

**The ‘Adjective’ in Tibeto-Burman:
A Case of the Mising Language**

Sarat Kumar Doley, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

=====
Abstract

The aim of the paper is to describe the form and distribution of Mising adjectives and adjectivals in their modificational and predicational functions. ‘Adjective’ refers to “terms which describe property concepts” (Dixon 1997). The term ‘adjectival’ is used because, in the Tibeto-Burman languages, words which describe property concepts are frequently derived from other word categories – primarily from verbs. Moreover it has been argued that Tibeto-Burman languages frequently do not support an independent category of adjectives and it is likely that they were not part of the proto-language (Noonan 1997). Thus this analysis can be brought to bear on the question of whether adjectives are a distinct and independent category in Tibeto-Burman and whether or not are they re-constructible to the proto-language.

Keywords:

Introduction

Within functionalist theory, grammatical categories are claimed to arise from prototypes according to either of two inter-related schemata. The first is the *time stability* schema of Givón (2001). In brief: *nouns* represent the most time-stable concepts, and *verbs* the least. The second is the *predication* schema, whereby the basic unit of communication is the predication, whose basic parts are *predicates* and *arguments*. *Nouns* represent those words which are prototypically used as arguments; *verbs* represent those words which are prototypically predicates. According to either schema, *adjectives* are problematic: they represent concepts whose time stability is between that of nouns and verbs, and their status as predicates or arguments is, as a group, indeterminate. It has been observed that as a result of this is many languages lack a definable set of adjectives; instead either nouns or verbs express property concepts as the sense requires. And of those languages that do have a set of

adjectives, the ‘true, or ‘core’ adjectives may be either small in number and constitute a closed set, and/or they may exhibit behaviours that distinguish them from nouns or verbs only in small ways (Dixon 1977, 2004). According to Noonan (1998), the native Tibeto-Burman pattern is, for the most part, to express property concepts as nouns (when modifying) or, as stative verbs (when predicating). Modifying adjectivals are usually nominalised, i.e. derived with a morpheme which also derives, or historically derived, nouns. Predicate adjectivals, on the other hand, will take the form of stative verbs, which in fact they are.

According to Noonan (1998), in Tibeto-Burman, where other patterns are found, the language has very likely innovated. One common sort of innovation involves the establishment of a class of adjectives through massive borrowings. In Tibeto-Burman languages, these adjective borrowings do not generally undergo the derivational processes that native forms do; and they form a separate (sub-) class.

Mising will be examined in light of these generalizations, and the following specific questions will be asked: How are property concepts in Mising expressed, with derived (adjectival) or underived (adjective) forms? If derived, are they nominalised? If underived, what is their origin – are they native or borrowed? What form and distribution do borrowings have; do they differ from native ones? How are the form and distribution of adjectives/adjectivals distinct from those of nouns and verbs?

The ‘adjective’ in Mising

Mising has two distinct lexical classes which encode property concepts. The first class of adjective contain the native terms. These native terms in turn are divisible into two distinct types- Core or underived and derived or nominalized native term adjectives. The second class of adjectives is the borrowed adjectives. Majority of these adjectives are borrowed from Assamese, an Indo-Aryan language widely spoken in Assam. In Mising, core semantic fields which cross-linguistically are expressed with adjectives (as identified by Dixon 1997, 2004) for example: colour, value, dimension and age, are core, nominalized and borrowed.

Native Terms

This section describes the form and distribution of the core native adjectives as opposed to borrowings – both those which are attributive and adnominal, i.e. those underived native terms which describe and modify nouns, as well as native terms which express property concepts as predicates.

Underived Adjectives

Mising, unlike other Tibeto Burman languages, has a small class of simple underived, i.e. non-nominalised adjectives (1a)-(1b):

1.(a) *anu*

‘new’

(b) *aku*

‘old (+inanimate)’

As well as the following, which are kinship terms (2a-2b):

(2a) *bottə-kai*

big-brother

(2b) *ajji-kai*

small-brother

These simple adjectives cannot be nominalised when functioning as predicate adjectives in copular complement constructions, as in (3a).

