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Morphosyntactic Analysis of Mro Language

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Abstract

In this article, I have used many examples to build up a concept about the relationship between Mro morphology and syntax, especially the different case markers to find out the relationship among them. During the research my goal was to provide a description of the constituent order; grammatical categories like tense; comparative marker -la'e (then), -lepleр la'e (most); pronominal system (determiners used with first and second person but 3rd person is independent); demonstratives, adverbs, clause combination like conditional markers, reasons, time, motion; structures of question like y/n question, informal, exclamatory; case markers like noun, pronoun (relative), numeral relation to conjunction, suffix, clause/sentence level; grammatical relation (GR) as well as text analysis of Mro language.

Key words: *Morphosyntax, Language family, Pronominal system, Case marker, Grammatical relation, Burman.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mro is a small ethnic minority settled in the hill district of Bandarban, Bangladesh. For a long Mros have been living there with their distinct traditional culture and language.

According to the report of SIL the population of this language is 30,000 in Bangladesh (2002, SIL), but population census report, 1991 shows as 25339. The total population of all countries is about 81,231. Mros live only in Bandarban of the Chittagong hill tracts. Their key habitats include the remote forest areas of Lama, Ruma, Alikaram and Thanchi near Chimbuk Mountain of the district. Outside of Bangladesh, they also live in the district of Akiab in Myanmar. According to the report of *Ethnology* there are about 20,000 Mros living in Myanmar (Bradley, 1997; 40). Mros depend mainly on hunting but many of them are also engaged in Jhum cultivation, *jautha khamar* (collective farming) and gardening. They have no permanent abodes. Buddhist influences are evident in the daily life of Mros. Traditionally Mros are worshipers of nature; however some of them converted to Christianity and a few are Buddhists also. Nowadays quite a few of the people converted to the new religion of *Krama* founded by a Mro named Manley. Mros introduce themselves as *Mro-cha,* though they are popularly known as Murongs in CHT. The word *mro* means *man* and *cha* stands for *being*. On the other hand, the Arakanis and Marma's of Chittagong hill tracts call people of Tripura as Mrong. Again the group of *Uzi* of Tripura living in Bandarban district calls themselves Mrong. Therefore, we should write the name of Mros as *Mro* instead of *Murong*.

The Mro are the same as the Murong, who deduce, their origin from tipperah, I have no doubt; though I have doubt about the origin. They were all parts of one and the same division. At the present moment, the Mro are in low condition; fallen from their ancient, high estate. For at one time, a Mro chief was chosen a king of Arakan; and when the Rukheng conquer on invaded the Country, the Country was Mro. However, at present, the Mro are despised. There are 2800 Mros in Arakan. Their present occupancy is somewhat west of their older one. This was on

the upper Koladyn; when they were expelled by the Kami or Kumi (Latham. 1889)

They have different clans and many sub-clans. According to the source, they have five major clans (*Dengua*, *Premsang*, *Kongloi, Maizer* and *Ganaroo Gnar)*. Others mention ten different Murong clans. They are *Yarua, Yaringcha, Tang*, *Deng*, *Kough, Tam-tu-chah*, *Kanbak*, *Prenju*, *Naichah* and *Yomore*. The Yarua is the most influential and powerful among the Murong clans. It has four subdivisions *(Khatpo*, *Chimlung*, *Zongnow*, *Chawla)*. These sub-clans are also considered independent clans (Sirajul Islam (ed.). 2003; 423)

