

THE VERBAL PIECE IN KHASI

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by

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## Abstract

The verbal piece in Khasi is established by a consideration of various types of declarative sentence (Chapter II). It is shown that the most usual basic form consists of pronominal prefix plus verb. This fact, not previously recognised, simplifies the description of Khasi particularly as it relates to the "article". A type of piece which incorporates an "object" noun unaccompanied by preposition or "article" is also here established. In the next chapters various more complex structures are considered. These involve verb particles of various kinds (Chapter III); auxiliary verbs, including the so-called "passive" constructions, and other two-verb structures (Chapter IV). In Chapter III the attribution of a rigid tense system to Khasi is rejected. Chapter V treats verbal extension and derivation by means of preverbs and affixes. It includes a full discussion of the attributive preverb ba, which has among its functions that of nominalising a clause so that in some cases a verbal sentence is transformed into a nominal one. The second part of the chapter serves to delimit the formal scatter of Khasi verb stems.

Chapter VI completes the treatment of the verbal piece by examining constructions involving adverbs, many of which are specially collocated with particular verbs. They have an important function in enlarging the expressive resources of the latter. Here particular emphasis is given to the so-called "phonaesthetic" adverbs, which have not been adequately treated elsewhere.

In the final chapter, earlier treatments of the topic are discussed and differences with that adopted here ~~are~~<sup>are</sup> drawn out.

1. Khasi, the sole representative of the Mon-Khmer language family on the Indian mainland, is spoken in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts of the State of Meghalaya, carved out of Assam in 1971.
2. Linguistically, the Khasi language-area exists as an island within an area where the languages spoken are either of the Tibeto-Burman (TB) or the Indo-Aryan (IA) family. To the north lies the Assam Valley where Assamese is the major language spoken, to the south and south-east lie Bangladesh and the Bengali speaking areas of Assam, where both Assamese and Bengali are IA languages. To the east and north-east lie the Mikir Hills and North-Cachar Hills districts of Assam where the local languages, Mikir and Cachari, are of the TB family. Its western neighbour, the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya, is also linguistically Tibeto-Burman.
3. The number of native Khasi speakers, taking into account those who speak either the Standard dialect (q.v) or its local variants, was 339,227 at the 1961 Census, the latest of which the results are available.
4. Since Grierson brought out his monumental survey of the languages of India<sup>1</sup> little has been done in the study of

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1. The LINGUISTIC SURVEY OF INDIA (Calcutta, 1904).

the minor dialects of Khasi. Grierson lists four dialects in his Survey<sup>2</sup> - Standard Khasi and Lyngngam spoken in the Khasi Hills, Synteng (now generally called Pnar) and what he calls War<sup>3</sup> which are spoken in the Jaintia Hills. The latter dialect is in fact the dialect commonly called by the local people Amwi. Gurdon, in his monograph on the Khasis<sup>4</sup>, mentions in addition Lakadong (a minor dialect spoken in an area to the east of the Amwi dialect-area) and Mynnar, or properly Mnar, an interesting dialect spoken in a small area in the north of Khasi Hills but having much in common with Amwi. Robert Needham Cust, in the chapter on the "Khasi family" in his notes on the languages of South and South-East Asia<sup>5</sup> mentions 'Battoa' (quite likely Bataw which is of the Lakadong group). It is only in the last few years that some serious work has been done on Amwi and Mnar.

5. Geography has obviously played an important part in the proliferation of dialects in the Khasi and Jaintia hills; and the absence of a written literature before the

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2. op cit (Vol. 2).

3. The term "War" is geographical rather than linguistic and is applied to the foothills along the southern border of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The portion in the Jaintia Hills is often called "War Mihngi" (Eastern War) to differentiate it from the Khasi Hills portion called "War Sepngi" (i.e. "Western War").

4. Gurdon, P.R.T.: The Khasis (London, 1907)

5. Cust, R.N.: A sketch of the modern languages of the East Indies (London 1878)

British occupation about 1833 was another factor that prevented standardization over the centuries. Administratively, too, the Khasis appear always to have been divided, and at the advent of the British there were 25 recognized principalities in the Khasi hills alone. By contrast, the whole of the Jaintia Hills was under one king. The significance of this will be apparent later. Topographically, the land rises very steeply in the south - from about 150 feet above sea level to three or four thousand feet in some ten miles. Thereafter, for the next 30 miles or so, the land slopes gradually northwards towards the central range and then falls gently away towards the Assam Valley where, at the border with Assam, the altitude may again be as low as 150 feet. As may be expected, it is in the southern fringe that one will discover an astonishing variation in dialect forms, to a greater degree, indeed, than elsewhere in the district. In the low valleys at the bottom of deep gorges carved out by rivers and streams, there are many villages whose inhabitants have but little contact with the upland Khasis, such contact being usually restricted to markets held normally once in eight days. So isolated indeed are they, and in many respects so different from the Khasis of the uplands, that the British thought it expedient to group these villages into "sirdarships"

which were directly administered by them. In the Jaintia Hills, on the other hand, where conditions, both administrative and geographical, were more favourable, dialect variations are by comparison slight.

6. The area inhabited by the Lyngngams is between Western Khasi Hills and Eastern Garo Hills. Racially, the Lyngngams appear to be of mixed stock, the matrilineal character of both societies encouraging inter-marriage.
7. Much work remains to be done on the Khasi dialects and such work when done may reveal even more clearly the place that Khasi occupies in the Mon-Khmer family of languages.
8. The dialect treated in my dissertation is that of the area around Cherrapunji and this has been the Standard Dialect for over a hundred years in educational institutions and for official purposes. The dialect is locally called "Ka Ktien Sohra" (Sohra being the Khasi name for Cherrapunji). Its choice as the standard dialect for the entire district came about more by historical accident than by design. It was in Cherrapunji that the British first established their headquarters after they had subjugated the Khasis in 1833, the village being in an area ruled by a friendly chief. It was in Cherrapunji also that the Welsh Presbyterian Mission began their work in 1841, when the first missionary, the



Rev. Thomas Jones, started a school. Within a short time this remarkable man was able to make a thorough study of the local dialect, and to reduce it to writing. His being on the spot was undoubtedly an advantage. By contrast, the Christian workers whom William Carey sent to work among the Khasis several years earlier had been obliged to confine their activities to the border areas, presumably because of the unsettled conditions in the hills. For this reason, although they had brought out a translation of the New Testament before the Welsh Mission came on the scene, transcription of the text (which was in the Bengali script) would suggest that the dialect chosen (if indeed there was only one) had been imperfectly studied.

9. The choice of the Cherra dialect was for several reasons a happy one. It is admittedly more euphonious than any other Khasi dialect and, moreover, it has a well-developed rhetorical tradition. Again, contact with the outside world had been going on at this point for a very long time before the British came, largely through trade - lime, iron, coal, oranges being among the products chiefly in demand in the plains, and it is conceivable that it was through Cherrapunji that most of the Indo-Aryan loan-words found their way into Khasi.
10. Studies on the Khasi Language: Thomas Jones appears to

have collected much material for a grammar of the language but he died before he could do anything more with it. It was on the basis of this material, with the addition of what had been collected by him personally, that the Rev. W. Pryse wrote the first descriptive grammar of Khasi - An Introduction to the Khassia Language which was published in 1855. True, short notes on particular aspects of the language had appeared earlier in contributions by British officials to learned journals, but Pryse's grammar was the first serious attempt to present a full description of the language.

This work has added merit in that it contains not only a working glossary but also several texts representing verbatim transcriptions of deliberations in court cases, legends and descriptions of Khasi customs. Obtained, as they were, on the spot and from native informants and, moreover, within 20 years or so of the coming of the British and before external influences had made their inroads with the spread of education, these texts provide valuable clues to the changes that have crept into the language, particularly in the syntax, since that time.

Although Pryse, like Thomas Jones, was a missionary of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, his work was among the Bengalis of the Sylhet plains and this fact seems

to have coloured his views on the future of Khasi and other minority languages of this part of the Empire, because he writes in his introduction:

"It is obvious that such a small and uninfluential tribe will not be able to retain characters different from those of the larger nations of the plains which surround their hills. Should the Khasia tribe be ever brought under the influence of education, civilization and commercial intercourse, the Bengali character must supplant the Roman at a not very distant day. For the sake of the Khasis that would be very desirable. Nor would it be less desirable for the Bengali language to supplant all the hill dialects of the north-east frontier".

Pryse's predictions have not materialized. The Roman script continued in use, and, as it turned out, facilitated the learning of English. It is interesting to note from the earliest Census Reports that population for population, there were more literates in English among the Khasis than among the more advanced communities in the plains.

By the first decade of this century, Khasi had been recognized as a minor Vernacular by the Calcutta University. Since then it has come to be accepted as a major subject for first degree examinations by both the Universities of Calcutta and of Gauhati. With the inauguration of the new North-Eastern Hills University in 1973, there is bound to be greater incentive for further development. The interest of the Khasis

themselves is a contributing factor in the building up of a large body of literature which must provide material for promoting the adoption of Khasi in higher education.

## Orthography

The first translation of the New Testament into Khasi which was published in Serampore in 1831 was in the Bengali script. Whether the language had been imperfectly studied or another dialect than the Cherrapunji dialect had been chosen is uncertain, and this translation has since remained just a literary curiosity. The decision to adopt the Roman script for the language was largely due to one man, the Rev. Thomas Jones, who was the first missionary sent out by the Presbyterian Church of Wales in 1841. The first steps towards working out a suitable system of orthography were of necessity tentative and in his translation of the Gospels in 1842 Thomas Jones used 'c' to represent both aspirated and unaspirated /k/, though immediately afterwards he discarded it in favour of 'k'. Even in 1848 this letter was used by the next missionary, the Rev. William Lewis, to represent both phonemes i.e. /k/ and /kh/. In fact, it was not till 1850 that these were recognized as distinct.

Strange as it may sound, even today - over a century later - Khasi spelling is still some way away from being uniform. For example, the word for 'to love' is variously spelt as 'ieid' and 'ieij' by some writers as against the standard 'ieit'. The convenient conventions adopted by the Rev. H. Roberts in his grammar<sup>1</sup> of using "an acute

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1. Roberts, H: "Khasi Grammar" (London: 1891)

accent to mark a vowel as long"<sup>2</sup> is no longer in use as is, to a large extent, the practice of using 'ï' to represent consonantal /y/, with the result that one who reads Khasi literature has to contend with several anomalies and in many cases is obliged to fall back on the context to understand what he reads.

By and large, though, Khasi spelling has advanced far from those faltering experiments of a century ago. There is a very pressing need however, for concerted action among present-day writers of Khasi in order that the irregularities that exist can be removed.

The spelling followed by me is that used by the majority of Khasi writers.

The recognized Khasi alphabet as used in schools consists of the following letters in the order given:

A B K D E \*G NG H I ï J L M N Ñ O P R S T U W Y

It may be noted that y is treated entirely as a vowel and never as a consonant.

As stated earlier, there is no way now of ascertaining vowel length apart from the Welsh device also mentioned by Professor Henderson "whereby final b and d are regularly used to indicate a preceding long vowel", although, as she

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2. Henderson, E.J.A.: "Vowel length and vowel quantity in Khasi" (BSOAS Vol. xxx. pt. 3: 1967), p. 567.

has herself discovered, a few irregularities do occur even in these situations.<sup>3</sup> Wherever necessary, in the illustrations cited by me, vowel length will be indicated by ':'.

Consonants present few problems. The common ones have their traditional phonetic values. 'g' by itself is not found in Khasi words and even in loan-words the original 'g' sound tends to be assimilated to the Khasi 'k' sound. Only the very early texts show this letter in the initial position.

All consonants can occur in the initial position. Finally, 'l' and 's' occur only in loan words. 'ĭ', when used, represents consonantal 'y' but it seems to have been largely replaced by 'ii' e.g. 'iit' [yit] (to seek).

Final 'h' always represents the glottal stop.

Ejectives are represented either by 'y' or "' " e.g. [syiem or s'iem] (King); [syang or s'ang] (To toast) etc..

In the final position, all stops are <sup>unexploded and voiceless</sup> ~~unvoiced non-~~ plosives. Final fricatives are never a feature of Khasi vocables except in interjections, e.g. [shish!] (Alack!).

Vowels are much less predictable, largely because diacritic marks are seldom if ever used to represent vowel length or vowel quality.

A few observations need to be made on the values

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3. op cit. pp. 575f.

attributed to vowels in present-day Khasi spelling:

a represents two phonemes - /a/ and /a:/ e.g. /jam/  
(To make a noise) /ja:m/ (To stride, pace)

e represents /ɛ/ between consonants but /e/ finally,  
✓ except in 'me' /mɛ/ ('thou' masc)

ie is actually a simple vowel representing /e/ e.g.  
'ktien' /ktèn/ (Word)

o represents /ɔ/ between consonants but /o/ finally

u represents two phonemes - /u/ and /o/ e.g. 'lum'  
/lum/ (To gather) 'lúm' /lom/ (Hill)

y represents /ə/ and <sup>only</sup> always occurs in minor syllables  
initially before consonants or between consonants.

### Diphthongs:

True diphthongs may be said to occur only in open syllables.  
In closed syllables we find only one type of the Vi pattern,  
and this only occurs before palatals and as such they may  
be considered as conditioned by the final palatals them-  
selves. The diphthongs are:

(i) V+i: /ai/ ai - 'bai' = A fee, remuneration etc.

a:i - 'pai' = Sugarcane

/ei/ ɛi - 'tei' = To build

/oi/ ɔi - 'poi' = To arrive

oi - 'kynhúii' = To shout in triumph



- (ii) V+u /au/ au - 'saraw' = Earthenware, potsherd  
 a:u - 'khlaw' = Forest  
 /eu/ ɛu - 'ksew' = Dog

(iii) ia /ia/ is of limited occurrence. It always follows the glottal stop whether that is preceded by a consonant or not:

/ʔia/ s'iar = Chicken, fowl

'iarkhiar = Partridge (the second 'ia'  
 is, properly speaking /ya/)

sh'iap = Sand

'iap um = River sand

(vi) V+i+C, where C is always a palatal, i.e. either /ɲ/ or /c/ which accounts for the i-glide:

saiñ /saɲ/ = To melt fat etc.

saiñ /sa:ɲ/ = Eagle

sait /sac/ = To wash

said /sa:c/ = To argue

leit /lɛc/ = To go

bieit /bec/ = Fool

### Palatals:

Initially, /j/ and /ɲ/ only can occur. As has been shown in the foregoing section, finally, /c/ and /ɲ/ occur after 'i'. In common with the stops, the final palatal<sup>/c/</sup> is unvoiced. In the Standard orthography, this final palatal

is represented by 't' rather than by 'j' e.g.

