

GENDER IN KHASI NOUNS

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Every Khasi noun is preceded by a gender indicator commonly known as an "article," a term borrowed for reasons of convenience from the grammar of Indo-European. This gender indicator is repeated before the verb, and is then known as a pronominal verbal prefix. A morpheme identical with the nominal article and the verbal pronominal prefix functions in free form as a personal pronoun. It might therefore be said that the Khasi pronoun occurs as a free morpheme by itself and as a bound form before nouns and verbs. In any case, the pronominal and preverbal forms always agree with respect to number and gender.

Gender differentiation in Khasi only occurs in the singular. Ki 'plural' and ?i, marking small objects and respect or endearment for members of one's family or clan, have no gender. In the singular the two articles distinguishing gender are ka and ?u, which are known traditionally as feminine and masculine respectively. However, ka also functions in a neuter capacity when preceding verbs: kata ka mut 'that means', ka loŋ ka?ey-ka?ey ka ba phlla 'it is something which is strange'. As far as the verb phrase is concerned, therefore, the designation feminine is not altogether satisfactory. Since the present description is restricted to gender in Khasi nouns, however, the terms feminine (hereafter F) and masculine (hereafter M) may be used without risk of ambiguity.

What we want to ascertain, specifically, is how the two genders of Khasi are distributed. Are we concerned with a truly grammatical gender, as in Latin or German? Does the phonological shape of the noun determine to which gender it belongs? Does morphology have any bearing on the problem? Does the language divide nouns into animate and inanimate categories? Is

there any other indication by which the student of Khasi can infer the gender of given nouns? The Khasis themselves are inclined to think that nice, small creatures and things are F while big, ugly creatures and things are M.¹ However, the facts prove otherwise.

Morphology decides gender in only two cases: noun compounds beginning with *jiŋ-* are F, those beginning with *noŋ-* are M. Both of these morphemes combine with verbs and yield mostly abstract and actor nouns respectively. For example,

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------|--------------------|------------|
| <i>ʔim</i> | 'to live | <i>ka jiŋʔim</i> | 'life' |
| <i>khura</i> | 'to search | <i>ka jiŋkhura</i> | 'search' |
| <i>khayi</i> | 'to trade' | <i>ʔu noŋkhayi</i> | 'merchant' |
| <i>khmiʔ</i> | 'to look for' | <i>ʔu noŋkhmiʔ</i> | 'spy' |

From a close examination of 1,400 forms² I find that Khasi nouns follow four different classifications. By far the largest class is based on meaning, and to this extent it is reasonable to say that Khasi has semantic gender. In addition, it exhibits natural gender for human beings and many animals; it has classificatory gender based on shape; and, finally, there appears to be a residue of arbitrary gender assignments which can only be termed grammatical gender. Such a diversity of gender types is probably to be explained on the basis of influences from other languages spoken in areas bordering upon the Khasi Hills, namely Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman. Rather than explore these influences, I shall confine myself here to the facts of Khasi gender as I understand them.

By far the larger group of nouns in Khasi are F: in my

¹This belief may have been influenced by Bengali, which is said to distinguish large and coarse from delicate and pleasant objects by suffixation. See Jules Bloch, *Indo-Aryan* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1965), 149-52.

²For this survey I have arbitrarily used all of the nouns in my forthcoming dictionary from the beginning to the letter *p*. Time alone precluded examination of a larger corpus.

data the proportion is 888 F items (64%) to 505 M items (36%). By deducting 220 F compounds with *jiŋ-* we obtain a possibly more meaningful distribution of 57% F to 43% M items.

On semantic criteria, the following classes can be established for F nouns:

1. female human beings.
2. female spirits and goddesses.
3. female animals.
4. most small animals (except insects).
5. domestic fowls and fishes.
6. family and clan groupings.
7. external parts of the human body.
8. illnesses (except skin diseases).
9. softwood trees and shrubs.
10. foodstuffs (except spices).
11. measures.
12. countries and cities.
13. musical instruments.
14. clothing.
15. tools and implements (except those used for boring and digging).
16. ring-shaped jewelry.
17. seasons, days of the week, divisions of the twenty-four-hour day.
18. financial and legal terms.
19. natural forces and landscape features.
20. abstract nouns.

The following classes have M gender:

1. male human beings.
2. evil spirits and male ghosts.
3. male animals.
4. most large animals.
5. most insects.
6. most internal organs of the human body.
7. singing and talking birds.
8. most plants (trees, shrubs, flowers).
9. skin diseases.
10. raw edibles (vegetables, fruits, spices).
11. boring and digging implements.
12. jewelry other than ring-shaped articles.
13. long and thin (stick-like) objects.
14. fine particles suspended in the air.

It goes without saying that it would be rash to attempt to list every single semantic class without possessing native competence in the language. It is nevertheless possible to offer

a useful generalization: all Khasi nouns are F unless they fall into one of the fourteen M classes.

