CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Stem alternation is a well-known characteristic of verbs across Kuki-Chin languages. It has also been a stimulating topic of concentrated investigation and discussion for linguists working on Chin languages such as *Tiddim, Sizang, Mizo, Lai, Bawm, Zahau,* and *Daai.* This thesis is a grammatical approach to the issue of stem alternation, considering syntactic and pragmatic environments that trigger the choice of one verb stem in favor of another in *K'Chò.* This study also adds a much needed syntactic description of the phenomenon to the existing study of phonological characteristics of verb stem alternation in *K'Chò.*

Chapter 1 contains a general introduction to the *K'Chò* people and language and a brief grammatical overview of *K'Chò.* A literature review of stem alternation in Kuki-Chin languages is presented in chapter 2 along with the criteria for determining which stem is which in *K'Chò.* Chapters 3, 4, and 5 contain the main data description and discussion of this thesis. The research findings are summarized in chapter 6.

1.1 The *K'Chò* language and its speakers

K'Chò /kxɔ¹/ or /kxou¹/ are the people who live mainly in Mindat and Kanpetlet townships of southern Chin State, western Myanmar. The *K'Chò* also call the language they speak *K'Chò.* Gordon (2005) lists the total population at about 30,000.

1.1.1 Name of the people and the language

K'Chò is the ethnonym of the people. It is a sociocultural label for speakers of several different language varieties who share significant cultural features and

consider themselves to be one unified group. This thesis will draw on data from one of the *K'Chò* speech varieties so that language variants are not contributing to the variation in the choice of verb stems (see: section 1.5.7).

K'Chò people are also known by several other names, such as *Müün*, *Ng'mèèn*, *Mindat Chin*, *Cho Chin*, *Yawdwin Chin*, *Chinbok*, and *Chinme*. These are often used interchangeably to refer to this same group of people (cf. Grierson 1904, Gordon 2005). Sometimes, some of these names are reported to be names of linguistically distinct groups (Peterson 2000:4). Therefore, a short discussion regarding these various names will be given here.

Müün[1] /mɨːn⁵/ is name of a *K'Chò* sub-group. Other *K'Chò* main sub-groups are *Daai* /dai/ (see Hartmann, forthcoming) and *M'kààng*[2] /m.kaːŋ/ (see Figure 3).

Ng'mèèn /ŋ.mɛːn¹/ refers to a sub-group of *Müün* living north of the *K'hngìgüng*[3] /k.hŋi.ɣɨŋ/ river tract. The term seems to be originally used by another sub-group of *Müün* called the *K'hngìyung*[4] /hŋi¹.juŋ⁵/, who live along the southern bank of the *K'hngìgüng* river. Hartmann-So's (1988) informant believes that the word came from name of a type of deer called the '*Ng'mèèn* deer'. However, it seems quite plausible rather, that the name is derived from the *Ng'mèèn* village, which has existed on the northern side of the *K'hngìgüng* river tract since well before

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[1] Hartmann-So (1988) seems to give a *Daai* rendering, '*Ngmüün*' for the word which the people themselves pronounce '*Müün*' without the initial velar nasal /ng/. No one seems to know the origin and meaning of this term. There are some opinions about where it etymologically came from. Hartmann-So (1988) speculates that it is derived from the word '*Ng'meen*'. The *Daai* spelling seems to have led her to this conclusion. During personal contact in 2005, an informant from *Ng'Bóng* village claims that the word comes from the name of a mountain called *Müün m'htuung* 'Mt. Müün' in the *Hlet-lòng* area. Some *K'Chò* tribes invoke the name of the mountain during their sacrificial prayers. And they began to be known as *Müün* after the mountain.

[2] According to my experience, these people call themselves '*Kaang*' without the initial bilabial nasal. They were also known as cane-belly Chins after the cane rings they wore around their waists.

[3] *K'hngìgüng* is the local name, which in Burmese is called *Chi chawng* or the *Chi* river.

[4] The word '*K'hngìyung*' is not well-accepted by the people themselves. They like to refer to themselves as *Maang Ng'Thang* or *Maang Ng'Thang K'chààng* 'descendents of *Maang Ng'Thang*'. The name seems to have been applied to them by the people they call *Ng'mèèn*. According to Buning and Eugene (2001), the name is derived from the '*K'Hngìgüng River*'.

Mindat was founded. The *K'hngìyung* people refer to the northern bank of *K'hngìgüng* river, the side where the *Ng'mèèn* village and Mindat are located, as *Ng'mèèn-ga* 'Ng'meen side of the river', probably meaning 'the *Ng'mèèn* village side of the river'. And they also referred to the people on the northern bank as *Ng'mèèn k'chàang* 'the Ng'mèèn people'. In any case, *Ng'mèèn* is an exonym for a sub-group of *K'Chò*.

Mindat Chin /mindat tʃin/ is a loconym 'The Chin of Mindat', an inclusive generic name for all the Chins of different languages and/or dialect groups living within the township of Mindat, similar to the terms *Hakha* Chin, *Falam* Chin, *Tidim* Chin, and *Matupi* Chin; terms that refer to the Chins inhabiting those townships irrespective of their linguistic and sociocultural diversity.

Cho (*Chin*) is Burmanized pronunciation of *K'Chò*. *Yawdwin Chin* 'Chins of Yaw region' seems to be an old generic term of the British colonial period ,for some southern Chin groups, especially those, including *K'Chò*, within the Pakhukku Hill tracts of the British administration.

In older literature (e.g. Greirson 1904:II:647), the *K'Chò* were also known collectively along with other southern Chin groups as *Chinbok*[5] or *Chinme*, which are Burmese derogatory terms meaning 'rotten Chin' and 'black Chin' respectively. These terms should no longer be used.

