

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Hkongso (ANL) is mutually intelligible with Anu, which is an unclassified Tibeto-Burman language with a population of 700 according to Gordon (2005).^B While their linguistic backgrounds are linked, cultural differences have resulted in separate sociolinguistic groupings.

The Anu and Hkongso groups do not appear in studies by other linguists. However, by noting the similarities with Mru as described by Ebersole (1996), we can gain a clearer picture of what is happening linguistically as well as historically in Hkongso.

The Mru language of Bangladesh and the Hkongso of Myanmar appear to be similar in many ways. One similarity is that of legend. The Joshua Project (2008) says, "The Mru of Bangladesh believe that Torai ("the great spirit") gave all peoples, except the Mru, a written language and rules to guide their social lives. They believe that by some accident, they themselves were excluded." In my elicitation of stories from the Hkongso, there is a great spirit, Turvai, who made the world.

The Joshua Project also writes that an alternate name for the Mru is Khammi. This is a name that I have found in use among the Anu and Hkongso people, but it was unclear to me which group it was referring to. It does not refer to the Khumi, who live north and west of the Hkongso. I originally speculated that it was an older name referring to a historical people group.

^B Burma Socialist Party (1968) says that the Hkongso and Anu live together in the Paletwa area and have the same culture and language.

Ebersole (1996) writes, “According to their legends [the Mru] migrated to the Chittagong hills from Arakan State several hundred years ago.” Arakan State lies in Myanmar, directly southeast of the Mru’s current location in Bangladesh. In between Arakan State and Bangladesh is the area where the Hkongso live. The history reported by the Hkongso is a little different. Kyaw Kyaw (2007) states, “Most of the subjects reported that before the Hkongso lived in that area, they came from Northern Chin State.” Pyi Min (2000) states, “A group of people moved up to the Chintwin River area, and as they were living there they began to fight among themselves. So, they decided to move to other places where they could find water and pasture.”

In the last decade, research on the Mru of Bangladesh has been furthered by David Peterson, who writes (2006: 1) that Mru is a “language with several dozen thousand speakers (latest published census cites only about 22,000 as of 1991) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh (southeast of Bandarban towards the borders of India and Burma).” Peterson says that there are “several dialects [and] many second language speakers.” He also says that “Mru varieties [are] spoken in adjacent areas of Burma (Arakan state), [and are] largely mutually comprehensible with Bangladesh varieties.”

The most notable similarity between Hkongso and Mru is the SVO word order. This is notable because the other languages in the area are strictly verb final. Example (27) from Peterson (2005b: 2) shows Mru SVO order and example (28) from Wright (2009: 56) shows Hkongso SVO order.

(27) ang ran ciö
 1S buy cow
 ‘I buy/bought a cow.’

- (28) ၵၢၣ် ၵၢၣ် ၵၢၣ်
 1SG hit Maung.Maung
 'I hit Maung Maung.'

As previously noted in Dryer (2012: 76), languages that have basic SVO order are also expected to have the complement clause following the complementizer (CompS). We see this in the English example (29) (Rahimpour 2016), where the complement clause comes after the verb, 'know,' with the complementizer, 'that,' preceding the clause.

- (29) I didn't know that my cousin, who was photographing my daughter, had captured that moment.

If the complementizer comes after the complement clause in an SVO language, it is exceedingly rare. In fact, SComp in SVO languages, along with postnominal relative clauses are so rare that Payne (1997: 326) claimed, "Languages which are dominantly VO in main-clause constituent order always have postnominal relative clauses." We also saw Steven Pinker (1994) say, "If a language has the verb before the object, as in English, it will also have prepositions; if it has the verb after the object, as in Japanese, it will have postpositions."

This expectation, championed in Universal Grammar, is not realized in Hkongso or Mru, as Peterson (2005b: 4) points out. Example (30) from Peterson and Wright (2009) and (31) from Wright (2009: 145) show the SComp order in Mru and Hkongso.

- (30) ...ca kōm-mi kram...
 eat irr-nz afraid
 '(They) were afraid to eat it.'

- (31) $in^1 \quad ja^1 \quad ham^1 \quad pe^1 \quad mi^?1 \quad aŋ^1 \quad juŋ^1$
 1PL win IRR this COMP 1SG believe
 'I believe that we will win.'

In Wright (2009) I discussed this feature and gave a handful of examples, but considering that SVO languages with SComp order are so rare, there are still many questions left to be answered. About the complementizer shown above, I previously stated, "I normally gloss this word as LNK (linker) because it is used in different kinds of clause combinations, but in this chapter I label it as COMP (complementizer) to aid in understanding" (Wright 2009: 145). What is the nature of the "complementizer"? Is it functioning as a subordinator or is it simply linking ideas, possibly in a topic/comment structure? Is it obligatory or not? If so, under what situations? Is SComp really the basic order? Is another order possible? If so, what does it signify?

An initial literature review helps to answer some of these questions and provides a foundation for the testing that I did in this research. Hkongso's SComp feature is much more common in SOV languages, such as those surrounding it. Example (32) shows the SComp order of the complement clause in Daai Chin (So-Hartmann 2009: 314), and example (33) shows the SComp order of Lemi Chin (So-Hartmann 2015), which are both Southern Chin languages. In both of these works So-Hartmann provides numerous examples of complementation.

- (32) $kah \quad thi-in \quad kkhai=a \quad kah \quad ngngaih \quad ni.$
 S.AGR:1S die-MIR FUT=CF S.AGR:1S think EMPH
 'I think that I will die.'

- (33) $käsu1=lä5 \quad käsi5 \quad sa3 \quad vävawi5=te3 \quad mäny3 \quad bawi5 \quad kha3$
 wolf=TOP evil do ASP:habitually=NOM know QUANTF:all NF
 'They all know that the wolf did habitually evil and ...'

The SComp order is also found in the national language, Burmese, as is shown in (34).

(34) tin maun pyo: te lou. youn = ci te
name say RLS COMP believe RLS
'I am confident that Tin Maung said thus.' (Soe 1999: 318)

We see that preverbal SComp complementation is common in the area. Also, complementation occurs with or without the complementizer. It is expected that complementation in Hkongso follows the pattern of the languages around it. However, this complementation pattern is extremely rare for SVO languages according to Dryer (2012: 76). To answer the question of how this came to be, we look to language change prompted by migration.

Peterson and Wright (2009) did a comparative study of the Mru and Hkongso and then presented our findings, in which we claimed that the languages are related and historically migrated from the Bodo Garo area in Eastern India. This hypothesis offers a reasonable explanation for Hkongso's anomalous word order features and provides a foundation for the research questions that I go on to address in this research.