(3a) *galuk-də anu-*nə ə
galuk-də anu-ə [>anno]
shirt-DEF new-COP
‘The shirt is new.’

Underived adjectives may be nominalised to become nominal-adjectives (nouns). In these cases, the nominaliser *nə* is used. The meaning that results is specifically inchoative one the ‘getting old one’, as in (3b).

(3b) *aku-nə-də-m* bi-tok
old-NMZ-DEF-ACC give away-IMP

‘Give away the one getting old.’

These underived adjectives take verbal inflections, for example the stative (4a), and the stative-anterior (4b).

(4a) galuk-də anu-dak
shirt-DEF new-STAT
‘The shirt is new.’

(4b) galuk-də anu-dag-ai.
shirt-DEF new-STAT-ANT
‘The shirt was new.’

Derived Adjectivals

The majority of native property-describing terms in Mising are derived with the nominaliser-*nə*. Hence they are called adjectivals. Examples (5a)-(5c) demonstrate that *nə* is a nominalizer; it productively derives agent nominals.

(5a) rə-nə-də (5b) tvv-nə-də
buy-NMZ-DEF drink-NMZ-DEF
‘the buyer’ ‘the drinker’

(5c) məə-dvr-nə-tə
think-exasperate-NMZ-DIS.EAST.LOC
lu-ma- ηəi
say-NEG-EMPH
‘That sad one (up there) is not saying a thing!’

As seen in (5c), these nominalised forms take case markers, as do nouns.

In Mising, modifying native adjectivals are derived from verbs like in other Tibeto-Burman languages. In their non-nominalized form, they can express predications and take verbal inflections, as in (6a)-(6b).

(6a) məə-po-nə kouwou-də keli-la-duŋ
think-please-NMZ child-DEF play- PROG-IMPF

‘The happy child is playing.’

- (6b) keli-la-duu-nə kouwou-də
play- PROG-DUU-NMZ child-DEM
məə-po-la-duŋ
think-please-PROG-IMPF
‘The playing child is happy.’

With the exception of the underived adjectives ‘new’ and ‘old’ property terms for core semantic fields (as per Dixon 1977, 2004), for example, colour and value, are nominalized (7a)-(7b). In many Tibeto-Burman languages, core terms are both native and borrowed. However, in Mising, both native and borrowed terms are nominalised.

- (7a) ŋo-m lvv-nə gayin-də-m bi
1-ACC red-NMZ cloth-DEF-ACC give
‘Give me the red cloth.’

- (7b) bv ai-maa-nə kou-ə
3 good-NEG-NMZ boy-COP
‘He is a bad boy.’

Borrowed adjectives

In Mising, many adjectival expressions are borrowed from the Indo-Aryan lingua franca- Assamese. These adjectives which are borrowed from Assamese are not a distinct category with a separate distribution from native underived adjectives or from native derived (nominalised) adjectivals. In their adnominal modifying function, they are nominalised, for example *pisol* from Assamese (8a). As predicates they are verbal and take all verbal inflections (8b).

- (8a) ŋo pisol-nə lambə-dok gv-man
1 slippery-NMZ path-TRV go-NEG
‘I won’t go through the slippery path.’

- (8b) lambə-də pisol-dak

path-DEF slippery-STAT

‘The path is slippery.’

Structural and Distributional Similarities Between Native and Borrowed Adjectivals

Nominalized adjectivals, native (9a) and borrowed (9b), pattern with nouns. Both modify nouns and the modifying term precedes the modified.

(9a) ηο οηοβοzar-to οη- ηοm rə-ka
1 fish market-DST.E.LOC fish-ACC buy-PF
‘I have bought fish at the fish market (to the east of here).’

(9b) ηο kampo-nə οη- ηοm bozar-to
1 white-NMZ fish-ACC market-DST.E.LOC
rə-ka
buy-PF
‘I have bought white fish at the market to the east of here.’

(9c) ηο heujiya-nə οη- ηοm bozar-to
1 green-NMZ fish-ACC market-DST.E.LOC
rə-ka
buy-PF

The borrowed adjective ‘heujiya’*green* in example (9c) is nominalized and precedes the modified.