I now proceed to illustrate these semantic classes and to cite inconsistencies with the general pattern.³

1. *Male human beings.*

| | |
|------------|-------------------|
| ?u mahajon | 'merchant'. |
| ?u kuki | 'a Lushai'. |
| ?u lqdo? | 'priest'. |
| ?u mraaw | 'slave'. |
| ?u kpa | 'father'. |
| ?u kñi | 'maternal uncle'. |
| ?u ba? | 'elder brother'. |

2. *Spirits and ghosts.*

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| ?u knraat | 'master; Christian God'. |
| ?u khrey | 'an evil spirit'. |
| ?u thlen | 'an evil snake god'. |
| ?u mnsiem ba khuoj | 'the Holy Ghost'. |
| ?u kloŋ ?u skaaw | 'a cleaned-out gourd kept as a deity'. |
| ?u sna-yap ?u Duncan | 'Duncan's ghost'. |

3. *Female human beings.*

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| ka kmɪ | 'mother'. |
| ka kyaaw kurim | 'mother-in-law'. |
| ka mem | 'a white lady'. |
| ka koyna | 'virgin'. |

4. *Benevolent spirits and deities.*⁴

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| ka khuri | 'a household goddess'. |
| ka ley-?um toŋ | 'goddess who safeguards drinking water'. |
| ka loŋ kur | 'guardian goddess of a clan'. |
| ka sna-yap ka tmmen | 'ghost of an old woman'. |

³The numbers of the following sections are not intended to correspond with the class numbers used above.

⁴Most, but not all, of these are F.

5. *Male domestic animals.*

| | |
|--------------|---------------|
| ʔu masi daap | 'bullock'. |
| ʔu sniaŋ | 'male pig'. |
| ʔu lnraaw | 'young bull'. |
| ʔu key-sop | 'roebuck'. |
| ʔu kulaay | 'horse'. |
| ʔu ksew | 'dog'. |

6. *Female domestic animals.*

| | |
|---------|-----------|
| ka masi | 'cow'. |
| ka blaŋ | 'goat'. |
| ka miaw | 'cat'. |
| ka piru | 'turkey'. |

7. *Large animals.*

Certain large animals are F, but these are definitely in the minority:

| | |
|-----------|------------------|
| ka ʔut | 'camel'. |
| ka skey | 'barking deer'. |
| ka huleeŋ | 'black ape'. |
| ka dŋrem | 'bear'. |
| ka hu | 'porpoise'. |
| ka khiat | 'mountain goat'. |

Most other large animals are M:

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| ʔu khleŋ | 'eagle'. |
| ʔu mnthna | 'bison'. |
| ʔu mrsiaŋ | 'fox'. |
| ʔu hati | 'elephant'. |
| ʔu khla | 'tiger'. |
| ʔu dŋoŋ | 'a small bear'. |
| ʔu ksar | 'fox'. |
| ʔu kada | 'donkey'. |
| ʔu muoj, ʔu snreʔ | 'buffalo'. |

Unexplained is the M gender of the small bear in contrast with the F gender of the larger bear. For most larger and/or domestic animals both articles, ka and ʔu, are used for the approp-

riate sex. If insects, birds and fishes are assigned to their own categories, few small animals remain to be discussed. But ka khnaay 'mouse, rat' seems to confirm the supposition that size is a basis of gender distinction. Note also

| | |
|--------------|---------------------|
| ka naay-luom | 'mole'. |
| ka naay-saaw | 'small hill-mouse'. |
| ka naay-yieŋ | 'house rat'. |

as opposed to ?u naay-pilaŋ 'large hill-rat'. Toads, frogs, bats and snails are F, while squirrels, ferrets and tadpoles are M.

8. *Birds.*

For one not intimately acquainted with the fauna of the Khasi Hills it is difficult to divide the names of birds on the basis of their English translations. Using the talking, singing or noise-making ability of the birds in question as a major criterion is therefore conjectural on my part. The following birds are M:

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| ?u tuta | 'parrot'. |
| ?u lŋlit-lŋlit | 'parrot'. |
| ?u kbej | 'hawk'. |
| ?u Intriaŋ | 'playful bird'. |
| ?u klew | 'peacock'. |
| ?u ja lkup | 'bird saying <i>kup-kup</i> '. |
| ?u pukni | 'eagle'. |
| ?u ja l'ej | 'small songbird'. |
| ?u ?iar-rŋku? | 'cock'. |
| ?u ko? karaŋ | 'hornbill'. |
| ?u moyna | 'myna'. |

These M birds stand in contrast with the following F birds:

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| ka khwak | 'bird of evil omen'. |
| ka lntaj | 'swallow'. |
| ka laŋ-brkaaw | 'bird that never touches ground'. |
| ka mrit | 'migratory winter bird'. |
| ka lorni | 'shrike'. |

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| ka puka | 'egret'. |
| ka piru | 'turkey'. |
| ka dkho? | 'owl'. |
| ka bru | 'owl'. |
| ka paro | 'pigeon'. |

Neither size nor domesticity seems to be the basis of distinction in these cases. Fowl, like other domestic creatures, can be marked either ka or ?u, depending on their sex. With the eagle, hawk and peacock large size could explain their M gender, although several other large birds are F: the owl, egret, turkey, and goose. The word for 'bird' itself, ka sim, is F, as is ka sim-khar 'a small bird'. But other compounds with sim are M. For example,

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| ?u sim pu? dreŋ | 'woodpecker'. |
| ?u sim so? pho | 'woodpecker'. |
| ?u sim tŋwreŋ | 'water ouzel'. |
| ?u sim tuŋ | 'a black bird which sings all day'. |
| ?u sim paj pnoŋ | 'a marsh bird'. |

One who lives for the welfare of others is known as ?u sim pa? sim karo, while a truthful person is called ?u sim soŋ; both of these appear to allude to male humans. By contrast, ka sim laay dreŋ 'a gossip' seems to imply a woman. Three birds have the diminutive article ?i:

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ?i sim kraay | 'a bird resembling a lark' |
| ?i sim kllaay do? dit do? daŋ | 'wagtail' |
| ?i sim pu? dreŋ | 'woodpecker' ⁵ |

The article ?i in the case of ?i sim ?i pa? klak-klak 'magpie', literally 'the bird that sings *klak-klak*', seems quite out of place if we consider the size of North American magpies.

