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Agreement system in Chiru

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ABSTRACT

Chiru is a North-Western Kuki-Chin language spoken in twelve villages in Manipur and one village in Assam, Northeast India. The language displays verb stem alternation. Person marking occurs either with prefixes or suffixes. For prefixes, there are two sets with a very slight difference: Either the first person prefixes include a vowel that copies the vowel of the following root or they include the vowel /a/. Otherwise, both sets have a second person prefix that always remains /a/, and a third person prefix that always has the copy vowel. This difference in person markers surfaces in the distinction between intransitive S marking vs. transitive A marking. The object is marked by a single prefix *nV-* that indexes any speech act participant.

KEYWORDS

Agreement System; Tibeto-Burman; Northwestern Kuki-Chin; Chiru

This is a contribution from *Himalayan Linguistics*, Vol. 18(1): 78–90.

ISSN 1544-7502

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1 Introduction

Chiru, the language spoken by the Chiru people, belongs to the Northwestern Kuki-Chin (formerly “Old Kuki”) group of the Tibeto-Burman language family (Konow 1902; Grierson 1904). Chiru is one of the thirty-three recognised tribal languages of Manipur. The total population of Chiru speakers is only 8599 (census of India: 2011). The language, which is also alternatively known as Riemchawng [remcɔŋ], has close affinities with other Kuki-Chin languages like Ranglong, Aimol, Kom, Chorei, Darlong, Hrangkhoh, Sakachep etc. These languages share similar terms with Chiru for most of the basic lexical items. They differ only in the level of syntactic constructions due to which Chiru is not mutually intelligible with the speakers of these languages. Chiru does not have a script of its own. Roman script is used for writing their language. A few books including ‘Chiru Primer’ by Chiru Christian Literature Committee and the ‘New Testament Bible’ in Chiru by Rev. R. Peter Chiru written in Roman script has been published recently. Chiru is a highly endangered language among the Tibeto-Burman languages. The language is influenced by Meiteilon in Manipur and by Hmar in Assam. The native speakers of one village are not in frequent contact with those of the other villages since they settle in different locations of Manipur and Assam and their villages are distant apart from one another. Rather, they are more frequently in contact with the speakers of other languages settling in their respective neighbouring villages. This may eventually lead to a great variation in the future. Moreover, it is evident that there are some borrowed words from other languages which have replaced the original terms in Chiru. Therefore, the documentation and description of the language are highly required to preserve the language. Chiru villages are widely scattered in different parts of Manipur and Assam. There are twelve Chiru villages which are located in Kangpokpi, Noney and Churachandpur districts of Manipur and one village located in Cachar District of Assam. Out of these, nine villages viz. Nungsai, Bungte, Bungte Kholen, Khoirok, Sadu, Thangjing, Kangchup, Uran and Waithou are located in different parts of Kangpokpi district of Manipur; 2 villages viz. Dolang and Lamdangmei in Noney district, Manipur and one village viz. Charoi khullen in Henglep subdivision, Churachandpur district, Manipur. Geographical locations of the Chiru villages in Manipur are provided in the map in Figure 1. In the map, the villages are numbered at their respective locations.