2. Language Family

Mros are also known as Maru, Marung, Niopring and Murong. 'Murong' means *Stranger* and the word 'Mro' means *Human*. Mro's are one of those minor anthropological races of Chittagong hill tracts who have been conserving their own culture, tradition, rituals and customs for a long time. According to the Burma Gazetteer in 1931there were about 2500 Mros in the district of Arakan. Mros do not have any written language. The language they speak has some similarity with Burmese and it seems to belong to the Tibeto-Burman family. In all probability, the Mro language was separated from Tibeto-Burman group at an early period. The Mro vocabulary, syntax and grammar, to some extent, resemble the *Kuki-Chin* languages of northeastern India and northwestern Myanmar. Mros talk to their neighbors in the local tongue and know Bengali. In this sense, they are bilingual. Mro language has 13% lexical similarity with Mro Chin (Gordon. 2005[online]). Mros are ethnically related to the Khumi. This language is divided into five linguistically distinct groups: the Anok and Tshungma in the north, Domrong in the lowlands north of the Matamuri, Dopreng and Ruma in the far south and into Arakan

(Brauns and Loffler, 1990[online]). The evolution of the Mro language can be shown with a diagram.

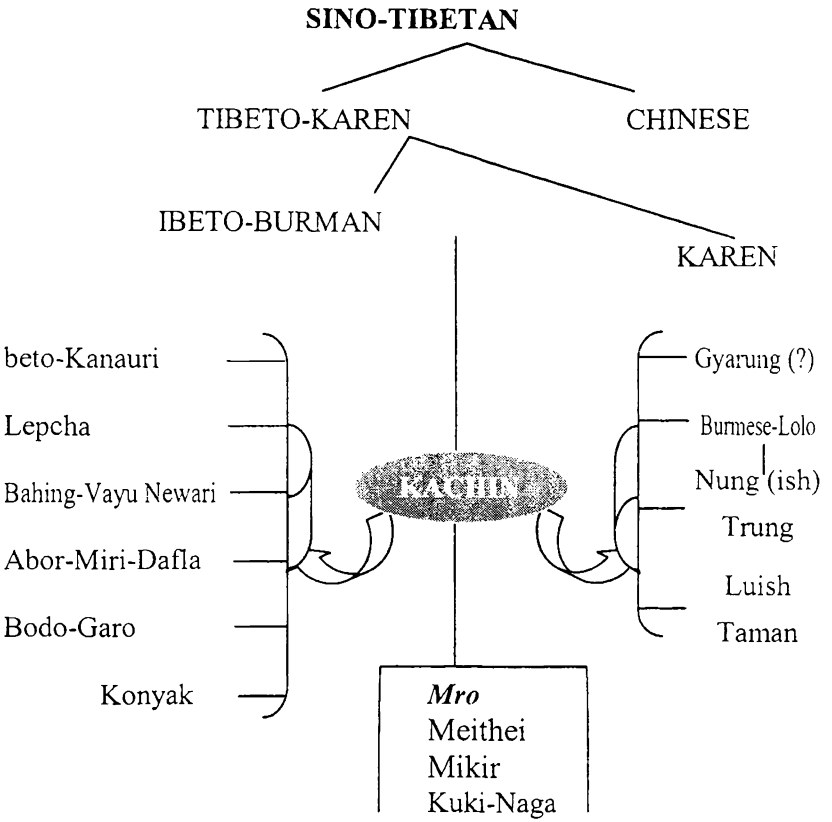


Figure : 1

In the book of *Linguistics Survey of India* (Grierson. 1901-1927), Mro language is accredited in the group of Burman and marked as a complex language Mru or Mro is a puzzling language in many respects. In the main it follows the phonetic system of Burmese, and yet it sometimes differs from in material points, presenting, forms which are parallel not only (and most frequently) by those which are meet in kuki-chin, but even by the construction of Bodo and Naga speech. It is

mainly spoken in North Arakan and A kyab, but a few speakers are also found in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In spite of different arguments David Bradley's (1997) opinion is much more logical and significant regarding this matter. He said that this language is spoken by about 40,000 people; most of them reside in Arakan state of Burma and some in Bangladesh. Its exact position in Tieto-Burman (TB) is not certain but it shows various layers of contact vocabulary from Kuki-Chin and Burmese. According to Loffler (1966) it is not Kuki-Chin as was suggested some times, but may be remotely related to the Burmese-Lolo group, Shafer (1967; 40) also braces this view.
The locative division of population by David Bradley (1997) is not appropriate; since majority of the Mros lives in Bangladesh. Being a minor among the minority communities living in Bangladesh with respect to population and language, the majority of the Mros are multilingual. In particular, they know Bengali and Marma besides their mother tongue. That is why lots of Bengali and Marma words are infused into Mro language.

