

AGREEMENT IN MATU

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ABSTRACT

Like other Kuki-Chin languages, Matu has a system of particles accompanying verbs which show agreement with the subject and object. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the Matu agreement system. There is no generally accepted Matu orthography; the examples discussed are taken from Pathen Awl Ciim Awlkhueh Thaa (The New Testament in Matu (Chin), Bible Society of Myanmar, 2005) and cited in the orthography used there.

Person agreement (with the subject only) is shown by particles which precede the verb (or prefixes):

ka (first) *na* (second) *a* (third)

Number agreement is shown by particles which follow the verb (or suffixes):

hih (dual) *u* (plural)

These may indicate the number of the subject or the object, or both. Exclusive versus inclusive first person dual and plural is marked in Matu pronouns, but not in the agreement system.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Matu language belongs to the Kuki-Chin subgroup of Tibeto-Burman. According to the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) it has about 60,000 speakers in Matupi Township, Chin State, Myanmar and adjoining areas in Mizoram State, India. Like other Kuki-Chin languages, Matu has a system of particles accompanying verbs which show agreement with the subject and object. There is no generally accepted Matu orthography; the examples

discussed are taken from Pathen Awl Ciim Awlkhueh Thaaï (The New Testament in Matu (Chin), 2005) and cited in the orthography used there.¹

2. PRONOUNS

The independent pronouns of Matu are the nine given in (1).

(1)		singular	dual	plural
	first	<i>kai</i>	<i>kaihih</i>	<i>kaimi</i>
	second	<i>nang</i>	<i>nanghih</i>	<i>nangmi</i>
	third	<i>ahih</i>	<i>ahih rawi</i>	<i>ahimi</i>

These pronouns are categorized for person (first, second or third) and number (singular, dual or plural). Number is shown by a suffix, *-hih* for dual and *-mi* for plural, added to the singular stem, except for the third person dual, shown by *rawi* added to the singular. Gender is not distinguished in the Matu pronoun system and plays no role in agreement.

A second set of Matu pronouns is given in (2). These consist of a stem *mah* 'self' with a prefix showing person and the same number suffix as in (1).

(2)		singular	dual	plural
	first (excl)	<i>kamah</i>	<i>kamahih</i>	<i>kamami</i>
	(incl)		<i>mahih</i>	<i>mami</i>
	second	<i>namah</i>	<i>namahih</i>	<i>namami</i>
	third	<i>amah</i>		<i>amami</i>

Unlike the pronouns in (1), those in (2) distinguish exclusive and inclusive first person dual and plural, but this distinction plays no role in Matu agreement. No example has been found of a third person dual pronoun distinct from the form *ahih rawi* in (1).

The sets of pronouns in (1) and (2) are noticeably different in meaning and distribution. Those in (2) have a reflexive sense lacking in those in (1), though not every use is appropriately glossed by an English reflexive pronoun or a genitive with *own*. Typical examples are (3) to (5). *Kamah* in (3) and *amah* in (4) and (5) could not be replaced by *kai* or *ahih*.²

- (3) *n'tu dawngah kai he kamah awl dawngah tuuk ham na ngaih u?* 22:18)
'why do you want to catch me by my own words?'

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² The numbers which accompany most examples are chapter and verse of 'Matthai kah a Thut Awlthang Theen' (The Gospel according to Matthew). In examples, pronouns and agreement markers under discussion are de-italicized.

(4) *amah oen amah haiphu oen phuli u vetih* (11:21)
'they sprinkle themselves with ashes, and ...'

(5) *amah oen amah tah thlawn u thai nawh!* (27:42)
'he could not save himself!'

Amah oen amah, literally 'he and he' is a typical Kuki-Chin reflexive form. In Matu it uses singular pronouns regardless of the number of persons referred to, but triggers plural agreement.

3. PERSON AGREEMENT

In Matu, person agreement is indicated by one of the particles given in (6) appearing before the verb.

(6) first person *ka*
second person *na*
third person *a*

The particles in (6) are clearly cognate with corresponding particles in other Kuki-Chin languages and reflect the person of the subject whether it is overtly present or not.³

Thus *ka* in (7) to (10) marks agreement of the following verb with its first person subject.

(7) *awltak ka thui.* (26:74)
'I speak the truth'

(8) *na miing oen ah Pathen awl ka thui u,* (7:22)
'we spoke God's word in your name'

(9) *Kai lawng takawi cuun ngaa ka eh tih* (16: 9)
'I broke five loaves of bread, and ...'

