

Potential marking in Bangladesh Khumi

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Modality is a descriptive domain which has been given little careful attention for many languages of the northeast India/Bangladesh/Burma borderland. The Bangladesh variety of Khumi (Kuki-Chin, Tibeto-Burman) has three relatively high-frequency indicators of potential modality, exemplified in 1-3. (All of these examples are negative; the markers also occur readily in affirmative contexts.)

- *káw* ‘mental capability, learned skill (e.g., speaking a language, singing a song, knowledge of how to perform some culturally significant activity)’

(1) ha=poeē klaay amyoe hie-rie=loeē páang=bo rie-káw-lae-bie=bo=te
one=FOC monkey various all-QUANT=TOP five=PERF count-POT-NEG-NEXT=PERF=EVID
‘...Not even one of the monkeys was able to count past five.’ (18.100)

- *tháy* ‘physical ability’

(2) khieng-bloeē sangkawng=tew=khloeē co-tháy=coēē
look-AND hair.lock=COP=REAS eat.NEG-POT.NEG=EVAL
‘She looked, and since it was locks of hair, of course she couldn’t eat it.’ (22.17)

- *pyááw* ‘manage (often after a protracted struggle); general epistemic possibility’

(3) kaay hní ueéng=loeē awm-pyáw-lae
1s this house.LOC=TOP stay-POT-NEG
‘...I can’t stay in this house.’ (20.12)

This talk will survey the occurrence of these elements in an extensive text corpus and provide a thorough description of their use, including overlaps in their semantic coverage, overlaps with aspectual connotations, and interaction with evidential marking. I will discuss their probable grammaticalization sources and, time permitting, I will treat the markers from areal and comparative perspectives.