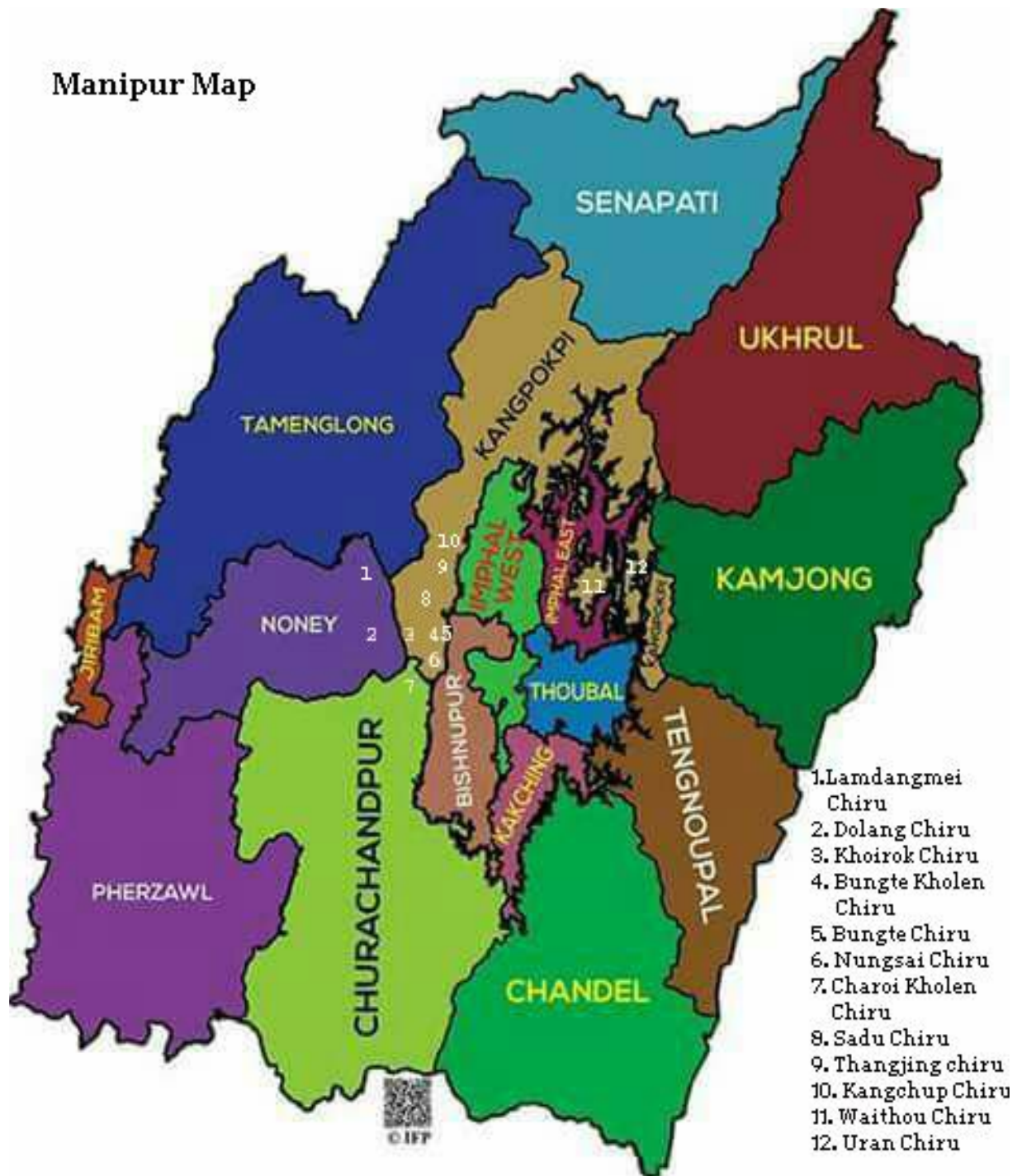


Figure 1. Map showing geographical locations of Chiru villages in Manipur.