9. *Fishes.*

All species of fish appear to be M, whether they have a

⁵Note that the same term has also been cited under ?u above.

special name of their own (e.g., ?u ktuŋ, ?u maañ, ?u puria) or whether they are compounded with ?u kha 'fish' (e.g., ?u kha saaw, ?u kha sʔiŋ, ?u kha raŋ). The flesh of fish in general, however, is ka doʔ kha.

10. *Insects.*

The classification of insects is baffling, for their gender distinctions defy rationalization. Their ability to crawl or to fly or to make noises, or even their shape, apparently cannot be used to assign them to one or the other gender; the same may be said for their ability to annoy people. The following are M:

| | |
|------------|-----------------|
| ?u jabrʔum | 'dragonfly'. |
| ?u koor | 'mole cricket'. |
| ?u ksañ | 'maggot'. |
| ?u prjoŋ | 'mosquito'. |
| ?u kbeer | 'white ant'. |
| ?u thlrem | 'leech'. |

These contrast with the following F nouns:

| | |
|---------------|--------------|
| ka thapbawa | 'spider'. |
| ka krbeŋ | 'mantis'. |
| ka jnreñ | 'flea'. |
| ka ñaŋ-kalaw | 'cockroach'. |
| ka dkhap | 'tick'. |
| ka thap balıʔ | 'butterfly'. |

If we were to eliminate ka ñaŋ-badiŋ 'glowworm' and ka ñaŋ-thaŋ-doʔ 'moth' from the F list and ?u ñaŋ-tari 'wireworm' from the M list, it might be possible to divide insects into flying (M) and nonflying (F). But such a division does not seem to be warranted by the facts.

The term for both 'insect' and 'worm' is ?u khñiaŋ, which is reduced to ñaŋ- when occurring in composition. It is worth noting that lizards are assigned to this same class:

| | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| ka ñaŋ-blen | 'a limbless lizard'. |
| ka ñaŋ-bšiaʔ | 'chameleon'. |

ka ñaŋ-bliar 'a small lizard'.

Evidently all of these are F.

11. *Diseases affecting the skin.*

It seems that the Khasis attribute all illnesses leaving visible marks on the skin to the effect of insects. Be this as it may, all of the names of such ailments are compounds with the element ñaŋ-. Most of these are M:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| ʔu ñaŋ-bley | 'chicken pox'. |
| ʔu ñaŋ-prsit | 'measles'. |
| ʔu ñaŋ-lŋkut | 'leprosy'. |
| ʔu ñaŋ-thllrw | 'smallpox'. |
| ʔu ñaŋ-dkhiat | 'scabies'. |
| ʔu ñaŋ-khriat | 'goose flesh' |
| ʔu ñaŋ-šit | 'prickly heat' |
| ʔu ñaŋ-thllrej | 'thrush (in infants)' |

There are four compounds, however, which are F:

| | |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| ka ñaŋ-khnap | 'foot-and-mouth disease'. |
| ka ñaŋ-trsim | 'whitlow'. |
| ka ñaŋ-mat | 'conjunctivitis'. |
| ka ñaŋ-trew | 'septic sore' |

Other skin diseases, not compounds of ñaŋ-, are also M:

| | |
|-----------|-------------|
| ʔu khaaj | 'ringworm'. |
| ʔu pršen | 'pimple'. |
| ʔu dkhiat | 'rash'. |

On the other hand, two terms for gonorrhoea, ʔu ñaŋ-truʔ and ka kulia, have different genders.

12. *Body parts.*

Most soft internal organs of the human body are M:

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| ʔu kloŋ snaam | 'heart'. |
| ʔu taŋ-kro | 'windpipe'. |
| ʔu khillaay | 'kidney'. |
| ʔu doʔ daʔ | 'uvula'. |

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| ʔu snri | 'womb'. |
| ʔu thlliej | 'tongue'. |
| ʔu ʔvoj | 'vagina'. |
| ʔu ksaŋ | 'bile'. |
| ʔu doʔ nuot | 'liver'. |
| ʔu khlaap | 'spleen'. |

The tonsils are usually known as ʔi doʔ daʔ, in contrast with ʔu doʔ daʔ 'uvula'. An internal body part which is not soft is ʔu buot luom 'spine', also M. I have no explanation for the circumstance that ka snrer 'intestine' is not also M.

A few noninternal body parts are also M:

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| ʔu šʔreŋ rupa tlli | 'collarbone'. |
| ʔu soʔ pet | 'navel'. |
| ʔu liʔ | 'foreskin'. |
| ʔu šñuʔ | 'hair'. |
| ʔu thloʔ | 'penis'. |
| ʔu pan khlləŋ | 'tuft of hair'. |
| ʔu troŋ | |

The M gender of two other forms of external body hair, ʔu tmaaŋ 'mustache' and ʔu maaŋ moʔ 'beard', suggests that the forms just given for 'hair' and 'tuft of hair' might be assigned to the class of long, thin objects.⁶ In the term for 'navel', the element soʔ 'fruit' is always M. This leaves only three M words unexplained: ʔu šʔreŋ rupa tlli, ʔu liʔ, and ʔu thloʔ. All other body parts, internal or external, soft or hard, are F.

