



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**A SKETCH STUDY ON TENSE AND ASPECTS OF TAI-KHAMYANG**

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*Research Scholar, Assam University, Silchar*Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10307>**ABSTRACT**

Tai-Khamyang is a critically threatened language of the Tai-Kadai or Daic group that belongs to the Sino- Tibetan language family. The spoken variety of Khamyang is only surviving in one remaining village Powaimukh. According to Ethnologue (ISO 639-3), there 800 ethnic populations are living all over Assam. According to Stephen Morey (2003), approximately only fifty (50) older adults use the language to communicate with each other. (Morey, 2018) During fieldwork, it was observed that there are only 4 to 5 people who can read and but there are very few people who can write the language. The proper use of the language is very low. This paper presents a brief sketch of tense and aspect in Tai-Khamyang, a variety of Tai Kadai language spoken by a very less number of people in Powaimukh village located in North East region District Tinsukia in the state of Assam. The paper begins with a brief introduction to the Tai-Khamyang language, which is followed by a descriptive analysis of the tense and aspects of the language.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Tai languages have a significant presence across Southeast Asia and Southern China. For instance, Siamese is renowned in Thailand, Lao is spoken in Laos, and Shan is prevalent in Northeast Myanmar, bordering China and Northeast India. George Abraham Grierson initially proposed a theory that united Tai languages with Chinese, coining the term 'Siamese Chinese' as part of the broader Sino-Tibetan language family. However, P.K. Benedict's efforts in 1942 aimed to associate Tai languages more closely with Chinese, placing them within the Deconstructed Siamese or Sino-Tibetan family. As a result, Benedict introduced an innovative language family termed "Tai-Kadai," merging the Tai and Kadai language families. Within this framework, the Tai language constitutes the largest subgroup within the Tai-Kadai language family (Phukan, 2019).

Tai-Khamyang, a language within the Daic or Tai-Kadai language family, stands on the brink of extinction. This critically endangered language has a rich history and cultural significance among an indigenous ethnic community that has coexisted alongside Assamese and various other language groups in Assam for centuries. The Khamyang variety of the Tai language is part of this critically endangered linguistic group.

Historically, the Tai-Khamyang community's origins trace back to an area named 'Khamjang' in the Kachin states of Myanmar. In the early 17th century, they migrated and established settlements across Patkai hills. Today, the Khamyang people are dispersed across two Indian states: Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Within Assam, they have established numerous villages in Brahmaputra valley such as – Chalapathar Shyam Gaon, Moniting, Disangpani, Bongaon and Rahan Shyam Gaon in Sivasagar and Charaideo District, Betbari Shyam Gaon, Balijan Shyam Gaon, Na Shyam Gaon in Jorhat District, Rajapukhuri in Golaghat District and Powaimukh in Tinsukia District. In Arunachal Pradesh, they have settled in three villages – Nong-tha, Jonapathar, and Khai-su in Lohit district. Theravada Buddhism is the religious choice of most Khamyang people of the region.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

This study provides an introductory analysis of the morphological traits of the Tai-Khamyang language within the framework of the Tai-Kadai language group. The core aim of this study is to delineate fundamental grammatical features in the Khamyang language, particularly focusing on morphological processes involving tense, verb inflection and aspects.

## 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data gathered for the intended study was obtained from two distinct sources: primary and secondary. The primary source of information for this research primarily relied on speech data derived from the specific community under study. Conversely, secondary data was amassed through library resources, encompassing written materials such as books, journals, and other available literary sources. To collect primary data, direct engagement was established with the informants of Powaimukh Village in Tinsukia. This approach spanned diverse age groups, professions, and genders, facilitating a comprehensive and representative collection of data.

## 4. TENSE /ASPECT:

In grammatical-semantic studies, grammarians distinguish aspect from tense. Saeed and Cruse (2000: 275) give theoretical description about tense and aspect. Tense serves to locate an event in time, but aspect says nothing about when an event occurred (except by implication). However, either encodes a particular way of conceptualizing an event or conveys information about the way the event unrolls through time. It is also important to make a distinction between aspect as a semantic phenomenon and aspect markers in a particular language which may have a variety of semantic functions. (Saeed, 1997), (D.Cruise, 2000). Then, Saeed (2016) states also that tense and aspect systems both allow speakers to relate situations to time, but they offer different slants on time. Tense allows a speaker to locate a situation relative to some reference point in time, most likely the time of speaking. Aspect systems allows speakers to review



an event in various ways: as complete, or incomplete, as so short as to involve almost no time, as something stretched over a perceptible period, or something repeated over a period.