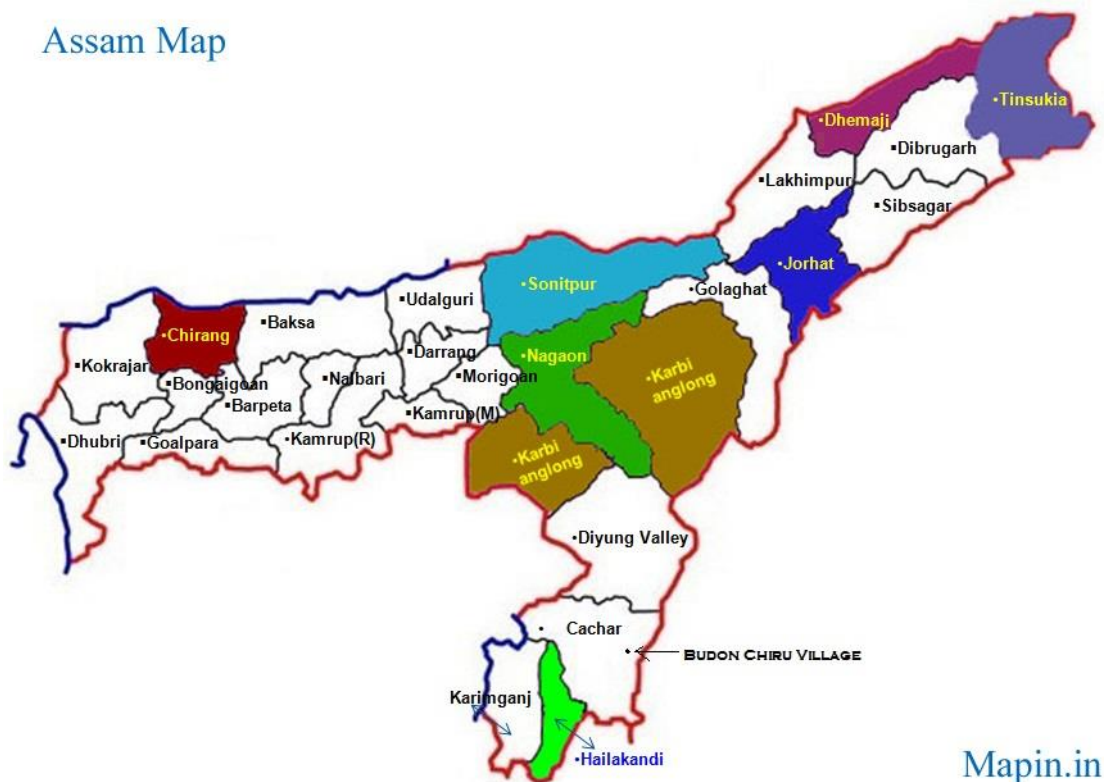


Figure 2. Map showing geographical location of Budon Chiru village in Assam.

There is also one Chiru village in Assam viz. Budon Chiru Village. It is located in the Cachar District of Assam as shown in Figure 2. The village consists of 65 households with a mere population of about 200 speakers. Nevertheless, the Chiru people still maintain or preserve the uniform culture and tradition be it lifestyle, family structure, child-naming, marriage, clothing etc. Like most of the Kuki-Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, Chiru has a system of particles accompanying finite verbs which show agreement with the subject and/or object. Both the prefixal verb agreement and post-verbal agreement paradigms are found in Chiru. Pronouns in Chiru can be categorised according to person and number. Gender is not distinguished in the Chiru pronominal system and has no role in agreement. This paper discusses the agreement system in Chiru based on person and number.

2 Verb stem alternation

Many Chiru verbs have two forms known as stem I and stem II in the literature on Kuki-Chin languages. Verb stem alternation is an important grammatical notion in the language and is considered to be a Proto-Kuki-Chin feature. Diachronically, stem I is the simplex form while stem II is derived from stem I by processes of consonant coda deletion, segmental change and tone change. In Chiru, the two forms usually differ in their tones and final consonants. Stem I is

the default form while stem II is used in grammatically or pragmatically marked constructions in Chiru. Stem II usually occurs in imperative, negative and nominalized clauses, while stem I occurs in other environments. In (1) and (2), we see an example of both verb stems for 'eat', in the affirmative and negative respectively.

- (1) *alén-nà* *m è* *s àk*
 Alen-ERG meat eat
 'Alen eats meat.'
- (2) *àmá-n à* *m è* *sà-mà*
 3-ERG meat eat-NEG
 'S/he doesn't eat meat.'