3. Methodology

This is a Sociolinguistic research based on field linguistic data. Primary and secondary sources have been used to cover the research. To conduct this research, I focused on qualitative approach. To gather secondary information I have extensively examined the available books, gazettes, records, Internet which are related to Indigenous language issues and other documents. For collecting field level data, I visited Bandarban hill tract, because most of the CHT communities reside there. I had extensive discussion with the key informants of the Mro community. Besides, I have had the opportunity to take face-to-face informal interview. I also used voice recorder while carrying out the audio data collection. A flexible time frame is an important factor for any empirical research. However, this research was done within a three-month time frame that was a

basic limitation for this study. As a result, this research is not able to highlight all characteristics of Mro language from linguistic views.

4. Morphosyntactic Analysis

4.1. Constituent Order

The constituent orders of Mro language are SOV, SVO and OSV. The most important characteristic of this language is the case marker, which is added after the object. So this is not an isolating language like China language. George Grierson (Grierson, 1927) says about the constituent order of Mro language that it is possible to construct all kinds of sentences in this language. Actually, there are no definite rules to constitute a sentence in Mro language. Some examples are given below;

a) I like you
-aŋ enkoj nauki
s o v

b) What is your name?
-en miŋ miə co
o s v

c) I gave Lelung a pig
-aŋ lelunŋnco kɔjpe pak $k^{h}ɔk$
s o v

d) You must go home
-en maŋkom kla kim
s v o

e) Paring ate mango
-pariŋ ca ɯip^{h}*um* $k^{h}ɔk$
s v o

4.2. Grammatical Categories

Tense: The Mro language has no Present Tense marker but it has Present Perfect Tense marker *-ɯi*, Past Tense marker -$k^{h}ɔk$ and Future Tense marker *-kom*. For example-

a) I go
-aŋ maŋ (Present tense)
b) I have two cows
-aŋkɔ cia <u>uj</u> prebɔk (Present Perfect)
c) Lelung went to market
-lelunŋ market kɔj kəj <u>k^{h}ɔk</u> (Past tense)

d) I went to shop
-aŋ doaŋ kɔj kəj <u>k^{h}ɔk</u> (Past tense)
e) I will go
-aŋ maŋ <u>kom</u> (m→ŋ. u) (Future tense)

kɔj used as a locative marker in Past tense but specially in Present tense *kɔj* do not use with 'Own house' (When *maŋ* is used, then *kɔŋ* will not be used there) otherwise it is used in the middle and after person it is also used as a Nominative manner.

4.3 Comparative

A comparative is a construction in which two items are compared according to same quality. Mro language expresses comparison by simply juxtaposing two clauses expressing the degree to which the compared entities exhibit the quality in question. In Mro language we found two compare markers -*la'e* (then) and -*leplep la'e* (most). Such as;

a) He is taller than me
-n'ka aŋ <u>la?e</u> krɔu
b) She is most beautiful
-n'ka <u>leplep la?e</u> klaŋju

4.4. Pronominal System

The Pronominal system of Mro language is different from other CHT languages. In this language Mro people use determiner with first and second person but the third person is independent. This pronominal system is as follows-

	Singular	*Plural*	*Determine*
1st Person	*aŋ*	*aŋiŋ*	*aŋciŋ*
2nd Person	*en*	*eniŋ*	*kɔjɔ*
3rd Person	*n'ka*	*kɔ:bua*	-

One of the interesting things in Mro language is that the pronominal system is changed according to the age category and plural number. This system is given beneath.

