

11 *Agreement and grammatical relations in Hyow**

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1 Introduction

This paper is intended as a primarily descriptive contribution on some basic morphosyntactic characteristics of Hyow, one of two Kuki-Chin languages I have been working on in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of southeastern Bangladesh. Hyow is spoken by about two thousand people to the north and east of the town of Bandarban. The data was collected during two field trips (November 1999–April 2000 and October 2000), in addition to a short visit to verify the accuracy of the examples and paradigms included here (April 2001). The main field site was Gongru village (cf. Bernot and Bernot 1958).

First, I will demonstrate the principles of case marking for core grammatical relations, including an infrequently attested number-based ergativity split. Second, I will illustrate the language's relatively complicated system of verbal pronominal agreement. The system of agreement is not complex in terms of the number of forms that it involves (as is the case for K'cho as reported by Bedell 2000), but as we will see, formal indeterminacy gives the system considerable complications that the systems of many Kuki-Chin languages do not exhibit.

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2 Nominal case marking

We begin with a discussion of nominal case marking. The examples in this section of course contain agreement morphology, but little will be said about agreement until §3.

2.1 Case marking of *S*, *A*, and *O*

At first blush, case relations are marked by a standard-looking, person-based split-ergative pattern. As seen in (1), *Ss* (the single argument associated with intransitive predicates) have no case marking.¹

- (1) *samuyco* *lɔdɔ=wa* *(ʔe-)cet-aʔy-sɔ*
 boy Bandarban=LOC 3SGS-go-FUT-CONCL
 'The boy is going to Bandarban.'

In (2), first and second person *As* (the argument associated with transitive predicates which has greater control of the action) and *Os* (the argument associated with transitive predicates which has less control of the action) likewise show no case marking.

- (2) a. *key* *vok-sɔ* *ke-hleʔy*
 1SG pig-meat 1SGA-buy
 'I bought some pork.'
- b. *naŋ* *vok-sɔ* *ne-hleʔy*
 2SG pig-meat 2SGA-buy
 'You bought some pork.'

However, (3) shows that third person *As* are marked by a case clitic, *=la*, which is thus glossed as an ergative marker.

- (3) *yɔntuʔa* *uy=la* *key* *ʔɔ-ŋɔʔwey-sɔ*
 yesterday dog=ERG 1SG 1O-bite-CONCL
 'Yesterday a dog bit me.'

Third person *As* always have this marker, and *Os* are always unmarked, regardless of their animacy.

Table 1 gives the full array of independent pronouns. Note that there are three numbers, and in the dual, there is an inclusive/exclusive distinction (the inclusive dual pronoun is *hniɬniʔ*, but some speakers also produce and accept the formally more transparent *naŋkey*). There is no inclusive/exclusive distinction in the plural. Third person forms are built on demonstrative elements.

¹ Transcription in examples is for the most part standard; however, voiceless sonorants are indicated by a preceding *h*, and the vowel represented by *u* is actually somewhat more centralised than this symbol usually indicates.

Table 1: Hyow independent pronouns

	singular	dual inclusive	dual	plural
1	<i>key</i>	<i>hnihni?</i>	<i>key-hni?</i>	<i>key-ni?</i>
2	<i>naŋ</i>		<i>naŋ-hni?</i>	<i>naŋ-ni?</i>
3	<i>cu(?uuy, ni)</i>		<i>cu-huu?y (?uuy-, ni-)</i>	<i>cu-khol (?uuy-, ni-)</i>

It is acceptable and not uncommon in Hyow to include independent pronominals in sentences which one might expect technically do not require them because of the extensive system of verbal pronominal morphology; thus, it is not difficult to examine the case marking of independent pronominals. When we consider various combinations of these pronominals in A and O function, we observe a wider distribution for the *=la* ergative case marker than we did initially. The examples here are all in the future tense and they are all affirmative, though as far as I have been able to determine, these case marking principles operate in any tense and also in negatives.

As shown in (4)–(7), first and second person dual and plural As are marked with *=la* if the O is a non-singular third person.