A list of stem I and stem II forms is given in Table 1. For intransitive verbs, stem I forms that end in a glottal stop correspond with stem II forms that end in *-t*. For transitive verbs, stem I forms that end in a velar stop correspond with stem II forms that end with an open syllable.

Stem I	Stem II	Gloss	Transitivity
<i>súʔ</i>	<i>sút</i>	'sit'	intransitive
<i>tʰáʔ</i>	<i>tʰát</i>	'good'	intransitive
<i>sèʔ</i>	<i>sèt</i>	'sin'	intransitive
<i>vàʔ</i>	<i>vàt</i>	'come'	intransitive
<i>nàʔ</i>	<i>nàt</i>	'hurt/pain'	intransitive
<i>tʰiʔ</i>	<i>tʰìt</i>	'die'	intransitive
<i>sàk</i>	<i>sà</i>	'eat'	transitive
<i>nèk</i>	<i>nè</i>	'drink'	transitive
<i>màk</i>	<i>mà</i>	'leave'	transitive
<i>ròcək</i>	<i>ròcò</i>	'buy'	transitive
<i>mùk</i>	<i>mù</i>	'see'	transitive
<i>pək</i>	<i>pè</i>	'give'	transitive

Table 1. Chiru verb stem forms

However, in stem I there are also a few intransitive verbs that end in *-k* and a few transitive verbs that end in *-ʔ* but have no alternation in stem II.

3 Person markers

Personal pronouns in Chiru can be distinguished in three ways as i) first person, ii) second person and iii) third person. Chiru distinguishes inclusiveness and exclusiveness of personal pronouns only in the first dual number. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness of first person plural are not distinguished not in the personal pronoun system, but as we will see, are distinguished in the pronominal prefix system. The personal pronouns in Chiru are given in the Table 2.

	SG	DU	PL
1.EXCL	<i>kèi</i>	<i>kádìn</i>	<i>kéini</i>
1.INCL		<i>nàdìn</i>	
2	<i>náŋ</i>	<i>náŋdìn</i>	<i>náŋni</i>
3	<i>àmá~àmá</i>	<i>ádìn</i>	<i>ámáni</i>

Table 2 . Chiru personal pronouns

Set A of the pronominal prefixes is given in Table 3. In Set A, the first and third person markers include vowels that copy the vowel of the following root. The plural marker *-u* is optional, except when the possessor is in the 1st person exclusive. It can mark plurality of either the possessor or the possessed. The tone on *-u* will be the opposite polarity of that on the noun root, i.e. High if the tone of the root is Low and vice versa. Examples that show the copy vowel in the prefix include *kù-pú* ‘my grandfather’; *kì-nì* ‘my aunt’; *kò-vòn* ‘my stomach’; *nù-nú* ‘our (incl.) mother’; *nì-ní* ‘our (incl.) aunt’; *ò-mó* ‘his/her hair’; *è-ké* ‘his/her trousers’. The vowel of the 2SG prefix does not display vowel harmony, e.g. *nàŋ-nú* ‘your mother’; *nàŋ-in* ‘your (sg.) house’. Set A functions as possessive prefixes on nouns as well as marking the A argument on transitive verbs.

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>kV̇-</i>	<i>kV̇- -u</i>
1.INCL		<i>nV̇- (-u)</i>
2	<i>nàŋ-</i>	<i>nàŋ- (-u)</i>
3	<i>V̇-</i>	<i>V̇- (-u)</i>

Table 3 . Chiru prefixal person markers – Set A

Set B of the pronominal prefixes is given in Table 4. In Set B, the vowel of the first person prefixes always remains /a/, and only the vowel in the third person prefix copies the vowel of the root. Set B marks the S argument on intransitive verbs.

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>kà-</i>	<i>kà- -u</i>
1.INCL		<i>nà- (-u)</i>
2	<i>nàŋ-</i>	<i>nàŋ- -u</i>
3	<i>V̇-</i>	<i>V̇- -u</i>

Table 4 . Chiru prefixal person markers – Set B

Unlike in the full pronoun system, inclusiveness and exclusiveness of first person plural are distinguished in the pronominal prefix system, as in (3) and (4). Verbs also do not agree for dual number, but take the plural agreement affixes, as in (5) and (6).