'ieit' /ec/ = To love, though some writers may spell it

'iej'

'leit' /lɛc/ = To go

In this chapter, it is proposed to establish the nature of the verbal piece in Khasi by reference to various types of declarative sentence from the simple minimal to more complex kinds. These constitute a representative selection of the frames in which the verbal piece occurs.

In the illustrations given, the subjects to which the selected verbs are related are in the first instance those of the Third Person, not merely because of the fact that in ordinary day-to-day communication declarative sentences of this class are more common but also because such statements admit of constructions that may be considered as representative of sentence types.

Within this limitation, it is proposed further to consider forms normally used in communication before proceeding to forms that are used to convey special meanings. For the purpose of this paper, it is proposed to avoid rhetorical or otherwise ornate forms except as incidental illustrations.

Some sentence-types common in Khasi may therefore be illustrated by the following examples grouped under two main heads - the Subject-Verb forms and the Subject-Verb-Object forms. What it is proposed to identify as the verbal piece is underlined in each case:

. Subject-Verb Forms:

- Form 1. u shong = He sits
2. u u shong = As for him, he sits
3. u briew u shong = The man sits
4. ma- u u shong = As for him, he sits (a more  
emphatic form than 2)
5. shong ma-u = It is he who sits (a variant of  
'u shong ma-u')

It will be seen that although a sentence may take one of several forms, in all cases except No. 5 there is regular juxtaposition of verb morph and pronominal element. The above forms will be taken as exemplifying the simplest type of Khasi declarative sentence, and we can thus infer that the commonest form of the minimal verbal piece in Khasi consists of a verb morph preceded by a pronominal prefix.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that Form 5 'shong ma-u'<sup>2</sup> does not show the affix, the fact that the alternative form 'u shong ma-u' has the same force justifies

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1. Roberts treats this as the definite article, but takes into account only third person constructions.
2. When 'ma-' is prefixed to the pronoun, it gives a form that is used for emphasis, or as a specific term, and it may also be used as a complement of the subject. It is in the second sense that it is used in the formation of the nominative interrogative pronoun viz. 'ma-no?' = 'Who?' Occasionally, however, when it comes after the verb it may appear without the principal subject although the presence of the subject is understood, e.g: "dei ma-nga" = nga dei ma-nga = It is I; never "\*ma-nga dei" which is a form erroneously used by many non-Khasis. "ma-nga" may also supplement the principal subject for emphasis as in "ma-nga nga dei u nong-hikai = I am a teacher".

treating pronominal affix plus verb as the normal type.

The basic structure of each type is in no way affected by commutation of the pronominal element to cover all other persons or number. For convenience, all possible variations of Form 1 are presented in tabular form:

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
1st person:	<u>nga shong</u> (I sit)	<u>ngi (ia-) shong</u> =(We sit)
2nd person:		
(masc)	<u>me shong</u> (Thou (sittest)	<u>phi (ia-) shong</u> =(You sit)
(fem)	<u>pha shong</u> (	
(hon. or polite)	<u>phi shong</u> (	
3rd person:		
(masc)	<u>u shong</u> (He sits)	<u>ki (ia-) shong</u> =(They sit)
(fem)	<u>ka shong</u> (She sits)	
(dim., hon. or polite)	<u>i shong</u> (He/she sits)	

It will be seen that Standard Khasi distinguishes between singular masculine and feminine pronominal affixes in the 2nd and 3rd persons, but not in the first. However, there are alternatives of the common gender which are used in a special way. In the 3rd person singular only there is in addition a diminutive affix without masculine/feminine distinction, i. It also has honorific



The system of distinctions in the pronominal affixes may be made clear by the following diagrams:

(a) Third Person

Singular		Plural
Non-Diminutive	Diminutive	ki
M	F	
u	ka	i

(b) Second Person

Singular		Plural (/ Honorific)
M	F	phi
me	pha	

(c) First Person

Singular	Plural
nga	ngi

Next, we may consider the structure of sentences of Form 3 which is extended to cover nouns in the subject head. All such sentences are necessarily of the Third Person. Here, we see that the agreement of affixes in subject-noun piece and verbal-piece is maintained throughout:

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
(masc)	u briew <u>u shong</u> = The man sits	
(fem)	ka briew <u>ka shong</u> = The woman sits	ki briew <u>ki (ia-)shong</u> = The people sit
(dim.or hon.)	i briew <u>i shong</u> = The mannikin sits	

This agreement will be referred to here as 'concord' as it has been by earlier writers. It is also extended to the qualifier of the noun-piece if there is one, e.g.:

u briew u ba-thait u shong = The man who is tired sits  
ka briew ka ba-thait ka shong = The woman who is tired sits  
i briew i ba-thait i shong = The mannikin who is tired sits  
ki briew ki ba-thait ki (ia-) shong = The people who are  
tired sit

Sentences of all forms with plural subjects show the verbal prefix 'ia-' optionally.

Unlike Form 3, Forms 1,2,4 and 5 occur for the 1st and 2nd persons also. Examples for the 1st person singular are given below:



- Form 1: nga shong  
 Form 2: nga nga shong  
 Form 4: ma-nga nga shong  
 Form 5: shong ma-nga

The structure is maintained for all verbs as shown in the following illustrations with a representative group of verbs:

Prenominal affix

nga (I)	}	(ia)	}	bam (Eat)
ngi (We)		(With plural subjects)		k'ang <u>or</u> kyang (Yell)
me (Thou, masc)				kynthih (Leap)
pha (Thou, fem)				dem (Lie down)
phi (Thou, hon.)				dih (Drink)
phi (You, pl.)				hiar (Descend)
u (he)				iaid (Walk)
ka (She)				ieng (Stand)
i (He/she, dim.)				mareh (Run)
ki (They)				phet (Flee)
			rung (Enter)	
			thiah (Sleep)	
			wan (Come)	

So far we have been considering simple sentence-types comprising subject and verb only. We shall now consider

other sentences in which the verb is involved in relationships between subject and object either directly (action-goal sentences) or indirectly (action-beneficiary sentences):

1. Action-goal sentences:

These are of two types, ia- constructions and constructions without ia-.

(a) ia- constructions: The 'direct object' in these sentences is ordinarily preceded by the particle 'ia'<sup>1</sup> and by the appropriate pronominal affix,<sup>2</sup> e.g.:

u siat ia ka dngiem = He shoots the bear

ka briew ka ot ia ka jaiñ = The woman cuts  
the cloth

ki sim ki bam ia u kba = The birds eat the  
paddy

(b) Constructions without ia-: In other sentences the object-noun follows the verb directly. They are again of two kinds:

i. When the verb and the object are so intimately connected in the mind that they in effect together constitute a verbal phrase as in:

u bam ja = He eats rice

ka dih um = She drinks water

ka briew ka thaiñ jaiñ = The  
woman weaves cloth

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1. This 'ia' is functionally different from the distributive particle considered in the previous section.

2. Termed by Roberts as an article.

ii. When the objects are nouns derived from the principal verb taking the form made up of the verb and the nominal prefix 'jing-' or its variants ('jym-', 'jyn-' etc.):

u bam jing-bam = He eats food

ka dih jing-dih = She drinks a drink

ka brieu ka thaiñ jing-thaiñ = The  
woman weaves (lit.  
the woman weaves weaving)

Both (i) and (ii) may be considered as instances of Redundant Objects.<sup>1</sup>

Nouns which occur as object in these constructions may equally occur in 'ia-constructions' but the inclusion of the particle then has the distinctive effect of particularizing the object, e.g.:

u bam ja = He eats rice

u bam ia ka ja = He eats the rice (of which the person spoken to is aware or to which his attention is sought to be drawn)

cf. u bam ia ka ja jong i pa = He eats father's rice

Similarly,

ka bam jing-bam = She eats food

ka bam ia ka jing-bam = She eats the food

cf. ka bam ia ka jing-bam jong nga = She eats my food

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1. The second group is called 'Cognate Object' by Roberts

## 2. Action-beneficiary sentences:

Action-beneficiary sentences appear to be essentially a form of the sentence with locative or directional complement, since the particles used are the directional particles.<sup>1</sup> However, sentences containing a direct object are more often 'beneficiary' in character, those without one are more often 'directional'. The distinction depends primarily upon whether the noun complement is animate or inanimate. Three common types of constructions are ha-constructions, sha-constructions and na-constructions:

### i. ha-constructions:

u ai ha-nga<sup>2</sup> = He gives (something) to me

u kpa u ai ha u khun = The father gives to his  
son

cf. u kpa u ai ia u khnam ha u khun = The father  
gives the arrow to his son

### ii. sha-constructions:

i pa i thoh sha i hep = Father writes to  
little sister

i pa i thoh ia ka shithi sha i hep = Father  
writes the letter to little sister

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1. See chapter on affixes.

2. \*'u ai ia nga' would mean 'He gives me (to somebody)' in the same way that an article may be given.

iii. na-constructions:

nga thied (let) na u nongkhaii = I bought (a pencil) of the merchant

cf. nga thied ia u-ne u let na u nong-khaii = I bought this pencil of the merchant

When the verbs are intransitive in character, the particles ha, sha and na have their usual locative or positional function, e.g.:

nga shong ha iing = I remain at home

nga sah ha shillong = I stay in Shillong

u leit sha bilat = He went to Britain

u mih sha phyllaw = He goes out into the courtyard

u wan na shillong = He comes from Shillong

u bseiñ u mih na thliew = The snake comes out of the hole

Certain sentences, however, show the particle ia when ha might rather have been expected, as in:

phi ai <sup>ja</sup>~~ja~~ ia nga = You give me rice

nga ai um ia ki jhur = I water the vegetables

The verb and the following noun in the above sentences would here as well appear to constitute verbal phrases of the type indentified in paragraph 1 (b) i above. ia nga may then be considered as formally the direct object of such a verbal phrase (here ai ja); and this gives some

justification for considering ai ja, bam ja, etc. as verbal phrases.

The sentence 'ai ia ka ja ha nga', though correct, has a meaning different from that of 'ai ja ia nga'. Whereas the latter has the same meaning as 'Feed me', the former means 'Give the rice to me' (say, in order that I can give it to someone else or do something with it).

### 3. Instrumentality:

We may finally notice da-constructions in which da- indicates instrumentality, e.g.:

u siat ia ka dngiem da u khnam = He shoots the bear  
with an arrow

u pyniap ia u bseiñ da u dieng = He kills the snake  
with a stick

nga pom ia u dieng da u sdie = I hack the tree with  
an axe

The noun in a da-construction may be a verbal noun with the prefix jing- or ba-, in which case the effect of the construction is one which might be described as adverbial:

u iaïd da ka jing-tieng = He walks with fear

ka phai dien da ka ba-sngewsih = She turned back with  
sorrow

## Questions

Questions may be of two types - absolute or relative. Absolute questions are those that are sometimes called "yes-no" questions. All others, requiring a circumstantial answer, are relative.

Questions may be distinguished from declarative sentences by one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Intonation pattern
2. Use of question markers
3. Change of word order

Of the above, the first characteristic - the intonation pattern - may be considered as the essential one. It varies according as the question is an absolute or a relative one, and even within the same type of question, it may vary with the use of question markers.

Absolute questions: The basic syntactic arrangement of this type of question is in no way different from that of declarative sentences. Such questions are always uttered on an ascending scale, ending on a high pitch, e.g.:

1     1     1     1 2 3  
phi sheptieng ia u khla? = Are you afraid of a tiger?

This may be compared with the declarative statement which is uttered more or less in a monotone:

phi sheptieng ia u khla = You are afraid of a tiger

Question markers may be present in absolute questions. When they are, the intonation pattern is modified, with the high pitch on the marker. The basic clause may or may not show any intonation variation, e.g.:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 3 \\ \text{phi sheptieng ia u khla, mo?} & \} & \text{= You are afraid of a} \\ \text{or, } \underline{\text{phi tieng}} & \text{ia u khla, mo?} & \} & \text{tiger, are you not?} \end{array}$$

Here, in fact, the first part of the question is in declarative form, and as such it is uttered in more or less a monotone.

Questions with mo are of the type which calls for a yes answer. There is another group of questions of the same type suggesting a lesser degree of certainty on the part of the speaker. These questions end with the marker em /ɛm/ (contrasted with em /ɛ:m/=No).

phi dei u doktor livingstone em? = You are Dr. Livingstone, I presume

Questions may also be framed in other ways with other question markers, and the characteristic intonation pattern is then noticeable:

i. The question may open with an initial sha,<sup>1</sup> e.g.:

- 
1. The exact significance of sha cannot categorically be defined. It is sometimes considered as the abbreviation of shisha (True). However, there does seem to be a difference in sense between the two forms as in sha, phi tieng ia u khla? and shisha, phi tieng ia u khla?. In the first example, sha would appear to be little more than an utterance made to draw the attention of the person addressed while shisha in the second example does bear the sense of



1 1 1 1 1 2 3  
 sha, phi sheptieng ia u khla? (in a way comparable to  
 "Look here, are you afraid of a tiger?" or perhaps  
 "Is it true that you are afraid of a tiger?"

ii. Alternatively, the question may be made with the  
 answers offered as alternatives, the marker in this  
 case being ne em (= Or not), e.g.:

1 1 1 1 1 3 3 1  
phi sheptieng ia u khla, ne em? = Are you afraid of a  
 tiger, or not?

It will be seen that the form of the verbal piece  
 (underlined in the examples) does not differ from that  
 appropriate to declarative sentences.

Relative questions: These questions are marked by the use  
 of question morphs or question words.

