A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF MNAR

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The present paper is an initiatory investigation of Mnar, a dialect of Khasi, which is classified under the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Mnar occupies the area known as Jirang, which falls under the RiBhoi district of Meghalaya. Although, Mnar shares common structural traits with other Austro-Asiatic languages, it still exhibits unique properties, providing a great opportunity for succinct investigation of the structural patternsexisting in the language.

1 Introduction

Diffloth (2005) coined the term 'Khasian' to refer to the varieties of Khasi spoken in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. As per the Census of India (2011), the total population of Jirang is 30,919. Mnar is not well studied linguistically and there is hardly any account of studies pertaining to Mnar in the field of literature. Further, Gurdon (1914) has listed Mnar as one of the Khasi dialects and mentioned briefly about the numeral system in Mnar. Although, he listed Mnar as one of the Khasi dialects, he still mentions that Mnar is affiliated to Synteng, Lakadong and Amwi rather than to Standard Khasi. As a result, there is no mutual intelligibility between Khasi and Mnar.

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief outline with a view of arriving at an understanding of the nature of structural constructions in Mnar and to perceive how such analysis can enrich the knowledge of fairly unknown languages. The components chosen are intended to enable a comprehensive view of the structural attributes of Mnar. The fact that there is very little work available that compares and contrasts the rich assortment of data found in Mnar, the empirical evidence is drawn from primary sources, i.e. field work and language consultants. It should also be added here that attention is centered on the formal aspects of typology.

2 Data

The data collection for this paper was undertaken in the village of Jirang. The data analysis comes from fieldwork transcription in the form of word list, derived from Swadesh List. For sentences the consultants were asked to translate Khasi texts into Mnar, so that the investigators could note down and transcribe the spoken data. The drawback of the present study is that it only presents data elicited by way of translation. Prospective work will need to include naturally occurring data related through folktales, narratives and communicative events that people regard as important parts of their cultural heritage, occurring in oratory, song, dance recitals of poetry or story-telling, rituals, and so on. Unfortunately, no audio or video recordings were made in this fieldtrip.

3 Phonology

The segmental phonology of Khasi and few other dialects including Pnar, Lyngngam and Bhoi has been presented adequately by Nagaraja (1985, 1993 1996, and 2014) and Ring (2012, 2014, and 2015). However, as mentioned by Diffloth and Zide (1992), the "so called Khasi dialects, such as Synteng (Pnar), Lyngngam and Amwi (War) are clearly distinct but related languages" (cited in Koshy and Wahlang 2011). Daladier (2011) in an extensive research on Pnar, War, Lyngngam and Standard Khasi also recognizes the fact that the aforesaid varieties are mutually unintelligible and, therefore, adduced that these varieties are four disparate languages. Accordingly, these varieties exhibit certain distinctive geographical and structural features. In keeping with the typical typological phonological lineation of Austro-Asiatic (AA) languages, Mnar exhibits the following characteristics.

3.1 Consonants

Mnarhas five places of articulation of stops bilabial /p,b)/; alveolar /t,d/; palatal /c,ɟ/; velar/k/ and glottal /ʔ/ and four for nasals: bilabial /m/; alveolar /n/, palatal /ɲ/ and velar /ŋ/. The fricatives available are /s/ and /h/. Furthermore, Mnar has one rhotic /r/, one lateral approximant /l/, and two semi vowels /w and j/.

Additionally, Mnar has two stop series, usually distinguishing between voiceless (unaspirated) and voiced stops /pʰ, bʰ, tʰ, cʰ and kʰ/. Aspiration is phonemic, thereby giving way to three way voicing contrast in oral stops. Nagaraja (1996) found the occurrence of voiced velar stop /g/ in his study of Lyngngam, but in Mnar its occurrence is limited and at the same time suspicious. First and foremost it occurs as an alternate variant of ka '3SF' [ka~ga] and ki '3PL' [ki~gi]. Secondly, there is no phonemic contrast for /g/ and that its occurrence is limited to the initial position only as in gana 'this'; gatai 'that'; gitai 'those'; gira 'relative marker' etc.

