Nouns in Dhiyan
A Preliminary Investigation

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Abstract

Dhiyan is the name of the language spoken by the Koch–Rajbangshi people of Barak Valley of southern Assam. Dhiyan is mainly spoken in ten villages in the Eastern part of Barak river namely Horinagar, Japirbon, Leburbon, Gororbon, Dewan (Labok) or Dewan Bosti, Narayanpur, Larchingpar, Thaligram, Lakkhichora, and Digli. Ethnically, they are Mongoloids however their language may fall under the Indo-Aryan sub-group of the Indo-European language family. Nevertheless no study has been made to prove their classification. The total population of Dhiyan speaking Koch-Rajbangshi in Barak valley is estimated about 2500 in approximate.

The present paper is a preliminary investigation on nouns in Dhiyan language. The present paper specifically focuses on the semantics and morpho-syntactic aspects of nouns in Dhiyan language.

Key words: Dhiyan, Koch-Rajbongshi, Indo-Aryan, Eastern part of Barak river, Noun, Semantics and Morpho-syntax.

1. Introduction

Dhiyan is the name of language spoken by Koch–Rajbangshi people of Barak Valley of Southern Assam. Dhiyan is mainly spoken in ten villages in the Eastern part of Barak river namely Horinagar, Japirbon, Leburbon, Gororbon, Dewan (Labok) or Dewan Bosti, Narayanpur, Larchingpar, Thaligram, Lakkhichora, and Digli. Ethnically, they are Mongoloids however their language may fall under the Indo-Aryan sub-group of the Indo-European language family. Nevertheless no study has been made to prove their classification. . It is interesting to note that Dhiyan language has close contact with neighboring languages like Assamese, Bengali, Dimasa,

and Manipuri. Therefore lexical items of all four languages are found in its vocabulary as loan elements. In this regard, some Koch-Rajbangshi scholars of Barak Valley are in opinion that they had their own language which is linguistically much closer to Boro, Deori, Dimasa, Garo, Tiwa, Dhimal and Toto of Eastern part of India particularly North Bengal and Northeast India. Etymologically, the term 'Dehan' is derived from the word 'Dewan' the court name of the commander of Koch army of Cachar which was given by the great Chilarai when he came to conquer Cachar in the middle of sixteenth century (Gait, 1984). The total population of Dhiyan speaking Koch-Rajbangshi in Barak valley is estimated about 2500 in approximate.

The present paper is a preliminary investigation on nouns in Dhiyan language. The present paper specifically focuses on the semantics and morpho-semantic aspects of nouns in Dhiyan language.

2. Typological Features of Dhiyan

Typologically, Dhiyan is a non-tonal, agglutinating and verb final language. Like many other Indo-Aryan languages, voiced aspirated stops are very common in Dhiyan. Nouns in Dhiyan can be postposed by gender markers, plural markers and cases. There is no grammatical gender in Dhiyan. Dhiyan exhibits relative pronouns which are j-initial. When used attributively, adjectives in Dhiyan function as a modifier and strictly precede the head noun. The verb roots are marked for Persons particularly in determining tenses but not for numbers and genders. Within a noun phrase, a noun is typically syntactic and semantic head, defining the type of entity involved. Negation is usually expressed by means of prefixation. Furthermore negative particle is also used to express negation post verbally.

3. Nouns in Dhiyan

Structurally, Dhiyan nouns can be categorised into three categories namely (i) Simple (ii) compound and (iii) derived.

3.1. Simple Nouns

Simple nouns are nouns which are not derived from any other word classes, i.e., they are underived nouns. Most of the basic nouns in Dhiyan are monomorphemic which can be sub-

classified into mono-syllabic, di-syllabic and tri-syllabic. The following are some of the simple nouns found in the language:

Monosyllabic

/jui/	'fire'	CVV
/bu/	'grandmother'	CV
/doŋ/	'river'	CVC

Di-syllabic

/diŋi/	'neck'	CVCV
/soiha/	'shade'	CVVCV
/hawek/	'mother-in-law'	CVCVC
/baŋgon/	'brinjal'	CVCCVC

Tri-syllabic

/owari/	'wife'	VCVCV
/dukuli/	'a female garment'	CVCVCV
/sukuriŋ/	'butterfly'	CVCVCVC

3.2. Compound Noun

Compound nouns are formed by juxtaposition of two nouns or Noun + Diminutive or Augmentive + Noun or Noun + Adjective. Compound nouns are frequently found in Dhiyan. Compounding is one of the productive morphological processes in almost all the South Asian languages (Goddard, 2005) particularly noun compounding. Dhiyan is a typical South Asian agglutinating language having SOV order. In the case of compound nouns where one noun modifies the other, the modifying noun must precede the modified noun. The formation of nouns by compounding can be done by the following processes:

(i) Noun +Noun

In this type of compound the head noun is in the right of the compound as can be seen in the following examples.