The name *K'Chò* is the most fundamental autonym the people use to refer to themselves. In cultural and traditional religious functions, the people routinely use the name *K'Chò*, never sub-group names *Müün, Ng'mèèn, Daai, M'kang*. The first Primer in the language printed in 1935 also clearly attests to the name by labeling the textbook in the local language as *K'Chò k'chü* - 'The *K'Chò* language'.

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[5] When the *K'Chò* orthography was first developed and a primer was made for teaching in some local schools, it was called *Cho Khi* 'Cho language' in the native language, but the English title puts it as the *Chinbok dialect of Chin* (Anon. 3: 1935). Later, it was changed to *Cho ca* or *K'Chò ca* 'the K'Chò language'. So the autonym at least dates backs to then.

The name *K'Chò* also seems to be analogous with other autonyms for different Chin groups such as *Zo, Mizo, Laizo, Asho*, and *Hyo*. It is often used by the *K'Chò* people as a generic name for all the Chin people; *Yòpá K'Chò* 'Northern Chin', *Àsho K'Chò* 'Asho Chin', *Bàtú K'Chò* 'Matu Chin' and so on.

Furthermore, some people believe that the name is derived from the word *K'Chò* 'higher location'.[6] *K'Chò* people identify themselves as *K'Chò* and call their neighboring Chins[7] down the Yaw valley northeast of Mindat as *Dó* 'flat land or valley' probably meaning 'Plain or Valley *Chins*'.

The name *K'Chò* in this thesis will refer to the *Hmong-K'Cha* variety of *Ng'meen* (excluding *Hlet-long*), which is a sub-group of *Müün* (see Figure 4). It should be noted that currently there is some confusion regarding which dialect is representative of *K'Chò*. The dialect described in this thesis is the variety in which the *K'Chò* orthography was first developed in 1935 and officially taught as *K'Chò* language in local schools of Mindat and Kanpetlet townships of Southern Chin State.[8]

1.1.2 Geographical location

Speakers of *Müün*, a variety of *K'Chò*, to be described in this thesis live mainly in Mindat township, some reside in Kanpetlet township of southern Chin State, and there is one village in Matupi township[9]. The language is generally bounded in the

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[6] Buning and Eugene (2001: 106 ff) and *Kyüì Lè Om* (in his 2005 'Political Statement' on the K'Chò-Net) clearly state that '*K'Chò*' means 'High land'. Hartmann (forthcoming: 25) says *K'Chò* simply means 'Chin'. It may be correct that *K'Chò* may be used to mean 'Chin' in its contemporary meaning, but, it may not be etymologically. 'Chin' is a Burmese word while *K'Chò* is not. Even if the word 'Chin' comes from the Chin word *Khàang or kxàang* 'man' as some suggest, the word 'Chin' and *K'Chò* are semantically distinct.

[7] These Chins call themselves *Rungtu*. But, they are more widely known by their Burmese name *Taungtha*, which the people themselves readily accept. Incidentally, like many other 'Chin' groups living outside Chin State, they do not like to consider themselves as Chin.

[8] Jordan's (1965) 'Chin dictionary and grammar' also is in the same variety.

[9] Some *K'Chò* people moved into *Matupi* township and set up a village called *Dìng* in the 1960's.

west by *K'Chò* sub-groups of *Daai* and *Kààng*, in the north by *Rawng-tu*[10] and in the east by *Taungtha* (Rungtu), and in the south by *Daai*.
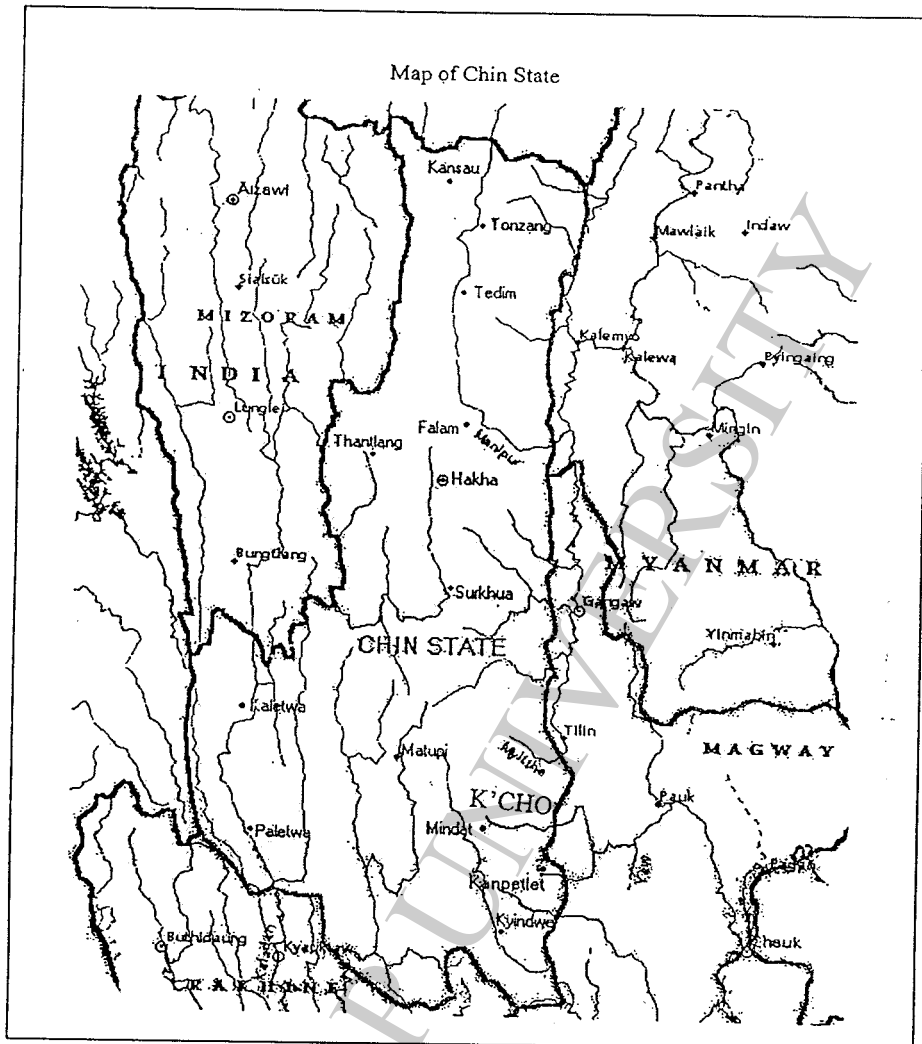