The systematic separation of inner organs and outer body parts is perhaps best illustrated by compounds formed with the element doʔ 'flesh', which is F. On the one hand we have terms for outer or largely visible parts which are not organs with the expected F gender: ka doʔ bnrat 'gums', ka doʔ len 'gums without teeth', ka doʔ kruŋ 'rib', ka doʔ ksaʔ 'muscle'. On the other hand, we have inner organs of M gender: ʔu doʔ khloŋ

⁶Cf. section 26.

'heart', ?u do? nuot 'liver', ?u do? da? 'uvula', ?u do? laap 'spleen'. Compounds in which do? means 'meat' rather than 'flesh' are F, as ka do? sniaŋ 'pork'.

13. *Plants.*

The Khasis divide plant life into three categories: ?u dreq 'the tree', ?u srej 'the bamboo', and ?u jhur 'the vegetable'. To these we may add the word for 'flower', ?u sntiw. As can be seen, all of these are of M gender. And indeed the majority of names for individual trees, bamboos, vegetables and flowers prove to be M, though not all.

| | |
|-------------|----------------------|
| ?u ?olip | 'olive tree'. |
| ?u kdaŋ | 'variety of bamboo'. |
| ?u kdoor | 'variety of bamboo'. |
| ?u ja mn?ir | 'variety of shrub'. |
| ?u ja mnrey | 'variety of shrub'. |

are M, but the following are F:

| | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| ka kya | 'simul tree'. |
| ka bra? | 'upas tree'. |
| ka krej | 'a hardwood tree'. |
| ka doŋ-matla | 'variety of bamboo'. |
| ka kse? | 'pine tree'. |
| ka tlaay | 'palm'. |
| ka kaañ | 'species of bush'. |
| ka bniap | 'species of shrub'. |

Likewise F are at least twenty other kinds of tree or shrub.⁷

Two gender reversals, though not in the same direction, are taking place for wood names: ka dreq 'wood' < ?u dreq 'tree' and ?u kse? 'pinewood' > ka kse? 'pine tree'.

⁷My first Khasi informant, a man, told me many years ago that softwood trees were F while hardwood trees were M. The F gender of ka krej, the name of an unidentified hardwood tree, appears to contradict this generalization. My more recent informants have all been women, who have had little information about tree fiber.

Most other terms for wood or wooden materials are F, as

| | |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| ka bliiat | 'a hard wood'. |
| ka bti | 'a wood of reddish color'. |
| ka lntaq | 'plank'. |
| ka lq̄qot | 'block of wood'. |

But

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| ?u d̄reŋ du? | 'walking stick'. |
| ?u d̄reŋ l̄q̄knap | 'small piece of shaped wood'. |
| ?u d̄reŋ bllaan | 'railroad trestle, sleeper'. |

preclude formulation of a rule according to which live wood calls for one gender while dead wood calls for the other. As a matter of fact, half of all tools and objects made of wood are M, the other half F; a similar proportion is found for the tree names in my corpus: 16 M items to 19 F items.

Herbaceous plants are mostly M:

| | |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| ?u phlaŋ | 'grass'. |
| ?u bet | 'sedge'. |
| ?u bhaŋ | 'wild hemp'. |
| ?u kdaj | 'variety of reed'. |
| ?u koor | 'variety of reed'. |
| ?u kha? | 'variety of reed'. |
| ?u l̄mphiaŋ | 'variety of thatch grass'. |
| ?u der-phiaŋ | 'variety of thatch grass'. |
| ?u knbat | 'weed'. |
| ?u kraay | 'millet'. |
| ?u l̄nnaay | 'reed'. |
| ?u kba | 'paddy'. |

Moreover,

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| ?u trkhaŋ | 'fern'. |
| ?u pnat | 'branch'. |
| ?u jrmi | 'creeper'. |
| ?u d̄uma sla | 'tobacco leaf'. |
| ?u jntaŋ | 'stalk'. |

are all M, while

| | |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| ka baden | 'irrigated paddy field'. |
| ka kop | 'corn husk'. |
| ka lmpen | 'tree trunk'. |
| ka lmmu? | 'branch with green leaves'. |

are F. It would seem that the growing plant itself is M, that parts of the plant are F. Certain inconsistencies do not lend themselves to resolution. For example, ?u khur met 'outer part of bamboo' and ?u khllreŋ 'inner part of bamboo' are both M, but ka khoj kaj 'inner part of the banana plant' is F. Ka sla 'leaf; page, surface' is F but ?u sla tiw-kulaap 'rose leaf' is M.

All vegetables without exception are M:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| ?u kajoor | 'carrot'. |
| ?u jarañ | 'vegetable of sour taste'. |
| ?u brthiw | 'pulse'. |
| ?u knde? | 'ground corn'. |
| ?u kubi | 'cabbage'. |
| ?u mator | 'pea'. |
| ?u khaaw | 'uncooked rice'. |
| ?u mula ~ muli | 'radish'. |
| ?u lnniaŋ | 'long bitter-tasting root'. |
| ?u paloŋ | 'spinach'. |
| ?u piskot | 'squash'. |
| ?u piat | 'onion'. |
| ?u phan | 'potato'. |

Almost all flowers are M, presumably because their names are compounds of ?u sntiw 'flower':

| | |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| ?u tiw do? maaw | 'a small golden flower'. |
| ?u tiw jalŋksiaŋ | 'rhododendron'. |
| ?u tiw kulaap | 'rose'. |
| ?u tiw jamiyaŋ | 'violet'. |
| ?u tiw japaŋ | 'bluebell'. |

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| ʔu trw kloŋ | 'orchid'. |
| ʔu trw lasubon | 'a yellow flower'. |

Monomorphemic flower names include ʔu loŋ 'foxglove' and ʔu jaʔut 'unidentified flower', likewise M. The only exceptions found are ka laŋtati 'lily' and ka pašoor kaj 'flower of the plantain', both F.