Age ⟶	*01-15*	*16-30*	*31-Up to*
Male	*ca?uaneɯa*	*klaŋua*	*lɔŋtaŋcaɯa*
Female	*miʃiuaneɯa*	*m'laua*	*lɔŋtaŋmiʃiua*

4.5. Demonstrative

Usually every language has a clear class of demonstratives. These are normally free forms and may proceed or follow the nouns they function with. Demonstrative may also be anaphoric on their own, as in *what is* ***that****?*. In which case they may be termed demonstrative pronouns. Demonstratives imply 'pointing to' or 'demonstrating' the object they refer too. e.g., *that* house (said while pointing to a *house*), or I will take three of those (said while pointing at some group of objects) (Payne. 1997; 86). Mro language possesses such kind of demonstrative pronouns.

a) This pen is nice
   -m'ka kɔlom klaŋjŋ
b) That watch is nice
   -ɔrka nari klaŋjŋ

In these examples *m'ka* (this) and *ɔrka* (that) are used as a demonstrative pronouns.

4.6. Adverb

a) He walks slowly
   -n'ka nauraca maŋ
b) Do the work slowly
   -nauraca caŋ lup

here -*ca* is used as an adverb

c) He speaks loudly
-n'ka tunma tæk

d) He ate rice very quickly
-n'ka lenma ca hom kʰɔk
here -*ma* is used as an adverb and *ca* is used as a verb.

4.7. Clause combination

Adverbial clauses are those that serve an 'adverbial' function. They modify a verb phrase or a whole clause. They are not an argument of the clause. Sometimes adverbial clauses are termed 'adjuncts'. The kinds of information embodied in adverbial clause are the same kinds of information expressed by adverbs, time, place, manner, reasons, conditions etc. Examples will be provided in the following paragraphs. Most of these examples are from Mro language:

4.7.1 Conditional

a) If Lelung go Paring will come
-lelunŋ kɔjnɔ parinŋ ɯaŋ kom
here -*nɔ* is a conditional marker, *ɯaŋ* is a verb and *kom* is used as a future marker.

b) If you want I will help you
-en nawnɔ aŋ kʰoŋ enkom
here -*nɔ* is a conditional marker, *kʰoŋ* is a verb and *kom* is used as a future marker.

c) If it does not rain Paring will go to market
-ɯaŋ ɯaŋ dɔj nɔ pariŋ market kom
here -*nɔ* is a conditional marker, *ɯaŋ* is a verb, *dɔj* is a negative marker, *kɔj* is a locative marker and *kom* is used as a future marker.

d) If you don't come, I will go.
-en ɯaŋ dɔj capɔ aŋ kɔjkom

here *-capɔ* is a conditional marker, *ɯaŋ* is a verb, *dɔj* is a negative marker, *kɔj* is a locative marker and *kom* is used as a future marker.

4.7.2 Reason

a) He did not come because he was ill
-n'ka krau n'jɔŋka ɯaŋ ja ɯaŋdɔj
here *-n'jɔŋka* is a conditional reason marker, *ɯaŋ* is a verb and *dɔj* is used as a negative marker.

b) He did not work because he was busy
-n'ka jakoj dɔj lup hu lajkɔ
here *-lajkɔ* is a conditional reason marker, *lup* is a verb and *dɔj* is used as a negative marker.

c) He ate because he was hungry
-n'ka ca tɔk^{h}ɔk ʃak kraj lajkɔ
here *-lajkɔ* is a conditional marker, *ca* is a verb, *kraj* is a suffix, *k^{h}ɔk* is used as a past tense marker.

4.7.3 Time

Come to our house within five minutes.
-taŋa minit nɔ aŋ kimkɔj ɯaŋ
here *-taŋa* is a number marker, *ɯaŋ* is a verb and *kɔj* is used as a locative marker.

4.7.4 Motion

I run fast
-aŋ len jɔm
here *len* is a suffix and *jɔm* is used as a verb.