Figure 1: Map of Chin State showing *K'Chò* region
(Adapted from Khoi Lam Thang 2000)

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[10] This group was formerly referred to as *Weilong* (Grierson 1904, Bradley 1997), and the government administration grouped them under the name *M'Kààng* or *Kààng*. However, the *Kààng* people used to call them *Yò Kààng*. Recently, the people identify themselves as *Rawng-tu*.
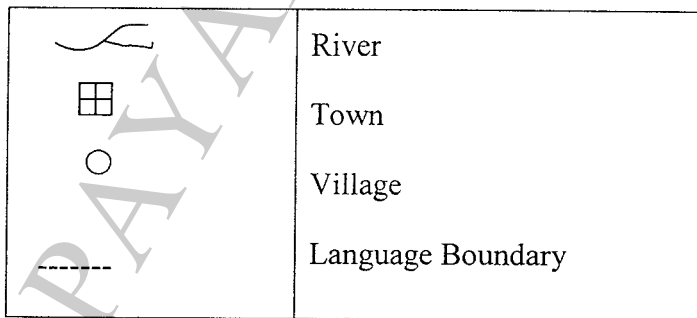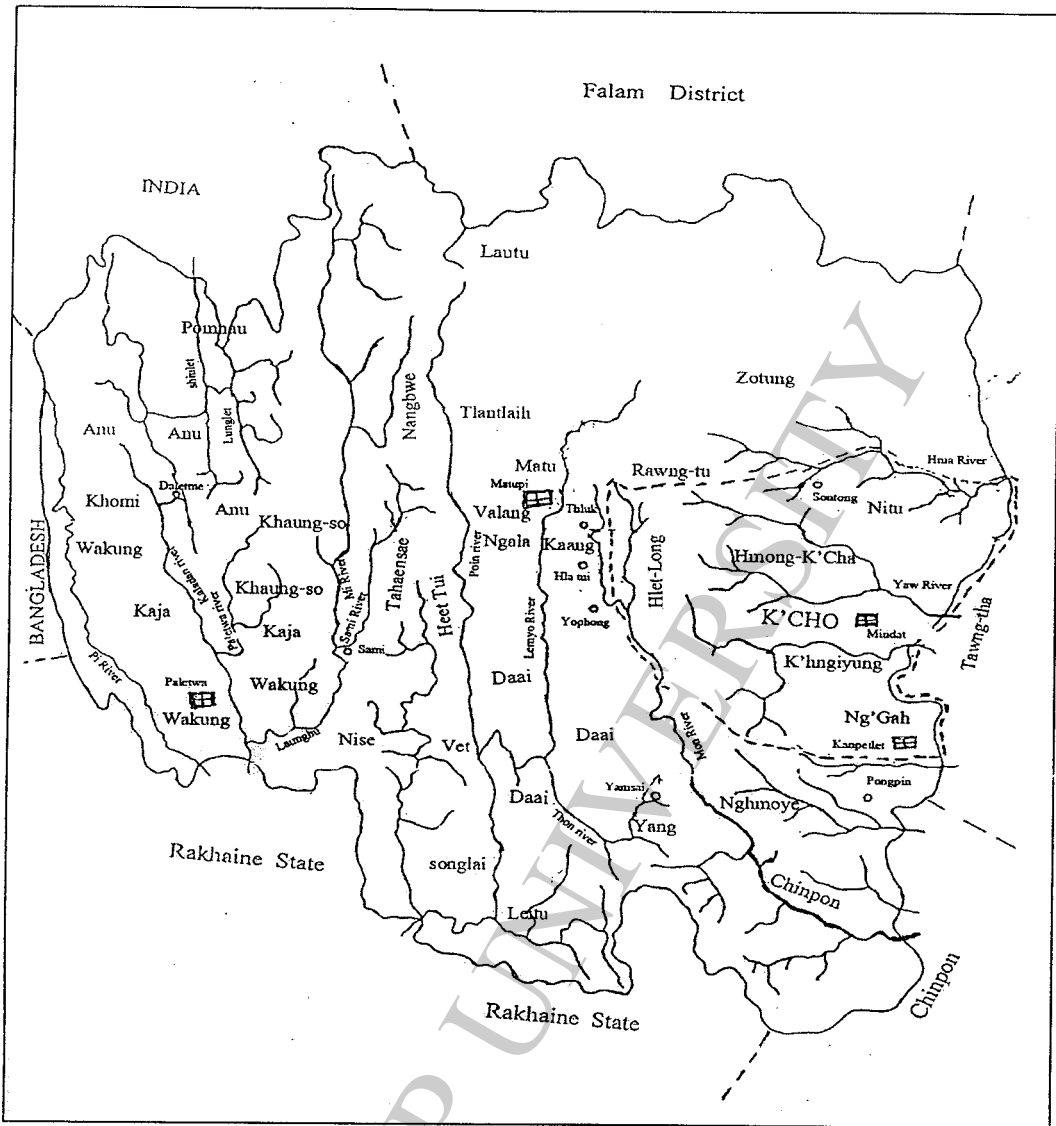
Figure 2: Map of *K'Chò* area (adapted from Hartmann-So 1988)

1.2 Genetic affiliation

This section is divided into four parts: the first three look at the wide genetic affiliation of *K'Chò* and the last section looks at the internal linguistic relations of *K'Chò*.