The question morphs are -no or -ei. As a rule, the  
 highest pitch on the intonation scale in this type of  
 question falls upon the prefix to either of these two

---

"Is it true?". Two equivalent forms in English that  
 come to mind are respectively: "I say, are you afraid  
 of a tiger?" and "To settle a point, are you afraid of  
 a tiger?". The difference is even more marked in the  
 two questions balei sha ki briew ki sniew kat-ne kat-ne?  
 and balei shisha ki briew ki sniew kat-ne kat-ne? res-  
 pectively equivalent to "Why for heaven's sake are  
 people so bad?" (a rhetorical type of question) and "Why  
 is it that people are so bad?"

morphs, irrespective of their position in the question, e.g.:

1 1 3 1 3 1 1 1  
phi wan myn-no?/ myn-no phi wan? = When did you come?

1 1 3 1 3 1 1 1  
phi sah ha-ei?/ ha-ei phi sah? = Where do you stay?

i. -no and -ei:

-no is demonstrative in function. It colligates with pronominal prefixes as well as with 'positional' and some adverbial prefixes, e.g.:

u-no?, ka-no?, i-no?, ki-no? = Which (one)?

hang-no? = Whereat? cf. ha-no? = To whom?

sha-no? = Where to?

nang-no? = Where from? cf. na-no? = From whom?

da-no? = By whom?

ma-no? = Who?

kum-no? = How?

kat-no? = How much?

-ei is the usual question marker when identification rather than indication is required. Its occurrence is more limited and, apart from the pronominal prefixes it colligates with other prefixes that end in vowels, e.g.:

u-ei, ka-ei, ha-ei, na-ei etc. (u-ei?, ka-ei? i-ei? =

Who/What?) In certain environments it contrasts with

-no. Compare:

ha-ei? = Where? but ha-no? = To whom?

da-ei? = With what? but da-no? = By whom?

na-ei? = Where from? but na-no? = From whom?

In these instances, -no refers to human beings but -ei to objects or places. As 'positional' morphs, -ei is less specific than -no.

ii. Question words are mainly balei? (Why?) and aiu? (What?)

e.g.:

a. balei phi wan sha-ne? = Why did you come here?

with intonation pattern 4-3-2-1-1-1

cf. phi wan sha-ne balei? (1-1-1-1-4-3/1)

or phi wan balei sha-ne? (1-1-4-3-1-1)

b. phi ong aiu? = What do you say? (1-1-1-4)

cf. aiu phi ong? (also 1-1-1-4)

Change of word-order: This is the least important characteristic of question types. As far as absolute questions are concerned, the order is that of declarative sentences, e.g.:

phi sheptieng ia u khla? = Are you afraid of a tiger?

phi sheptieng ia u khla = You are afraid of a tiger

The only difference is in the intonation pattern.

However, even with relative questions, the order may often be that of declarative sentences. As we have seen,

with some types of questions the question morph or question word may precede or follow the verbal piece, the intonation pattern only being observed. There are however certain questions where the question morph may not precede the verbal piece, e.g.:

u-tai u dei u-ei? = Who is that?

not \*u-ei u dei u-tai

As with absolute questions, the form of the verbal piece is that appropriate to declarative sentences.

#### Commands, requests etc..

Sentence types embodying commands take a somewhat modified form as compared with declarative sentences of the types that have been considered, entailing further forms of the verbal piece. The important points of difference are:

1. (a) Omission of the pronominal prefix of the second person, except in special circumstances as will be indicated later in this section, and  
 (b) Use of the simple verb form at the head of the command statement
2. Use of special verb forms in place of the usual verb forms in a few cases
3. Use of command markers

1. Abrupt commands are generally limited to the simple verb without the pronominal prefix which has been considered as an essential component of the verbal piece in nearly all types of declarative sentences, e.g.:

leit!<sup>1</sup> = Go!

wan!<sup>1</sup> = Come!

leit sha-tai! = Go there!

wan sha-ne! = Come here!

2. The above verbs leit and wan have honorific forms which are never used in declarative sentences. These special verb form are respectively khie and ale, e.g.:

khie<sup>2</sup> bad i kong! = Go with (elder) sister!

ale bad nga! = Come with me!

- 
1. This is probably the primary locus of the affix-less forms of the verbal piece already seen in emphatic sentences of the type of "shong ma-u" (ref. p.19)
2. This khie is different from the verb khie that can be used intransitively in declarative sentences and means "to get up, to arise", as in the following sentences:  
nga khie na ba thiah = I get up from bed (lit.sleep)  
 hadien ka jing-pang ka ba slem, u la lah ban khie =  
 After a long illness, he has been able to rise (lit. to raise himself from a recumbent position)
- The special character of khie and ale is also seen in the fact that they are never used in negative commands or with particles of aspect: \*wat ale! (for "Do not come").  
 "wat khie!" will not mean "Do not go!" but "Do not get up!".

3. Command markers are used in the following cases:

a. For mild exhortations, the particle to<sup>1</sup> may precede the verb, e.g.:

to shah-shkor ia la ki kmie ki kpa! = Give heed  
(lit. direct-ear) to your parents!

"to wan, phi ki riew-ngeit!" = "O come, all ye faithful!"

b. Requests may be made in what may be termed an honorific form of statement by the use of initial sngew-bha<sup>2</sup> (lit. feel good, be pleased = Please), e.g.:

sngew-bha ai um shi klat! = Please give (me) a glass of water!

sngew-bha ap shi phang! = Please wait a little while

c. In negative commands, the pre-verb particle wat is invariably used, e.g.:

wat leit sha-tai! = Do not go there!

wat wan sha-ne! = Do not come here!

The polite form of negative commands or requests may also show initial "sngew-bha", e.g.:

sngew-bha wat ia-jam! = Please do not make a noise!

(Statement made to several people)

cf. sngew-bha wat jam! = Please do not make a noise  
(to one person)

---

1. In certain contexts, to has the force of "Very well! You may . . .", e.g.:

to leh kat ba phi mon! = Very well, do whatever you like!

2. If the second person pronoun is used, the effect is that of a mild command, e.g.:

phi'n sngew-bha ban wan sha-ne! = You will please come here!

d. In commands that include the speaker as well as those he addresses, a third marker ia (different from the distributive particle or the pre-object particle) occurs at the head of the statements, e.g.:

ia ngi'n ia-leit sha bethlehem! = Come, let us go  
to Bethlehem!

Particles of aspect, if used, precede the verb directly, the command markers, where present, occurring at the head of the statement, e.g.:

da shah-shkor ia la ki kmie ki kpa! = Give heed to  
your parents! (as a condition or obligation)

or the more appealing

to da shah-shkor ia la ki kmie-ki kpa!

iai neh ha la ka jing-ngeit! = Be steadfast in your  
faith!

wat iai leh ia ka jing-bakla! = Do not persist in  
committing a mistake!

wat ju leh ia ka bym-dei! = Do not ever do what is  
wrong!

We now proceed to examine more complex forms of verbal piece than the basic combination of pronominal prefix and verb which has been discussed and analysed in the preceding chapter. We begin by considering the occurrence and function of verb particles: morphs which occur in conjunction with verbs in <sup>the</sup> verbal piece and which do not have an independent function (e.g. in distinction from auxiliary verbs which will be treated in a later chapter).

The particles to be considered are mainly of the following classes:

- (a) Temporal or 'tense' particles
- (b) Particles relating to aspect
- (c) Particles of negation

In addition to these, however, we deal also with a number of subordinating particles which occur only in compound sentences, as these are of syntactic importance.

(a) Temporal or 'tense' particles: Earlier grammarians have written of an elaborate tense system in Khasi, stating in general terms that past actions show the pre-verb particle la or lah<sup>1</sup>, present actions  $\emptyset$ -particles and subsequent ones yn or 'n<sup>2</sup> as in the following examples:

- 
1. The existence of a verb lah (To be able, to finish) may be noted. u lah leit may very well mean "He has completed the act of going".
  2. When yn follows a pronominal prefix with its final vowel the result is a contraction of form. Thus, u+yn = u'n, nga+yn = nga'n etc.



u la leit = He went

u lah leit = He has gone

u leit = He goes

u'n leit = He will go

This results from the application of the schema of European classical grammar to a language to which it is not particularly appropriate. In practical terms it may be said that the boundary between 'past', 'present' and 'future' is often blurred, and spoken Khasi often exhibits usages which are better discussed without the fetters imposed by commitment to an extraneous tense system.

Thus, after a game, for example, one who has not attended it may well ask "ma-no ba jop?" = "Who won?" to which question the reply may be "ki jop ki mawlai" = "The Mawlai (team) won". Although the 'accepted' expressions "mano ba la jop?" and "ki la jop ki mawlai" may be used, they are likely to strike a Khasi as being unnecessarily pedantic.

Again, a person who is about to leave may say: nga la leit (which may also mean "I went") instead of using the 'future' expression nga'n leit (I shall go), or, more properly, nga'n leit noh (equivalent to "I am going" or the colloquial "I am off").

Often, therefore, it may be necessary to relate events

in time to the semantic category of aspect rather than to that of tense. This is done with the help of what may be called 'temporal' particles, that is, particles that convey some sense of time.

Following are particles of this class: yn, la. In common with most particles, they can occur at the head of a statement unaccompanied by a pronominal prefix as in sentences of the impersonal type. They may precede the verb directly, but when they combine with other particles, they come first:

yn alone is, strictly speaking, a 'tense' particle since in simple sentences it refers to future time. In co-ordinating sentences of which the principal sentence relates to an event in the past yn refers to a subsequent event. Examples of the various functions of yn follow:

yn long jing-ia-lang lashai = There will be <sup>a</sup>meeting tomorrow

nga'n wan sha ka jing-ia-lang = I shall come to the meeting

shwa ba nga'n wan phi dei<sup>1</sup> ban pynbiang ia ki kot = Before  
I (shall) come, you must  
have the papers ready

shwa ba nga'n poi u la lah leit = Before I arrived, he had  
gone

---

1. In the illustrations given later in this chapter not only the construction described in the text but verbal pieces in compound sentences are also underlined.

la refers to past time or it may also refer to an action or occurrence that takes place prior to another at any point on the time scale, e.g.:

la don u briew u ba don arngut ki khun shynrang = There was  
a man who had two sons

u la leit sha skul = He has gone/he went to school

la dap shiteng sngi = It is midday (dap = To be full)

nga la shoh shibit! = I shall beat (you) in a moment!

katne por lashai nga la poi sha shnong = By this time to-  
morrow I shall have reached (my)  
village

(b) Particles of aspect: These are used to express the state of action indicated by the principal verb, whether completed, progressing, habitual etc. They precede the verb directly. Some of these particles may be called 'semi-temporal' e.g.: lah, dang, ju<sup>1</sup>, sa, iai. 'Non-temporal' particles include da, shu and nang. Of the above, all except lah, dang and ju may occur at the head of sentences of command or request.

(i.a)

lah, dang, ju, sa, iai:

lah - indicates completed action, e.g.: nga lah bam =  
I have eaten (finished eating)

lah shim mano ia ka wait jong nga = Who has taken my  
knife?

---

1. A similar word is shait which is the equivalent of the English 'used to'. This is treated in the section on Auxiliary Verbs.

dang - used for an act or event that is continuing at a particular time or whose effect still continues, e.g.:

haba poi ma nga, u dang bam = When I arrived he was still eating

nga dang bam, ap khyndiat = I am still eating, wait a moment

cf. nga dang dep bam = I have just finished eating

ju - suggests an action that is customary, e.g.:

u ju long u ba minot haba u dang <sup>rit</sup> ~~nit~~ = He was always industrious when he was small

nga ju ia id kai shwa ba nga'n bam = I usually go for a stroll before I eat

wat ju leh ia ka bym dei = Do not ever do what is wrong

(i.b)

sa - generally associated with 'yn/'n to indicate an indefinite future action, but also used for an act or event that is subsequent to another:

nga'n sa bam = I shall eat (eventually/in due course)

cf. nga'n bam = I shall eat (more definite than nga'n sa bam)

ngi ngiat ia ka kali bad ka sa im = We pushed the car and it thereafter started (lit. came to life)

sa ai ia kane ka jaiñ ha i mei = Give this cloth to Mother (i.e. at a convenient time)

cf. ai ia kane ka jaiñ ha i mei = Give this cloth to Mother (i.e. a categorical command, leaving no choice to the person addressed)

iai<sup>1</sup> - suggests continuation, e.g.:

u iai sneng ia la ki khun man ka sngi = He admonishes his children daily

iai neh haduh ka ba kut = Be steadfast to the end

(ii)

da, shu, nang:

da - used when referring to a conditional action, whether taking place simultaneously with, or in anticipation of, the principal action, e.g.:

haba u leit jingleit u da ialam ia u khun = When he travels he takes his son

da rah tiar shwa ba phi'n shur khlaw = (Be sure to) take a weapon before you venture into the forest

shu - used for an action that is tentative, fortuitous or one that is undertaken casually, e.g.:

nga shu ktah ia ka shang, ka hap pynban = I just touched the basket (but) it fell down instead

u shu leit khlem kren = (<sup>For</sup> ~~When~~ no apparent reason) he just <sup>goes</sup> went away without speaking

haba nga kren u shu peit = When I spoke he just <sup>looks (or</sup> looked)

nang - descriptive of an occurrence that is progressive, e.g.:

u nang roi ha ka jingstad = He continued to increase in wisdom

ka ding ka nang pur = The fire is spreading

---

1. In combination with other particles, iai always comes last.

Combination of particles: The sentences we have been considering involve the use of single pre-verbal particles. We now proceed to those in which these particles combine. In the main, temporal particles precede all others. There are also a few instances in which particles of aspect combine either with or without temporal particles. As has been done in the foregoing section, we shall start with the combination involving the temporal particles yn<sup>1</sup> and la and then proceed to the others.