4.8. Structure of question

4.8.1 Y/N question: In Mro Language, we found *ba* to make a Y/N question. This kind of examples is given below.

a) Will you eat?
-en ca akom ba

b) Will you go?
-en maŋ kom ba
c) Do you eat?
-en ca ba
d) Do you go?
-en maŋ ba

4.8.2 Informational: In Mro Language, we found *tɔŋ* to make informational question. This kind of examples is given below-

a) What do you eat?
-tɔŋcɔ en ca
b) Where do you go?
-en tɔɔŋkɔj cɔkoj

4.8.3 Exclamatory

a) How beautiful the bird is!
-ɯa nɔmnɔm klaŋjŋ
b) How nice the tree is!
-ʃin nɔmnɔm klaŋjŋ

Here *nɔmnɔm* is used as an exclamation marker and *klaŋjŋ* is used as an adverb.

4.9. Case Marker

Case is very important marker for the languages of the hill tracts as well as in Mro language.

4.9.1 Noun Marker

-kɔj -koj = Locative
-kɔj (except own home)
-kɔj (after person it is used in Nominative manner)

Ex: I gave Lelung the pig that I had
-aŋ lelunŋkɔj pe paklɔk kʰɔk aŋkɔ ɯɔj mi
here *-kɔj* is a nominative manner because it is used after a person.

-kɔ = Possessive

Ex : Parin visits his father
-pariŋ n'ka pahon tɔkɔ

-hon = Associative case

Ex : 1 Paring visited Lelung
-pariŋ lelunŋhon tɔk^{h}i k^{h}ɔk

Ex : 2 Father visited Parin
-pa pariŋhon tɔk^{h}i k^{h}ɔk

Ex : 3 Parin visits his father
-pariŋ n'ka pahon tɔkɔ

-ma = instrumental commutative

Ex : He speaks loudly
-n'ka tunma tæk

-kɔjɔ, - kɔbua = Plural

-kɔjɔ is used only two people

-kɔbua is used only many people

4.9.2 Pronoun Marker (relative pronoun)

Relative pronouns are typically similar to other pronouns in the language; either the question words or the pronouns are used to refer to non-specific, indefinite items. Relative pronouns can be thought of as combining the functions of a plain relativizer and a clause internal pronoun that refers to the relativized Noun phrase. In Mro language we find some relative pronouns such as *-mi, -wj*. Examples are given below.

a) I gave Lelung the pig I had
-aŋ lelunŋkɔj pe paklɔk k^{h}ɔk aŋkɔ wɔj mi
here *kɔj* is a nominative manner, *k^{h}ɔk* is a past tense marker, *lɔk* (one) is a numeral marker and *mi* is used as a relative pronoun marker.

b) Parin visited the place where Lelung lived
-pariŋ lelunŋwj ra kɔj tɔk^{h}i

here *kɔj* is a locative marker, *ɯj* is a suffix, *ra* (lived) and *tɔk^{h}i* (visited) are verb and *ɯi* is used as a relative pronoun marker.

c) Lelung who is my friend is a good boy
-lelunŋ jŋma mi neuua nka aŋ auja

here *jŋma* is a adjective and *mi* is used as a relative marker.

4.9.3 Numeral Relation to conjunction

One	*[lɔk]*	Eight	*[rijat]*	Thirty	*[ʃoŋkɔm]*
Two	*[pre]*	Nine	*[tako]*	Thirty one	*[ʃoŋkɔmlailɔk]*
Three	*[ʃum]*	Ten	*[muit]*	Forty	*[likɔm]*
Four	*[ta:li]*	Eleven	*[lailɔk]*	Forty-one	*[likɔmlailɔk]*
Five	*[taŋa]*	Twelve	*[laipre]*	Fifty	*[ŋakɔm]*
Six	*[tro]*	Twenty	*[pirmi]*	Fifty-one	*[ŋakɔmlaiɔk]*
Seven	*[rinit]*	Twenty-one	*[pirmilailɔk]*	Hundred	*[akɔm]*

In Mro language, a conjunction is added after a number and before a noun. Such as;

a) One egg *-lɔk ca dui*
b) One pig *-lɔk ca pa*
c) One man *-lɔk ca muru* or *muru lɔk*