1.2.1 The place of Chin in Tibeto-Burman languages

Chin languages belong to the Kuki-Chin sub-branch of Kuki-Chin-Naga in the Tibeto-Burman family (Gordon 2005). Bradley (1997) classifies Chin languages under Kuki-Chin-Naga, which is part of the Northeastern India branch of Tibeto-Burman language family. However, higher level classifications are still uncertain. In any case, Chin languages form a clear cluster within Tibeto-Burman.

1.2.2 The place of *K'Chò* in Chin languages

Traditionally, linguists have classified Chin languages basically into three main groups: Northern, Central, and Southern based on geographic location (cf. Grieson 1904, Bradley 1997, Khoi Lam Thang 2000). However, recently Peterson (2000) proposed only two main groups: Central (the traditional Central Chin languages excluding Mara) and Peripheral (the traditional Northern and Southern Chin languages excluding Khumi).

K'Chò clearly belongs to what has been delineated as the Southern group (or Peterson's Peripheral Group) of the Kuki-Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.

1.2.3 The place of *K'Chò* in Southern Chin languages

Hartmann-So (1988) classified southern Chin languages into two main sub-groups (Figure 3). She regards the name *Cho (K'Chò)* as the super-ordinate name of five

southern Chin languages: *Matu, Chinpon, Daai, Müün,* and *Mkaang*[11]. The *K'Chò* variety of this thesis is *Müün* under this *Cho* group. Therefore, the name *K'Chò* will refer to *Müün*.
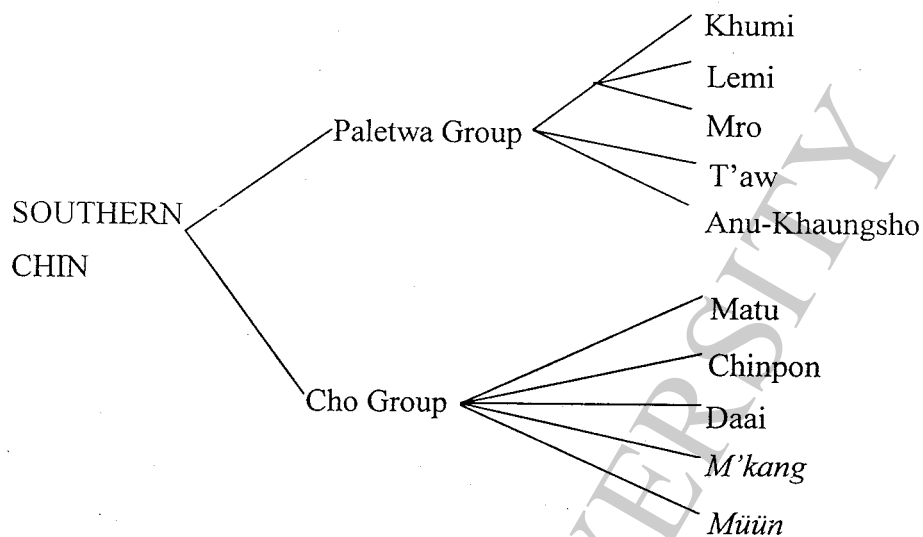

Figure 3: Place of *K'Chò* (*Müün*) in southern Chin languages
(Based on Hartmann-So 1988 and forthcoming).

1.2.4 Internal classification of *Müün*

According to my own field observations, and personal contact with speakers over the years in Mindat, the following broad generalizations can prove helpful in distinguishing *Müün* varieties of *K'Chò*. The main varieties are *Ng'mèèn, Nìtú,* -

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[11] This grouping reflects the popular attitude of politicians in Mindat and Kanpetlet. *Mkaang* and the majority of *Daai* seem to regard themselves as *K'Chò*. However, I learned that some people from the west *Daai* area used to refer to the people to their east as *K'Chò pá* 'K'Chò man/people'. This raises a question whether even some sub-groups of *Daai* had *K'Chò* as their super-ordinate name before. At this point, I am not in the position to comment whether *Matu* and *Chinpon* consider *K'chò* as their super-ordinate name either.

K'hngìyung, and probably *Ng'Gah*[12]/ŋ.ɣaʔ/ as shown in Figure 4. *Ng'mèèn* can further be divided into two main sub-groups: the variety spoken along the *Hlet-lòng* river tract and one spoken in Mindat and along the two river tracts of the *Hmóng-lòng* and *K'Cha-lòng*, and also some villages north of *Myincheitawng* or Mt. Myinchei, locally called *Pùghü m'htuung* 'Grandfather Mountain'.
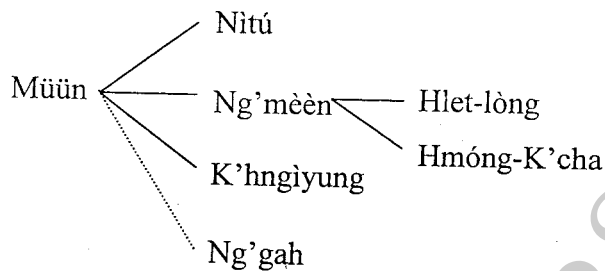

Figure 4: Internal classification of *K'Chò* (*Müün*)

Hartmann-So (1988) gives the following list as *Müün* sub-group names: *Ng'mèèn, Ng'lung Tu, Ha Ta, Kyuun Ta, Nitu, Ma Ngthang* (*Ng'hngi Long / Nghngi Yung*), *Mvak Lo*[13] (*Kyung So, Mlung So*), *Kyah Long, and Hlet Long*.