Tai-languages are usually categorized as being 'tenseless', Comrie (1985:9), defined tense as a "Grammaticalised expression of location in time" Most of the verbs in Khamyang are monosyllabic however di-syllabic verbs are also attested in the language. Khamyang verbs are mono-morphemic in nature irrespective of compound verbs. Like many other Tai languages there are very less distinction found in Transitive and Intransitive verbs. In Khamyang Tense verbs are morphologically marked for having three ways opposition of tense as:

ii. Present Tense

ii. Past Tense

iii. Future Tense

In Tai-Khamyang there is no different inflected forms of verb are attested to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person with different number. The paper mainly takes the verb /kin/ 'to eat' as an example, and discusses the related verbal nuances.

**i. Present Tense:**

The present tense denotes to the action or event that takes place or is taking place to represent current utterances delivered. In Tai-Khamyang there is no present tense marker is attested to the verb or object. For example –

Table – 1

Person	Singular	Plural
1 <sup>st</sup>	kau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 1SG eat rice 'I eat rice.'	hau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 1PL eat rice 'We eat rice'
2 <sup>nd</sup>	mau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 2SG eat rice 'You eat rice.'	mau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 2PL eat rice 'You eat rice.'
3 <sup>rd</sup>	mun kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 3SG eat rice 'He/She eat rice.'	khau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 3PL eat rice 'They eat rice.'

**ii. Past Tense:**

The Past tense refers to the action that is already happened in a definite time of past or previously existed delivered utterances of a

particular time period. Most of the Tai languages of Assam followed both SOV and SVO pattern. In Khamyang past tense is carried by the auxiliary /yù/ which is attested to well attested with the object. For example



Table-2

Person	Singular	Plural
1 <sup>st</sup>	kau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw - yòu 1SG eat rice-PST 'I ate rice.'	kau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw - yòu 1PL eat rice-PST 'We ate rice.'
2 <sup>nd</sup>	mau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw - yòu 2SG eat rice-PST 'You ate rice.'	mau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw - yòu 2PL eat rice-PST 'You ate rice.'
3 <sup>rd</sup>	mun kín k <sup>h</sup> aw - yòu 3SG eat rice-PST 'He/She ate rice.'	khau kín k <sup>h</sup> aw - yòu 3PL eat rice-PST 'They ate rice.'

## iii. Future Tense :

Future tense may be referring as indicating the time sequence to the

time of utterance. In Khamyang future is carried by the auxiliary /ti/ which is prefixing to the verb root. For example

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Table-3

Person	Singular	Plural
1 <sup>st</sup>	kau tí-kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 1SG FUT-eat rice 'I will eat rice.'	hau tí-kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 1PL FUT-eat rice 'We will eat rice.'
2 <sup>nd</sup>	mau tí-kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 2SG FUT-eat rice 'You will eat rice.'	mau tí-kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 2PL FUT-eat rice 'You will eat rice.'
3 <sup>rd</sup>	mun tí-kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 2SG FUT-eat rice 'He/She will eat rice.'	khau tí-kín k <sup>h</sup> aw 2SG FUT-eat rice 'They will eat rice.'

## 5. ASPECT

Many of the Tai languages are categorized as having aspect rather than tense. According to Bauman (1975) the indistinctiveness of tense is an important part of

### 5.1 Simple Aspect:

The simple aspect in Khamyang is unmarked. For example-

(1) mau kín-nam lù  
2SG-you drink wine  
'You drink wine.'

(2) hau kín k<sup>h</sup>au  
3PL-we eat rice  
'We eat rice.'

(3) meu kín pé  
3PL-cat eat fish  
'Cats eat fish.'

(4) mun ma hun haŋ-kau  
3SG-she visit home my  
'She visits to my house'

### 5.2 Progressive Aspect:

A progressive aspect refers to an event or action having no commencing boundaries. In other words Progressive aspect is an event of developing or progress of a particular action. In Khamyang Progressive aspect is expressed by aspectual particles '-sú', which is attached to the verb root post verbally. The expression of Progressive aspect in Khamyang is illustrated in following examples-

(5) mun k<sup>h</sup>au kín-sú  
3SG-she rice eat-PROG  
'She is eating rice'

(6) kau len-sú  
1SG-I sleep-PROG  
'I am sleeping'

(7) hau lik p<sup>h</sup>at-sú  
1PL-we book read-PROG

representation of time in Tibeto-Burman languages (Matisoff 1997, 1991) Likewise Khamyang has five aspectual distinction- (i) Simple (ii) Progressive (iii) Perfective (iv) Irrealis (v) Completive

'We are reading books'

(8) mun luk delhi ma-sú  
3SG from delhi come-PROG

'She is coming from Delhi.'