The form ja does double duty: ʔu ja 'vegetable' forms 23 M compounds, while ka ja 'rice' forms 23 F compounds, all of the latter designating different ways in which rice is cooked.

There are over a hundred M compounds with ʔu soʔ 'fruit', such as

| | |
|--------------|---------------|
| ʔu soʔ mnken | 'pepper'. |
| ʔu soʔ trun | 'pineapple'. |
| ʔu soʔ ʔapul | 'apple'. |
| ʔu soʔ saaw | 'tomato'. |
| ʔu soʔ šaan | 'strawberry'. |
| ʔu soʔ šur | 'wild pear'. |

My data include only four monomorphemic fruit names:

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|
| ʔu kismis | 'raisin'. |
| ʔu khajur | 'reddish date'. |
| ʔu kwaay | 'areca nut'. |
| ʔu jayur | 'unidentified pungent fruit'. |

Only one fruit name is F: ka kaj 'banana'.

The form soʔ is sometimes used metaphorically, as in ʔu soʔ khaaw rndaŋ 'throat, Adam's apple' and ʔu soʔ šnoŋ or ʔu soʔ sʔrem 'stranger, alien'. There are four soʔ compounds of F gender, but only one of these has the concrete sense of 'fruit': ka soʔ mariʔ 'pine cone'. The other three have transferred meanings: ka soʔ khlijaŋ 'scar', ka soʔ sat 'difficulty', and ka soʔ pduŋ 'target (made of paddy husks)'. A fifth compound, ka soʔ trew 'sore caused by scratching' has an alternate form, satrew, and may have been altered by folk etymology.

All spices, finally, are M: ʔu musla, ʔu ney til, ʔu loŋ,

and ?u barobakhor.

14. *Prepared foods.*

The inventory of prepared foods is dominated by compounds with ka ja 'rice', which are therefore F.

Apart from these,

| | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| ka makhon | 'butter'. |
| ka malaay | 'cream'. |
| ka ṅap | 'honey'. |
| ka mithay | 'molasses'. |
| ka khi | 'ghee'. |
| ka khiir | 'rice pudding'. |

are F, while other food names are M, as

| | |
|------------|----------|
| ?u ?ata | 'flour'. |
| ?u kpu rew | 'flour'. |
| ?u kpu | 'bread'. |
| ?u kpu ?im | 'dough'. |

Certain categories are predominantly F. These include terms for legal and monetary concepts (most of which are Indo-Aryan loans), musical instruments, and names of countries. Abstract nouns are F without exception.

15. *Law.*

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| ka ?iktīar | 'authority'. |
| ka jutaṅ | 'oath'. |
| ka dostabit | 'agreement'. |
| ka patok | 'jail'. |
| ka hatkari | 'handcuffs'. |
| ka kašari | 'courthouse' |

16. *Money.*

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| ka khroṅ | 'tax'. |
| ka khajna | 'tax'. |
| ka kamay | 'income'. |
| ka plia? | 'cash'. |

ka peysa 'money'.

17. *Musical instruments.*

ka bisli 'flute'.

ka duytara 'harp'.

ka bela 'violin'.

ka ksiq 'drum'.

18. *Countries.*

ka ri 'country'.

ka lqka 'Sri Lanka'.

ka bilat 'England'.

ka phran 'France'.

19. *Abstract nouns.*

ka mnraañ 'shame'.

ka khruot 'difficulty'.

ka boor 'strength'.

ka ?iman 'honor'.

ka rwiaq 'fate, luck'.

ka jot 'reputation'.

20. *Geographical terms.*

Of 50 geographical or topographical terms only five are M:

?u maaw 'stone'⁸

?u š?iap 'sand'.

?u lnstog 'turf, sod'.

?u luom 'mountain, hill'.

?u pahaar 'mountain, hill'.

Both 'stone' and 'hill' could be considered of spherical shape (see section 22), but 'sand' and 'turf' cannot.

Examples of the many F terms are

ka wa? duoj 'stream'.

ka pubon 'cave'.

ka lqkha 'field'.