(10) *Kaimi tah khawyungkhun khawling khawlai khuiah ka bi u.* (20:12)
'We worked all day in the hot sun'

In (7) and (8) no overt subjects are present, but in (9) and (10) the subjects are first person pronouns, singular and plural. The absent subject in (8) is marked as plural by the particle *u* after the verb; the same particle appears in (10).

Similarly, *na* in (11) to (14) marks agreement of the following verb with its second person subject.

³ The particles in (6) are sometimes taken to be pronouns. For arguments that this is a mistake for another Kuki-Chin language (which in general apply to Matu) see Bedell (1995).

- (11) *N'tu na ngaih?* (20:21)
'what do you want?'
- (12) *Metila na poek u?* (21:28)
'what do you think?'
- (13) *nang lawng kai he ka ming nawh, tila voeithum toe na basa ai,* (26:34)
'you will say three times that you don't know me'
- (14) *namami khaw na kuun u nawh;* (23:13)
'you yourselves do not go in'

As in (7) and (8), no overt subjects are present in (11) or (12). (13) and (14) contain overt second person subjects, singular and plural. In (14) *namami* is an example of a *mah* based pronoun, and plurality is marked in (12) and (14) in the same way as in (8) and (10).

All non-pronominal noun phrases in Matu are third person, so that the only overt subjects which are possible with verbs marked for first or second person agreement are first or second person pronouns. Any noun phrase may appear as an overt third person subject.

- (15) *capa a cuun ai,* (1:23)
'she will give birth to a son'
- (16) *camawca oen a manu Meri te a huh u vengah* (2:9)
'when they saw the child and his mother Mary'
- (17) *Ahah lawng capa a cuun vetih* (1:21)
'she will give birth to a son, and ...'
- (18) *ahimi lawng Pathen te a huh u ai!* (5: 8)
'they will see God!'

(15) to (18) show the same pattern as (7) to (14); (19) and (20) illustrate non-pronominal subjects.

- (19) *Pathen lawng ahimi te ka ca a tina ai!* (5: 9)
'God will call them his children'
- (20) *thlaang broe lawng a kawpoek rai u tih,* (12:23)
'the crowds were amazed, and ...'

The subject in (19) is *Pathen* 'God' and that in (20) is *thlaang broe* 'crowd'. The postposition (or case marker) *lawng* appears with the subject of transitive verbs.

In addition to marking person agreement of verbs with their subjects, the particles *ka*, *na* and *a* may be used before a noun, marking person agreement of that noun with a genitive noun phrase, either overtly present or absent.⁴

- (21) *Ka puei, hutung lah!* (20:13)
'listen, my friend!'
- (22) *Ka hu ah bang hih lah,* (4:18)
'follow after me'
- (23) *na maya manau pakhat khat lawng* (5:23)
'one of your brothers'
- (24) *na tengah kavan thui, Piter: nang tah lungto ni!* (16:18)
'I say to you, Peter: you are a rock!'
- (25) *A kut dawngah* (3:12)
'in his hand'
- (26) *Matthai lawng tho tih a hu ah bang.* (9: 9)
'Matthew stood up and followed after him'

Together with standard genitives as in (21), (23) or (25), Matu uses a genitive construction with a relational noun to express many notions expressed in English by prepositions.⁵ Thus in (22) and (26) we see the noun *hu* 'after' and in (24) the noun *teng* 'toward'.

There are several possibilities when a genitive noun phrase is overt. The genitive noun phrase may appear with agreement as in (27) and (28), but there will be also a genitive particle (or case marker) *kah* separating them.

- (27) *Baptisma pekung Johan kah a luu te* (14: 8)
'John the Baptist's head'
- (28) *Johan kah a hubang hue* (11: 7)
'John's followers'

The agreement marking may be omitted, as in (29) and (30).

- (29) *Jesuh kah himbai hmoi te* (14:36)
'the edge of Jesus' cloak'
- (30) *Johan kah hubang thli,* (14:12)
'John's disciples'

⁴ For similar type of agreement in another Kuki-Chin language, see Bedell (2007a).

⁵ For details on relational nouns in another Kuki-Chin language, see Bedell (2000a).

Finally, *kah* also may be omitted and the genitive construction reduced to juxtaposition, as in (31) and (32).

(31) *Johan capa Simon* (16:17)
'John's son Simon'

(32) *Johan luu te* (14:10)
'John's head'

It is not possible to have an overt genitive with agreement but no *kah*, as in (33) or (34).

