

# RECOVERING VOICES

Seminar Series in Endangered Languages and Indigenous Knowledge



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presents:

**Puma: An Overview of Rites of Passage  
and Some Linguistic Features**

**Tuesday September 8, 2015  
12:00pm - 1:00pm  
Rose Room (Rm 337), NMNH**

Puma, an endangered Tibeto-Burman language of the Kiranti subgroup, has approximately 4000 speakers living in the remote and isolated villages of eastern Nepal. This paper will briefly introduce rites of passage and then will concentrate on some fascinating linguistic features of Puma. The language is characterised by a remarkable complex morphological system of agreement where the verbs agree with both Agent (A) and Patient (P) arguments. Case-marking of nouns and pronouns is split between nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive-dative.

Linguistically Puma is interesting because it exhibits some of the complex syntactic phenomena, such as split ergativity, upside down ergativity, split-S pattern and a typologically unusual characteristic in reflexive constructions, where the reflexive root, is homophonous with the main verb, which is inflected detransitively (Sharma 2014). In contrast to Dryer's (1986, 2007) typology of languages, Puma is neither a fully primary object nor a fully direct object language.

In this talk I will discuss transitive verbs can be detransitivised with a kha- prefix or with zero, which is typologically more common (Bickel et al. 2007) and for kha-detransitivisation the affected entity must be human; this is typologically unusual, but characteristic of the Kiranti subgroup.

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