Here *lɔk* is a numeral marker and *ca* is used as a conjunction. But when they mean one Mro, then the numeral marker is used after noun and the conjunction will not be used in this case.

d) Two eggs-*pre buk dui*
e) Two friends *-pre buk auja* or *auja pre*
Here *pre* is a numeral marker and *buk* is used as a conjunction. But when they mean Two Mro, then the numeral marker is used after noun and the conjunction will not be used in such case.
f) Three eggs *-ʃum buk dui*
g) Three horse *-ʃum buk koryŋa*
Here *ʃum* is a numeral marker and *buk* is used as a conjunction.

h) Four eggs *-ta:li kl'uŋ dui*

Here *ta:li* is a numeral marker and *kl'uŋ* is used as a conjunction.

4.9.4 Suffix

-hon = Paring visited Lelung

-pariŋ lelunŋhon tɔk^{h}i k^{h}ɔk

-jɔm = I run fast

-aŋ len jɔm

-dɔj = I don't go *-aŋ maŋ dɔj*

I don't eat *-aŋ ca dɔj*

(This negative marker -dɔj is generally use after the verb)

-jɔm = I run fast

-aŋ len jɔm

-tuk = Lelung sings very well

-lelunŋ tuk tæk mæŋ

-kɔj = Come to our house within five minutes.

-taŋa minit nɔ aŋ kimkɔj ɯaŋ

In Mro language the prefix *a* is used before adjectives, especially in relative word or to suggest a relationship. It is used, like the corresponding prefix in Burmese in order to form noun from verbs. In Mro language marker is not added to verb. Here verb marker or tense marker is added after object. But any sentence of present tense containing first person singular number can be constructed to express thoughts without adding any marker.

Generally there is no case marker or affix for present tense, although *-hɔm* is used occasionally to indicate the present tense, likewise *k^{h}ɔk* for past tense and *kom* for future tense. In order to make negative sentence negative marker *dɔj* is used after a verb. In Mro language verb case marker never changes with respect to changes in person and number.

4.9.5 Clause/sentence level

-cɔ = Informational question

Ex : How many brother and sister do you have?
-en nawma en tuama mjnjacɔ

-tɔŋ = Informational question

Ex : What do you eat?
-tɔŋcɔ en ca

la?e = Affirmative statement

Ex : He is taller than me
-n'ka aŋ la?e krɔu

-ba = Y/N question marker

Ex : Will you go?
-en maŋ kom ba

-nɔmnɔm = Exclamatory

Ex : How beautiful the bird is!
-ɯa nɔmnɔm klaŋ jŋ

-maŋ = Formal marker

Ex : I go to his house
-aŋ maŋ n'ka kim

-kɔk'j = Informal marker

Ex : I go to his house
-aŋ kɔk'j n'ka kim

4.10. Grammatical Relation (GR)

Grammatical relations (GRs) are often thought of as a relations between *arguments* and *predicates* in a level of linguistics structure that is independent of semantic and pragmatic influences. Grammatical expression of semantic roles and pragmatic statuses are understandable in terms of the communicational function of language. However, it is much more difficult to explain GRs in this way.

In order to adequately define grammatical relations, it is convenient to identify three basic semantic-syntactic roles,

termed as S (Single-argument clause), A (Agent) and P (Patient-multiple arguments clauses). Similar terms are used by Dixson (1972, 1979, 1994) and Silverstein (1976). Presuppose two prototypical clauses in Mro language;

a. Single argument

Paring left

pariŋ maŋkʰɔk

S V

b. Multi-argument

Paring goes to home

-pariŋ kɔj kim

A V P

The S is defined as the only nominal argument of a single-argument clause. This type of clause is referred to as an intransitive clause (SVO>AVP). The A is defined as the most AGENT-like argument of a multi-argument clause. This type of clause is referred to as a transitive clause. If there is no argument that will be a very good AGENT, the A is the argument that is treated morphsyntactically in the same manner as prototypical AGENT A is treated. The grammatical relation of *subject* can be defined as S together with A, while direct 'object' or simply 'object' can be define as P alone. In the following comprehensive discussion, I will try to present some system for grouping S, A, and P through the Morphosyntactic means. Mro language employs to express these grouping.