From my experience, *Ng'mèèn* and *Hlet-lòng* are names signifying linguistically more or less cohesive groups, the latter being a variety of the former (see Figure 4). *Nìtú* and *Ma Ng'thang* (*K'hngìlòng/K'khngìyung*) are tribally as well as linguistically distinct groups. Other terms like *Ng'lùng Tú, Hnga Htá (Hnga ta), Kyuun Htá (Kyüün ta), M'vá-k'ló*[14] (*Kyüng Hlo, M'lung Hlo*) are tribal names rather than names of linguistically defined groups.

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[12] I have no reliable information on the status of this group. Some information indicates that the name itself is not a native one and somewhat disapproved of by the people themselves.

[13] Hartmann-So spells as *Mbak lo*, which is *Mvá-k'ló* in *K'Chò*.

[14] Such names as *Müün, Ng'mèèn, Kaang*, and *Daai* refer to linguistically distinct and geographically as well as socio-culturally defined groups, which often embrace a number of different tribes. For example, *Müün* (*K'chò* in this thesis) is linguistically more or less a unified group within which can be enumerated the tribes of (1) *M'vá-k'ló* (those who migrated from Bama/Burmese area or the Yaw valley east of Mindat), (2) *M'Kààng-k'ló* (those who came from the *M'Kààng* group, i.e., *Nìtú*; Lehman (1963:86) also noted that some *M'Kaang* becoming *Ng'mèèn* are called *M'Kak-tu.*), and (3) *K'Khaan-k'chák* (those who dropped from above- including *K'hngìyung, Lautu*, and etc.).

The *K'Chò* varieties shown in Figure 4 are groups that exist, like any neighboring linguistic groups, in the manner of dialect continuity rather than with clear and discrete boundaries. Each group also has its own internal variations. Generally, the *Nìtú* variety is spoken in the *Mòne* or *Maw* river (locally known as *Hmaa-lòng*, one of the tributaries of *Myit-tha* river) region north of Mindat in over 30 villages. *Hlet-lòng* variety is spoken in about 12 villages along the *Hlet-lòng* river tract west of Mindat. *K'hmóng-lòng* and *K'cha-lòng* varieties are spoken in Mindat, along the two river tracts of *K'hmóng-lòng* and *K'cha-lòng* by about 40 villages. *K'hngìyung* is mainly spoken by some 30 villages south of *K'hngìgüng* river and 5 villages in Kanpetlet township. *Ng'Gah* is spoken by about 17 villages in Kanpetlet township.

1.3 Socioculture and religion

The land of the *Müün K'Chò* people is mountainous and there is no flat land. The mountain ranges around Mindat generally run from West to East and they are separated by deep gorges with swift running rivers. The weather is generally much cooler than the Yaw valley in the east and the Daai area in the West.

The people are swidden farmers. Culturally, they have many traditions in common with neighboring groups (*Daai, Kaang,* and *Matu*) such as mithan feasts, face tattooing, and blood feuds. *Müün* men used to knot their hair on top of the head,

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Ng'Lùng-tú and *Ma-hlo* (*Ma-so*) are the two major sub-groups of *M'vá-k'ló*. From these two main sub-groups branch off a dozen other smaller tribes: *Tai-hlo* (*Tai-So*), *Kyüün-hlo, M'lùng-hlo, Ha-htá, Kyüün-htá,* and other numerous clans with –*hlo(-so)* and -*htá* (-*ta*) suffixes.

Lehman (1963:86) observed that *Daai* are made up of various displaced people heterogeneous both linguistically and culturally. This seems to be supported by the fact that there are some stone dolmans around Mindat attributed to the *Daai* people as *Daai lung* 'Daai dolmans'. Some *Daai* in Kanpetlet are *Tai Hlo* (*Taiso*), who are said to be related to the *Tai Hlo* group of Mindat. Moreover, some northern *Daai* people, particularly from *Àthèt-chéng* and *Òk-chéng* villages, claim to be *Kyüün-htá* tribe of *Ng'lùng-tú* group, which is one of the main tribal groups of *Müün*. The *K'Chò* oral history recounts that the *M'vá-k'ló* group entered the current region from the *Yaw* valley and wandered off to the west as far as the confluence of *Phung-lòng* (*Lemyo* river) and *Ót-long* (one of its tributaries). Then, they migrated back to the current region. It is possible that the *Daai* group claiming to be *Kyüün-htá* tribe of *K'Chò* remained behind when others backtracked. During the influx of the *M'vá-k'ló* group from the *Yaw* valley, the present *K'Chò* region was said to be occupied by *Kò-tú* and *Mah-tú* tribes with whom they apparently intermarried. These people are not seen in the area today. It seems that they were either totally assimilated or pushed further west and south by the influx of the *M'va-k'lo* group.

while *Daai* and *Kàang* tended to knot their hair over their forehead. *Müün* traditional dress also used to be different from that of *Daai* and *Kàang*. Lehman (1963:84) noted that the *Müün* (he used *Ng'mèèn*) have some distinctive material culture that is not found among the tribes to their west (*Daai* and *Kàang*) such as multicolor-striped blankets, men's sitting cloth (*puumhlui*), men's loincloth or genital sheath[15], and some other items. But these distinctions are not so obvious anymore, as most people have abandoned wearing hair-knots, and non-native dress has been replacing the traditional costumes.