(i)

yn combines with, and precedes, ym, dang, sa, da, shu, iai and nang, thus: yn ym/yn nym, yn dang, yn sa, ynda<sup>2</sup>, yn shu, yn iai and yn nang. It has been suggested above that yn is a particle of futurity; it does not therefore combine with la or lah which have their separate places in the time-scale.

yn ym/ yn nym - This combination is discussed at some length in the sub-section on 'negation' (q.v)

yn dang - yn dang long jingialang hi shiteng synñia? = Will the meeting be still going on at midnight?

u'n dang bam, khie nang leit = He is yet to eat, (you) go ahead

yn sa - yn sa long jingialang hadien ka jingkhawai = There will be a meeting after the feast

nga'n sa bam = I shall eat in due course

---

1. Reference to yn includes the form in combination with pronominal prefixes such as nga'n, me'n, u'n etc.

2. ynda: so written in Khasi orthography

ynda - Discussed in the sub-section on 'subordinating particles (q.v.)' yn da: In writing, this combination (with the morphs separated) is often used in sentences expressing wish for a condition to be achieved or fulfilled e.g.:

phi'n da roi (phi'n da par) ha la ka jingtrei! = May you prosper in your work!

ka leh bein ia ki ba duk, ka'n da hap-khop! = lit. She oppresses the poor, may she meet with misfortune!

It is also used for an action in the future that preceded another, e.g.:

nga'n da bam shwa; khie nang leit = I shall eat first; (you may) go ahead

u'n da sum shwa ba'n bam = He will take a bath before eating

yn shu - yn shu tip mano khlem don ba iathuh? = Who would know when there is none to tell?

phi'n shah nga'n shu peit liak ia ka jingthoh jong phi? = Will you permit me to have just a brief look at your writing

yn iai - This is used for a continuing situation in the future, e.g.:

nga kyrmen u'n iai long u briew u ba khlain = I hope (that) he will continue to be a strong man

yn nang - used for a situation that will progress in the future, e.g.:

nga kyrmen ba u'n nang roi = I hope that he will continue to prosper (lit. increase)

(ii)

la combines with the semi-temporal particles lah, dang, ju, iai, and with the non-temporal particles da, shu and nang, thus: la lah, la dang, la ju, la iai as well as lada, la shu, la nang.

la lah - This corresponds to the auxiliary "had" in English. It precedes the verb relating to an action preceding another in the past, e.g.:

shwa ba nga'n<sup>1</sup> poi u la lah leit = Before I arrived (or "could arrive": lit. "would arrive") he had gone

la dang - These two particles together have an adverbial function when linked to a word indicating time, usually in the phrase la dang step equivalent to "quite early in the morning", e.g.:

la dang step u la khie ba'n leit lyngkha = Quite early in the morning he got up to go to the field

la ju - Used for a habitual action in the past, e.g.:

u la ju long u birew u ba sniew shibun = He used to be a very bad man

la iai - Used for a continuing action in the past, e.g.:  
u kpa u la iai sneng ia la ki khun = The father continued to exhort his children

ju may interpose between la and iai to refer to a habitual continuing action in the past, e.g.:

u la ju iai sneng ia ki khun hynrei ki'm sngap = He always kept on exhorting his children but they would not heed (him).

---

1. It may be noted that 'n here refers to a subsequent event.



lada - Discussed in the sub-section on "co-ordinating particles"

la shu - Used for a past action undertaken casually, or tentatively, or occurring fortuitously, e.g.:  
u la shu leit khlem kren = He just went (away without speaking)

la nang - Used for a progressive action or occurrence in the past, e.g.:  
u khynnah u la nang roi ha ka jingstad = The boy continued to grow in wisdom

(iii)

dang<sup>1</sup> combines with shu and iai, thus: dang shu and dang iai.

dang shu - Used for an action that has just taken place and whose effect still remains, e.g.:

nga dang shu lah bam = I have just finished eating

nga dang shu bam = I have just (started) eating

dang iai - Used for an action that persists contrary to expectation, e.g.:

la u kpa u la sympat ia u, u dang iai neh ha ki jingmlien ba sniew = Although his father chastised him, he persisted in his bad habits

(iv)

ju may combine with da and iai, thus: ju da and ju iai.

ju da - Used for an habitual action performed in

---

1. dang is not likely to be a contracted form of sdang (To begin) since it may precede the verb sdang as in: ki dang sdang ia ka jingialang = They have (just) started the meeting.

anticipation of some other action, e.g.:

u ju da sum shwa ba'n thiah = He would always take a bath (or, make sure that he had his bath) before going to bed (lit. sleeping)

ju iai - Used for a habitual action occurring continuously or persistently, e.g.:

u ju <sup>iai</sup> ~~ai~~ sneng ia la ki khun man ka por = He keeps on exhorting his children daily

(v)

sa may combine with da, shu, nang, iai thus: sa da, sa shu, sa nang and sai iai.

sa da - Used for an action that is to take place conditionally, generally in sentences of command, e.g.:

sa da leit sha iew shwa ba phi'n wan shafing /#  
(Be sure to) go to the market before you come home

sa shu - Generally used in sentences or command in respect of actions to be undertaken tentatively or causally, but also occasionally in declarative sentences for similar actions, e.g.:

sa shu leit sha iew shwa ba phi'n wan shafing /#  
(Just) go to the market before you come home

sa nang - Used for a subsequent occurrence that is progressive in its development, e.g.:

nga kyrmen ba phi'n <sup>sa</sup> nang roi ha ka jingtrei jong  
phi = I hope that you will continue to prosper in your work

sai iai - Used for a subsequent action <sup>that is</sup> ~~of~~ a continuous in its occurrence, e.g.:

namar u ialang bad ki lok ki ba sniew u sa iai leh ia ki kam sniew = Because he kept bad company (lit. mixed with bad friends) he thereafter continued to do evil acts

(vi)

da combines with nang and iai thus: da nang and da iai.

da nang - Used for an anticipatory action that is progressive in its development, e.g.:

da nang pynbha ia la ka jingtrei = (Be sure that you) improve your work further

da iai - Used for an anticipatory action that is repetitive or continuous in its occurrence, e.g.:

u da iai kynmaw ia la iing haba u don ha ri nongwei = He would always remember his family when he is in a foreign land

(vii)

shu combines with lah, dang, and iai thus: shu lah, shu dang and shu iai.

shu lah - Used for a casual or fortuitous action completed earlier, e.g.:

u dang shu lah leit kumne-kumne = He has just recently gone

shu dang - Used for an action that still continues in spite of another taken to anticipate it, e.g.:

la u kpa u la sneng ia u, u shu dang leh kumjuh = Although his father exhorted him (to do otherwise) he still goes on or insists on doing the same thing

shu iai - Used for a casual action performed continuously,

e.g.:

la u kpa u la sneng ia u, u shu iai leh ia ka juh =  
Although his father exhorted him (to do otherwise)  
he went on/ goes on doing the same thing

(viii)

nang combines with iai thus: nang iai.

nang iai - Used for a continuous action that is progressive in its development, e.g.:

la u kpa u la sneng ia u, u nang iai leh ia ka juh = Although his father exhorted him (to do otherwise) he continued/continues to do the same thing in a greater degree (equivalent to "the more his father exhorted him, the more he continued to to the same thing")

(c) Negation: The negative morph in Khasi is ym /ə̃m/ which precedes the verb and most other verb particles. Like other particles it follows the pronominal prefix in a declarative sentence in which it occurs in its contracted form 'm. While ym <sup>a</sup> occur in the same environment as yn it differs from the latter in that it is non-temporal, and it must combine with temporal particles when indication of time is necessary.

1. ym, like yn, may occur at the head of an impersonal statement as in the following sentences, the verbal piece being underlined in each case:

ym don brieu ha iing = There is no one (lit. no person) at home

cf. don brieu ha iing = There is someone at home

ym lah im khlem bam = (It is) impossible to live without food

cf. u brieu u'm lah im khlem bam = Man cannot live without food

2. The above examples have no definite reference to the time of occurrence. Where such reference is intended, ym must be reinforced by one or more temporal particles. The principal ones that are colligated with ym are yn (the particle of futurity which precedes ym) shym and pat which follow it.

(i)

yn ym or yn nym<sup>1</sup> refer to a negative situation in the future, or subsequent to another at any time, e.g.:

yn ym/yn nym don klas lashai = There will be no class tomorrow

nga'n ym/nga'n nym wan klas lashai = I shall not come to class tomorrow

nga la ong ia u ba u'n ym/u'n nym shah khriat ba u dang pang = I told him that he should not expose (himself) to the cold as he was still ill

(ii)

ym shym - This combination suggests a negative situation in

---

1. yn nym, a variant of yn ym is often so written. It shows fusion merging of the final consonant of yn with ym.

the indefinite past, particularly one contrary to expectation, e.g.:

ym shym don briew ha iing = There was no one at home (contrary to expectation)

u jon u'm shym wan skul = John did not come to school

(iii)

ym pat - This combination indicates a situation that has not arisen up to the time of speaking or any other time referred to in the statement, but which may <sup>do</sup> so later, e.g.:

ym pat don briew ha iing = There is no one yet at home

i bah i'm pat wan phai na ophis = Elder brother has not yet returned from the office

nga la wan na lyngkha mynhynnin, hynrei nga shem  
ba u kba u'm pat ih = I came from the field yesterday but I found that the paddy had not ripened yet

(iv)

ym may combine with pat and shym generally in relation to negative past situations contrary to expectation e.g.:

nga la phah ia u sha iew hynrei u'm pat shym leit = I sent him to market but he has not gone yet

(v)

ym pat may further combine with ju to suggest an action or a situation that has never arisen up to the time of speaking or any other time referred to in the statement, e.g.:

ym pat ju don shipai ha iing jong ki = There has never been a soldier in their family

u jon u'm pat ju bam dohsniang, hynrei u ong u'n sa bam = John has never eaten pork but he says he will eventually eat (it)

u jon u'm pat ju mad dohsniang tat haduh ba u'n da dap khadsan snem = John had never tasted pork until he reached the age of fifteen (years)

(vi)

ym pat may combine with da to refer to a conditional action that has not taken place, e.g.:

ngi'm lahot ia u kba namar u'm pat da ih = We cannot harvest the paddy because it has not quite ripened

(vii)

ym shym similarly, in combination with da refers to a conditional action that did not take place, e.g.:

nga leit peit ia i bah bad nga shem ba i'm da shitom = I went to see my brother and found that he was not exactly very sick (lit. troubled)

3. Apart from the above temporal situations, ym may also occur with a limited number of semi-temporal particles and particles of aspect i.e. ju, da, shu and iai, thus: ym ju, ym da, ym ju da, ym shu, ym iai, ym ju iai, ym da iai.

(i)

ym ju - Used for an action that has never been undertaken or a situation that has never arisen, e.g.:

ym ju don u ba'n buh sharak hapoh u shang =  
There is no one who will ever place a lamp  
under a basket

u jon u'm ju bam dohsniang = John never eats pork

(ii)

ym da - Suggests a condition not fulfilled or an option  
not taken, e.g.:

haba u thngan u'm da ap ia ka kmie ba ka'n khat =  
When he is hungry he does not wait for his mother  
to serve (it)

(iii)

ym may combine with ju and da to suggest what is not cus-  
tomary as a precedent, e.g.:

u'm ju da ap ia ka kmie ba ka'n khat ja = He  
would not wait for his mother to serve rice

(iv)

ym shu - Is used for an action that is not taken casually  
e.g.:

u briew u ba kwah ba'n trei bha u'm shu pyndonkam  
kat ka ba ioh ka tiar = A man who wants to work  
effectively does not merely use whatever tool he  
can get (lit. whatever tool is available)

(v)

ym iai - Suggests that the action is one not persisted in,  
e.g.:

ki briew ki ba tipbriew ki'm iai leh bakla man ka  
por = Sane people do not persist in making mis-  
takes all the time



(vi)

ju may interpose in the above combination to suggest that such action is never persisted in, e.g.:

ki briew ki ba tipbriew ki'm ju iai leh bakla =  
Sane people never persist in making mistakes

(vii)

ym da iai - Used for an action not persisted in as a prior condition or the non-performance of an anticipatory action that is continuous in its occurrence, e.g.:

u'm da iai neh ha ka jingmut = He does not exactly show steadfastness in his mind (lit. he-not conditionally continue fixed in the mind)

4. ym also combines with the nominalizing particle ba<sup>1</sup> to give either of the two forms ba'm or b'ym<sup>2</sup> (often spelt bym). In speech, the latter form is more likely to be used because of the unstressed character of the form. Examples of these forms are given below:

ki ba'm shlur ki ju phet iap or  
ki b'ym shlur ki ju phet iap = They who are  
not brave usually run for their lives (lit. flee  
death)

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1. See chapter "Preverbs and Affixes"

2. ba'm is weaker than bam (To eat). The two words may be represented as /bam/ and /ba:m/ respectively.

5. In negative commands, the verb is preceded by the negative command morph wat<sup>1</sup> (*also underlined*)

wat leit sha-tai = Do not go there

cf. leit sha-tai = Go there

wat wan sha-ne = Do not come here

wat always comes at the head of the statement even when the verb takes other particles, e.g.:

wat da bam ia u soh = Do not (go so far as to)  
eat the fruit

wat shu bam ia u soh = Do not merely eat the fruit

wat pat bam ia u soh = Do not eat the fruit yet

wat ju bam ia u soh = Never eat the fruit

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1. See also the ~~following~~ <sup>3c</sup> section on Commands (p.37).

Subordinating particles: Khasi Verbs do not undergo any inflectional change corresponding to change of mood or attitude on the part of the speaker. Earlier grammarians, Roberts among them, have however, labelled certain constructions as those of the Subjunctive Mood etc.. In fact, the simple form of the verb is invariably used, reinforced when circumstances so require by particles, whether singly or in combination.

Certain particles are appropriate to subordinate clauses of compound sentences. These particles include as the more common the following: la, lada, lynda, ynda, ba, haba, katba, mynba, naba, namar ba, hamar ba all of which, with the exception of la and ba are made up of two or more basic particles. ba and its compounds, mynba, haba etc., although treated by Roberts along with the foregoing under the head of Conjunctions, are here dealt with in the chapter on Preverbs and Affixes for reasons there indicated.

The sentences in which la etc. occur are conditional in character. The subordinating particles invariably occur at the head of the relevant clause, preceding the verbal piece. In this respect they are different from other particles which precede the verb and follow the pronominal prefix.