(33) **Johan a luu te*

(34) **Johan a hubang thli*

The possibilities are more restricted if the genitive noun phrase is a pronoun. If the agreeing noun is a common noun as in (35) and (36) or (39) to (42), *kah* may or may not appear, but no agreement marker is possible. *Kah* is seldom if ever used when the agreeing noun is relational, as in (37) and (38).

(35) *kai kah hubang la koeih nawh.* (10:37)
'he is not worthy to be my disciple'

(36) *kai hubang la a awm dawngah* (10:42)
'because he is my disciple'

(37) *kai tengla nang na law lat oh kai,* (3:14)
'and yet you come to me'

(38) *kai hu ah aka law thlaang* (3:11)
'the man who comes after me'

(39) *nangmi kah aangna te* (5:16)
'your light'

(40) *Na thui ham koei awl te tah nangmi awl nawh ni.* (10:20)
'the words you say will not be your words'

(41) *namah kah awlthui te* (12:37)
'your own words'

(42) *namah mik ah thingboeng aka awm te* (7: 3)
'the log in your own eye'

When indicating genitive person agreement the particles *ka*, *na* and *a* immediately precede the noun whose agreement they mark. When indicating agreement between a verb and its subject, however, one of at least two particles may intervene. These include *-van* as in (43) to (48), and *-n* as in (49) to (52).

- (43) *Kavan awng manawh;* (25:12)
'I will not open it (for you)'
- (44) *Duek laa kavan sak u,* (11:17)
'we sang funeral songs (for you)'
- (45) *Navan bih he na ming hih nawh!* (20:22)
'you do not know what you ask (me) for'
- (46) *Nangmi lawng kawpoekraina navan bih u?* (16: 4)
'do you ask (me) for a miracle?'
- (47) *Na ca lawng buh avan bih vengah* (7: 9)
'when your child asks (you) for bread'
- (48) *a-u lawng avan thui u?* (3: 7)
'who told you?'
- (49) *Navan bih boeih te kan pe ai,* (14: 7)
'I will give (you) everything you ask for'
- (50) *Metaang tim ah tuu angla nangmi he kan tuih u.* (10:16)
'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves'
- (51) *Me ang thaihu then ti he n'tu dawngah nan doet?* (19:17)
'why do you ask (me) what is good?'
- (52) *kai he nan hu koep u tlaih manawh,* (23:39)
'you will never see me again'

Orthographically, both *-van* and *-n* are treated as suffixes to the person agreement marker, though *va* is plausibly a directional particle. The *-n* is equally plausibly the same whether or not *va* is present, but its exact significance is unclear. *Van* appears by itself in imperatives (see below the discussion of examples (54) to (59)).

- (53) *tangka te khawdeng harah thli van peh.* (19:21)
'give the money to the poor'

The particles *ka*, *na* or *a* typically show agreement of a Matu verb with its subject in person. But not every Matu verb agrees in this way with its subject. One substantial class of exceptions shared with other Kuki-Chin languages is imperatives.⁶ The normal post-verbal imperative marker is *lah*, as in (54); a variant found in non-final and non-main clauses is *lang* as in (55).

⁶ See Bedell (1995), (2000), (2001), (2004) and (2007b).

(54) *Na kut yueng lah,* (12:13)
'reach out your hand'

(55) *aloela cet lang* (5:24)
'go elsewhere, and ...'

In less formal situations, *lah* may be omitted with a glottal stop suffixed to the verb as in (56), or altogether as in (57).

(56) *namah pum na lungna angla na imbe te lungnah,* (19:19)
'love your neighbor as you love yourself'

(57) *ka hu ah va bang,* (19:21)
'follow after me'

A negative imperative is marked by *boel*, as in (58), and a third person imperative by *seh*, as in (59).

(58) *Meri te yuna ham rih boel,* (1:20)
'don't be afraid to marry Mary'

(59) *na sawah ngaimawngna awm seh,* (26:49)
'peace be with you'

In none of these examples is person agreement of the subject marked, except in so far as the post-verbal imperative marker is sensitive to it. It is possible but unusual to see an overt pronoun subject in an imperative, but non-pronoun subjects are common in third person imperatives such as (59).

A second type of Matu verb which does not agree in person is a stem I form with a third person subject. Like other Kuki-Chin languages, Matu shows verb stem alternation: many (but not all) verbs distinguish two morphological forms, traditionally called stem I and stem II. In examples (60) through (67), *cet* is the stem I form and *ceh* the stem II form of the Matu verb meaning 'go'.