Face tattoo[16] patterns of women can also distinguish the *Müün* from *Daai* and *Kàang*. The *Müün* face-tattoo pattern has semi-circles on vertical lines, while the pattern of *Daai* and *Kàang* is black dots all over the face. Like many other traditional customs, face-tattooing is not practiced among younger generations anymore.

Müün music is also different from that of the *Daai* and *Kàang*. The *Müün* orchestra uses six heavy-resonant brass gongs (even 12 are said to have been used before) along with a drum and mini-cymbal, and the rhythm is lively. *Daai* and *Kàang* use three or four light and less resonant plate-like gongs, which are much similar to the northern Chin gongs, and a drum. The *Daai* melody also seems to the author to be more similar to that heard among the northern Chins and the Shans. Some *Daai* and *Kàang* also share with the northern Chins some wind instruments and the singing style called *la-sak*. *Müün* people never sang with instrumental accompaniment. Women generally sing solo, and men either solo or

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[15] Men of some tribes to the west of *Müün*, unlike *Müün* men who cover the whole front part with the loincloth, are said to wrap the male organ with the loincloth exposing the testicles on either side of it.

[16] Tattoo patterns among Chin groups are interesting. Leman (1963) notes that the further one moves to the west from the Burmese lowlands the more the density of the tattoo diminishes. The 'Chinpon' or *Üppü* tattoo is painted-black, Some *Daai* and *Kàang* wear dots all over the face making it almost as dark as the *Chinpon*'s. Some *Daai* wear stripes up their face with vertical lines. The *Müün* tattoo has two or three vertical lines on each side of the face with semi-circles along the outer-edges of these. Some tribes between Mindat and Matupi have a single Y-shape tattoo in the middle of the forehead. Some Matu tribes wear a curve line on each side of the face in the shape of parenthesis ( ) and a straight line from top of the forehead and along the nose to the chin. Some other pattern can be found further western and southern Chin groups.

duet. Singing is always spontaneous and impromptu, requiring a good command of the lyric language, customs, and history of the group.

Müün folk stories recount a creation story, how death came upon man, and the great inundation[17]. *Müün* people used to burn the dead, and put the bone pot under the stone dolmans constructed during mithan sacrifices, and believe in the life after. Today, Buddhism and Christianity have replaced the traditional religion to a large extent.

1.4 Sociolinguistic situation

The *Hmong-K'Cha* variety of *Müün* was developed as the *K'Chò* orthography and taught as the official *K'Chò* language in local schools of Mindat and Kanpetlet townships since 1935. But it has never been successfully taught despite several attempts. The writing of the language has not been practiced by the people themselves except by some churches in the form of Bible translation, hymns, and prayers.

Geographical proximity to the Burmese lowlands and contact with Burmese speaking people over the years seem to have reshaped the *K'Chò* language as significant number of Burmese words became established in the *K'Chò* vocabulary as can be seen in Jordan's (1969) dictionary. Recently, Burmese has become more influential and will continue to increase in dominance, as is the case in most languages of the various ethnic groups in the country, since it is the national language and the sole language of instruction at school. The presence of a strong Burmese speaking community in Mindat as traders, government employees, army personnel with their families, and Buddhist missionaries also reinforces the influence of Burmese language.

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[17] A French missionary to the region noted his bewilderment at the *Müün* folklores similarity to some Bible stories.

Moreover, as Mindat is the district administration center of southern Chin State, speakers of other Chin languages from all over Chin State are also present causing other changes to *K'Chò* language.[18] Recently, the language has drawn the attention of some linguists, and there have been some studies on the language from modern linguistic point of view. Therefore, it is hoped that the study of the *K'Chò* language from a linguistic point of view will contribute to the maintenance of it to some extent or at least the language will be documented before its total assimilation into the mainstream Burmese culture and language.

1.5 An Overview of *K'Chò* phonology and grammar

This section briefly introduces the phonology and typology of *K'Chò* grammar to provide a background to the thesis. The phonological inventory of the language, tone and vowel length, word order typology, postpositions, case marking on the arguments, and verbal indexations are discussed briefly.

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[18]For instance, *K'Chò* normally uses the particle *neh* for 3rd person agreement in interrogative sentences. E.g. *Gai neh ang?* 'Is s/he well?' Today, the particle is used indiscriminately for all persons. For example: *Na hngu neh ang* formerly would mean 'Does/did s/he see me?' But, now people use it to mean 'Do/did you see him/her/it?' This shift seems to have begun with some non-native or other variety of K'Chò speakers who do not make this distinction.

1.5.1 Phonological inventory

K'Chò has 28 consonants and seven vowels (Nolan 2000).

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Post alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Vl stops	p pʰ			t tʰ		k kʰ	ʔ
Ingressive	ɓ			ɗ			
Vl fricatives					ʃ	x	h
Vd Fricatives		v			ʝ	ɣ	
Vl Affricates			tθ			kx	
Vd Affricates				dʒ		kɣ	
Nasals	m m̥			n (n̥)		ŋ ŋ̥	
Lateral				l ɬ			
Clusters	pl pʰl						

Table 1: *K'Chò* consonants

K'Chò vowels:

	Front	Center	Back
Close	i, i:	ɨ, ɨ:	u, u:
Mid	e, e:	ə, ə:	ɔ, ɔ:
Open		a, a:	
Diphthongs	əi, ai, ui, ɔi		

Table 2: *K'Chò* vowels

Tone is an important feature of *K'Chò* phonology. Nolan (2000) identified four tones in *K'Chò*: high, low, rising, and falling. The first three are mutually contrastive, but the falling tone is found in a few grammatical items and mainly as the result of morphological coalescence. Vowel length is also contrastive in the language.