In this section, then, we shall consider only the first

four of the particles mentioned above : la, lada, lymda  
and ynda:

la - Occurs at the head of the subordinate clause embodying a condition irrespective of which the action of the main clause takes place, e.g.:

la u la trei shitom u'm shym jop = Although he worked hard he did not succeed

lada - (presumably the 'tense' particle la denoting prior occurrence and da the basic conditional particle) and equivalent to English "If". lada-clauses merely state a condition, e.g.:

lada phi wan kloj, ngi'n ia leit sha iew = If you come early, we shall go to the market

lada phi'm wan, nga'n shong ha iing = If you do not come, I shall remain at home

lada me'n bam ia une u soh, me'n iap = If thou shouldst eat this fruit, thou shalt die

If the conditional clause relates specifically to the past, the principal clause undergoes a slight modification, e.g.:

lada me la don hangne, ngi'n jin<sup>1</sup> da la jop = If thou hadst been here, we would have won (Main clause affirmative)

lada me la don hangne, ngi'n ym/nym da la rem = If thou hadst been here, we would not have lost (Main clause negative)

---

1. jin is of restricted occurrence, collocating with lada. It must therefore perhaps be called a "super-ordinating" particle. It may be the same word as jin which occurs with numerals as in: u don jin shi lak tyngka = He has as much as a lakh of rupees.

lynda - Is a unique formation comprising three particles, i.e. la, ym and da. In its function it may be considered as the negative counterpart of lada and it is equivalent to the English "unless", or "if ... not", e.g.:

lynda u la thoh,ngi'n ym da la lah ba'n rung = If he had not written, we would not have been able to enter

ynda - In form it contrasts with lada in that it relates to future or subsequent events, yn being the particle of futurity. Moreover, in effect it implies a greater element of certainty than lada, e.g.

ynda i mama i wan, sa ai jai ia i = When uncle comes, give him rice

ynda (ka) la dap san baje, ngi'n sangeh trei = When it is five o'clock (lit. it is full five o'clock), we shall stop work.

The three particles that we have considered have as their base da which has been described as the conditional particle. This implies prior occurrence of the action stated in the subordinate clause, whereas the others with ba as the base imply simultaneity of occurrence. A fuller discussion will be found in the chapter on Preverbs and Affixes.

In cases where events take a different course from what one would expect from prior conditions, lada and ynda will

be preceded by wat<sup>1</sup>. This appears to be different from the homophonous morph of negative command, q.v.:

wat lada ka slap, nga'n ym shong ha iing = Even if it rains, I shall not stay at home

wat ynda la dap shi baje, wat leit noh sha iing = Even when it is one o'clock, do not go home.

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1. This is also applicable to the particles with ba as the base, e.g.:

wat haba ki khun ki thngan, u'm leit wad jingtrei = Even when his children are hungry, he does not go out looking for work

wat hab'ym don ba beh, u 'riewsniew u phet = Even when there is no one pursuing, a bad man runs away.

## IV. Auxiliary Verbs and Two-Verb Pieces

## Auxiliary Verbs:

We come next to a small group of words that may be classified as auxiliaries because they do not have any independent function but are combined with verbs in the verbal piece, either preceding them directly or with ba'n the pre-verb nominalising morph.

The more common auxiliaries are: lah, nang, hap, dei and thap. In a slightly different class are shait and shah which differ from the first group in that they always precede the principal verbs directly.

A characteristic which they share with verbs is the fact that they may be preceded by particles, whether temporal or non-temporal.

lah and nang: These two auxiliaries whose semantic function corresponds to that of modal verbs suggest potentiality. The difference between them lies in the fact that nang suggests ability acquired as the result of learning and lah suggests natural physical ability, e.g.:

<u>phi lah<sup>1</sup> rah</u> ia une u maw? <u>or</u>	}	= Can you carry this stone?
<u>phi lah ba'n rah</u> ia une u maw?		
<u>u lah kan</u> mynsiem ar minit <u>or</u>	}	= He can hold his breath for two minutes
<u>u lah ba'n kan</u> mynsiem ar minit		

---

1. lah in this sentence is different from lah discussed in the section on 'Tense' and Aspect or lah (= To win, to be superior to, etc), e.g.: u lah leit = He has gone: cf. u lah u hati ia u kyndad = The elephant beats the rhinoceros

<u>u nang kren lai tylli ki jait</u>	}	= He can speak
ktien <u>or</u>		
<u>u nang ba'n kren lai tylli ki</u>	}	three languages
jait ktien		
<u>phi nang shna miej? or</u>	}	= Can you make a table?
<u>phi nang ba'n shna miej?</u>		

lah and nang may even be used by themselves in replies to such questions as the above, e.g.:

phi lah rah ia une u maw?

ho-oid, nga lah = Yes I can

phi nang shna miej?

em, nga'm nang = No, I cannot

hap and dei suggest obligation. The difference between them is that hap suggests obligation imposed by external forces while dei suggests one undertaken as a duty, e.g.:

u hap leit sha thma = He has to go to war (which may be said of an unwilling conscript)

u dei leit sha thma = He has to go to war (as a duty)

The forms "u hap ba'n leit sha thma" and "u dei ba'n leit sha thma" are equally acceptable.

thap<sup>1</sup> suggests that the action described is of a surreptitious character

u. tai u briew u thap shoh ia i pa = That man tried to beat Father

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1. thap may be the same as the word which, used by itself in a sentence, means "to lie in wait", e.g.: u thap ia ka skei na lor dieng = He lay in wait for the deer from (his hide on) the tree.



shait<sup>1</sup> suggests habituality, e.g.:

u shait leit man ka sngi sha baiskúb = He goes to  
the cinema every day

'Voice':

We next consider the use of an auxiliary in passive constructions. As a rule, Khasi declarative sentences correspond to English sentences in the Active Voice. Even in sentences in which ostensibly the subject "receives" the action of the verb, the verb is combined with an auxiliary to express "passivity".

shah is an important auxiliary used in such constructions. shah by itself, it may be noted, means "to suffer". Where therefore in English we can have a sentence like: "He was beaten by his father", in Khasi one generally says, using an auxiliary-verb construction, "u shah shoh ha u kpa" i.e. "He suffered beating at (the hands of) his father". We may compare this with the sentence "u kpa u shoh ia u" = His father beats him.

Naturally, these observations apply to those situations in which a person may be said to suffer an adverse action or an affliction. One cannot therefore put in the same way the equivalent of "He is loved by all" and say\* "u shah ieit ha baroh". One says: "ki ieit baroh ia u" (lit. They love all him i.e. They all love him) or, inversely, "ia u ki ieit baroh".

Written Khasi as we know it is of quite recent origin, the first examples of which being translations of the New Testament

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1. There is also a word, shait which, used by itself, means "To be active, to be well" e.g.: u pang jur shibnai hynrei mynta u la shait = He was very ill for a month but now he has recovered (i.e. he has become well).

around 1841<sup>1</sup>. The man who reduced Khasi to writing, as has been stated, was the Rev Thomas Jones and it is a moot point whether the so-called passive constructions were not actually influenced by English. This is not to suggest, of course, that if they were they have exercised a detrimental effect upon the language. The reverse is true, up to a point. For "deteriorative" sentences, constructions as in the example cited above - "u shah shoh ha u kpa" - are certainly less cumbrous than the "passive" form "ia u la shoh da u kpa".

Nevertheless, many writers today do resort to "passive" constructions, though not to the extent that one may expect. It is significant that in the original pieces of Khasi text included by Pryse in his grammar<sup>2</sup>, such constructions are absent. Dr H Lyngdoh in his chapter on birth rites in his book on the Khasi Religion<sup>3</sup>, does not use them even once, though we find in the small book on the same subject<sup>4</sup> edited by Jeebon Roy, the sentence: "ia kata ka sati sa leit ai da u shynrang ha ka kynthei" which, translated, means: "That ring is then handed over (lit. go-give) by the man to the woman".

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1. The earlier translations in the Bengali script had very serious flaws and in all probability could not have been ever used by native speakers. They have no value except as museum pieces.

2. op.cit.

3. H Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi (Shillong 1937)

4. Jeebon Roy, Ka Niam jong ki Khasi (Shillong 1897)

However, when we analyse the above sentence we immediately notice a significant difference between the English and Khasi constructions. The noun-head in the English sentence is in form unmistakably the subject. Its counterpart in the Khasi sentence, however, follows ia which is the particle that invariably precedes the object in declarative sentences. It may also be added that the above sentence can be modified by the removal of the agentive-instrumental particle da to read: "ia kata ka sati sa leit ai u shynrang ha ka kynthei" without affecting the sense in any way. This then will be seen as the inverted form of the sentence: "u shynrang (u) sa leit ai ia kata ka sati ha ka kynthei" which is patently active in form, meaning "The man then hands over (or goes and gives) the ring to the woman". The only addition is the bracketed u which has already been classified as the pronominal prefix of the verbal piece and is often omitted in inverted sentences. For emphasis, it may be stated, sentences are often stated in the inverted form.

The following sentences may also be considered which, though in form they appear to be in the active voice, in sense actually imply an action that affects the subject. This construction is restricted to certain verbs and strictly speaking concerns their range of transitivity type as items of lexicon, e.g.:

nga thar shiah = (lit. I prick thorn) = I am pricked  
by a thorn cf. u shiah u thar ia nga = A thorn  
pricks me

nga phot ka kti = I am cut in the hand (not "I have cut my hand" since phot is not used transitively

nga jnang shiah = I have a fish-bone stuck in my throat

### Two-verb pieces:

Some Khasi sentences may show two-verb constructions.

These constructions are mainly of two types:

- a. Verb + verb constructions
- b. Verb + particle + verb constructions

To these may be added a third and somewhat different construction involving verbal "imitatives".

a. Verb + verb constructions: Some sequences of Verb + verb are distinguished from Auxiliary verb constructions as discussed above. A typical example is "leit-trei" (lit. go-work) which refers to two distinct actions which are simultaneous in some cases and sequential in others.

The following are declarative sentences of this type:

u leit-trei = He goes to work

u wan-trei ha ka por phra baje = He returns from work at eight o'clock

u shong-pyrkhat marwei ha la kamra = He sits (and) thinks by himself in his room

u shang-pynking ia ka shnong man ka sngi = He goes about upsetting the village daily

In the above sentences, the first verb refers to an action undertaken for the purpose of another action referred to by the second verb.

If particles denoting aspect are to be used, they precede

the first verb only. From this it is clear that to the Khasi mind the <sup>co-occurring</sup> ~~geminated~~ verbs suggest a single action, e.g.:

u dang wan-trei = He has just returned from work

ki dang ia-wan-trei = They have just returned from work

In the second sentence it may be noted that the distributive particle ia occurring with plural subject-heads directly precedes the first verb.

It is pertinent to point out here that there are certain verbs in Khasi that in form suggest verbs with plural subjects by the presence of the distributive particle ia although they may actually follow singular subjects. This is perhaps because the actions they represent are of a social nature involving more than the actor. Such verbs include 'iathuh' = To tell; 'ialam' = To guide; 'iaroh' = To praise. Any of these verbs may thus be substituted for the second verb in the construction above, thus:

u dang wan-iathuh = He has just come to tell

ki dang ia-wan-iathuh = They have just come to tell, etc.

b. Verb + particle + verb: This construction again may be of two kinds (i) to express simultaneous actions or (ii) to suggest repetition:

- (i) Simultaneous actions may be expressed by the combination of two verbs, with a particular intervening particle, e.g.:

u bam-da-iaid = He eats while walking

u bam-ia<sup>1</sup>-iaid = He eats as he walks

Of the two sentences, the second one suggests movement in a sense not implied by the first.

If particles denoting aspect are to be used, they precede the first verb only, e.g.:

u shu bam-da-iaid = He merely eats while walking

With plural subject-heads, the distributive particle ia directly precedes the first verb, e.g.:

ki shu ia-bam-da-iaid = They merely eat while walking

(ii) Repetitive action is suggested by the duplication of the same verb with an intervening particle,<sup>2</sup> usually sa, shi and pa. These different particles suggest different shades of meaning, e.g.:

u kren-sa-kren = He keeps on talking (endlessly)

u kren-shi-kren = He keeps on talking (tediously, perhaps even after having been stopped repeatedly)

u kren-pa-kren = He talks again and again (i.e. with pauses; for example, a person in a meeting who stands up again and again to speak, whether of necessity or by choice)

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1. This ia is not the same as the particle that follows plural subject-heads as in other examples shown in the sub-section.

2. sa in this case suggests the indefinite temporal particle sa commonly used in collocation with yn/'n (see chapter on Particles).

shi has a pejorative sense. It is different from the numeral prefix shi (One)

pa suggests intermittent action (see chapter on Affixes) p. 87

When the subject-head is in the plural, the distributive particle ia may precede each of these two verbs directly,<sup>1</sup> e.g.:

ki ia-kren-sa-ia-kren = They keep on talking

ki ia-kren-shi-ia-kren = They keep on talking (tediously)

ki ia-kren-pa-ia-kren = They talk again and again

This remark is also true of any other particle or particles which may occur in repetitive construction, e.g.:

u iai-kren-sa-iai-kren (more emphatic than "kren-sa-kren")

ki iai-ia-kren-sa-iai-ia-kren

u nang-kren-sa-nang-kren = He goes on talking (getting more and more voluble)

ki nang-ia-kren-sa-nang-ia-kren, etc.

- (iii) Somewhat different is a third form of expression in which the pronominal affix and other concomitants may be repeated with each of the co-ordinate verbs. Pieces of this type fall within the class of expressions variously called Imitatives or Redundant Expressions.<sup>2</sup> These usually feature in oratory, in the language of the court or in religious ceremonies. While the great majority of them are nouns, a large number are verbs or even adverbs. We are here concerned only with the verbal type and the two-verb

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1. Occasionally (though not preferentially) the particle may be omitted before the second verb, e.g.:

ki ia-kren-sa-kren

ki nang-ia-kren-sa-kren

2. Lili Rabel: Redundant Expressions in Khasi

pieces in which they occur. It may be noted that redundant expressions are fixed collocations and tend to carry a sense that is different from that conveyed by the two verbs taken separately.