- (4) a. *keyhni?=la cuhuu?y kihni-hyul-a?y*
 1D=ERG 3D 1D.A-follow-FUT
 ‘We two are going to follow those two.’

- b. *keyhni?=la cukhol kihni-hyul-a?y*
 1D=ERG 3PL 1D.A-follow-FUT
 ‘We two are going to follow them.’

- c. *keyhni?(*=la) cu kihni-hyul-a?y*
 1D=ERG 3SG 1D.A-follow-FUT
 ‘We two are going to follow her.’

- (5) a. *keyni?=la cuhuu?y kini-hyul-a?y*
 1PL=ERG 3D 1PL.A-follow-FUT
 ‘We’re going to follow those two.’

- b. *keyni?=la cukhol kini-hyul-a?y*
 1PL=ERG 3PL 1PL.A-follow-FUT
 ‘We’re going to follow them.’

- c. *keyni?(*=la) cu kini-hyul-a?y*
 1PL=ERG 3SG 1PL.A-follow-FUT
 ‘We’re going to follow her.’

- (6) a. *naŋhni?=la cuhuu?y hnihni-hyul-a?y*
 2D=ERG 3D 2D.A-follow-FUT
 ‘You two are going to follow those two.’

- b. *naŋhni?=la cukhol hnihni-hyul-a?y*
 2D=ERG 3PL 2D.A-follow-FUT
 ‘You two are going to follow them.’

- c. *naŋhni?(*=la) cu hnihni-hyul-aʔy*
 2D=ERG 3SG 2D.A-follow-FUT
 'You two are going to follow her.'
- (7) a. *naŋni?=la cuhuʔy nini-hyul-aʔy*
 2PL=ERG 3D 2PL.A-follow-FUT
 'Y'all are going to follow those two.'
- b. *naŋni?=la cukhol nini-hyul-aʔy*
 2PL=ERG 3PL 2PL.A-follow-FUT
 'Y'all are going to follow them.'
- c. *naŋni?(*=la) cu nini-hyul-aʔy*
 2PL=ERG 3SG 2PL.A-follow-FUT
 'Y'all are going to follow her.'

However, this is not the case if a first or second person singular A acts on a third person O, as shown in (8) and (9):

- (8) a. *key(*=la) cu ku-hyul-aʔy*
 1SG(=ERG) 3SG 1SG.A-follow-FUT
 'I'm going to follow her.'
- b. *key(*=la) cuhuʔy ku-hyul-aʔy*
 1SG(=ERG) 3D 1SG.A-follow-FUT
 'I'm going to follow those two.'
- c. *key(*=la) cukhol ku-hyul-aʔy*
 1SG(=ERG) 3PL 1SG.A-follow-FUT
 'I'm going to follow them.'
- (9) a. *naŋ(*=la) cu nu-hyul-aʔy*
 2s=ERG 3SG 2SG.A-follow-FUT
 'You're going to follow her.'
- b. *naŋ(*=la) cuhuʔy nu-hyul-aʔy*
 2s=ERG 3D 2SG.A-follow-FUT
 'You're going to follow those two.'
- c. *naŋ(*=la) cukhol nu-hyul-aʔy*
 2s=ERG 3PL 2SG.A-follow-FUT
 'You're going to follow them.'

The only way for first or second person singular As to be expressed in these cases would be without *=la*.

Next, first person dual and plural As are marked by *=la* if the O is a non-singular second person, as seen in (10) and (11):

- (10) a. *keyhni?=la naŋhni? kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1D=ERG 2D 1A.2O-follow-FUT
 'We two are going to follow you two.'

- b. *keyhni?=la naŋni? kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1D=ERG 2PL 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'We two are going to follow y'all.'
- c. *keyhniʔ(*=la) naŋ kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1D=ERG 2SG 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'We two are going to follow you.'
- (11)a. *keyni?=la naŋhni? kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1PL=ERG 2D 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'We're going to follow you two.'
- b. *keyni?=la naŋni? kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1PL=ERG 2PL 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'We're going to follow y'all.'
- c. *keyniʔ(*=la) naŋ kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1PL=ERG 2SG 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'We're going to follow you.'