bisna + cador = *bisnacador* 'bedcover'

bed   cover

goru + *gat^{h}ol* = *gorugat^{h}ol* 'cowshed'

cow   shed

ata + *p^{h}ol*   =   *atap^{h}ol* 'custardapple'

ata   fruit

(ii) Noun + Diminutive

In this type of compound, the noun precedes the diminutive as can be seen in the following examples:

kukur + *sua*   =   *kukursua* 'puppy'

dog   baby

mui   + *sua*   =   *muisua* 'buffalo calf'

buffalo baby

goru + *sua*   =   *gorusua* 'calf'

cow   calf

(iii) Augmentive + Noun

Interestingly, in this type of compound, the augmentive precedes the head noun. It is worth mentioning here that the head noun precedes the diminutive in noun plus diminutive compounds as shown above:

bor + *goru*   =   *borgoru* 'big cow'

big + cow

bor + *birali*   =   *borbirali* 'big cat'

big + cat

bor + *kukur*   =   *borkukur* 'big dog'

big + dog

(iv) Noun + Adjective

In Noun + Adjective compounds adjective precedes the noun as can be seen in the following examples:

huru + at^hu   =   *huruat^hu* 'ankle cap'

small   ankle

bor + hil   =   *borhil* 'big stone'

big   stone

tit + kakrol   =   *titkakrol* 'bitter gourd'

bitter   gourd

3.3. Derived Nouns

Derived nouns in Dhiyan are formed by the process of suffixation. Formation of nouns through derivation is not very common in Dhiyan. Dhiyan has a distinct nominalising morpheme **-ok** to form agentive nominal where the person involved normally does the action as a job or regular activity. It is worth mentioning here that the nominalising morpheme *-ok* occurs with transitive verb however it cannot occur with the intransitive verb as in:

/sol/ 'drive'   */salok/* 'driver'

/gay/ 'sing'   */gayok/* 'singer'

/lek^h/ 'write'   */lek^hok/* 'writer'

Comrie and Thompson (1985) have rightly pointed out that **some languages have a special deriving pattern for forming nouns which means 'the way of "verbing" from 'verbs'.** This is true in the case of Dhiyan that it has a distinct derivational morpheme **-a** to form manner nominalization. It is interesting to note that the nominalising morpheme *-a* occurs with transitive and intransitive verbs regardless of its absence or presence of arguments as in:

/k^hand/ + /-a/   =   */k^handa/* 'mode of digging'

/bak/ + /-a/   =   */baka/* 'mode of putting'

/di/ + /-a/   =   */dia/* 'mode of giving'

/lud/ + /-a/   =   */luda/* 'mode of running'

/k^ha/ + /-a/   =   */k^howa/* 'mode of eating'

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S. Sulochana Singha, Ph.D. Scholar
Nouns in Dhiyan: A Preliminary Investigation   230

On the basis of semantico-morphosyntactic criteria, Dhiyan nouns are primarily classified into two classes, viz. (i) animate (ii) inanimate. Animate nouns can be further sub-categorised into two: human and non-human. Both human and non-human nouns are differentiated for masculine and feminine genders. All inanimate nouns are considered neuter. It is worth mentioning here that the gender distinction in the language is determined on the natural recognition of sex and therefore it is applied only to the animate nouns. Gender of animate nouns is marked morphologically except some kinship terms which are absolute forms. Inanimate nouns are considered as neuter gender, which are morphologically unmarked.

4. Determining Gender

The various ways of determining gender in Dhiyan are described in the following sections.

(i) Some of the human nouns in Dhiyan are lexically marked as masculine and feminine as evidenced by the use of kinship terms as can be seen in the following examples:

Masculine	Feminine
dada 'uncle'	*k^{h}uri* 'aunt'
putek 'son'	*j^{h}ala* 'daughter'
aja 'grandfather'	*bu* 'grandmother'
juai 'husband'	*buari* 'wife'

(ii) By alternating *-a* to *-i*:

Some nouns are made feminine by alternating vowel *-a* to *-i* that is the final vowel *-a* of masculine nouns are morphophonemically changed into *-i.* It is observed that the process of vowel alternation for determining male and female gender is found in both the human and non-human nouns as can be seen in the following examples:

Masculine	Feminine
pat^{h}a 'he goat'	*pat^{h}i* 'she goat'
b^{h}ula 'he dog'	*b^{h}uli* 'she dog'
bura 'old man'	*buri* 'old man'
mama 'mother's brother'	*mami* 'mother's brother's wife'

(iii) By using *muina* and *jʰala*:

In Dhiyan, the morphemes ***muina*** for male and ***jʰala*** for female are preposed to the generic form of nouns to express gender distinctions particularly non-human animate nouns. More specifically ***muina*** and ***jʰala*** are used to express gender distinction in the case of some specific animals. It is important to note here that the morpheme ***muina*** and ***jʰala*** are the lexical items indicating man and woman in the language. Consider the following examples:

Masculine	Feminine
muina *kʰorgus* 'male rabbit'	***jʰala*** *kʰorgus* 'female rabbit'
muina *kurkuta* 'male squirrel'	***jʰala*** *kurkuta* 'female squirrel'
muina *indur* 'male rat'	***jʰala*** *indur* 'female rat'
muina *hiyal* 'male jackal'	***jʰala*** *hiyal* 'female jackal'