The following are examples of different forms of sentences in which the expression occur:

(1) With a singular subject, each verb is preceded by the appropriate pronominal prefix:

nga bam nga dih = I feast (bam = To eat; dih = To drink<sup>1</sup>)  
me bam me dih = Thou (masc.) featest  
ka bam ka dih = She feasts

(2) With a plural subject, the distributive affix ia- precedes each verb:

ngi ia-bam ngi ia-dih = We feast  
phi ia-bam phi ia-dih = You feast  
ki ia-bam ki ia-dih = They feast

(3) This form is somewhat emphatic in effect. More usually with a plural subject the pronominal prefix is omitted before the second verb:

ngi ia-bam ia-dih = We feast  
phi ia-bam ia-dih = You feast  
ki ia-bam ia-dih = They feast

(4) An object-noun without preceding ia of the type which

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1. If the order in which the verbs are placed is reversed (i.e. dih-bam) a different meaning (To carouse) is conveyed.



I have suggested forms part of the verbal piece (p. 25 )

nga'n long bynriew-nga'n man bynriew = I shall prosper (long bynriew-man bynriew = lit. To attain the full stature of humanity).

As a sub-type of (4) we may include grammatically parallel expressions in which the same verb is repeated for rhetorical effect with two different nouns standing as object. Such nouns are ones which themselves occur as redundant expressions of the nominal type:

ki ia-tem ksing (ki) ia-tem dhah<sup>1</sup> = They play drums (from "ka ksing-ka dhah" = Percussion instruments generally)

- 
1. dhah is probably an obsolete word. It is never used by itself. There are several other expressions of the nominal type in which the second of the pair of nouns has no independent meaning, e.g.:

ki mrad-ki mreng = Beasts collectively (mrad = Animal; mreng - meaning obscure)

ka sharak-ka pyrbit = Lamp (sharak = Lamp; pyrbit - meaning obscure)

## V. Preverbs and Verbal Affixes

Preverbs and verbal affixes play a large part in the construction of Khasi sentences. Of those considered in this chapter, ba is of special syntactic importance on account of the variety of its functions. It may be colligated either with a verb or with a verbal phrase. Its two principal functions are attributive and agentive.

1. (a). ba has an attributive function qualifying the noun to which the verb linked to it is in subordination, e.g.:

u khynnnah u ba rit = The boy who is small = The small boy

u briew u ba iong = The man who is dark = The dark man

ka samla ka ba rkhi = The damsel who laughs = The laughing damsel

It may be noted that both rit and iong are functionally attributive verbs as will be seen in the sentences below, thus performing the function that adjectives do in other languages:

mynta u snem u phan u rit = This year the potato (is) small

lada phi shah sngi phi'n iong = If you expose (yourself) to the sun you will (be) black/dark

- (b) ba has its negative counterpart ba'm or b'ym<sup>1</sup> (often spelt bym) which may occur in the same environment as

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1. ba'm, b'ym are contracted forms of ba + ym the negative particle (see section on Negation p.56).

itself and may thus be substituted for it in all the examples shown above:

u khynnah u b'ym rit = The boy who is not small

u briew u b'ym iong = The man who is not dark

ka samla ka b'ym rkhie = The damsel who does not laugh

2. ba is used frequently however, without a nominal antecedent and then itself has the function of nominalising a verb or a clause.

(a)

ba has an agentive function<sup>1</sup> when it is combined with a verb to form a derivative noun, and like nouns proper it then takes the gender-number marker and may be the subject or the object of a verb in a sentence, e.g.:

ki ba don burom (often spelt "badonburom") = The nobility  
(don = To have; burom = glory, prestige)  
i.e. They who have prestige

ki ba duk (or baduk) = The poor (duk = To be poor)

ki ba sngew rit (or basngewrit) = The humble (sngew = To feel; rit = To be small)

hence,

ki ba don burom ki'm dei ba'n ñiew beifñ ia ki ba duk =  
The noble must not despise the poor

ki ba sngew rit bunsien ki shem bha = The humble often  
prosper (lit. find good)

1. This combination of "attributive" and "agentive" functions is found also in, for example, (old and literary) Mon ma with which Khasi ba has been thought to be cognate (H.L. Shorto: A Dictionary of the Mon Inscriptions: Oriental Series, Vol. 24, London: OUP 1971 s.v.).

ka syiem ka khot ia ki ba don burom sha ka jingkhawai =  
The queen invited the nobility to the feast

(b)

There are other forms of ba-constructions again which refer to the action rather than the actor, e.g.:

ka ba shong jaituh ka long ka ba sniew = Sitting idly is  
bad / a bad thing

(Note however, that ka ba shong jaituh when used for the actor means "She who sits idly")

In these functions, particles of aspect may occur between the verb and ba thereby modifying the meaning of the forms e.g.:

ki ba dang don burom = They who are still noble

ki ba da sngew rit = They who are truly humble, etc.

ka ba shu shong jaituh = Just sitting idly, she who just  
sits idly

As with the actor-forms, action-forms can also be the object in a sentence, e.g.:

nga'm sngewbha ia ka ba shong jaituh = I do not like sitting  
idly (Note the pre-object ia)

(c)

ba is the base of some subordinating particles which have been mentioned in the relevant section of the chapter on verb particles. This is considered the appropriate place in which the function of this second group of particles should be discussed. The particles are written haba, katba, mynba, naba, namar ba and hamar ba

haba (ha the locative prefix and ba as nominalizer) = When, where)

haba don tdem, dei ba'n don ding = When or where  
there is smoke there must be fire

haba ka miaw ka'm don, ki khnai ki ia mastieh = When  
the cat is away, the mice will frolic

The negative counterpart of haba is hab'ym (haba+ym)

and the second sentence can also be put in the following way:

hab'ym don ka miaw, ki khnai ki ia mastieh = When the  
cat is away, the mice will frolic

It will be noticed that in this construction, the verb precedes the subject. The reason becomes obvious when it is realised that the alternate form of the sentence includes ym which occurs at the head of impersonal sentences, e.g.:

haba ym don ka miaw etc.	}	When there is no cat etc.
haba ym don miaw etc.		

cf. ym don miaw = There is no cat

katba (kat the quantitative prefix) = While, as long as

katba nga dang don ma-nga, phi'm dei ba'n tieng = When  
I remain (lit. exist), you must not be afraid

katba u dang im, ki khun ki shngaiñ = As long as he  
is alive, the children feel secure

katba u'n poi, la dap san baje = By the time he will  
arrive it will be 5 o'clock

c.f. the more speculative<sup>1</sup> sentence incorporating the particle da:

---

1. The presence of the conditional particle da is suggestive.

katba u'n da poi, ki la lah kma = By the time he arrives (lit. would arrive), the cattle will have strayed

mynba (myn the temporal prefix indicating time up to the immediate present) = While (past time), during the time when

mynba nga dang khynnah, nga la kren kum u khynnah =  
When I was a child, I spoke like a child

The difference between katba and mynba is that mynba refers to past time only, while katba may refer to any time, present past or future.

naba<sup>1</sup> (na the 'ablative' prefix = From), presumably a shortened form of "namar ba" or the phrase "na ka daw ba" (lit. from the reason that), hence = Because. (Often in this sense naba or namar ba is reduced to the basic form ba):

naba u long uba lyngkot, u'm lah ban iohi nalor uta u paidbah = Because he was short, he could not see over (the heads of) that crowd

or

ba u long uba lyngkot etc. = Because he was short

namar ba (na+mar<sup>2</sup> - probably the particle denoting parity - +ba) = Because

---

1. naba is distinguished in writing from na ba which is specifically locative, e.g.:  
ka tnat ka kdiah na ba pyut = The branch broke (at the point) where it <sup>was</sup> decayed.

2. Cf. the sentence, ngi iadon mar 5 tyngka = We have 5 rupees each.

mar has in certain contexts the effect of defining location more or less exactly. In writing, distinction is made with the above statements by separation of the particles, thus: ka tnat ka kdiah na mar ba pyut = The arrow fell (or hit) (at the very spot) where (it was) aimed= decayed.

namar ba u long u ba riwspah, baroh ki burom ia u =  
Because he is wealthy, everybody respects him

hamar ba (ha+mar+ba) equivalent to "Precisely at the  
point/moment, where/when"

hamar ba ki dang iakren, u wan ring u nonghikai =  
While they were (yet) talking, the teacher entered

(d)

There are also certain sentences in which ba-constructions follow the verb directly, that is, without the pre-object ia. In these constructions, they are more or less identical with noun-phrases, e.g.:

nga iohi ba u khreh kot = I saw that he was studying  
(lit. preparing a book)

nga tip ba phi la thied kali = I know that you have  
bought a car<sup>1</sup>

Compare this with the following sentence in which the phrase occurs as the subject head:

ba phi la thied kali ka long ka jingiarap ka ba khraw =  
That you have bought a car is a great help

(e)

The ba-construction may also stand as a sentence expressing a wish, e.g.:

a ba nga'n da ioh leit sha amerika! = Oh, that I could  
go to America!

(f)

ba as a nominaliser may also combine with yn (the particle

---

1. On the principle advanced above (ch.II, p. 28 ) it would appear to follow that these sentences in their entirety constitute verbal pieces. While the convenience of treating them here is obvious, that is probably a fruitful approach.

of futurity) into the form ba'n (often spelt ban).

ban has more or less the same function as the English infinitive "to":

ba'n leit = To go

ba'n shong jaituh ka'm long ka ba bha = To sit idly  
is not a good (thing)

This observation is true even of ban-constructions in the predicate:

nga'm kwah ba'n shong jaituh = I do not want to sit idly

phi nang ba'n shong kulai? = Are you able (lit. "adept")  
to ride (a) horse?

Less commonly, ba'n-constructions can fill the same slots as nouns either as subject or more usually as object of a sentence:

ki ba'n wan bam ki iadon hynriewngut = Those who will  
come to eat are six (in number)

u khunlung u'm sngewthuh ia ka ba'n mynsaw = A baby  
does not understand what is (likely to be) dangerous.

The implication of futurity is obvious. Without yn the sense of the above sentence is modified:

ki ba wan bam ki iadon hynriewngut = Those who came/  
have come to eat are six (in number)

u khunlung u'm sngewthuh ia ka ba mynsaw = A baby does  
not understand what is dangerous.



Affixes:

In dealing with verbal affixes - principally prefixes - we may include those prefixes that function as nominalising prefixes and those that create new verbs or extend the function of verb roots. While nominalising prefixes properly fall outside the scope of this thesis as strictly defined, mention of them serves to illustrate one way in which the role of the verb is extended.

1. Nominalising prefixes consist of the bound morph /jing-/ with its variants and the agentive prefixes /nong-/ and /myn-/.

i. jing-: When prefixed to verbs of action, jing- produces nouns that are cognates of the verbs, e.g.:

bam = To eat	jingbam = Food
dih = To drink	jingdih = Drink
khang = To close	jingkhang = Door

When prefixed to stative verbs, jing- creates abstract nouns, e.g.:

stet = To be quick	jingstet = Speed
bha = To be good	jingbha = Goodness
khriat = To be cold	jingkhriat = Coldness

Occasionally, when jing- precedes stops, whether voiced or unvoiced, there is homorganic assimilation of sounds, the initial consonant of the verb influencing the final nasal of the prefix, e.g.:



term 'mynpang' carries the meaning of

'hypochondriac, malingerer', etc.

2. A much larger class of verbal prefixes consists of those that serve to intensify or modify the sense of the verb. In most cases, the verb-morph is identifiable, but there are also stems in which it is not. However, the functional role of the affix is generally clear.

The common prefixes of this class are: kyn-, kyr-, jyn-, jyr-, lyn-, pyn-, (with its variant pyl-), pyr-, syn-, thyn-, tyng-, tyr-, pa-, sa-, ta-.

i. kyn-: Usually, this prefix reinforces the verb root:

kyn-at = To swell progressively (usually applied to the human body, cf. at = To swell), e.g.:

ka kti jong nga ka kyn-at = My hand is swelling

cf. ka kti jong nga ka at = My hand is swollen

kynran = To retreat as from a confrontation

cf. ran = To shrink, shrivel e.g.:

u riewshlur u'm ju kynran na ka jingialeh = A brave man never retreats in a fight

cf. lada phi sait jain syaid da ka umkhluit, ki'n ran = If you wash warm clothes with hot water they will shrink

kyntur = To butt, push with the head

cr. tur = To press forward, e.g.:

ka masi ka kyntur ia ka kynton bad pynkyllon ia ka = The cow pushes the wall down (with its head) lit. butts the wall and causes it to collapse

kyn- has another role. It may serve as a prefix to utterances like interjections, exclamations etc. to indicate that such utterances have been made e.g.:

kynphui = To heap scorn upon a person (from the interjection 'phui' equivalent to the English 'phooey!');

kynha = To raise a shout (from 'ha!')