(60) *Ahimi haiah aisi lawng cet tih* (2:10)
'the star went ahead of them'

(61) *A hubang hue a tengla cet u tih* (8:25)
'his followers went to him'

(62) *ramhum huhang la a ceh puei.* (4: 1)
'he led him to the desert'

(63) *Jesuh oen a hubang hue tah Jeriko khaaw kalawng a ceh u vengah* (20:29)
'when Jesus and his followers were leaving Jericho'

With a third person subject the third person agreement marker *a* does not appear with *cet* in (60) and (61), but does with *ceh* in (62) and (63). The first and second person agreement markers *ka* and *na* are not so restricted, as seen in (64) to (67).

(64) *ka cet manawh*, (21:29)
'I will not go'

(65) *tuitunlii ah lowng oen na cet u tih* (23:15)
'you go on the sea in boats, and ...'

(66) *n'tu huh ham na ceh u?* (11: 9)
'what did you go to see?'

(67) *Kaimi lawng thaihu boeih ka ceh taak u tih* (19:27)
'we have abandoned everything, and ...'

This phenomenon is shared by Matu and the southern Kuki-Chin language K'cho.⁷

A third type of Matu verb which does not agree in person is one with a nasal prefix. The verb *ng'hoett* 'abandon' in (68) is a nasal-prefixed form of *hoett* in (69).

(68) *Thlaangtloe boeih lawng nang te ng'hoett sut tih* (26:33)
'all other people may abandon you, but ..."

(69) *n'tu ah kai nan hoett sut?* (27:46)
'why do you abandon me?'

The verb *m'pe* in (70) is a nasal-prefixed form of *pe* in (71), and *m'peek* in (72) is a nasal-prefixed form of *peek* in (73). *Pe* is the stem I form and *peek* the stem II form of the Matu verb meaning 'give'. This verb compounds with *awl* 'word, speech' to mean 'order'.

(70) *na teng la tui sawah ka lawna ham awl m'pe lah*, (14:28)
'order that I come to you on the water'

(71) *Thlaang lawng thaihu avan bih atah pe uh*, (5:42)
'if a person asks (you) for something, give it to him'

(72) *A-u lawng saithaina aana he m'peek?* (21:23)
'who gave you the authority?'

(73) *Galili tuilii khatben rall la ceh ham a hubang hue te awl a peek.* (8:18)
'he ordered his followers to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee'

⁷ For discussion of agreement in K'cho, see Bedell (2000b) and Mang (2006).

4. NUMBER AGREEMENT

In addition to the person agreement particles *ka*, *na* and *a*, Matu verbs may also be accompanied by one of the number agreement particles given in (74). While the former particles precede the verb, the latter follow it. While the former particles may also indicate person agreement between a noun and its genitive modifier, the latter are not used with nouns.

- (74) dual *hih*
 plural *u*

The number agreement particles *u* and *hih* have appeared in several examples already given. Some are repeated here for convenience.

(75) to (78) illustrate *u* marking the subject as plural; the subjects are either first or second person, and either absent or an overt pronoun.

- (75)=(8) *na miing oen ah Pathen awl ka thui u*, (7:22)
 'we spoke God's word in your name'

- (76)=(10) *Kaimi tah khawyungkhun khawling khawlai khuiah ka bi u*. (20:12)
 'We worked all day in the hot sun'

- (77)=(12) *Metila na poek u?* (21:28)
 'what do you think?'

- (78)=(14) *namami khaw na kuun u nawh;* (23:13)
 'you yourselves do not go in'

(79) to (81) illustrate third person plural subjects, which in addition to being absent or an overt pronoun, may be an overt regular noun phrase.

- (79)=(16) *camawca oen a manu Meri te a huh u vengah* (2:9)
 'when they saw the child and his mother Mary'

- (80)=(18) *ahimi lawng Pathen te a huh u ai!* (5: 8)
 'they will see God!'

- (81)=(20) *thlaang broe lawng a kawpoek rai u tih,* (12:23)
 'the crowds were amazed, and ...'

(82) and (83) illustrate *hih* marking a first or second person subject.

- (82) *Ka mik navan tueng sak ham ka ngaih hih,* (20:33)
 'we want you to make our eyes see'

- (83)=(45) *Navan bih he na ming hih nawh!* (20:22)
 'you do not know what you ask (me) for'

(84) to (86) illustrate third person dual subjects, respectively absent, a pronoun and an overt regular noun phrase.

- (84) *a yuvaa hih nawh ah theen ngaai ai.* (19:10)
'it will be better not to marry'
- (85) *Ahih rawi te lowng khuila a kuun hih coeng atah* (14:32)
'after they got into the boat'
- (86) *Hutaa rawi lawng a rih hih de* (28: 8)
'the women were afraid, but ...'