Both native (10a) and borrowed (10b) adjectivals take noun phrase markers, as for example ‘təηor’ *cunning* (10b). The transcription of the word, here, is slightly modified to suit Mising phonology.

(10a) məə-po-nə-kidi -də lu-duη
think-please-NMZ-PL-DEF say-IPFV
‘The happy (ones) are saying.’

(10b) təŋor-nə-kidi-də gi-duŋ
 clever-NMZ-PL-DEF come-IPFV
 ‘The cunning (ones) are coming.’

Nominalized adjectival that has a reference to action and process, both native and borrowed, do not appear with the equative copula ‘ə’ (11a), as do nouns, non-nominalized adjectival or ‘core’ adjectives. More explanations will be provided in the next section of this paper.

(11a) *koo-də dug-joŋ -*nə ə
 boy-DEF run-able-NMZ COP

In predications, adjectivals, native (12a) and borrowed (12b), and ‘core’ adjectives (12c) pattern with verbs.

(12a) ncc-dc kaŋ-kan-dak
 woman-DEF look-nice-STAT
 ‘The woman is beautiful.’

(12b) koo-də təŋor-dag-ai
 boy-DEF cunning-STAT-ANT
 ‘The boy was cunning.’

(12c) galuk-də aku-yə
 shirt-DEF old-FUT
 ‘The shirt will be old.’

Dissimilarity with Verbs

Although they function as verbs do in most linguistic situations, Mising nominalized adjectivals and ‘core’ adjectives differ from verbs in their ability to appear in copular constructions. It seems that predicate adjectivals and underived adjectives as opposed to those that modify are not nominalised, Adjectivals are nominalised only when they exist as

adnominal. Yet both derived and underived adjectives may occur with the equative copula. In this respect they differ from verbs (13a-13b).

(13a) * koo-də dug-ə
 boy-DEF run-COP

(13b) koo-də kang-kan-ə
 boy-DEF look-nice-COP
 ‘The boy is beautiful!’

But Adjectives and adjectivals are not nouns either. They can appear with verbal inflections and cannot occur with the equative. So they are a class on their own – an adjective class.

Conclusion: Points of Convergence and Divergence in Mising Adjectivals

As is the case with other Tibeto-Burman languages, Adjectival modifiers, in Mising (7a)-(7b), are virtually always expressed with derived nominalized forms. Though Mising does have a **very** small class of underived adjectives, Nominalized adjectivals behave like nouns in Mising (9a)-(10b) too: they modify nouns, take noun phrase markers, and do not take verb inflections. As in other Tibeto-Burman languages, Mising (12a)-(12c), adjectivals in predications take all verbal inflections, i.e. they pattern with verbs. However, the two languages differ with respect to adjectivals as complements in copular clauses.

Unlike many other Tibeto-Burman languages, non-derived adjectivals seem to appear in a copular construction in Mising. The issue is discussed in the last section of this paper. Mising also diverges from other Tibeto-Burman languages in that adjectives borrowed into Mising are nominalized (8a)-(8b). Borrowed adjectives, in Mising, behave exactly as do native adjectives, both ‘core’ and nominalized, which does not occur in many other Tibeto-Burman languages and most other Bodic languages.

=====

References

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2007. Typological distinctions in word-formation. In Shopen (ed.) 2007. Volume 3, 1-65.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017

Sarat Kumar Doley, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The ‘Adjective’ in Tibeto-Burman: A Case of the Mising Language

Baker, Mark. 2003. *Lexical Categories: Verbs, Nouns, and Adjectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bhandari, J. S. (1992). *Kinship Affinity and Domestic Group*, New Delhi, p. 27.

Bhat, D. N. S. and Pustet, Regina. 2000. Adjective. In Booij, Lehmann and Mugdan (eds.) 2000, 757-770.

DeLancey, Scott. 1986. Toward a history of Tai classifier systems. In Colette Craig (ed.) 1986. *Noun Classes and Categorization*, 437-452. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

DeLancey, Scott. 2001. Functional Syntax. Lecture series presented at the Linguistic Society of America Summer Linguistics Institute, University of California at Santa Barbara, Summer 2001.