The following minimal and sub minimal sets illustrate the contrast between Mnar consonants:

Table 1: Consonant phoneme opposition in Mnar

Stops	
/p/ po? 'belly'	/b/ bo?'to tie'
/t/ tɛw 'tree'	/d/ dɛw 'cloth'
/c/ cut 'choose'	/ɟ/ ɟut 'count'
/k/ ksei 'dance'	/p/ psei 'sister-in-law'
Aspirated vs. Unaspirated	
/p/ pi '2PL'	/pʰ/ pʰi 'ten'
/b/ bi?'poison'	/bʰ/ bʰi? 'good'
/t/ tai 'that'	/tʰ/ tʰai 'herd'
/c/ ci 'see'	/cʰ/ cʰim 'blood'
/k/ kam 'work'	/kʰ/ kʰam 'handful'
Trill vs. Lateral	
/r/ re? 'auxiliary verb'	/l/ le? 'past tense marker'
Nasals	
/m/	/n/

mar 'each'	nar 'iron'
/n/ nar 'iron'	/ɲ/ ɲa? 'drive'
/ɲ/ tʰaɲ 'red'	/ŋ/ tʰaŋ 'burn'
Fricatives	
/s/ sa? 'stay'	/h/ ha 'locative case marker'
Approximants	
/w/ wa?'also'	/j/ ja? 'black'

As already mentioned, Mnar has four nasals; m, n, ɲ, ŋ. They can occur in both onset and coda positions as illustrated below:

Table 2: Distribution of nasals

Phoneme	Onset	Coda
m	mat 'eye'	crɲam 'green'
n	nɔ 'leg'	san 'five'
ɲ	ɲim 'cry'	tʰaɲ 'red'
ŋ	ŋa '1SG'	tɨrlaŋ 'ear'

The inventory of syllable-final consonants is smaller than that of onset consonants in Mnar in that there is only one series of stops, which are always voiceless and typically unreleased, i.e. accompanied by glottal restriction which stops the airflow (skep˺ 'ribcage'; sut˺ 'veins'). Other consonants that can occur in the coda position are ŋ (knrɔŋ 'long'); k (wak 'many'); r (i: r 'two'); ? (snia? 'skin'); m (cʰim 'blood'); n (lmen 'tooth') and ɲ (tʰaɲ 'red').

3.2 Vowels

The richness of Mnar vocalic system is typically Austro Asiatic (Jenny et al. 2014), with a minimum of three degrees of vowel height. It has a total of 8 vocalic nuclei: one high front vowel (i), two mid front vowel series (e,ɛ), one low front vowel (a), three back vowels (u, o, ɔ) and one central vowel (ɨ).

Table 3: Vowel contrast pairs in Mnar

/i/ im 'sibling'	/a/ am 'progressive marker'
/a/ sam 'take'	/e/ sem 'bathe'
/a/ ma '2sm'	/u/ mu 'mother'
/ɛ/ ɛʔ 'loud'	/a/ aʔ 'auxiliary verb'
/e/ reʔ 'auxiliary verb'	/ɛ/ ɛʔ 'loud'
/e/ hen 'measuring unit'	/u/ hun 'child'
/ɛ/ ɛt 'stick'	/ɔ/ ɔt 'cut'
/i/ liʔ 'go'	/e/ leʔ 'past tense marker'
/a/ saʔ 'stay'	/ɔ/ sɔʔ 'fruit'
/u/ tʰuʔ 'search'	/ɔ/ tʰɔʔ 'write'
/i/ wiʔ 'earthworm'	/ɔ/ wɔʔ 'grandfather'
/o/ noʔ 'throw'	/ɔ/ nɔ 'leg'

As with theKhasian languages (Nagaraja 2014: Ring 2014 and 2015),vowel length contrast is irregular and restricted to a subgroup of vowel in Mnar. Only [a:] shows phonemic contrast in length. The long vowel [i:] is inconsistent as well. Other examples with long vowels include: pla:m 'cloud' sta:t 'wise' pa:m 'slice' i:r 'two' bi:m 'eat' sɟi: 'rice' ki:ʔ 'climb'.