- (3) *kéi-nì ká-mèi-ù*
1-PL 1EXCL-sleep-PL.AGR
'We (excl.) sleep.'
- (4) *kéi-nì nà-mèi(-ù)*
1-PL 1PL.INCL-sleep-PL.AGR
'We (incl.) sleep.'
- (5) *ká-dìn ká-mèi-ù*
1EXCL-DU 1EXCL-sleep-PL.AGR
'We two (excl.) sleep.'
- (6) *nà-dìn nà-mèi-ù*
1INCL-DU 1INCL-sleep-PL.AGR
'We two (incl.) sleep.'

4 Equational sentences

In equational sentences, the copula *ni* takes the agreement affixes (see Table 5). While the 3rd person singular *i-ni* is expected, as in (7), the 3rd plural *ni-u* only takes the plural agreement suffix *-u*, as in (8). In addition, the 3rd person copula has a special form *kèŋ* that can be used for both singular and plural agreement, as in (9) and (10).

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>ká-nì</i>	<i>ká-nì-ù</i>
1.INCL		<i>nà-nì-ù</i>
2	<i>náŋ-nì</i>	<i>náŋ-nì-ù</i>
3	<i>ì-nì / kèŋ</i>	<i>ní-ù / kèŋ</i>

Table 5 . Chiru equational copular paradigm

- (7) *àmà Chiru ì-nì*
3 Chiru 3SG-COP
'S/he is Chiru.'
- (8) *àmá-nì Chiru ní-ù¹*
3-PL Chiru COP-PL.AGR
'They are Chiru.'
- (9) *àmà Chiru-kèŋ*
3 Chiru-3.COP
'S/he is Chiru.'

¹ Low tone in *nì* has become high tone *ní-ù* in (8) due to tone sandhi.

- (10) *àmá-nì Chiru-kèŋ*
 3-PL Chiru-3.COP
 ‘They are Chiru.’

The third person form of the copula, i.e. *-kèŋ*, may also occur together with already inflected *ni*, as in (11) and (12). As we would expect, the same third person form is also used in predicate possessive expressions, as in (13) and (14).

- (11) *kèi Chiru ká-nì-kèŋ*
 1 Chiru 1SG-COP-3.COP
 ‘I am Chiru.’
- (12) *kéi-nì Chiru ká-nì-ù-kèŋ*
 1-PL Chiru 1SG-COP-PL.AGR-3.COP
 ‘I am Chiru.’
- (13) *hì-hái-hì kî-in-kèŋ*
 DEM-PL-DEM 1GEN-house-3.COP
 ‘These are my houses.’
- (14) *kʰə-hái-kʰə kù-úi-ù-kèŋ*
 DEM-PL-DEM 1GEN-dog-PL.AGR-3.COP
 ‘Those are our dogs.’

The existential/locational copula in Chiru is *-òm*. It is inflected the same way as the equational copula or intransitive verbs as in (15) and (16).

- (15) *pʰákhatlài atár inkòsajram-khàt rú-òm*
 Once old couple-one PST-EXIST
 ‘Once there was an old couple.’
- (16) *ciŋ-lòn-kʰàn tʰiŋkùŋ-òm*
 mountain-up-DET tree-EXIST
 ‘There are trees on the mountain.’

5 Intransitive paradigm

Table 6 and Table 7 give the affirmative intransitive verb paradigm, in the non-future and future tense respectively, using the verb *mèi* ‘sleep’ as an example. The future is marked on all affirmative forms by *-ráŋ* and the copula *-nì*.