1.5.2 Word order typology

K'Chò, like most Tibeto-Burman languages, is an SOV language as shown in (1) and (2). It can also have OSV order in order to reflect the discourse prominence of or focusing on the object as in (3). When none of the arguments are overtly case-marked, SOV is the only acceptable interpretation as in (4).

(1)   S   V
        Vok   dóng-ci.
        pig   run.I-NF
        The pig ran.

(2)   S   O   V
        Ui   noh   vok htui-ci.
        dog   ERG   pig bite.I-NF
        The dog bit the pig.

(3)   O   S   V
        Vok   ui   noh htui-ci.
        pig   dog   ERG bite.I-NF
        It was the pig that the dog bit.

(4)   S   O   V
        Vok   ui   htui-ci.
        pig   dog   bite.I-NF
        The pig bit the dog/*The dog bit the pig.

1.5.3 Head-dependent ordering

K'Chò is a head final language as can be seen by (1) SOV word order (see 1.5.2); (2) TAM are marked by post-verbal particles; (3) nominal arguments are followed by case markers; (4) topic marker occurs after the topicalized arguments. *K'Chò* is a head-marking language in that the arguments are indexed with the head or the verb.

1.5.4 Case marking

K'Chò exhibits ergative-absolutive alignment in case marking on arguments as shown in (5) and (6).

(5) *Vok   shì(k)[19]-ci.*

Pig   die.I-NF

The pig died.

(6) *Ui   **noh**   vok   htui-ci.*
Dog   ERG   pig   bite.I-NF
The dog bit the pig.

Vok   S

(Ui-**noh**) Vok   A-ERG   P

The subject of intransitive sentence in (5) and the object in (6) are unmarked or marked absolutive, while the subject of transitive sentence in (6) is marked by *noh* 'ergative'.

The recipient in *K'Cho* is marked with the particle *am* as in (7).

(7) Om *noh* Yong   **am**   pàpai   pe(k)-ci.
Om ERG Yong   DAT   flower   give.I-NF
Om gave flowers to Yong.

1.5.5 Personal pronouns and possessive pronouns

K'Chò personal pronouns and possessive pronouns are shown in the following table (cf. see also Table 4 on person and number indexation on verbs). *K'Chò* generally distinguishes singular, dual, and plural. First person dual and plural numbers are further distinguished between exclusive and inclusive.

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[19] *(k)* is epenthetic /k/. Short open syllables are closed with /k/ when followed by *ci* 'Non-Future' and *khai* 'Future'. Notice that no epenthesis occurs in the case of an open syllable with diphthong (i.e., long) vowel in the same environment as shown in (6).

			Personal pronoun	Possessive pronoun
1st person	singular		kei	ka
	dual	exclusive	keiní	kani
		inclusive	nikní	ni
	plural	exclusive	keimi	kami
		inclusive	mik-mí	mi
2nd person	singular		nang	na
	dual		nangní	nani
	plural		nangmí	nami
3rd Person	singular		ani	a
	dual		ngani	ani
	plural		ngami	ami

Table 3: *K'Chò* personal pronouns and possessive pronouns

1.5.6 Verbal indexation

K'Chò verbs normally carry preverbal pronominal indexation and post-verbal number indexation of their syntactic subject and object in addition to TAM markers (see Bedell 2000). The *K'Chò* verb has two slightly different structures determined by the stem of the verb root as given below.

Stem I Verb Phrase structure

1/2SBJ.PER&NUM-1/2OBJ.PER–Stem.I – 1/2/3OBJ.NUM-TAM- 3SBJ.NUM (DL & PL)

Stem II Verb Phrase Structure

1/2/3SBJ.PER&NUM-1/2OBJ.PER -Stem-II - 1/2/3OBJ.NUM-TAM

The above verb phrase structures are exemplified by (8) and (9).

(8)a. *Keini noh a-k'hmó gui* **kani-Ø-hngu-gui-ci.**
1DL ERG child PL 1DL.SBJ-3OBJ-see.I-PL-NF
We two(exclusive) saw the children.

b. *A-k'hmó goi noh nangmi* **Ø-ning-hngu-gui-ci-goi.**
child DL ERG 2PL 3SBJ-2OBJ-see.I-PL-NF-DL
The two children saw you (plural).

(9)a. *Nangni noh a-k'hmó gui* **nani-Ø-hnguh-gui.**
2DL ERG child PL 2DL.SBJ-3OBJ-see.II-PL
You two saw the children.

b. *A-k'hmó goi noh keimi* **ani-na-hnguh-gui.**
child DL ERG 1PL(excl) 3DL.SBJ-2OBJ-see.II-PL
The two children saw us (plural).

Generally, the way syntactic subject and object are marked on the verb is restricted by three factors, namely verb stem, argument type, person.

First, stem I allows 1st and 2nd person subjects to be marked preverbally with respect to both person and number as shown in (8a). Third person subject is zero marked on stem I with respect to person, but it is marked post verbally with respect to number as (8b) shows. Stem II root, on the other hand, is preverbally marked with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person subject with reference to both person and number as shown in (9a&b).

Secondly, only 1st and 2nd person object are marked preverbally on both stem I and stem II with regard to person, and they are marked post verbally with reference to number as shown in (8b) and (9b). Third person object is zero marked with respect to person, but it is marked with respect to number post verbally as (8a) and (9a) show.