Words like 'kynpha' (To address a man as a woman - pha being the 2nd person singular pronoun of the feminine gender - or to use the pronoun, usually reserved for equals or inferiors when speaking to people who should be respected) and also 'kynme' (To use the 2nd person singular masculine pronoun when speaking to people who should not be so addressed) may be compared to the French 'tutoyer' or the German 'duzen' although they do not convey the latter sense of affectionate familiarity:

utai u briew u kynpha ia la u hynmen = That man addresses his own brother as a woman

ba'n kynme ia la u kpa ka long ka ba sang = To address one's own father as 'me' is a moral offence

ii. kyr-: sometimes used with interjections in the same way, though in contrast with kyn- in similar environments it conveys the idea of more sustained action, e.g.:

kynha = To shout but kyrha = To keep on shouting  
u kynha ba'n pyntieng ia nga = He shouted to frighten me  
 ki nongbehmrad ki kyrha ba'n pynkhie ia ka skei =  
 The hunters keep on shouting to raise the deer  
 (from cover)

iii. jyn-: serves to intensify the meaning of the verb root

jynrat = To uproot forcibly; rat = To uproot  
nga rat ia ki diengkper = I take out the paling (pales)

nga jynrat ia ka diengkper = I uproot the fencing  
forcibly

- iv. jyr-: Words with this prefix often carry a  
deteriorative sense. Like kyn- and kyr- above it may  
be used to form onomatopoeic words, e.g.:

jyrhoh = To cough

jyrhiah = To sneeze (a less common alternative to  
'synriah')

It may also be prefixed to particular verbs to form  
other verbs with the same deteriorative sense:

jyrwit = To be complicated

cf. wit = To obstruct, e.g.:

kane ka kam ka ~~ka~~ jyrwit bha = This matter is very  
complicated

ki masi ki wit ia ka lynti = The cattle block the  
path

- v. lyn-: has an intensifying effect when prefixed to the  
verb root, e.g.:

sher = To cast (a stake or a spear for example) into  
the ground

lynsher = To cast with force

Examples:

u sher ia u sum khlem peit = He cast the spear  
without looking

u lynsher ia u sum haduh ba u da pei lyngba ia u  
sniang = He cast the spear (with such  
force) that it pierced the boar right  
through

Compare also the words 'pyndam' and 'pynlyndam'

pyndam = To erase a mark

pynlyndam = To obliterate wholesale

vi. pyn-: has two functions: (1) a causative one when prefixed to intransitive verbs, and (2) a benefactive one when prefixed to transitive verbs. In either case, the sentence containing the 'pyn-' verb differs from the sentence containing the corresponding unprefixed verb by the addition of a ia-term ('object' or 'indirect object'), e.g.:

1. u dieng u kyllon = The tree falls  
 ka lyer ka pynkyllon ia u dieng = The wind fells  
 the tree  
  
 ka miaw ka iap = The cat dies/is dead  
 u ksew u pyniap ia ka miaw = The dog kills the cat
2. i mei i shet ja = Mother is boiling rice  
 i mei i pynshet ja ia i ĩia = Mother is boiling  
 rice for Auntie

pyn- has a variant pyl- in the word 'pyllait' (= To free, release)

'pynlait' where the final nasal of the prefix has been assimilated to the initial consonant of the verb<sup>1</sup> 'lait' (To escape), e.g.:

- ka syiar ka la lait na (ka) ruh = The hen has  
 escaped from the cage  
  
nga pyllait ia ka syiar na ruh = I released the  
 hen from the cage

---

1. It may be pertinent to point to another pair of words showing a similar shift i.e. 'khyllung' and 'khunlung' (Baby), the former being colloquial and the latter being the literary form.

vii. pyr-: Words with this prefix appear to relate to actions that are tentative or exploratory, e.g.:

pyrshang = To buy  
 pyrthuh = To imitate  
 pyrkhath<sup>1</sup> = To think  
 pyrsad = To blow

viii. syn-: The prefix in several cases appears to have an attenuating effect, e.g.:

tuid = To flow, to slide  
 syntuid = To slip

Examples:

ka wah ka tuid = The river flows  
nga syntuid ha u sohpaillen = I slipped on the moss

Compare also:

dam = To be erased  
 syndam = To be dented, flattened, flat

ix. thyn-: One example of a word with this prefix is "thynrim" (= Slightly old) compared with "rim" (To be old) both used of things

x. tyng-: This prefix appears to have the function of a modifier, e.g.:

khap = To seize or hold with a pair of pincers  
 or tongs  
 tyngkhap = To insert

---

1. pyrkhat seems to be the only word in which the root is identifiable. khat = To scoop with a ladle. The imitative is pyrdain (dain = To cut into pieces). This may be a comparison to the mental process.

Examples:

nga khap rnga da ka nap = I pick up live coal  
with a pair of tongs

nga tyngkhap ia ka shithi hapoh ka kot = I placed  
the letter inside a book (i.e. pages of  
the book)

xi. tyn-: This prefix, likewise, appears to act as a  
modifier in the examples shown below:

dung = To stab, to prick (with a suggestion of  
penetration)

tyndung = To poke

Examples:

u brutus u dung ia u kaisar = Brutus stabbed Caesar

u khynnah u tyndung ia ka skum-sim = The boy poked  
the bird's nest

xii. tyr-: In the example shown below, this prefix seems  
to suggest an exploratory act:

suh = To stitch (with needle, bodkin etc), to pin

tyrsuh = To probe

Examples:

nga suh jaiñ da u thyrnia = I stitch cloth with  
a needle

nga tyrsuh ia u siej ha thliew khnai = I insert a  
bamboo (pole) into the rat-hole

xiii. pa-: suggests intermittent as opposed to smooth  
sustained action, e.g.:

sied = To leap

pasied = To splutter, spatter

ring = To pull

paring = To tug

Examples:

ka skei ka sied ruma ba beh ki ksew = The deer  
leapt wildly being chased by dogs



ka umphniang ka pasied kylleng ba sdieh dohkha =  
The oil spluttered all round because of  
frying fish

u khynnah u ring ia u tyllai = The boy pulls the  
rope (of a continuous action)

u khynnah u paring ia la u para na ka kti = The  
boy tugs his brother by the hand (suggesting  
resistance)

xiv. sa<sup>1</sup>: suggests spreading action

phret = To crumble      saphret = To be scattered

u kpu u la phret = The bread has crumbled

ki lyngkhot kpu ki la saphret ha tbian = The  
pieces of bread are scattered (all) over  
the floor

phriang = To spread out      saphriang = To scatter

u khynnah u phriang ia ki kot ha ka sngi = The boy  
spreads the books out in the sun

ki kot ki la saphriang ha phyllaw = The books are  
scattered all over the courtyard

xv. ta:- suggests encircling or rotary movement in the

following examples:

bah = To carry (on back)      tabah = To hang on  
something

wah = To hang (on peg)      tawah = To wrap round

Examples:

nga bah ia i hep = I carry little sister (on my back)

u jyrmi u tabah ia ka diengkper = The creeper has  
spread upon the fencing

---

1. "sa" is also the verb used to describe infections that manifest themselves in eruptions or as patches, e.g.:  
u sa ñiangthohlieh = He is affected with leucoderma  
ka sa ñiangthylliew = She is affected with smallpox

i kong i wah ia ka jaiñ ha u prek = Elder sister  
hangs the cloth upon a nail

i bah i tawah jaiñ ha ryndang ba khriat eh =  
Elder brother wraps <sup>(a piece of) cloth round</sup> his neck ~~with cloth~~  
because of the intense cold

## VI. Adverbs

Adverbs, <sup>probably</sup> constitute the largest class of words in the Khasi vocabulary, on account principally of the proliferation of what are called phonaesthetic adverbs, a class further discussed below. The direct colligation of adverb with verb does not need stressing or, a fortiori, the propriety of treating the former in a discussion of the verbal piece. In the case of phonaesthetic adverbs, there is not only colligation but specific collocation of one or more adverbs with a particular verb. The collocational relations extend further to the actor or subject and serve to narrow the reference <sup>of</sup> to the verb.

The following adverbs associated with the verb 'stem' (To be yellow) will illustrate the point suggested above:

stem mir-mir = To have the vivid yellow colour of turmeric (for instance)  
instance)

stem blaid-blaid = To be pale or anaemic

stem bler = To go pale (as with a fainting person)

Within each adverb type, again, the vowel differences can convey shades of meaning or even the quality of physical characteristics of the actor or the object associated with a particular action, e.g.:

ka stem bler<sup>1</sup> = She goes pale (of a person of generous proportions)

ka stem blar<sup>1</sup> = She goes pale (of a smaller person)

For purposes of discussion here, the following classes of adverbs may be distinguished, the formal properties of each being elicited in the course of the discussion:

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<sup>1</sup> A similar use of vowel variation is found in the MK language Bahnar though in the main verb itself (see Guilleminet Dictionnaire bahnar, passim).

- A. Spatio-temporal adverbs
  - a. Positional adverbs
  - b. Temporal adverbs
- B. Descriptive adverbs
- C. Adverbs of manner
- D. Adverbs of quantity
- E. Modal adverbs
- F. Phonaesthetic adverbs

For obvious reasons, more space in this paper needs to be given to some rather than others of the above adverbs, the criterion being the extent to which they help to bring out the meaning of the verb.

- A. (a) Positional adverbs: This class of adverbs have, as their roots, morphs that are deictic in function. (These, besides being significant components of adverbs of place, can also combine with pronominal prefixes to form demonstrative pronouns). In addition, these morphs also have 'orientational' features indicating not only relation to the place of utterance but also to the speaker/hearer.

It is not surprising that a mountain folk like the Khasis should possess a deictic system of some complexity to demonstrate the position of a person, object or place spoken of in relation to the speaker - whether it is in proximity to, or at a distance from him and whether above, below, at the same level with him, or even out of sight, for example, an unspecified location beyond their immediate ken and quite apart from the speaker-hearer environment. These deictic morphs are:

- ne : Indicating a place near the speaker  
 -tei : Indicating a place etc. away from the speaker/hearer and above  
 -tai : Indicating a place etc. away from the speaker-hearer at same level  
 -thie : Indicating a place etc. away from the speaker/hearer below  
 -to : Indicating a place near the hearer  
 -ta : Indicating a place out of sight of the speaker/hearer

to which may be added

-no<sup>1</sup> , }  
 -ei<sup>1</sup> } Used with questions

The 'spatial' prefixes that may combine with the above morphs to form adverbs of place are:

- nang- (From): a cognate, if not a fossilized form of 'na'<sup>2</sup>  
 hang- (At) : ditto 'ha'<sup>2</sup>  
 sha- (To) : an egressive prefix

The resultant adverbs are, thus:

1. Nangtei, nangtai, nangthie, nangne, nangto, nangta, e.g.:

u wan nang<sup>g</sup>tei = He came from there (above)

u wan nangtai = He came from there (at the same level with the speaker)

u wan nangthie = He came from there (below)

u wan nangne = He came from here

u wan nangto = He came from there (where the person spoken to is)

u wan nangta = He came from there (an unspecified place out of sight)

u wan nangno? = Where did he come from?

2. hangtei, hangtai, hangthie, hangne, hangto, hangta, e.g.:

---

1 See Section on Questions. 2. na, ha and sha only can be prefixed to -ei. On the other hand every prefix can colligate with deictic morphs with initial consonants, though in some dialects we have the forms \*na-tai, ha-tei etc.

u don hangtei = He is there (above)

u don hangtai = He is there (at the same level)

u don hangthie = He is there (below)

u don hangne = He is here

u don hangto = He is there (near the hearer)

u don hangta = He is there ( at an unspecified place out of sight)

u don hangno? = Where is he?

3. shatei, shatai, shathie, shane, shato, shate, shano, e.g.:

u'n leit shatei = He will go there (above)

u'n leit shatai = He will go there (at same level)

u'n leit shathie = He will go there (below)

u'n wan shane = He will come here.

u'n wan shato = He will come there (i.e. the place where the hearer is)

u'n leit shano?<sup>1</sup> = Where will he go?

A device very often resorted to in order to express comparative distance is the doubling of the morph and/or the lengthening of its vowel, e.g.:

hangthie-thie	}	Further down there
hangthie-e-e - thie		
hangthie-e-e		

A (b) Temporal Adverbs: Two common prefixes associated with adverbs of time are 'myn', overtly relating to past time up to the

---

<sup>1</sup> The deictic morph no is usually a question marker. When it is repeated together with its prefix, however, it is affirmative in force, e.g. shano-shano sha ba u leit, ngi ia-leit lang = Wherever he goes, we go together.

immediate present and 'la-' to the future<sup>1</sup>. 'hangta' and 'nangta', both already shown under A(a) 1 and 2 above, are also used as temporal adverbs to mean, respectively, 'Then, at that time' and 'From that time, thereupon', which perhaps indicates their spatial connotation.

myn<sup>2</sup> adverbs include:

mynhynne = Earlier today

mynhynnin = Yesterday

mynshisngi = The day before yesterday

mynshemsnem = Last year

mynshemtaiew = Last week

myyno? = When?

mynhyndai = In ancient times

<sup>1</sup> On closer examination 'la' may appear to be the "temporal" prefix which has been considered in the chapter on "Verb particles". Its use in connection with adverbs of futurity can be explained by the fact that they relate to something that has happened earlier. Both 'la-shai' (Tomorrow) and 'la-shibit' (Presently) are, strictly speaking, adverbial phrases meaning, respectively, "When it has become light" and "When a short time will have passed". In regard to 'la-shai' we may consider the following sentence: "Haba ka la shai te, ki rangbah lyngdoh . . ki la ia-sylla etc." = When morning came, the chief priests met in conference (Matt.xxvii.1)

<sup>2</sup> myn may be considered as a temporal prefix with a much wider connotation and relating to duration of time generally, since we also have the following adverbs:

mynsngi = During the daytime

mynmiet = During the night

mynstep = In the morning, etc.

Consider 'nga'n leit la-shai mynmiet' = I shall go tomorrow night

It may be noted that 'myn' may also occur at the head of adverbial phrases relating to the past, e.g. 'myn ha kata ka por' = At that time (in the past); 'myn ba nga dang khynnah' = When I was a child etc..

1a adverbs include:

lasyit = Tonight, at nightfall (lit. 'When it shall have become dark')

lashai = Tomorrow

lashisngi = The day after tomorrow (shi = One; sngi = Day)  
equivalent to "After one day"

lashemsnem<sup>1</sup> = Next year (shem = To find, meet; snem = Year)  
perhaps equivalent to "After a year has been found"

lashentaiew = Next week (taiew = Week)

lano? = When? (future)

lashai-lashisngi = In the future

B. Descriptive Adverbs: Most of these belong to the attributive class and invariably follow the principal verb in a sentence, e.g.:

U trei bha = He works well

u trei shitom = He works hard, he toils (shitom = With hardship, suffer)

'bha' and 'shitom' can be used as stative verbs in the sentences:

ka jing-kren ka bha = the speech is good

u'n shitom lada u'm sumar = He will suffer if he is not careful

'bha' may even be used with another adverb to intensify the meaning:

u trei shitom bha = He works very hard

In this context, 'bha' does not have its usual meaning (i.e. 'good')

Indeed, it can be used quite appropriately in juxtaposition with the word

<sup>1</sup> There are no such forms as \*'lashembnai' for 'Next month' or \*'mynshembnai' for 'Last month' for which the more circumlocutory forms "na utai u bnai u bnai uba la dep" (lit. In that month that has passed) and "ha utai u bnai u ba'nwan" (lit. In that month that will come) are used.



