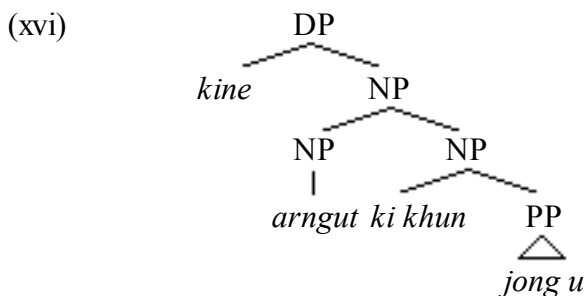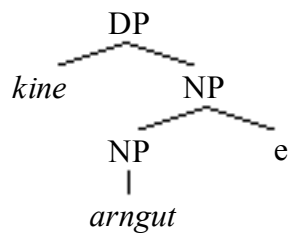

The numeral *arngut* 'two (people)' is itself a kind of noun. If the head noun is absent, the structure will be something like (xviii).

(xviii)

It would also be possible to analyze (18) with an empty head position as in (xviii').

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   160
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

(xviii')

```
                    DP
              ╱           ╲
         kine              NP
                      ╱         ╲
                    NP            e
                    │
                 arngut
```

Clause Modifiers

In addition to numeral modifiers as in (16) to (20), Khasi noun phrases may contain clause modifiers as in (21) to (23).

(21)   kata   *ka   lyer ba   ka   jur* (14:30)
        3SF-that 3SF   wind C   3SF   strong
        'the strong wind'

(22)   kata   *ka   sngi ba   U Noah   u   la   leit hapoh   kata   ka*
        3SF-that 3SF   day C   Noah   3SM   PAST go   in   3SF-that 3SF
        iïng   lieng (24:38)
        house   boat
        'the day that Noah went into the ark'

(23)   kita   *ki   symbai   babha* (13:38)
        3PL-that 3PL   seed   C-good
        'the good seeds'

Clause modifiers begin with the particle *ba*, which we take to be a subordinating conjunction or 'complementizer' parallel to English *that* as in the gloss for (22). Under certain circumstances, *ba* is prefixed to a stative verb, as in (23). In our examples, *ba* is glossed as C to avoid confusion with the deictic *that*. Like numeral modifiers, clause modifiers may agree with the modified head noun, as in (24) to (26).

(24)   kata   *ka   lynti kaba   lam sha kaban   im* (7:14)
        3SF-that 3SF   path 3SF-C   lead to   3SF-C-FUT live
        'the path which leads to life'

(25)   kata   *ka   dohkha   kaba   la   ngat nyngkong* (17:27)
        3SF-that 3SF   fish   3SF-C   PAST catch first
        'the fish which was caught first'

(26)   kita   *ki   langbrot   kiba   la   jah noh na   ka   iïng   Israel*
        3PL-that 3PL   sheep   3SF-C   PAST loose away from 3SF house   Israel
        (10: 6)
        'those strayed sheep from the house of Israel'

Also like numeral modifiers, clause modifiers may appear as complements to deictic modifiers without an overt head noun, as in (27) to (32).

(27)   *Naba une   u   long uta   ba   la   thoh shaphang jong u:* (11:10)

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   161
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

| for | 3SM-this | 3SM | be | 3SM-that | C | PAST | write | about | of | him |

'for he is the (one) that it was written about him:'

(28) *phim   shym la   pule ia   kata ba   la   ong U Blei   ha   phi, ...?*

| you-NEG | NEG | PAST | read | OBJ | that | C | PAST | say | God | | to | you |

(22:31)

'didn't you read what God said to you, ...?'

In (27) and (28) the clause modifier does not agree, but does in (29) to (32).

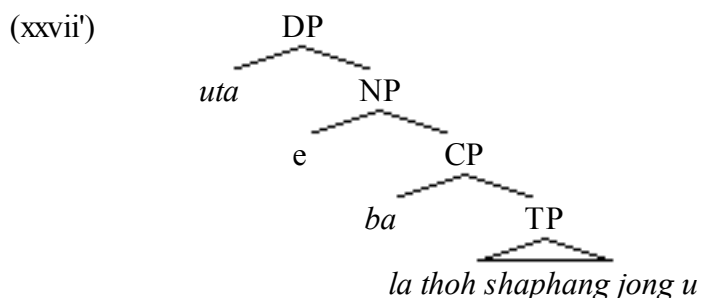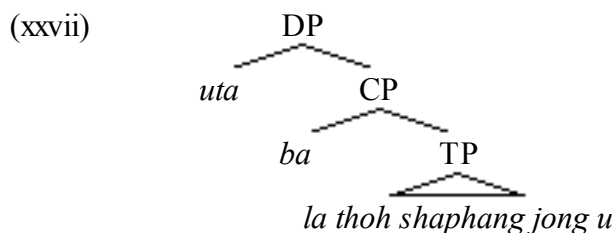(29) *bad leit sha lum   ban   wad   ia   kata   kaba   la*

| and | go | to | mountain | C-FUT | look-for | OBJ | 3SF-that | 3SF-that | PAST |

sakma (18:12)

go-astray

'and go to the mountains to look for the (one) that went astray'

(30) *Ngam   don jingrem   na   ka   snam   une   uba   hok*

| I-NEG | have | guilt | from | 3SF | blood | 3SM-this | 3SM-C | righteous |

(27:24)

'I am innocent of the blood of this righteous (one)'

(31) *yn   iathuh   ruh   ia   kane   kaba   ka   la   leh* (26:13)

| FUT | tell | | also | OBJ | 3SF-this | 3SF-C | | 3SF | PAST | do |

'and what she did will be told'

(32) *ia   uwei   na   kine   kiba   rit* (10:42)

| OBJ | 3SM-one | from | 3PL-this | 3PL-C | little |

'to one of these little (ones)'

Structures 4

An example like (21) will have a structure as in (xxi).