Mnar is similar to Pnar (Ring, 2012 and 2015) in its inventory of diphthongs. There are only two phonemic diphthongs [ia] and [ɔu]. [ia] is found in closed syllables as in sniaʔ 'skin'; sˀiaŋ 'seed'; tʰiaʔ 'sleep'. While, [ɔu] is found in open syllables as in ksɔu 'dog'; smɔu 'stone'; hlɔu 'door'. Mnar also shows the presence of a vowel sound with either a labial [w] or palatal [j] glide, that either precedes (an on-glide) or follows (an off-glide) the main vowel.

Table 4: Mnar diphthongs with on- and off- glides

Diphthongs	Description	Word	Gloss
/ei/	a front mid	tei	'hand'
	vowel with palatal off-glide		
/ai/	an open vowel with palatal off-glide	mai	'face'
/oi/	a back mid vowel with palatal off-glide	moi	'buffalo'
/ie/	a front mid vowel with palatal on-glide	biet	'fool'
/ui/	a front close vowel with labial on-glide	khuic	'clean'

3.3 Syllable structure

Phonological words in Mnar consist of monosyllabic, sesquisyllabic (Matisoff 1973:86) and multisyllabic roots. Disyllabic words are most frequent and phonologically they are merely the composite of two syllables, each of which follows the same phonological requisites. Trisyllabic words are rare, if found to prevail they are an outcome of word formation (compounding).A syllable in Mnar may consist of an initial consonant cluster (CC), an obligatory vowel nuclei V, and an optional final consonant phoneme (C). The formulaic structure of the syllable is (C_1) (C_2) V (C_3). The smallest word shape allowed in Mnar is a single vowel nuclei and the largest word shape consists of a complex onset of two consonants, a diphthong nucleus and a coda consonant.

Table 5: Structure of syllables in Mnar

Monosyllables	Word	Gloss
V	i	'1PL'
VC	im	'niece'
CV	mu	'mother'
CVC	san	'five'
CCV	sŋi	'house'
CVV	lei	'three'

3.3.1 Consonant cluster

The combination of consonants in the initial position is rich in Mnar, usually all consonants can occur, some of them go against the sonority ranking, but sequences of the same place of articulation are avoided. Mnar onset clusters

include the sequences of stop plus nasal, stop plus liquid, fricative plus stop, fricative plus nasal, liquid plus nasal, etc.

Table 6: Permissible onset clusters

Cluster	Word	Gloss
pn	pnuʔ	'salt'
ps	psen	'snake'
pr	praʔ	'know'
pl	pla:m	'cloud'
bl	blaŋ	'goat'
tŋ	tŋam	'cold weather'
tl	tlɔt	'weak'
tʰr	tʰrei	'six'
tʰm	tʰmi	'war'
cr	crŋam	'green'
cʰl	cʰlam	'cold water'
ktʰ	ktʰar	'axe'
kl	klɔŋsnam	'heart'
ks	ksaŋbʰi	'good'
km	kmen	'happy'
kʰl	kʰlɔu	'head'
sn	sniaʔ	'bone'
sk	skɔu	'sit'
sm	smɔu	'stone'
sŋ	sŋeic	'stout'
st	sta:t	'clever'
hl	hlɔu	'door'

3.3.2 Sesquisyllabic structure

A distinct syllable type termed 'sesquisyllabic' (Matisoff 1973:86) is found to exist in many Austro-Asiatic languages (Jenny et al. 2014) wherein a disyllabic word consists of an initial unstressed syllable often called a minor (Henderson, 1952) or pre-syllable followed by a stressed full syllable (main syllable). In this minor or pre-syllable the nucleus of the syllable is occupied by either of these sonorant sounds (l,r,m,n, ŋ), in lieu of certain weak vowels and as such they carry the main weight of the first syllable in a disyllabic word. This phenomenon can be explained with the disyllabic word ɟyṇdaŋ

'neck'. The pre-syllable in this example is ɟyn, which is orthographically spelled as ɟyn,and transcribed phonetically as ɟṇ or ɟɨn. Here the vowel is eliminated or rendered weak and the following nasal /n/ takes possession of the nucleus position, thereby giving rise to a sesquisyllabic structure.