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>ká-mèi</i>	<i>ká-mèi-ù</i>
1.INCL		<i>nà-mèi-ù</i>
2	<i>náŋ-mèi</i>	<i>náŋ-mèi-ù</i>
3	<i>è-méi</i>	<i>è-méi-ù</i>

Table 6 . Non-future affirmative paradigm of intransitive *mèi* 'sleep'

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>ká-mèi-ràŋ-nì</i>	<i>ká-mèi-ù-ràŋ-nì</i>
1.INCL		<i>na-mei-u-raŋ-ni</i>
2	<i>náŋ-mèi-ràŋ-nì</i>	<i>náŋ-mèi-ù-ràŋ-nì</i>
3	<i>è-méi-ràŋ-nì</i>	<i>è-méi-ù-ràŋ-nì</i>

Table 7 . Future affirmative paradigm of intransitive *mèi* 'sleep'

Table 8 and Table 9 give the negative intransitive verb paradigm, in the non-future and future tense respectively, again using the verb *mèi* 'sleep' as an example.

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>méi-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>méi-ù-mì-ìŋ</i>
1.INCL		<i>méi-ù-màk-mè</i>
2	<i>méi-màk-cè</i>	<i>méi-ù-màk-cè</i>
3	<i>méi-mà</i>	<i>méi-ù-mà</i>

Table 8 . Non-future negative paradigm of intransitive *mèi* 'sleep'

	SG	PL
1.EXCL	<i>méi-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>méi-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>
1.INCL		<i>méi-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>
2	<i>méi-nò-tìni</i>	<i>méi-ù-nò-tìni</i>
3	<i>méi-nò-nì</i>	<i>méi-ù-nò-nì</i>

Table 9 . Future negative paradigm of intransitive *mèi* 'sleep'

6 Transitive paradigm

Different from the intransitive paradigm, the 1st person A agreement prefix on transitive verbs displays full vowel harmony with the verb root, as in (17), or with the following 2nd person object prefix, which also exhibits full vowel harmony with the verb root, as in (18) – (20).

(17) *kéi-nà àmá kù-mùk*
1-ERG 3 1-see
'I see him/her.'

(18) *kéi-nà náŋ kù-nù-mùk*
1-ERG 2 1-2OBJ.AGR-see
'I see you(sg).'

(19) *kéi-nà náŋ kè-nè-pè*
1-ERG 2 1-2OBJ.AGR-beat
'I beat you(sg).'

(20) *kéi-nà náŋ kò-nò-tòr*
1-ERG 2 1-2OBJ.AGR-push
'I push you(sg).'

Table 10 and Table 11 give the affirmative transitive verb paradigm, in the non-future and future tense respectively, using the verb *muk* 'see' as an example. As with the intransitive paradigm, the future is marked on all affirmative forms by *-raŋ* and the copula *-ni*. Table 12 and Table 13 give the negative transitive verb paradigm, in the non-future and future tense respectively, again using the verb *muk* 'see' as an example. Person agreement markers are pre-verbal, while number agreement markers are post-verbal.

A > O		1 st person			2 nd person		3 rd person	
		SG	PL.EXCL	PL.INCL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	SG				<i>kù-nú-mùk</i>	<i>kù-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>kù-múk</i>	<i>kù-múk-ù</i>
	PL.EXCL				<i>kù-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>kù-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>kù-múk-ù</i>	<i>kù-múk-ù</i>
	PL.INCL						<i>nù-mùk-ù</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù</i>
2	SG	<i>nàη-nú-mùk</i>	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ù</i>			<i>nàη-múk</i>	<i>nàη-múk-ù</i>	
	PL	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ù</i>			<i>nàη-múk-ù</i>	<i>nàη-múk-ù</i>	
3	SG	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk</i>	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk</i>	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-múk</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ù</i>	
	PL	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-nú-mùk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ù</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ù</i>	

Table 10 . Non-future affirmative paradigm of transitive *mùk* 'see'