But a first person **singular** A acting on a second person O may not be marked by *=la*, as seen in (12):

- (12)a. *key(*=la) naŋ kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1SG(=ERG) 2SG 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'I'm going to follow you.'
- b. *key(*=la) naŋhni? kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1SG(=ERG) 2D 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'I'm going to follow you two.'
- c. *key(*=la) naŋni? kini-hyul-aʔy*
 1SG(=ERG) 2PL 1.A.2O-follow-FUT
 'I'm going to follow y'all.'

Similarly, second person dual and plural As are marked by *=la* if the O is a non-singular first person (13–14):

- (13)a. *naŋhni?=la keyhni? khrɔŋ-hnihni-hyul-aʔy*
 2D=ERG 1D 1O-2D.A-follow-FUT
 'You two are going to follow us two.'
- b. *naŋhni?=la keyni? khrɔŋ-hnihni-hyul-aʔy*
 2D=ERG 1PL 1O-2D.A-follow-FUT
 'You two are going to follow us.'
- c. *naŋhniʔ(*=la) key khrɔŋ-hnihni-hyul-aʔy*
 2D=ERG 1SG 1O-2D.A-follow-FUT
 'You two are going to follow me.'
- (14)a. *naŋni?=la keyhni? khrɔŋ-nini-hyul-aʔy*
 2PL=ERG 1D 1O-2PL.A-follow-FUT
 'Y'all are going to follow us two.'

- b. *naŋni?=la keyni? khrɔŋ-nini-hyul-aʔy*
 2PL=ERG 1PL 1O-2PL.A-follow-FUT
 'Y'all are going to follow us.'
- c. *naŋniʔ(*=la) key khrɔŋ-nini-hyul-aʔy*
 2PL=ERG 1SG 1O-2PL.A-follow-FUT
 'Y'all are going to follow me.'

But it is never possible to mark a second person **singular** A with *=la* if the O is a first person, as in (15):

- (15)a. *naŋ(*=la) key khrɔŋ-ni-hyul-aʔy*
 2SG(*=ERG) 1SG 1O-2SG.A-follow-FUT
 'You are going to follow me.'
- b. *naŋ(*=la) keyhni? khrɔŋ-ni-hyul-aʔy*
 2SG(*=ERG) 1D 1O-2SG.A-follow-FUT
 'You are going to follow us two.'
- c. *naŋ(*=la) keyni? khrɔŋ-ni-hyul-aʔy*
 2SG(*=ERG) 1PL 1O-2SG.A-follow-FUT
 'You are going to follow us.'

Finally, for the sake of completeness, first person dual inclusive As are marked by *=la* if the O is a non-singular third person:

- (16)a. *hniŋni?=la cuhuuʔy ni-hyul-aʔy*
 1D.INCL=ERG 3D 1D.INCL.A-follow-FUT
 'We two are going to follow those two.'
- b. *hniŋni?=la cukhol ni-hyul-aʔy*
 1D.INCL=ERG 3PL 1D.INCL.A-follow-FUT
 'We two are going to follow them.'
- c. *hniŋniʔ(*=la) cu ni-hyul-aʔy*
 1D.INCL=ERG 3SG 1D.INCL.A-follow-FUT
 'We two are going to follow him.'

Thus, in addition to the generalisation that all third person As are marked with *=la*, first and second person As are also marked with *=la* if they are dual or plural and if the O also is dual or plural.

This distribution of the ergative marker is noteworthy in two respects. First of all, ergativity splits which are based on number are relatively rare cross-linguistically, so it is good to have another example to generalise from. Second, the Hyow case also involves marking more distinctions in the non-singular categories than in the singular categories, which is in contradiction to a principle which Dixon (1994) claims often governs number-based splits (92).

However, for the split to occur where it does makes good functional sense. Singular As and Os make the clearest agents and patients, whereas dual and plural As and Os do not have as clear a concentration of agency and patienthood. Thus, if ergative splits are to be understood in terms of a marking of less-likely agents (following the general functional explanation for case-marking splits suggested by Comrie (1989)), agents which are non-

singular and which are acting on non-singular entities are less prototypical, and should be expected in some cases to be marked ergatively.