3.3.3 Suprasegmental

Since most Austro-Asiatic languages are sesquisyllabic, they tend to be strongly iambic, wherein a weak and unstressed syllable is followed by a strong and full stressed syllable (Jenny et al. 2014). Likewise, the stress in Mnar is always in the last syllable of the word. The pre-syllable always gets the reduced stress and transitional vowel.

4 Morphology

Mnar is isolating, in that it is extremely analytic with words consisting of a single morpheme constituting a separate word and independent grammatical words. However, no language is purely or predominantly of one type. Thus, Mnar is also characterized by some degree of agglutination, mainly, in its technique of employing affixes to be juxtaposed to root words. The addition causes no significant changes in the root and the different affixes are readily identifiable and easily segmented from the root and from one another as illustrated in the examples below.

(1) u   pitar   bi:m   sɔʔ   u
     3SM   PN   eat   fruit   3SM
     'Peter eats fruit.'

(2) ga saphi   pṇ-rɔʔ   kaha-rara
     3SFPN   CAUS-praise   3SFACC-REFL
     'Saphi praised herself.'

Sentence (1) illustrates how Mnar comes close to being an isolating type. Each word in the sentence consists of just a single and free morpheme. There are monosyllabic words both lexical and grammatical (function words) as in bi:m 'eat', sɔʔ 'fruit' and u '3SM'. Each morpheme is invariable in that the words are strung together in a sentence but without change; thus, bi:m 'eat' does not inflect to show person, number or tense.

In sentence (2) the word pṇ-rɔʔ 'cause to praise' consists of two morphemes pṇ- 'a causative suffix and rɔʔ meaning 'praise'. The boundary between these two morphemes in the word is clear-cut; moreover, the identification of morpheme in terms of their phonetic shape is also straightforward. The anaphoric expression ha-rara is a combination of two morphemes ha- 'accusative case' and rara 'personal reflexive', here too the boundary is clear-cut.

The lack of inflectional categories as attested in Mnar is compensated by the extensive derivational morphology, including class changing derivational prefixes, compounding and reduplication. Compounding is common, and can consist of two or more nouns, a sequence of a noun plus verb, or a combination of two or more verbs.

Table 7: Compound words

Combination	Compound	Gloss	Gloss 2
Noun+Noun	sʔiaŋ+tɨmpɔn	back+bone	'backbone'
Verb+Noun	don+burɔm	be+honour	'honourable'
Verb+Adjective	ksaŋ+kmen	feel+happy	'elated'
Noun+Verb	a:m+biaʔ	water+spit	'saliva'

Derivational morphology in Mnar is operational through affixation attaining nominalization and causativization processes. Normally verbs are nominalised by adding prefixes such as tʰei- (its function is to derive noun stems from verb and adjectives) in tʰie+sali (NOMLZ+lazy) 'sloth'. Additionally, Mnar also has an agentive nominalising prefix men- as well as a causativizing prefix containing the element pṇ- is attached to a simplex verb *jip* meaning 'die' as in pṇ-jip 'cause to kill'.

Reduplication is yet another common word formation process attested in almost all Austro-Asiatic languages. It appears in various manifestations either as full or partial reduplication (imra-imra 'there'; ju-ju 'nothing'; muɔn-muɔn 'slowly'; ɟɔkʰa-mɔkʰa 'some'). Adjectives, question words and adverbs all have reduplicated forms in the various Khasian varieties (Ring 2014 and Nagaraja 2014). This also holds true for Mnar, in that it uses reduplication to mark emphasis, change the grammatical category of words and intensify the meaning through complete repetition of adverbials, deictic words and question words. Full reduplication is constructed by repeating the element in an identical form whereas in partial reduplication a consonant is changed in the initial position in the repeated element.