A > O		1 st person			2 nd person		3 rd person	
		SG	PL.EXCL	PL.INCL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	SG				<i>kù-nú-mùk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>kù-nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>kù-múk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>kù-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>
	PL.EXCL				<i>kù-nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>kù-nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>kù-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>kù-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>
	PL.INCL						<i>nù-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>
2	SG	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>			<i>nàη-múk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nàη-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	
	PL	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nàη-nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>			<i>nàη-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nàη-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	
3	SG	<i>nú-mùk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nú-mùk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ràη-nì</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	
	PL	<i>nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>nú-mùk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	<i>(ù)-múk-ù-ràη-nì</i>	

Table 11 . Future affirmative paradigm of transitive *mùk* 'see'

		1 st person			2 nd person		3 rd person	
		SG	PL.EXCL	PL.INCL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	SG				<i>nù-mùk-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-mì-ìŋ</i>
	PL.EXCL				<i>nù-mùk-ù-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-ù-mì-ìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-ù-mì-ìŋ</i>
	PL.INCL						<i>mùk-ù-màk-mè</i>	<i>mùk-ù-màk-mè</i>
2	SG	<i>nù-mùk-màk-cè</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-màk-cè</i>			<i>mùk-màk-cè</i>	<i>mùk-ù-màk-cè</i>	
	PL	<i>nù-mùk-ù-màk-cè</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-màk-cè</i>			<i>mùk-ù-màk-cè</i>	<i>mùk-ù-màk-cè</i>	
3	SG	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-mùk-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-mùk-ù-mà</i>	
	PL	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-nù-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-mùk-ù-mà</i>	<i>(ù)-mùk-ù-mà</i>	

Table 12 . Non-future negative paradigm of transitive *muk* ‘see’

		1 st person			2 nd person		3 rd person	
		SG	PL.EXCL	PL.INCL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	SG				<i>nù-mùk-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>
	PL.EXCL				<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-nìŋ</i>
	PL.INCL						<i>mùk-ù-nò-mì-nì</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-mì-nì</i>
2	SG	<i>nù-mùk-nò-tìni</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-tìni</i>			<i>nù-mùk-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	
	PL	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-tìni</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-tìni</i>			<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	
3	SG	<i>nù-mùk-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>mùk-nò-nì</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	
	PL	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>nù-mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	<i>mùk-ù-nò-nì</i>	

Table 13 . Future negative paradigm of transitive *muk* ‘see’

7 Ditransitive verb agreement

In ditransitive clauses, verbs are marked with the same affixes as verbs in transitive clauses. Object agreement is hierarchically with a speech act participant, independent of its syntactic role. Some examples are given below:

(21) *kéi-nà náη-hì àmá-dèη kè-né-pèk*
 1-ERG 2-DET 3-DAT 1-you-give
 'I give you(sg) to him.'

(22) *kéi-nì-nà àmá-hì náη-dèη kè-né-pèk-ù*
 1-PL-ERG 3-DET 2-DAT 1PL.EXCL-2.OBJ-give-PL.AGR
 'We(excl) give him to you(sg).'

(23) *kéi-nì-nà náη-hì àmá-dèη kè-né-pèk-ù*
 1-PL-ERG 2-DET 3-DAT 1PL.EXCL-you-give-PL.AGR
 'We(excl) give you(sg) to him.'

8 Conclusion

Chiru uses both pre-verbal and post-verbal agreement marking. There is an interesting distinction between two sets of prefixal agreement markers, which differ in whether or not first person prefixes have a copy vowel or always retain the vowel /a/. This corresponds to the cross-referencing of the intransitive S argument vs. of the transitive A argument. Speech act participant objects of transitive and ditransitive verbs are indexed by *nV*.

ABBREVIATIONS

AGR	Agreement marker
COP	Copula
DAT	Dative
DEM	Demonstrative
DET	Determiner
DU	Dual
ERG	Ergative
EXCL	Exclusive
GEN	Genitive
INCL	Inclusive
NEG	Negative
OBJ	Object
PL	Plural
SG	Singular

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