(xxi)
```
           DP
          /  \
       kata   NP
             /  \
          ka lyer  CP
                  /  \
                ba    AgP
                      /\
                   ka jur
```

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   162
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi
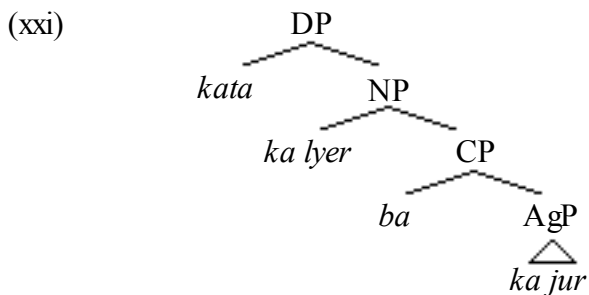
The modifier here is *ba ka jur* 'which is strong'. Unlike numeral modifiers, clause modifiers are not noun phrases; if the head noun is absent, the structure may be as in (xxvii) or alternatively as in (xxvii').

(xxvii)

```
              DP
           ／    ＼
        uta        CP
                ／    ＼
             ba        TP
                      ◯
               la thoh shaphang jong u
```

(xxvii')

```
              DP
           ／    ＼
        uta        NP
                ／    ＼
              e        CP
                    ／    ＼
                 ba        TP
                          ◯
                   la thoh shaphang jong u
```

Loose Ends

There are a variety of other deictic phrases without a headed noun phrase complement. (33) shows a deictic pronoun which has been incorporated into an adverb (written as a single word by Singh 1904).

(33)   *namar   kata*
         because   3SF-that
         'therefore'

(34) illustrates the quantifier *baroh* 'all, every' which (unlike numerals) follows the head noun in a noun phrase.

(34)   *kata   ka   ri   baroh*. (9:31)
         3SF-that   3SF   country   all
         'all that country'

(35)   *Kata   baroh   te   ka   la   long,* (21:4)
         3SF-that   all   and 3SF PAST become
         'and all of that happened'

(35) shows *baroh* in a headless noun phrase.

In (36) the numeral *kawei* 'one' contains a gender/number particle, and occupies the position of other numeral modifiers.

(36)   *kata   kawei   Ka   Mari* (28:1)
         3SF-that   3SF-one   3SF   Mary

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   163
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

'the other Mary'

(37)   *kum kata   kawei* (12:13)
        like 3SF-that   3SF-one
        'just like the other'

In (37) it appears without a noun phrase complement.

(38)   *bad ban   ym iehnoh   ia   kita   kiwei.* (23:23)
        and C-FUTNEG abandon OBJ 3PL-that   3PL-one
        'and not neglect the others'

In (38) in addition it shows plural agreement. In all three cases, its meaning corresponds to English 'other'.

        (39) shows a deictic phrase with two clause modifiers.

(39)   *ia   iwei   na   kine   kiba   rit kiba   ngeit   ha   nga,*
        OBJ 3D-one   from 3PL-this 3PL-C   small 3PL-C   believe   in   me
        (18: 6)
        'one of these little (ones) who believe in me'

(40) to (42) illustrate a special type of head noun, composed of a reduplicated interrogative *kiei* 'what'.

(40)   *u   sei   noh ia   kiei   kiei   kiba   bha* (12:35)
        3SM bring-out away OBJ 3PL-what 3PL-what 3PL-C   good
        'he brings out good things'

(41)   *haba u   dang puson   ia   kine   kiei   kiei   ruh* (1:20)
        when 3SM still ponder   OBJ 3PL-this   3PL-what 3PL-what even
        'while he was thinking about these things'

(42)   *te   ia   kine   kiei   kiei   baroh   yn   sa   ai   lang*
        and OBJ 3PL-this 3PL-what 3PL-what all   FUT PROX give together
        tam   ha   phi. (6:33)
        gather   to   you
        'all these things will be given to you'

When within a deictic phrase as in (41) or (42), *kiei kiei* is usually modified by *ruh* 'even' or *baroh* 'all'.

===
Abbreviations

1S   first person singular
1PL   first person plural
2SM   second person masculine singular

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   164
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

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
C	complementizer
CLASS	classifier
DIM	diminutive
FUT	future tense
IMP	imperative
NEG	negative
OBJ	object
PAST	past tense
PROX	proximate
SUBJ	subjunctive
youSM	you (singular masculine)
youSF	you (singular feminine)
youPL	you (plural)

==

References

H. Roberts, *A Grammar of the Khassi Language*, London: Kegan Paul, 1891 (reprint New Delhi: Mittal 1995).

U N. Singh, *Khasi-English Dictionary*, Shillong, 1904 (reprint New Delhi: Gyan 2003).

L. Rabel, *Khasi, a Language of Assam*, Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1961.

K. S. Nagaraja, *Khasi, a Descriptive Analysis*, Pune: Deccan College Post-Graduate & Research Institute, 1985.

Ka Khubor jong ka Jingieit (The Message of Love: the New Testament in Khasi), Bangalore: Ka Bible Society jong ka Ri India, 2000.

M. P. Lewis (ed.) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth edition. Dallas: SIL International. Online version: http://www.ethnologue.com, 2009.

G. Bedell, 'The Syntax of Agreement in Khasi', *Language in India* <www.languageinindia.com> 11.4: 84-94, 2011.

==============================

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

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   165
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi

gdbedell@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com   166
11 : 5 May 2011
George Bedell, Ph. D.
The Syntax of Deixis in Khasi