Mro language treat S and A the same and P is treated differently. The following Mro examples illustrate these facts with pronominal case forms-one form *he*, is used for third person singular masculine pronouns in both the S and the A roles. A different from *him*, is used for third person masculine singular pronouns in the P role:

a) He left
b) He hit him

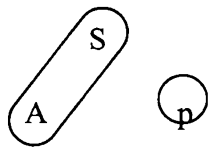


Fig: Nominative/Accusative System

Mro language manifests this system in case marking of free noun phrases. In the following examples the case marker 0 (zero) occurs on noun phrases in both the S (ex. c) and A (d) roles. Another case marker *-coŋ* occurs on noun phrases in the P role:

c) *pariŋ-0 kɔj* "Paring goes"
Paring-NOM goes
S

d) *pariŋ-0 Lc-coŋ bɔp* "Paring hits Lelung"
Paring-NOM Lelung-ACC hits
A P

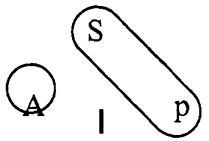
This system is referred to as a nominative (NOM)/accusative (ACC) system. The morphological case marks both S and A roles, so we can call it nominative case and the case that marks only the P role is the accusative case. The following examples from Mro language illustrate another system for grouping S, A, and P:

e) *pariŋ tɔk^{h}i-k^{h}ɔk* "Paring visited"
Paring- ABA visited
S

f) *pa pariŋ tɔk^{h}i-k^{h}ɔk* "Father visited Paring"
Father- ERS Paring hon- ABA visited
A P

In these examples the case marker *-0* (zero) occurs on the S argument of an intransitive clause (e) and the case marker *-hon* occurs on the P argument of a transitive clause. The morphological case marks A alone, so it can be called the

ergative case. If the morphological case that marks both S and P can be termed the absolutive case:



ergative absolutive

Fig: ergative / absolutive system

In addition to morphological case marking on pronoun or free noun phrases, languages of Mro may manifest ergative/absolutive or nominative/accusative systems in other areas of morphsyntax.

Conclusion

To collect the data of Mro language, I have conducted an empirical study in the concerned area. They have distinct characteristics in constructing verb and plural numbers. In this regard, Mro language has much more similarity with Kuki-chin language than Burma language. Particularly, it seems to be some oral language that made some significant linguistic influences on Mro language. That is why Mro language seems to hold some contrasting features in tone and verb-related aspects with the languages of Tripura (kokborak) or Manipuri. This Language of western Burma may also be remotely related part of the Burmese-Lolo group and all Burmese-Lolo (BL) languages are verb final with complex tonal and initial consonant system but with little or no morphology.

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APPENDIX – 1

[ta]	[jɔ]	[ŋe]	[mɪ]	[ba]
[da]	[a]	[pʰɪ]	[kʰəj]	[hau]
[dai]	[cu]	[kəu]	[al]	[mum]
[nin]	[pa]	[u]	[ɔ]	[ro / ru]
[jɪ]	[tʰə]	[o]	[ua]	[e]
[kə]	[lam]	[la]	[hai]	[ri]
[tæk]				

Figure-1: Chart of Mro letters (31), in alphabetical order (reading from the left to right)

APPENDIX – 2

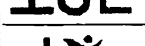
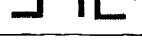
 [bɔn] Soil	[maŋ] Go
[mu] Bally	[pak] Pig
[Sui] Fox	[waŋ] Come
[kɲn] Homer	[haŋ] Forbidden
[tui] Water	[tɔn] to catch
[hom] Rice	[naj] Fry
[kɲn] Homer	 [la] Cotton
[rak] Wine	[ca] Eat
[pu] Grandfather	

Figure- 2 : Examples of Mro Words

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