Diller, Anthony. 1980. Cross-cultural pain semantics. *Pain* 9(1). 9-26.

Dixon, R. M. W. 1977. Where have all the adjectives gone? *Studies in Language* 1(1).19-80.

Dixon, R. M. W. 2000. A typology of causatives: form, syntax and meaning. In R. M. W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald (eds.) 2000. *Changing Valency: Case Studies in Transitivity*, 30-83. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dixon, R. M. W. and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald (eds.) 2004. *Adjective Classes: A Cross-Linguistic Typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dixon, R. M. W. 2004. Adjective classes in typological perspective. In Dixon and Aikhenvald (eds.) 2004, 1-49.

Dutta Choudhury, S. (1994). *Gazetteer of India, Arunachal Pradesh East Siang & West Siang Districts*, Itanagar. p. 30

Elwin, Verier.(1966). *Democracy in NEFA*, Shillong.p.18.

Enfield, N. J. 2004. Adjectives in Lao. In Dixon and Aikhenvald (eds.) 2004, 323-347.

Foreign Proceedings (Assam). (1884). August, No. 6 59

Givón, T. (2001 [1984]).*Syntax : An Introduction*. Vol. 1.Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

Judicial Proceedings (Bengal).(1862). December, No. 195.

Nath, Jogendra. (1998). “The Kcbang: Aboriginal Self-Government of the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh”. In S. Dutta (ed.). *Studies in the History, Economy and culture of Arunachal Pradesh*, Delhi, p. 213

Noonan, M. (1997).“Versatile Nominalizations.”In J. Bybee, J. Haiman and S. A.

Nyori, T. (1993).*History and culture of the Adis*.New Delhi, p137.

Pamegam, Nandeswar. (1970). “Po:rag” in BrigumoniKagyung (ed.) *MisingsanskritirAlekhya*, Vol.1, Guwahati, p. 89.

Pathak, Manjushree. (1991). *Crimes, Customs and Justice in tribal India: A Teleological study of the Adis*. New Delhi, p-155

Pegu, N.C. (1981). *The Mishings of the Brahmaputra Valley*, Dibrugarh, p. 72.

Post, M. (2006). “Compounding and the Structure of the Tani Lexicon.” *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 29(1): 41-60.

Srivastava, L. R.N. (1962).*The Gallongs*, Shillong, p. 88

Sun, T.-S.J. (1993a).“Evidentials in Ando Tibetan.”*Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, AcademiaSinica*(63-4): 945-1001.

Language in Indiawww.languageinindia.comISSN 1930-2940**17:8 August 2017**

Sarat Kumar Doley, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

The ‘Adjective’ in Tibeto-Burman: A Case of the Mising Language

--- (1993b).A *Historical-Comparative Study of the Tani Branch of Tibeto-Burman*.PhD Dissertation.Department of Linguistics.Berkeley, University of California.

Talukdar, A.C. (1989). “Political Modernization in Arunachal Pradesh: A study of socio-political Transition at the Grass-root level”. In J.B. Bhattacharjee (ed.) *Sequence in Development in North East India*. New Delhi, 1989, p.96

Thompson, Eds. *Essays on Language Function and Language Type Dedicated to T. Givon*. Amsterdam, Netherlands, Benjamins: 373-94.

=====

Acknowledgement

The author is extremely grateful to Karen Grunow-Hårsta, a linguist from Canada, for her helps in writing this paper. The paper is a result of a comparative study of Magar and Mising adjectives presented jointly at NEILS Conference at Gauhati with her. The author also takes this opportunity to thank Dr. Mark William Post for his comments and UGC for providing the financial assistance for the study.

=====

Sarat Kumar Doley, M.A., PGDFCS,PGDHE, PGDET, Ph.D. Candidate
Assistant Professor
Department of English
North Lakhimpur College
Khelmati
North Lakhimpur, Lakhimpur 787031
Assam
India
dolesar@tezu.ernet.in