5 Pronominal system and gender

On account of the absence of obligatory morphological markingof tense, agreement, number or any other morpho-syntactic category generally expressed by inflection, syntactic notions such as subject and object are purely based on syntactic criteria in Mnar. Having said so, Mnar conforms to Subject-Verb-Object basic word order and is characterized by a fairly rigid word order, wherein constituents cannot befreely moved from one position to the other. It has a rich set of functional words which mark the grammatical properties of phrases and clauses. It is a head initial displaying modified-modifier ordering and has a noun classifier system. Before describing the word order typology of Mnar it is important to discuss the pronominal and gender system.

Table 8: Pronominal chart of Mnar

Singular	Nominative	Accusative	Genitive/Possessive
First Person	ŋa 'I'	ha-o 'me'	ɟɔ-o 'my'
Second Person	ma(M) pa(F) 'you'	ma(M) pa(F) 'you'	ɟɔ-ma(M) ɟɔ-pa (F) 'your'
Third Person	u / ka~ga 'he' / 'she'	wei / kai 'him' /'her'	ɟɔ-wei/ɟɔ-kai 'his'/ 'her'

Plural			
First Person	wi 'we'	wi 'us'	ɟɔ-wi 'our'
Second Person	pi 'you'	pi 'you'	ɟɔ-pi 'your'
Third Person	ki~gi 'they'	kei~gei 'them'	ɟɔ-kei 'their'

Mnar has a rich pronominal system with two number distinctions: singular and plural. Feminine and masculine gender distinction is seen in second person singular ma (M) and pa (F). Further it must be pointed out that Mnar has a nominative-accusative form of alignment in terms of case marking and/or verb agreement, wherein the subject (S) of an intransitive verb has the same case as the subject or agent (A) of a transitive verb, contrasting with the patient (P) / object (O) of a transitive verb which gets coded differently. Third person pronoun /u/ and /ka/ can be labelled as portmanteau morphs for its multifunctional attribute. The said pronominals can function as gender clitics, personal pronouns as well as agreement markers in Mnar.

Gender distinction in Mnar is seen not only in pronouns but also in lexical nouns (nominals). In Mnar nouns cannot function without gender, it is obligatorily attached before a noun. Some animate nouns can be divided into female and male. The following are the gender clitics: ka~ga (feminine); u (masculine) and ŋa (neuter) as in:

(3) ga sara
    F   PN
    'Sara'

(4) u ɟɔn
    M PN
    'John'

(5) ŋa hai
    N thing
    'thing'

5.1 Verbal agreement

Agreement in Mnar is overtly realized between an NP (noun phrase) and a verb. The verb obligatorily agrees with 3rd person subjects NP in terms of person and number and gender but there is no agreement for non-3rd person subject. The subject is marked by the pronominal clitics placed after the verbal root, though the place of occurrence of agreement is not fixed. The pronominal agreement clitics have the same shape as personal pronouns, the third person masculine is marked by u (masculine) and ka (feminine) respectively in the singular, and by ki in the plural; when an animate noun stands as the subject NP, it agrees with the verb by its clitic form. Here, it must be mentioned that the agreement pattern in Mnar is post verbal, post adjectival and post sentential unlike Khasi which has a preverbal agreement. Furthermore, Mnar is also a pro-drop language, where agreement enables the subject to be dropped; pro is a covert nominative case pronoun occurring in the subject position of the finite clauses, showing a rich verb agreement.

(6) u   ɟɔn   ieid   u   ha
    3SM   PN   love   3SM   ACC
    ga meri
    F PN
    'John loves Mary.'

In sentence (6) the highlighted u marks agreement of the verb ieid 'love' with its subject u ɟɔn 'John'. The subject is third person singular masculine, which is also marked by the u directly preceding the head noun ɟɔn 'John'. Further, the agreement marker is located after the verb.

(7) sa ɟi   ki   (pro-drop)
    eat rice   3PL.
    'They eat rice.'

The subject can be dropped as in (7), because the subject agreement marker is coded on pronominal clitic ki '3PL' following the verb.