⁸All compounds with ?u maaw are likewise M.

| | |
|----------|----------------|
| ka bneŋ | 'sky, heaven'. |
| ka lhuʔ | 'valley'. |
| ka bañun | 'swamp'. |

The four cardinal points are likewise F:

| | |
|-----------|----------|
| ka miʔ-ŋi | 'east'. |
| ka sep-ŋi | 'west'. |
| ka rum | 'south'. |
| ka neŋ | 'north'. |

21. *Divisions of time.*

Almost all time periods are F, as is 'time' itself, ka poor.

| | |
|------------|----------------------|
| ka miaj | 'stipulated period'. |
| ka knta | 'hour'. |
| ka sŋi | 'day'. |
| ka yew duʔ | 'first market-day'. |
| ka lŋka | 'second market-day'. |
| ka noŋkrem | 'third market-day'. |
| ka mret | 'night'. |
| ka tayew | 'week'. |
| ka prʔem | 'spring'. |
| ka liyur | 'summer'. |
| ka snraay | 'autumn'. |
| ka tlaŋ | 'winter'. |
| ka snem | 'year'. |

The seven weekdays according to the Christian calendar are all F owing to the fact that they are compounds of ka sŋi:

| | |
|------------------|--------------|
| ka sŋi ʔu bley | 'Sunday'. |
| ka sŋi balaŋ | 'Wednesday'. |
| ka sŋi thoʔ dɪeŋ | 'Friday'. |

All the months, however, are M, as is ʔu bnaay 'moon, month':

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| ʔu (naay-) klla lŋkot | 'January'. |
| ʔu lbeer | 'March'. |

?u jllirw 'June'.

22. *Masses and dimensions.*

Terms designating groups, measurements and shapes in general are all F, with one exception: ?u sqwreŋ 'circumference'. This tends to confirm the supposition that spherical shapes (section 23) are associated with M gender. Examples from my data are

| | |
|-----------|------------|
| ka kneer | 'width'. |
| ka knjaŋ | 'height'. |
| ka huot | 'group'. |
| ka liaŋ | 'side'. |
| ka nuoŋ | 'segment'. |
| ka lnniap | 'slice'. |

23. *Spherical containers.*

Most vessels of spherical shape are M:

| | |
|----------|-------------------------|
| ?u braw | 'vessel'. |
| ?u khriw | 'pot, vessel'. |
| ?u buyam | 'earthenware jar'. |
| ?u ketli | 'kettle'. |
| ?u dekši | 'large cooking vessel'. |
| ?u kum | 'pitcher'. |
| ?u khra | 'earthenware vessel'. |
| ?u lwa | 'container for liquor'. |

The term for 'circumference', ?u sqwreŋ, has been cited in section 22. However, ka lŋwiar 'circle' is F, as are the following receptacles:

| | |
|----------|-------------------|
| ka khuri | 'cup, bowl'. |
| ka pliaŋ | 'plate'. |
| ka karay | 'cooking vessel'. |

24. *Natural phenomena.*

Under the head of natural phenomena my corpus contains 37 F items as against only 6 M items. The gender of the latter would seem to defy rationalization:

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| ʔu khnñuʔ | ʔu jumaay | 'earthquake'. |
| ʔu prthat | | 'thunder'. |
| ʔu bnaay | | 'moon'. |
| ʔu khluor | | 'star'. |
| ʔu lʔoʔ | | 'cloud'. |
| ʔu slap | | 'rain'. |

These stand in contrast to such F items as

| | | |
|---------------|--|---------------|
| ka krtiaʔ | | 'rainstorm'. |
| ka klloŋ | | 'cyclone'. |
| ka lʔeer | | 'wind, air'. |
| ka jhum | | 'vapor, gas'. |
| ka diŋ | | 'fire'. |
| ka dew | | 'wave'. |
| ka jwaar bata | | 'tide'. |
| ka sŋi | | 'sun'. |

To ʔu lʔoʔ 'cloud' and ʔu slap 'rain', given above, one might add three other M items and so set up a class of M forms designating matter consisting of fine particles: ʔu bin-bin 'atom', ʔu pum-pum 'dust', and ʔu phnyoŋ or ʔu priŋ 'soot'. But the F nouns just given for 'rainstorm', 'cyclone' and 'vapor' seem to rule out such a class.

25. *Tools and implements.*

Tools used for insertion, boring and pounding are M:⁹

| | | |
|---------------------|--|----------------|
| ʔu proʔ | | 'fork, prong'. |
| ʔu pañtali | | 'chisel'. |
| ʔu borma | | 'auger'. |
| ʔu tiar khrwaj khir | | 'screwdriver'. |
| ʔu piskot | | 'screwdriver'. |
| ʔu trnem | | 'hammer'. |

These contrast with tools and implements of F gender which are not used for these operations:

⁹Ka phar 'ploughshare' does not fit into this category. Cf. section 27.

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| ka koorni | 'trowel'. |
| ka mataḡ | 'carpenter's square'. |
| ka kurat | 'saw'. |
| ka kriaʔ | 'sieve'. |
| ka koor | 'machine'. |
| ka kopja | 'hinge'. |
| ka khanši | 'scissors'. |
| ka nap | 'tongs'. |

Weapons and certain articles of sports equipment can be considered a subclass of tools. Observe how the following conform with the "insertion" class given above:

| | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| ʔu jathi | 'spear'. |
| ʔu khnam | 'arrow'. |
| ʔu khapoor | 'dart'. |
| ʔu khap | 'prong'. |
| ʔu khwaay doʔ kha | 'fishhook'. |
| ʔu rḡwianḡ | 'fishing rod'. |

The term for 'bullet', ʔu kuli, may be M because of its spherical shape (see section 23). Other weapons are F, as is ka thma 'battle': ka krit or ka waj-lam 'sword' and ka man 'cannon'.

Note that most of the M items just listed might, with perhaps equal justice, be assigned on nonsemantic grounds to the class of long and slender (stick-like) objects to be mentioned next (section 26). We seem to have here a case in which the article has assumed the function of a former classifier. Possibly fine, dust-like matter (section 24) derives its M gender from the same cause.