'sniew' (= Bad), e.g.:

utai u briew u ba sniew bha = That man (is) very bad

C. Adverbs of manner: (i) These are generally 'kum = ' constructions, 'kum' being the prepositional 'like', and can therefore be prefixed to the deictic morphs discussed in A(a) above or govern nouns in adverbial phrases, e.g.:

phi dei ban leh kumne = You must do like this

wat leh kumto = Do not do like that

kumno phi leh ia kane? = How do you do this?

u iaaid kum u shipai = He walks like a soldier

u kren kum u ba tip = He talks as if he knows (everything)

nga'n leh kum ba<sup>1</sup> phi batai = I shall do as you instruct

(ii) In this class are also adverbial phrases consisting of the 'instrumental' preposition 'da' (With) with or without a following gerund of the 'ba + verb' construction (for which please see sub-section 1 under the section on preverbs and Affixes):

trei da ka ba\* suki = Work slowly (lit. work with what is slow)

u shymporong u kynriah da dien = A crayfish moves backwards

D. Adverbs of Quantity: These are either quantitative words like 'khyndiat' (A little), 'shibun' (Much) or words of phrases of the 'kat' + ' construction, 'kat' being equivalent to 'As much as'. Like 'kum' (Section C above), 'kat' may be prefixed to the positional morphs: (i.e. katne = As much as this; kattei = As much as that (above) etc..)

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1. See sub-section relating to ba in Chapter on "Preverbs and Affixes".

u rishot u dem khyndiat = The post leans slightly

u kpa u ieit shibun ia u khun = The father loves his son greatly

nga don katne ki pisa = I have this amount of money (lit. as much as  
this money)

katto ka ja ka la biang? = Is that quantity of rice sufficient?

u khynnah u bam kat u rangbah = The boy eats as much as a man does

nga'n trei kat ba<sup>1</sup> nga lah = I shall work as much as I can

#### E. Modal Adverbs:

(a) Negative Adverbs: These are few in number and include 'satia'

(At all) 'ei-ei ruh (em)' (lit. nothing at all), 'da lei-lei  
ruh em' (lit. no, whatever happens) e.g.:

u'm jubab satia la nga khot ia u = He does not respond though I call  
him

nga'n ym leit da lei-lei ruh em = I shall not go, whatever befalls

(b) Affirmative Adverbs: These are also few in number and include

'keiñ' (Of course) 'shisha' (Actually), e.g.:

nga ju bam doh keiñ = Of course I eat meat!

phi'n wan shisha la-shai? = Will you really come tomorrow?

Note: There are some adverbs that are particularly expressive in their meaning content and that may be used as well with negative as well as with affirmative verbs, e.g.:

'khat-ei' and/or 'du' = Contrary to expectation,

'ade' = Probably

<u>khat-ei</u> u jubab ynda khot ma-nga	)	(But) he replies when I call him (i.e. contrary to what we have been led to suppose)
u jubab <u>du</u> ynda khot ma-nga		
u jubab <u>du khat-ei</u> ynda khot ma nga		

i'm da shait ade = He/she is not quite well apparently

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1. See sub-section on ba in chapter on "Preverbs and Affixes"

F. Phonaesthetic Adverbs: This is perhaps the largest class of adverbs in the Khasi language.

- (a) Nuances of semantic distinction can be suggested by their use, the meaning being determined by the sounds (mainly vowel sounds and to a limited extent by the consonants - either final or pre-vocalic). An element of onomatopoeia may be involved, final 'm' or 'r' or 'k', for instance, suggesting respectively an echoing sound, or vibration, or an abrupt end, e.g.:

u noh pum ha um = He jumped into the water (causing the typical echoing sound)

ka mator ka kieh ur = The motorcar roared into life

ka mator ka sangeh khuk = The motorcar stopped suddenly

In certain cases, prevocalic 'r' suggests impedance and the semi-vowel /j/ (written 'i') may suggest smoothness of action, e.g.,

u khnam u dei phak na shyllang = The arrow hit the forehead (impact)

u khnam u dei phrak na dohnud = The arrow pierced the heart (passing through the body before doing so)

u khnam u dei phiak na dohnud = The arrow sank smoothly into the heart

- (b) A larger group of adverbs of this class consists of those which permit vowel variation, usually inter-consonantal and only rarely final. It may be stated that while consonants generally have an onomatopoeic function, vowels generally provide the clue to the manner of the action when associated with transitive verbs and to the quality or the character of the subject of the verbs in adverbs associated with intransitive

verbs. As an illustration, the following forms of the adverb

with a 'm-r' morph may be considered:

stem mir/mir-mir<sup>1</sup> = To have a vivid yellow colour

stem mer/mer-mer<sup>1</sup> = To have a pale yellow colour

stem mor/mor-mor<sup>1</sup> = To have a delicate shade of yellow

stem mur/mur-mur<sup>1</sup> = To have a rich yellow colour

As has been stated above, vowels in adverbs associated with intransitive verbs provide a clue to the character of the subject but in those associated with transitive verbs they relate to the manner of the action. Consider the following examples:

u tynrah ruk<sup>1</sup> ia ka ding = He poked the fire (i.e. deep into a well-stacked fire)

u tynrah rak is ka ding = He poked the fire (superficially)

but,

u liat kruk ha thliew = He (a big man) stepped into a hole

u liat krak ha thliew = He (a small man) stepped into a hole

A few more examples of adverbs of the latter type are given below:

(i)

'th-r' or 'th-r - th-r'<sup>2</sup> associated with the verb 'iaid' (To walk), e.g.:

u iaiaid thar-thar = He walks fast (of a person of average build)

u iaiaid ther-ther = He walks fast ( of a bigger person, perhaps even one wearing loose clothes)

u iaiaid thir-thir = He walks fast (of a small, nimble person)

<sup>1</sup> Repetition of an action is suggested by duplication of the adverb morph. Endless or tedious repetition is suggested by the intervening pejorative particle shi e.g.: u tynrah ruk-shi-ruk is ka ding = He keeps on poking the fire.

<sup>2</sup> Gemination in this case suggests a continuing state whereas the single forms have no such temporal signification.

u iaiaid thor-thor = He walks fast (of one so light that he appears to be blown about by the wind)

u iaiaid thur-thur = He walks fast (of a heavy person, one moreover who is apt to be clumsy)

(ii)

'sb-k' associated with the verb 'hap' (To fall) e.g.:

u hap sbak na dieng = He fell with a crash from the tree (average person)

u hap sbek na dieng = He fell with a crash from the tree (bigger person)

u hap sbik na dieng = He fell with a crash from the tree (small, stocky man)

u hap sbok na dieng = He fell with a crash from the tree (small, puny man)

u hap sbuk na dieng = He fell with a crash from the tree (heavy person)

Not all adverbs of this class have the full range of vowel alternations. In some cases, phonological limitations exclude some forms, e.g. 'khl-w' (fixedly) associated with the verb 'peit' (To look) has the forms 'khlaw', 'khlew', 'khliw' but not 'khlow' or \*'khluw'. 'ld-i' (pendulously) associated with 'snoh' (To cling) has the forms 'ldai', 'ldoi' and 'ldui' but not \*'ldei' or \*'ldii', for which the (l)aternate forms 'ldet' and 'ldit' may be used. S

Generally speaking, however, it may be stated that a suggests smallness or average size, e heaviness and a hint of the obese, i compact stockiness, o smallness and u heaviness and bulk.

(iii)

Some adverbs of this class end in a vowel, e.g. 'khro' (/khro/), 'khru' which may be used with the verb 'ur' (To trip and fall):

u ur khro = He stumbled and fell down (of a small or light person)

u ur khru = ditto (of a big or heavy person)

(There are no forms \*'khra', \*khre, \*khri, perhaps because the above adverbs are already complementary).

(iv)

The length of the vowel also suggests drawn-out action and adverbs which show similar morphs may mean differently (and be associated with different verbs) according to the length of the vowel, e.g.:

taiñ (/ta:p/) and **taiñ** (/ta:p/) *respectively in*

u pyrthat u tied taiñ = The thunderbolt struck with a loud crash

ka jri ka jrong taiñ = The rubber stretched (lit. lengthened)

The repetitive adverbs discussed in this section should be distinguished from those composed of imitatives with different vowels (usually 'u' and 'a') which do not relate to the character of the agent but to the action. These adverbs suggest speed:

u khreh buk-bak = He dressed hurriedly

u bret bhuk-bhak ia ka jingkt = He threw down the load hastily

u pam bhut-bhat ia u ñiut = He slashed at the bushes

u shu peit luk-liak ia ka kot = He just gave a fleeting glance at the book

Note that the final 't' in bhut-bhat suggests the swishing sound of the hacking knife.

## VII. The Verbal Piece: present and earlier approaches

As stated in the Introduction, the first serious grammar on the Khasi language was published in 1855. Robert's grammar, the next one worthy of note, was published in 1891. After that, until the publication of Dr. Rabel's descriptive grammar in 1961 nothing original was done in this field.

Both Pryse and Roberts lived and worked in an age when there was unquestioned faith in the universal applicability of Greco-Latin grammar and accordingly they shaped their material to the mould suggested by it. Although many of their statements could be accepted with little or no change today, they also included in their works a great deal that would now be disputed. In fact, Robert's grammar had a rough reception from Khasis when it was published, though not (it must be added) because of the framework within which it was written but because of his imperfect mastery of the language. Writing in the journal U KHASI MYNTA<sup>1</sup> the editor while conceding that discerning readers could profit from a reading of the grammar by their ability to choose what was of value in it while rejecting its errors, asserted that its use by school-children or by those with little knowledge of Khasi would be catastrophic.

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1. U Khasi Mynta, 1st January 1897

The section on conjugation of verbs in the grammar at times suggests that Roberts devised a schema and then sought Khasi expressions which would fit it. Some of these are of quite doubtful validity. Thus, under "Potential Mood", he gives the sentence "ka lah ba nga'n long" which he translates as "I may be", whereas it is a word-for-word rendering of "it is possible that I shall be" and not in fact correct Khasi. The correct form of the English expression quoted is simply "nga lah ba'n long".

In their treatment of what they called the Passive Voice in Khasi, it is remarkable that after their first comments that Khasi, strictly speaking, had no passive voice, Roberts and Pryse nevertheless produced copious material suggesting that it did have one. Roberts, indeed, qualified his observations with the statement that "the so-called Passive, is formed by omitting the subject and so, using the verb indefinitely or impersonally, with the object following the verb in the accusative with ia". Pryse in his opening remarks wrote: "The Passive Voice, if it can be said to exist, is very imperfectly found in the Khasi language . . . The form usually called passive requires the noun or pronoun preceded by ia or some other preposition, after the verb . . ."

"According to general usage at present, the form seems to be used in but few different tenses; principally, the present



or past indicative . . ." But then he went on to say: "It would be desirable to have some mark of distinction between the present and the past tenses but the natives do not seem to observe any; or if they do, it is very partially or imperfectly developed . . . The general tendency appears to be to avoid the passive form altogether and to express the sense by inverting the sentences and employing the active voice".

Pryse's interest in Khasi was largely academic. His work as a missionary was confined to the Bengali-speaking areas in the plains south of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. It is almost certain, however, that his grammar was used as a guide to the study of the language by later missionaries, among others, particularly as there was no other work on the subject to study. Roberts on the other hand was stationed in the hills, a missionary-teacher whose task at one time was to train young Khasis who in time themselves became teachers, writers and even translators. His grammar was certainly used in schools for a very long time. It will be no exaggeration to say that, subject to the limitations inherent in the language itself, some new literary forms were influenced by the traditional attitude towards language.

Notwithstanding the flaws, there is no doubt that

these two books were of value to discriminating students.

Dr. Rabel's descriptive account of the language was the first to break away from the old tradition. Much of the commonly accepted categories has been discarded or re-classified and her work offers a sound starting point for further studies on the language.

There are, however, a number of points on which my treatment differs from that of the authors just mentioned. Initially, I have treated the verbal piece not as an isolated morph but as a morph with a pronominal element thus avoiding the cumbrous and awkward proposition that in a sentence with a noun as subject the pronoun-article precedes noun, qualifier (if any), and verb.

I have also in the section on the Object treated as the verbal phrase what would commonly be treated as verb + object wherever the particle 'ia' governing the object is absent, the significance of which particle I have also tried to bring out through contrasting sentences. Indeed, in my treatment of the Indirect Object I have suggested that this consists of the object preceded by directional particles thus avoiding the suggestion of the existence of minor cases as has generally been asserted.

Basing my observations on the spoken <sup>rather than</sup> ~~as opposed to~~ the written language, I have differed from the earlier authors

in my treatment of "tense", suggesting that this question ought rather to be treated as one of aspect, and in so doing I have sought to explain what would otherwise appear to be anomalies when so-called tense markers show no relation whatever to time of occurrence. In other cases, again, I have sought to modify rather than suggest any correction of any previous assertion.

More space has also been given to particles because I believe that these are very important elements in Khasi syntax and not merely incidental to it.

Also important is the question of bound morphs which are treated in the section on Affixes. Some of them have been illustrated in contexts not previously indicated, for example, the prefixing of 'kyn-' to words and utterances in the coining of meaningful words.

Finally, I have tried to bring out the significance of vowel alternations in the chapter on Adverbs, and in particular, in the section on Phonaesthetic Adverbs. I have indicated the bearing these have on the character of the subject and, in certain cases, on the nature of the action suggested by the verb. This point, I believe, has not been dealt with elsewhere by other writers.

Much, however, must remain unchanged. Of the minority languages of N.E. India, Khasi has perhaps been under more

sustained scrutiny for over a century than any other and it is to be expected that there could be little that is new in any work on the language. The main difference between my treatment and that of many other previous authors is that I have tried to use the material accessible to me as a native speaker of Khasi in the light of what has been accepted as the modern approach to linguistic studies. I have approached my work with a sense of humility, and even of awe, at the thought that past scholars, lacking the advantages of native speakers should have paved the way for what has been done since they started their pioneering work.

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