5.2. General word order

The unavailability of morphological markingof tense, agreement, number generally represented by inflection, syntactic notions such as subject and object are purely based on syntactic criteria in Mnar. Having said so,Mnar conforms to Subject-Verb-Object basic word order and is characterized by a fairly rigid word order, wherein constituents cannot befreely moved from one position to the other. It has a rich set of functional

words which mark the grammatical properties of phrases and clauses. It is head initial language displaying modified-modifier ordering and has a noun classifier system.

The word order characteristics discussed in this section will be based on the writings and research of Greenberg (1963) and Dryer (1992). At the surface level, Mnar seems to exhibit three different types of word order. They are: (a) SVO, (b) VSO, and (c) VOS.

The following is an illustration to show the basic word order of Mnar (SVO) in a simple declarative sentence.

(8) ga meri   tieŋ   haicbi:m   ka
    3SF PN   cook   food   3SF
    'Mary cooks food.'

Sentence (8) exhibits S-V-O word order where the subject/agent precedes the main verb; and the object/patient follows the verb. However, possible alternate variation orders also exist in Mnar as in the following examples. A further research on word order variations is needed as no conclusion has been arrived at as yet.

(9) ieid   ki   wei   (VSO)
    love   3PL   3SM(ACC)
    'They   love   him.'

(10) dɛʔ a:m wi i:rwat si siŋ (VOS)
     drink water 1PLDD twice QUANT day
     'We drink water twice a day.'

As predicted by the implicational universal (Greenberg, 1963) for verb medial language which includes Mnar the genitive follows the head noun.

(11) am   saʔ ka   i   sʰillɔŋ
     PROG live 3SF   LOC   PN
     'She still lives in Shillong.'

(12) ga im   ɟɔ   ga   meri
     3SF niece GEN   3SF   PN
     'Mary's niece.'

Subject-Verb

(13) u   ban   lhɔʔsari u
     3SM PN   laugh   3SM
     'Ban laughs.'

Subject-Verb-Direct Object

(14) u ɟɔn   dat   u   ha   ga
     meri
     3SG   PN   beat   3SG   ACC
     F   PN
     'John beat Mary.'

Subject-Verb-Direct Object-Indirect Object

(15) u   ɟɔn le?lep ai ʃitʰi u   ha
     3SM PN finish give letter 3SM   ACC
     ga meri
     F PN
     'John gave the letter to Mary.'

Subject-Verb-Complement

(16) u   ɟɔn   le? ɔŋ u   ba   ŋat
     3SM PN   PST say 3SM COMP AUX
     li? ŋa   i   sŋi
     go   1SG   LOC house
     'John said that I should go to the house.'

Subject-Verb-Relative

(17) la:m   ka   tarei   gara   a?
     bring   f   knife   rel   aux
     i   sŋi   tieŋ-ɟi
     loc room   cook-food
     'Bring the knife which is in the kitchen.'

5.4. Prenominal Modifiers

Demonstratives precede the head noun and classifiers and numerals precede the head noun.

(18) a. i:r   kʰlen a?   ksɔu   ŋa
        two   CLF AUX   dog   1SG
        'I have two dogs.'

     b. sɔu bei a? hun antʰei ki
        four CLF AUX child girl PL
        'They have four daughters.'

5.5 Postnominal modifiers

Adjectives follow the head noun

(19) ga sʔir   sŋaid
    F   hen   fat
    'fat hen'

5.6 Order of auxiliary verb

The auxiliary verb precedes the main verb

(20) leʔ   tʰɔʔ   u   ga   ʃitʰi
    AUX   write   3SG   F   letter
    'Did he write the letter?'

6 Conclusions

This work is an attempt to make few pertinent and preliminary observations on the structural features of Mnar. The findings presented in this paper do validate the fact that Mnar does share a number of features with other Austro-Asiatic languages like Khasi and Pnar. However, as matter of course, Mnaralso has some peculiar characteristics of its own, thus demonstrating that each language retains its identity in spite of intense contact with other languages.

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