### 5.3 Perfective Aspect:

Perfective aspect is also known as aoristic aspect. This aspect indicates an event or action which is under process of discussion. It's a *grammatical form used to describe a present state* resulting from a past or a past event with present relevance. The perfective aspect in Khamyang is expressed by aspectual marker 'yòu'. The perfective aspectual particle 'yòu' occurs in both transitive and intransitive verbs. The expression of Perfective aspect in Khamyang is illustrated in following examples-

(9) kau amù haŋ hat-yòu  
1SG-I homework 1SG-Do PERF  
'I have done the homework'

(10) Raja delhi ka-yòu  
3SG delhi go-PST-PERF  
'Raja went to Delhi.'

(11) luk-saw kau ka-haŋ-yòu son-lik  
daughter 1SG 3SG-go-PST-PERF school  
My daughter has gone to school.

### 5.4 Irrealis or Unrealized Aspect

In Khamyang the irrealis or unrealized aspect is expressed by the aspectual particles 'ti', which is attached to the verb root in pre verbal position followed by verbal root. On the other hand the aspectual particle 'in' is used as negative marker which is also attached to the verb root in pre- verbal



position followed by verb. For example-

- (12) kau tí-kin k<sup>h</sup>au  
ISG-i IRR-eat rice  
'I will eat rice.'

- (13) hau tí-ka leí  
1PL-we IRR-go outside  
'We will go outside'

- (14) kau tí-ka  
ISG-i IRR-go  
I will go'

- (15) kau m<sup>h</sup>ák tí-kín mu  
1SG tomorrow IRR-eat mango  
'I will eat mango tomorrow.'

The aspectual particle 'ín' is used as negative marker in which is also attached to the verb root in pre-verbal position followed by verb. For example-

- (16) kau ín-ka guwahati  
ISG-I NEG-go guwahati  
'I will not go to guwahati.'

- (17) hau ín-kín k<sup>h</sup>au  
1PL NEG-eat rice  
'We will not eat rice.'

### 5.5 COMPLETIVE ASPECT:

Tai-Khamyang refers to completive aspectual particles in order to indicate an event or an action under contemplation has been completed (or will be completed) before some other stipulated or unstipulated event take place, and further that no effect of previous endure. Completive aspects of Khamyang is expressed by aspectual particle 'a' and 'ka' which is attached to the verb root. For example-

- (18) kau a-kín mak mu  
ISG COMP-eat ripe mango  
'I eat ripe mango.'

- (19) kau -hañ mun nak-ka

ISG-POSS 3SG beat-COMPL-PST

'I have beaten her.'

- (20) John a-loi an-kau hañ-ho  
3SG come-COMPL POSS- 1SG home  
'John has come to my home.'

### CONCLUSION

The Tai-Khamyang culture and language is a culturally significant language spoken by a handful of Khamyang people in parts of Assam. With a rich history and unique linguistic features, it plays a crucial role in preserving the identity and heritage of the Khamyang community. In this current research, this present paper tries to describe the fundamental features of Tense and Aspects of the language. Tai languages are usually categorized as being 'tenseless', Khamyang is no exception either. In Khamyang Tense verbs are morphologically marked for having three ways opposition of tenses as Present Tense, Past Tense, and Future Tense. The present tense denotes the action or event that takes place or is taking place to represent current utterances delivered. The present tense signifies the event that occurs or is taking place to depict current utterances delivered. In Tai-Khamyang there is no present tense marker attested to the verbal root. Most of the Tai languages of Assam followed both SOV and SVO patterns. In Khamyang past tense is carried by the auxiliary /yòù/ which is well attested to the object. In Khamyang's future, the tense is transmitted by the auxiliary /ti/ which is prefixing to the verbal root. Many of the Tai languages are categorized as having aspect rather than tense. Khamyang has five aspectual distinctions- (i) Simple (ii) Progressive (iii) Perfective (iv) Irrealis (v) Completive. The simple aspect of Khamyang is unmarked. In Khamyang Progressive aspect is expressed by aspectual particles-'sú', which is attached to the verb root post verbally. The perfective aspect in Khamyang is conveyed by the aspectual marker 'yòù'. The perfect aspectual particle 'yòù' occurs in both transitive and intransitive verbs. In Khamyang the irrealis or unrealized aspect is expressed by the aspectual



particles 'ti' attested to the verb root in a pre-verbal position. Completive aspects of Khamyang are expressed by aspectual particle '-a' and 'ka' which is well attached to the verb root pre verbally.

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