Person and number indexation of subject and object arguments on the verb are shown in table (4). (cf. possessive pronouns in 1.5.5).

Interestingly, the *K'Chò* 1st and 2nd person verbal indexations, unlike case marking on the arguments (cf. 1.5.4), show nominative-accusative.

(10) **Ka**-*ip-ci*.
1SG.SBJ-sleep.I-NF
I sleep/slept.

(11) **Ka**-**ning**-*hngu(k)-ci*.
1SG.SBJ-2OBJ-see.I-NF
I see/saw you.

(12) *Na*-*dóng-ci*.
2SG.SBJ-run.I-NF
You run/ran.

(13) *Na*-**na**-*hngu(k)-ci*.
2SG.SBJ-1OBJ-see.I-NF
You see/saw me.

			Pre-Verbal	Pre-Verbal	Verb Root	Post Verbal	Post Verbal
			SBJ.PER & NUM	OBJ. PER		OBJ. NUM	SBJ. NUM
1st person	Singular		*ka-*		Verb Root		
	Dual	Exclusive	*kani-*	*na-*		*-goi*	
		Inclusive	*ni-*				
	Plural	Exclusive	*kami-*			*-gui*	
		Inclusive	*mi-*				
2nd person	Singular		*na-*	*ning-*			
	Dual		*nani-*			*-goi*	
	Plural		*nami-*			*-gùi*	
3rd Person	Singular		*Ø/a-*	Ø			
	Dual		*Ø/ani-*	Ø		*-goi*	*-goi*
	Plural		*Ø/ami-*	Ø		*-gùi*	*-gùi*

Table 4: *K'Chò* person and number indexations on verb

		1st Person	2nd Person
Intransitive:	S	ka-	na-
Transitive	A P	ka- na-	na- ning-

Figure 5: Nominative accusative alignment of verbal indexation

If we look at the first person indexations on the verb in (10) and (11), the subject argument of both S and A are marked identically by *ka-*, but first person P in (13) is marked differently as *na-*. Likewise, identical morpheme *na-* is co-indexed with the verb with regard to the 2nd person S and A in (12) and (13). However, the co-indexation for 2nd person P is *ning-* as in (11).

1.5.7 Verb stem alternation

In *K'Chò*, like other Chin languages, many verbs have two distinct forms called stem I and stem II. This verb stem alternation is considered to be a Proto-Kuki-Chin feature. Different Kuki-Chin languages have retained this feature to a greater or lesser extent. In *K'Chò*, the majority of verb roots do not show overtly distinct forms. However, the two stems can be distinguished as they differ in the way they can be morphologically marked and in syntactic environments they can occur. Verbal alternation is an important grammatical notion in the language. The appropriate use of each stem is determined by the syntactic and/or pragmatic context.

1.5.8 Tense

K'Chò distinguishes two tenses: namely, Non-Future (which includes past and present time) and Future.

(14).   *A-k'hmó   ip-ci.*
        child   sleep.I-NF
        The child slept or is sleeping or sleeps.

(15)   *Mindat   ah   ka-hteit-khai.*
        Mindat   to   1SG.SBJ-go.I-F
        I will go to Mindat.

When the verb is marked with *-ci*, the verb is in the Non-Future tense, which means the tense can be either past or present as shown in (14). Future time is generally shown by *-khai* as (15) shows.

1.6 Orthography used in this thesis

The examples in this thesis are given in the *K'Chò* orthography. *K'Chò* has not completely standardized the orthography despite some effort by the local literature committee since it was developed in 1935. A few people have even proposed their own version of the orthography.

In this thesis, the original orthography is followed with some modifications. In the traditional orthography, tone and vowel length have not been marked. In this thesis, tone will be marked on lexical items, but grammatical items will be left unmarked for tone. Unmarked lexical items will represent High tone. Low tone will be marked with the diacritic (`), and rising tone with (´). Long vowels will be written by doubling the vowel. For more discussion on tone in the language, see Nolan (2000 and 2006).

1.7 Research goal

This present research aims at explaining verb stem alternation in *K'Chò* by uncovering the conditioning factors for the stem choice.

The study of the phonological aspects of stem alternation in the language has been conducted by Nolan (2003). Thus, this research will serve as a complementary study to the existing phonological study of stem changes in the language, bringing a more comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon in the language. Moreover, the research will also shed light on the verb stem studies across Chin languages.

1.8 Hypothesis

This thesis is based on the following hypothesis.

> Verb stem choice cannot be attributed to only a single factor. The stem choice in *K'Chò* can only be described by considering two parameters: namely syntactic and pragmatic factors.

1.9 Research Methodology

This research is not based on a particular formalized linguistic theory; it is more descriptive in nature aiming to provide data and analysis for any syntactic theory.

The steps in the analysis and description are as follows:

First, all possible syntactic environments of the two variant stems of a verb are collected. The author, as a native speaker, largely depended on native intuition and on a few existing texts in the language for such work. Some previous verb stem studies in other Chin languages, particularly *Lai* and *Daai,* also are helpful resources for identifying certain similar syntactic environments.

The accumulated syntactic environments are sorted and classified into three main syntactic levels, namely intra-clausal, inter-clausal, and matrix clause levels.

Then, the data is analyzed for pinpointing the determining factors triggering the stem choice.

Some example sentences are adapted from texts and others examples are constructed by the author. All the examples are checked by two native speakers for validity and naturalness: Rev. Ng'Thang Ngai Om and B. Ghung Om, who are acting members of the *K'Chò* Literature Committee.