At times the number agreement markers *u* and *hih* appear to mark the number of an object of the verb they accompany rather than its subject. (87) to (90) illustrate *u* used in this way, and (91) illustrates *hih*.

- (87) *nangmi tengah kavan thui u,* (18:18)
'I say to you'
- (88) *kai lawngah duemdawngna kan pe u ai.* (11:28)
'I will give you rest'
- (89) *ahimi na peek yoeh van te kaimi nan peek u,* (20:12)
'you gave us the same as you gave them'
- (90)=(48) *a-u lawng avan thui u?* (3: 7)
'who told you?'
- (91) *thlaang tukang la kan coeng sak hih ai,* (4:19)
'I will make you catchers of people'

In these and most such examples, either *-van* or *-n* is attached to the person agreement marker. However, the presence of these is equally compatible with subject number agreement, as in (92) to (96).

- (92) *Nangmi lawng kawpoekraina navan bih u?* (16: 4)
'Do you ask me for a miracle?'
- (93) *A luu te beelphai dawngah avan khuen u tih* (14:11)
'they brought his head on a platter, and ...'
- (94) *la te ka tengla bok van mawt hih.* (21: 2)
'bring the donkey to me'
- (95) *mevengah na bung a pawng te kan huh u tih* (25:37)
'when did we find you hungry and ...?'
- (96) *a-u lawngkhaw nan tu u nawh.* (26:55)
'you did not arrest anyone'

Unlike the person agreement markers *ka*, *na* and *a*, the number agreement markers *u* and *hih* appear freely in imperatives, as in (97) through (102).

(97) *Vaan ah aka sawng va thli ke bueh u lah!* (6:26)
'look at the birds flying in the sky'

(98) *Tho u lang do uh,* (25: 6)
'come and meet him'

(99) *a ro thaihu lawh pe u sih,* (21:38)
'let's take his inheritance'

(100) *thangvuen ham lakueng u boel;* (6:34)
'don't worry about tomorrow'

(101) *ahuepla namahih bueng thui hih.* (18:15)
'speak in private only yourselves'

(102) *Na hai kah khaaw la cet hih langtah* (21: 2)
'go to the town ahead of you, and ...'

They also appear freely with third person stem I verb forms, as in (103) to (105), and with nasal-prefixed verb forms, as in (106) to (108).

(103) *Herod lawng a tina angla cet u tih* (2: 9)
'they went as Herod had told them, and ...'

(104)=(60) *A hubang hue a tengla cet u tih* (8:25)
'his followers went to him, and ...'

(105) *a hubang rawi lawng cet hih tih* (21: 6)
'his followers went, and ...'

(106) *awlcekna yung la ng'khuen u vetih* (10:17)
'they will take you to the court, and ...'

(107) *He thlaang hue lawng awlhong oen kai ng'hinyah u,* (15: 8)
'these people honor me with words'

(108) *Ciim Muithla oen hai oen ah baptisma m'peek u ai.* (3:11)
'he will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire'

Though the number agreement markers *u* and *hih* are not systematically restricted like the person agreement markers, still it is not the case that every verb with a dual or plural subject agrees with it. All of (109) through (112) have explicitly plural subjects, either noun phrases containing the plural marker *thli* or pronouns. The verbs do not agree with them.

(109) *Te thli lawng va meel vetkat vetih namah te ng'nggeh ai.*
'they will turn and attack you'

(110) *Khawlaw thlaangcuih thli lawng a thai a latna te* (2:16)
'that the eastern visitors had tricked him'

(111) *Kaimi lawng n'tu ka tina ai?* (27: 4)
'what will we say?'

(112) *Nangmi lawng ahimi te athaih oen na noek ai.* (7:16)
'you will know them by their actions'

Similarly, (113) and (114) have explicitly dual pronoun subjects; the verbs do not agree with them.

(113) *Ahah rawi lawng a tengla cet, a khow ah a phoeih tih a bok.* (28: 9)
'they went to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.'

(114) *Nanghih lawng ka boengloeng dawngkah na awkk thai lang tangtang ai.* (20:23)
'you will indeed drink from my cup'

These examples are to be compared with those offered to illustrate number agreement with a subject: (75) to (86). There are no very obvious structural differences between the two sets, and we conclude that number agreement in Matu is syntactically optional. It is used when information about the number of subjects (or in some cases objects) needs to be made explicit or emphasized, but not otherwise.

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