Dixon does mention that in Chukchi, plurals tend to make more distinctions than singulars, in direct contrast to the patterns frequently attested in Australian languages. Perhaps there are really two competing tendencies at work here: a tendency to make more formal distinctions in singulars than in plurals, and also the well-supported tendency to mark less prototypical As. In some languages the first tendency manifests itself clearly, whereas in other languages the second tendency takes precedence.

Finally, I should note that there are two things which are still not clear about the distribution of *=la*. For some members of the speech community, the use of the marker does not appear to extend beyond its use with third person subjects; these are mostly older speakers, so I would hypothesise that the spread of *=la* to first and second person subjects is a change in progress among the younger speakers of the language. Secondly, even for the speakers that have it, it is not always the case that they use it under direct elicitation or in spontaneous discourse. There are many possible explanations for these inconsistencies, including differences in the semantics of the predicates involved, degree of control of the agent, and so on, which I have not yet tested to my satisfaction. Resolution of these issues will have to be the subject of future inquiry.

2.2 Case marking of multiple objects

Verbal agreement in Hyow codes the O of monotransitives and the *recipient* of three place verbs, but recipients are marked with the locative case clitic, as can be seen in (17)–(20).

- (17) *cu=la key=a cɔ ʔe-pek*
 3SG=ERG 1SG=LOC book 1O-give
 'He gave me a book.'
- (18) *key naŋ=a cɔ kini-pek*
 1SG=ERG 2SG=LOC book 1.A.2O-give
 'I gave you a book.'
- (19) *key piya naŋ=a kini-dɔn-aʔy-sɔ*
 1SG wife 2SG=LOC 1.A.2O-show-FUT-CONCL
 'I'm going to show you my wife.'
- (20) *naŋ piya key=a khrɔŋ-nɔ-dɔn-aʔy-sɔ-wey*
 2SG wife 1SG=LOC 1O-2SG.A-show-FUT-CONCL-INTERR
 'Are you going to show me your wife?'

The treatment of objects is thus neither purely of the direct object type, nor of the primary object type. It exhibits a split between the two marking strategies.

3 Pronominal agreement

Moving on to verbal agreement morphology, the intransitive affirmative paradigm is given in Table 2 (Σ indicates the position of the stem with respect to agreement markers).

Table 2: Intransitive affirmative

1s	1d	1d incl	1p	2s	2d	2p	3s	3d	3p
<i>kV</i> -Σ	<i>kihni</i> -Σ	<i>ni</i> -Σ	<i>kini</i> -Σ	<i>nV</i> -Σ	<i>hni</i> <i>hni</i> -Σ	<i>nini</i> -Σ	(<i>?V</i> -)Σ	(<i>?i</i>) <i>hni</i> -Σ	(<i>?i</i>) <i>ni</i> -Σ

Concerning the phonological content of these agreement markers, a *V* in markers that contain it is an underspecified vowel which harmonises with the first stem vowel. Most of these markers consist of elements well known from elsewhere in Kuki-Chin (*k* in first person, *n* in second person; the *ni* plural element and the *hni* dual element are also clearly direct reflections of the independent pronominal morphology). The distribution of the third singular *?V*- marker is not clearly definable at present. There are some roots which it definitely cannot occur with, roots which it definitely must occur with, and others for which it may or may not be present, with no apparent semantic difference to condition its presence or absence. It would seem to be lexically conditioned.

Interestingly, negatives are not indicated by a separate negative marker, but are encoded instead by a distinct suffixal agreement pattern given in Table 3.

Table 3: Intransitive negative

1s	1d	1d incl	1p	2s	2d	2p	3s	3d	3p
Σ- <i>ŋa</i>	Σ- <i>hni?ŋa</i>	Σ- <i>pu</i>	Σ- <i>?uŋa</i>	Σ- <i>ti</i>	Σ- <i>hni?ti</i>	Σ- <i>cu</i>	Σ- <i>a?</i>	Σ- <i>huu?y</i>	Σ- <i>?u</i>

In the first and second dual of these markers, the first part (*hni?*), like the *hni?* of the independent pronouns, is etymologically from the number ‘two’ (< **g-nis*); the second element in these markers is the same person marker seen in first person (*-ŋa*) and second person (*-ti*) in the other numbers. The first person plural marker also clearly consists of the general first person marker (*-ŋa*) and the same plural element that may be seen in the third person plural (*-?u*).