26. *Long, thin objects.*

Terms relating to house construction and terms designating articles of clothing or jewelry and other items of daily use are M when the objects in question are long and thin.¹⁰

¹⁰Bloch, *op.cit.*, draws a parallel between the treatment of stick-like objects in Bengali and the use of classifiers in Thai.

Note the M gender of the following longitudinal members for house construction:

| | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| ʔu knši | 'support beam for roof'. |
| ʔu khnoq | 'joist supporting plank flooring'. |
| ʔu khuti | 'a short post'. |
| ʔu bim | 'beam'. |
| ʔu paya | 'concrete pillar'. |
| ʔu patriw | 'purlin'. |

Of 43 house-connected terms only 10 are M. These contrast with the far more numerous F terms, such as

| | |
|-------------|----------------|
| ka brthap | 'partition'. |
| ka dwar | 'door'. |
| ka knroʔ | 'wall'. |
| ka krdan | 'step, shelf'. |
| ka khilon | 'archway'. |
| ka khilonši | 'scaffolding'. |

Most articles of clothing for men and women alike are F:

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| ka dhara | 'Khasi formal dress'. |
| ka jaañ | 'clothes'. |
| ka muja | 'stockings'. |
| ka noʔtasor | 'silk dhoti'. |
| ka pakri | 'turban'. |
| ka juti | 'shoe'. |
| ka paṅkha | 'fan'. |
| ka jmphoṅ | 'man's sleeveless coat'. |

But long and narrow articles of attire are M:

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| ʔu krdot rndaṅ | 'necktie'. |
| ʔu pañ-poʔ | 'belt'. |
| ʔu labon | 'scarf'. |
| ʔu maphlor | 'muffler'. |

All pieces of jewelry that form a closed circle, such as rings, bracelets and armlets, are F:

| | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| ka ksaʔ | 'ring'. |
| ka khaɗu | 'bracelet'. |
| ka mahu | 'armlet'. |
| ka khayla | 'earring'. |
| ka nanti | 'earring'. |
| ka šoʔ škoor | 'earring'. |
| ka lɣkrneɣ | 'earring'. |
| ka nyay | 'baby's earring'. |
| ka mukor kndor | 'ear pendant'. |

By contrast, jewelry that does not form a closed circle, and in particular jewelry of essentially linear design, is M:

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| ʔu knjri ksiaɾ | 'gold chain'. |
| ʔu kpiɛɣ | 'string of beads'. |
| ʔu payla sada | 'string of beads'. |
| ʔu konopaat | 'choker'. |
| ʔu kuboj | 'amulet, charm'. |
| ʔu bajubon | 'bracelet' ¹¹ |

Other long and thin objects of M gender, not readily divisible into semantic classes, are:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| ʔu lañ | 'line'. |
| ʔu tllaay | 'rope'. |
| ʔu mnja | 'kite string'. |
| ʔu ksaay | 'thread'. |
| ʔu janari | 'brad'. |
| ʔu mombati | 'candle'. |
| ʔu khulom sneer | 'writing pen'. |
| ʔu let | 'pencil'. |
| ʔu jiqteʔ | 'string'. |
| ʔu jiqpruoj | 'match'. |

The last two compounds should by all accounts be F because of the constituent jiq-. There must be a factor which converts

¹¹Presumably a bracelet that opens up.

them to M gender, and this factor is evidently their shape.¹²

27. *Loanwords.*

The gender of borrowed Khasi nouns is not inherited from the source language. Hindi nouns are assigned gender in terms of the Khasi system which has been described. As it happens, most Hindi nouns prove to be F in Khasi, though the following M nouns fit into the Khasi system:

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------|------|
| ʔu muktiar | 'advocate'. | \$1 |
| ʔu ʔaŋgret | 'an evil spirit'. | \$2 |
| ʔu kartus | 'cartridge'. | \$26 |
| ʔu jada | 'a vegetable'. | \$13 |
| ʔu ʔata | 'flour'. | \$14 |
| ʔu bilor ~ bitor | 'bottle'. | \$23 |

Loans from English are assigned gender on the same basis:

| | | |
|-------------|----------------------|------|
| ʔu plidaar | 'pleader, advocate'. | \$1 |
| ʔu pulit | 'policeman'. | \$1 |
| ʔu ʔaŋel | 'angel'. | \$4 |
| ʔu barli | 'barley'. | \$13 |
| ʔu bim | 'beam'. | \$26 |
| ʔu pin | 'pin'. | \$26 |
| ʔu bol poyn | 'ballpoint pen'. | \$26 |
| ʔu kek | 'keg'. | \$23 |
| ʔu brušpin | 'brooch'. | \$26 |
| ʔu ʔikwitor | 'equator'. | \$22 |

28. *Compounds.*

In general the first constituent (headnoun) of an N₁N₂ compound determines the gender of that compound. Thus ʔu maaw 'stone' + ka dur 'picture' > ʔu maaw-dur 'statue' (whence perhaps the gender of ʔu stašu, from English 'statue'); ʔu šñu? 'hair' + ka khmat 'eye' > ʔu ñu?-mat 'eyelash, eyebrow'; ka

¹²Two other compounds with jiŋ- are M, probably for different reasons: ʔu jiŋmraaŋ 'private parts (male or female)', possibly by reason of being an inner body part---though this is doubtful, and ʔu jiŋbi? 'an evil spirit', identified with male sex.

ksiŋ 'drum' + ?u ŋap 'bee' > ka ksiŋ-ŋap 'beehive'; ka khndew 'earth' + ?u ksaŋ 'bile' > ka dew-ksaŋ 'hard earth'. Similarly, redundants¹³ take their gender from their first constituent: ka ja 'rice' + ?u jhur 'vegetable' > ka ja ka jhur 'boiled rice'.