Nevertheless, in the case of elephant, cattle and buffalo, different lexical items are used to express male and female. However it is not a productive grammatical process as it is applicable in few non-human animate nouns in the language. Consider the following examples:

Masculine	Feminine
datal 'male elephant'	***kʰunti*** 'female elephant'
domra 'bull'	***goru*** 'cow'
boira 'male buffalo'	***baŋri*** 'female buffalo'

(iv) Gender marking of community nouns

In the case of community nouns the masculine and feminine gender are assigned by postposing ***muina*** and ***ani*** to the generic nouns. It is worth mentioning here that the feminine marker ***ani*** is specifically used to denote the feminine gender of the various communities as demonstrated below:

Masculine	Feminine
moglai muina	*moglai ani*
'manipuri boy'	'manipuri girl'

baŋali muina	*baŋali ani*
'bengali boy'	'bengali girl'
baŋal muina	*baŋal ani*
'muslim boy'	'muslim girl'
kʰasi muina	*kʰasi ani*
'khasi boy'	'khasi girl'

Dhiyan Nouns can also be categorised into (i) count and (ii) mass nouns. Here, count nouns can be pluralised by adding plural morphemes ***kal, guti,*** and ***kʰini*** according to animateness of the nouns as ***kal*** is used to pluralise animate nouns particularly kin nouns as exemplified below:

bunu 'sister'	*bunu **kal*** 'sisters'
jʰek 'daughter'	*jʰek **kal*** 'daughters'

However ***kʰini*** is merely used to pluralise the inanimate nouns particularly flat, long, wide and two dimensional objects as exemplified below:

pat 'leaf'	*pat **kʰini*** 'leaves'
putʰi 'book'	*putʰi **kʰini*** 'books'

Interestingly**, *guti*** is used to pluralise both animate and inanimate nouns. It is   observed that ***guti*** is the plural morpheme which is commonly found in the language.

putek 'son'	*putek **guti*** 'sons'
gʰora 'horse'	*gʰora **guti*** 'horse'
gʰor 'house'	*gʰor **guti*** 'house'
torabol 'star'	*torabol **guti*** 'stars'

Nevertheless the mass nouns are pluralised by quantifier ***dʰer*** regardless of animate and inanimate distinctions as shown in the following examples:

dʰer pani 'lot of water'

dʰer manu 'many people'

Syntactically, nouns most typically to assume the clausal grammatical role of *subject, direct object, indirect object* or *predicate noun* (Givon, 2001), as it is true in the case of Dhiyan too as evidenced from the following examples:

(1)   *jʰala-go-te*   *nana-go-tok*   *e-kʰon*   *putʰi*
         woman-CL-NOM   boy-CL-ACC   one-CL   book

         di-sl-e
         give-PERF-PST
         'The woman gave a book to the boy.'

(2)   *moina-e*   *kukur go-tok*   *barikʰola-di   mar-sl-ei*
         Boy-NOM   dog   CL-DAT   stick-INST   beat-PERF-PST
         'The boy beat the dog with a stick.'

(3)   *i-kʰon*   *e-ta*   *gʰor*
         this   one-CL   house
         'This is a house.'

It is evidenced that noun assumes the various grammatical role as shown in sentence (1), (2) and (3). However, within the noun phrase, a noun is typically syntactic and semantic head, defining the type of entity involved. All other elements in the noun phrase are modifiers of that head noun. Thus in examples (4), (5) and (6) below, the head noun *muina* 'boy' is accompanied by different modifiers such as numeral *du* 'two', adjective *bʰal* 'good', and quantifier *dʰer* 'many'.

(4)   *du-ta muina*
         two-CL boy
         'two boys'

(5)   *bʰal muina*
         good boy
         'good boy'

(6)   *dʰer muina*
       many boys
       'many boys'

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we can conclude that Simple Nouns in Dhiyan are monomorphemic. This can be sub-classified into mono-syllabic, di-syllabic and tri-syllabic. Compound nouns are formed by juxtaposition of two nouns, or noun + Diminutive or Augmentive + noun, or Noun + Adjective. In the case of compound nouns where one noun modifies the other, the modifying noun must precede the modified noun. Derived nouns in Dhiyan are formed by the process of suffixation. In Dhiyan, the morpheme **-ok** is used to form agentive noun and the morpheme **-a** is used to derive manner nominalization. On the basis of semantico-morphosyntactic criteria, the gender distinction of nouns in the language is determined on the natural recognition of sex. Nouns most typically to assume the clausal grammatical role of subject, direct object, indirect object or predicate noun. A noun within an NP is typically syntactic and semantic head, defining the type of entity involved.

Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
C	Consonant
CL	Classifier
DAT	Dative
NOM	Nominative
INST	Instrumental
PERF	Perfective
PST	Past
SOV	Subject Object Verb
V	Vowel

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