This separate set of agreement markers is noteworthy in light of full suffixal agreement paradigms attested elsewhere in the family, such as Tedim (otherwise known as Tiddim Chin) and Sizang, as seen in 21 and 22.

(21) Tedim (Henderson 1965:109–111):

Σ- <i>iŋ</i>	‘1st singular’	Σ- <i>uŋ</i>	‘1st plural excl’	Σ- <i>haŋ</i>	‘1st plural incl’
Σ- <i>tε?</i>	‘2nd singular’	Σ- <i>u?tε?</i>	‘2nd plural’		
Σ- <i>(i?)</i>	‘3rd singular’	Σ- <i>u?</i>	‘3rd plural’		

(22) Sizang (Stern 1963:264):

Σ- <i>bo-ŋ</i>	‘I not’	Σ- <i>bua-u-ŋ</i>	‘we not’
Σ- <i>bua te</i>	‘you not’	Σ- <i>bua-u-te</i>	‘y’all not’
Σ- <i>bo?/bua</i>	‘he/they not’		

In Tedim and Sizang these markers actually occur in both positive and negative contexts, but the forms in (21) and (22) are nonetheless in many cases obviously related to the ones seen in the Hyow negative paradigm.

For transitives, the fundamental generalisation is that there is no coding of O number. First, consider Table 4 which gives the paradigm for third person Os.

Table 4: Third person O (affirmative and negative)

	1sA	1dA	1d inclA	1pA
affirmative	<i>kV-Σ</i>	<i>kihni-Σ</i>	<i>ni-Σ</i>	<i>kini-Σ</i>
negative	<i>Σ-ŋa</i>	<i>Σ-hni?ŋa</i>	<i>Σ-pu</i>	<i>Σ-?uŋa</i>

	2sA	2dA	2pA
affirmative	<i>nV-Σ</i>	<i>hnihni-Σ</i>	<i>nini-Σ</i>
negative	<i>Σ-ti</i>	<i>Σ-hni?ti</i>	<i>Σ-cu</i>

	3sA	3dA	3pA
affirmative	<i>Σ</i>	<i>(ʔi)hni-Σ</i>	<i>(ʔi)ni-Σ</i>
negative	<i>Σ-a?</i>	<i>Σ-huʔy</i>	<i>Σ-?u</i>

A consideration of these forms reveals that they are essentially the intransitive markers used with transitive stems—third person O is entirely unmarked. Note, however, that third singular As are obligatorily *unmarked* in the transitive affirmative paradigm as opposed to the intransitive paradigm, where third singular Ss are sometimes marked. We will see a possible motivation for this gap shortly, when we consider the first person O forms.

Somewhat more complicated are the second person O forms, as seen in Table 5. The basic pattern is similar to that in Table 4: there is a prefixal marker for the A argument in the affirmative which is absent in the negative; negative As are expressed by predictable suffixal morphology.

Table 5: Second person O (affirmative and negative)

	1s.A	1d.A	1p.A
affirmative	<i>kini-Σ</i>	<i>kini-Σ/kihni-Σ</i>	<i>kini-Σ</i>
negative	<i>kini-Σ-ŋa</i>	<i>kini-Σ-hni?ŋa</i>	<i>kini-Σ-lʔuŋa</i>

	3s.A	3d.A	3p.A
affirmative	<i>ni-Σ</i>	<i>ni-Σ/hni-Σ</i>	<i>ni-Σ</i>
negative	<i>ni-Σ-a?</i>	<i>ni-Σ-huʔy</i>	<i>ni-Σ-?u</i>

The variation in coding for first person dual and third person dual A may perhaps be explained in the following way: there is a second person O marker *ni-* which sometimes can be pushed out of its slot by a *hni-* dual A marker for dual first and third person As. On this analysis, the *-ni* of the *kini-* in the first singular A form would be this second person O marker, as would the *ni* in the third person singular A form; the *ni* in the first plural and third plural A forms could either be the second person O marker or a plural marker. In the first and third dual A forms, however, either the second person O *-ni* marker, or the *-hni* dual A marker might be present in the affirmative.