29. *Change of gender.*

Change of gender is occasionally brought about by personification of an animal or object. For example, ?u ŋap 'bee', but ka ŋap kiaw 'queen bee'; ?u maaw 'stone', but ka maaw knthey 'special stone set on end in a group of monoliths'; ka ?ej 'excrement', but ?u ?ej jakor 'devil (*male*) in the shape of a serpent'; ka laar 'piece of broken eggshell used in divination', but ?u laar-?en 'thunderbolt; a fabulous monster'; ka khli? 'head', but ?u khli? 'head of a group, leader'.

Sometimes also a shift in gender is induced by N_2 in an N_1N_2 compound. Thus ka knja 'kind, sort' as a headnoun with constituents of M gender takes on the gender of N_2 : ?u pathaaw 'pumpkin' > ?u knja pathaaw 'a kind of gourd'; ?u sntiw 'flower' > ?u knja sntiw 'a kind of flower'.¹⁴

A good many nouns, moreover, have ambivalent gender depending on their referent. In my data all of these denote human beings or animals:

| | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| ka / ?u hnbew | 'sister / brother'. |
| ka / ?u hnmen | 'older sibling'. |
| ka / ?u para | 'younger sibling'. |
| ka / ?u briw | 'woman / man'. |

¹³Traditionally known as "imitatives." The meaning of a redundant is the same as that of its first constituent. In most cases native Khasis do not know the meaning of the second constituent, much as is the case with *kith* in "kith and kin."

¹⁴These examples are from U Nissor Singh, *English-Khasi Dictionary*, Edited by Rai Sahib Dohory Ropmay and U Hajom Kissor Singh (Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office in 1920; Reprinted by the Kamala Agency with the permission of the Government of Assam at the Don Bosco Industrial School, 1930).

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| ka / ?u khlluŋ | 'baby'. |
| ka / ?u khnraaw | 'young woman / man'. |
| ka / ?u khvon | 'child'. |
| ka / ?u mnder | 'stranger'. |
| ka / ?u mraat | 'animal'. |
| ka / ?u masi | 'cow / bull'. |
| ka / ?u blaŋ | 'goat'. |
| ka / ?u khleŋ | 'eagle'. |
| ka / ?u s?iar | 'hen / rooster'. |

Note, however, that many kinship terms are preferably used with the respectful and endearing article ?i, which, as has been said, makes no distinction of gender. This is obligatory, among others, for

| | |
|------------|-------------------------|
| ?i ma[ma] | 'maternal uncle'. |
| ?i hep | 'younger sibling'. |
| ?i mey | 'mother'. |
| ?i koŋ | 'elder sister'. |
| ?i mey-hep | 'paternal grandmother'. |

It is also the usual diminutive marker for nouns such as

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| ?i sim yreŋ | 'sparrow'. |
| ?i noŋba? khvon | 'baby-sitter'. |
| ?i khvon bnriw | 'doll'. |
| ?i khot lŋkdop | 'booklet'. |

In the 1,400 nouns examined 40 homophones were found of which one is F and the other M. A clear semantic relationship can be seen between the following, for example:

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ka dpey 'hearth'. | ?u dpey 'ashes'. |
| ka ?iŋ-trkhoŋ 'old grouch'. | ?u ?iŋ-trkhoŋ 'ginger'. |
| ka ŋap 'honey'. | ?u ŋap 'bee'. |
| ka do? nuot 'heart, mind' | ?u do? nuot 'heart (organ)'. |
| ka krtia? 'rainstorm'. | ?u krtia? 'wind demon'. |
| ka kse? 'pine (tree)'. | ?u kse? 'pine (wood)'. |
| ka ja 'rice'. | ?u ja 'vegetable'. |

Occasionally a loanword gives rise to a similar pair for which no semantic relationship is claimed, as

ka knda 'handcuffs'. ?u knda 'rhinoceros'.

Still under the head of gender change, note, finally, that when referring to people in general or as types the Khasis avoid F gender and use the M article. For example,

?u khasi 'Khasis (collectively)'.
 ?u pharaŋ 'a European'.
 ?u do? lɪ? 'a white person'.
 ?u papun 'person born under an evil star'.

30. *Conflicts of gender.*

It is worth remarking that in a small number of cases the Khasis themselves are in disagreement over the gender of a given noun. Thus my latest informant does not accept the gender of a few items as given in one or the other of the native Khasi dictionaries. For example, Kharkongngor's *Dienshonhi* marks the term for 'bird trap' as M, ?u kna?,¹⁵ while Nissor Singh and my informant use ka kna?, which is F. In the same way Nissor Singh marks the term for 'knot of hair' as F, ka pan khllon, whereas my informant uses the same term as M, ?u pan khllon.

In conclusion, I have three redundants of mixed gender, which contravene the general rules set forth above:

ka kha ?u jaay 'a rotten-smelling fish'.
 ka mŋkoy ?u jom 'hell'.
 ?u bley nonthaaw
 ka yaaw-bey 'God'.

¹⁵U Iarington Kharkongngor, *Ka Dienshonhi, A Khasi-Khasi Dictionary* (Shillong: Ri Khasi Press, 1968).