The persistence of *ki-* at the beginning of the first person A on second person O forms in the negative is anomalous, however, as indicators of A are otherwise invariably expressed postverbally in the negative. I do not believe, however, that synchronically there is anything to say about this discrepancy.

The most complicated agreement patterns involve first person Os. Table 6 gives the simplest parts of the paradigm, those for first persons acted on by second or third person duals and plurals. These forms consist simply of a first person O marker *khɾɔŋ*- followed by the normal preverbal or postverbal S/A agreement markers.²

Table 6: First person O (including dual inclusive) with third dual and third plural A (affirmative and negative)

	2d.A	2p.A
affirmative	<i>khɾɔŋhni-Σ</i>	<i>khɾɔŋmini-Σ</i>
negative	<i>khɾɔŋ-Σ-hniʔti</i>	<i>khɾɔŋ-Σ-cu</i>

	3d.A	3p.A
affirmative	<i>khɾɔŋhni-Σ</i>	<i>khɾɔŋni-Σ</i>
negative	<i>khɾɔŋ-Σ-huʔy</i>	<i>khɾɔŋ-Σ-ʔu</i>

Next, Table 7 shows that for third singular As, you get either the *khɾɔŋ*- first person object marker, or you get a different marker, a prefixal underspecified vowel formally identical to the one sometimes seen for third person singular Ss. This marking perhaps motivates the absence of third person A coding by such a marker in the affirmative of transitives, which we saw earlier.

Table 7: First person O with third singular A (affirmative and negative)

	3s.A
affirmative	<i>ʔV-Σ</i> or <i>khɾɔŋ-Σ</i>
negative	<i>khɾɔŋ-Σ-aʔ</i> (<i>ʔV-Σ-aʔ</i>)

Lastly, the second singular A on first person O forms seen in Table 8 either do or do not involve the *khɾɔŋ*- object marker, but always include one of the two second person participant markers that we have seen already. If the *khɾɔŋ*- object marker is not present, though, these forms have considerable potential for ambiguity. A form like *ni-hyul*, for instance, could indicate ‘you follow me,’ ‘they follow him,’ ‘they follow you,’ or ‘we (inclusive) follow him’.

Table 8: First person O with second singular A (affirmative and negative)

	2sA
affirmative	<i>khɾɔŋnV-Σ</i> , <i>khɾɔŋni-Σ</i> , <i>nV-Σ</i> , <i>ni-Σ</i> ,
negative	<i>khɾɔŋ-Σ-ti</i> , <i>Σ-ti</i>

² This element appears to have arisen from the independent lexical item *khɾɔŋ* ‘man’. A comparable grammaticalisation of ‘man’ has been reported in Kiranti languages (Ebert 1991, Michailovsky 2001).

4 Conclusion

To summarise what I have tried to demonstrate in this paper concerning Hyow morphosyntax: verbal pronominal agreement has a roughly nominative/accusative alignment, though extensive and idiosyncratic syncretism obscures this; in terms of verbal agreement, multiple objects show a primary object orientation; finally, nominal alignment is split between neutral and ergative/absolutive for core case relations, and multiple objects are treated in a direct object fashion.

Future work will have to concentrate on third singular intransitive marking, to better account for its distribution, and on finding (semantic) correlates for the different options seen in many of the transitive paradigm slots, e.g. the ?V- vs. the *khroŋ*- first person object markers in the third singular A on first person O portion of the paradigm. It seems likely that factors such as focus may play a role in the choice of one or another of these options, as suggested by Hartmann (2000) to account for a similar variability seen in Daai, but I have not yet had an opportunity to test this possibility. Also, some issues concerning the distribution of the number-based ergativity split in first and second persons were mentioned at the end of section 2. Further investigation will shed light on these problems.

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