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Gender in Kokborok

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Kokborok Couple

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Abstract

Kokborok is a Tibeto-Burman language of Northeast India with a population of about 761,964 (census of India, 2001) spoken mainly in the state of Tripura and in the neighbouring country, Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tract). The goal of present paper is to describe some of the aspects of gender marking system in Kokborok. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages, gender in Kokborok is expressed means of lexical and suffixation.

Introduction

Kokborok is a Tibeto-Burman language of Bodo-Garo sub-group spoken by 761,964 (census of India, 2001) populations in the North Eastern state of Tripura. It is also spoken in some parts of Chittagong Hill Tracts i.e. in Bangladesh and some parts of Assam. It has also close affinities with other languages of the sub group like Bodo, Garo, Tiwa, Rabha, Dimasa etc. Among these Bodo, Dimasa and Kokborok are more closely related to each other as far as their lexical items is concerned.

Gender

Gender is not a grammatical category in Kokborok, but the lexicon distinguishes gender for humans, animals, birds and trees etc. However, there are few suffixes that indicate male and female referents. Gender-marking directly follows the head noun. The gender markers are bound and free morphemes. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages Kokborok do not show any gender in 3rd person personal pronoun i.e., *bo* refers to both ‘he/she’.

Like other Tibeto-Burman language, the basic kinship terms in Kokborok have two distinct forms.

| Feminine | Masculine |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| bihik ‘wife’ | busai ‘husband’ |
| hanok ‘younger sister’ | phayuṅ ‘younger brother’ |
| mare ‘girl friend’ | kičiq ‘boy friend’ |
| pi ‘paternal aunty’ | piyai ‘paternal uncle’ |
| hamjuk ‘daughter-in-law’ | čamari ‘son-in-law’ |

Nouns relating to the name of community can also take gender suffixes to indicate masculine and feminine. The masculine suffix is /-sa/ and feminine suffix is /-juk/ and /-jukma/.

| Feminine | | Masculine | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| khasiya-juk | ‘young Khasi girl’ | khasiya-sa | ‘Khasi boy or man’ |
| mugili-juk | ‘young Manipuri girl’ | mugili-sa | ‘Manipuri boy or man’ |
| thuruk-juk | ‘young Muslim girl’ | thuruk-sa | ‘Muslim boy or man’ |
| wain-juk | ‘young Bengali girl’ | wan-sa | ‘Bengali boy or man’ |

The suffix /-jukma/ means married or aged woman. It is incorrect to use only /-ma/ which may be ungrammatical. Thus, when referring to aged or married female /-jukma/ is suffixed to the nouns as given.

| Feminine | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| khasiya-jukma | ‘Khasi woman’ |
| mugili-jukma | ‘Manipuri woman’ |
| thuruk-jukma | ‘Muslim woman’ |
| wan-jukma | ‘Bengali woman’ |

Animal nouns take the gender suffix /-ma/ and /-juk/ for referring female and /-la/ for male. Most of the nouns are followed by *čila* and *burui* which indicate maleness and femaleness respectively. Only a few domestic animals take the marker /-ma/ and /-la/ for female and male while some nouns are marked by separate morpheme /-juwa/ for goat and some use distinct lexical word as in case of male pig, i.e., genda as given below.

| Feminine | Masculine |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| sui-ma ‘bitch’ (lit. mother dog) | sui-la ‘male dog’ |
| pu-ma ‘goat’ (lit. mother goat) | pun-juwa ‘male goat’ |
| wak-ma ‘pig’ (lit. mother pig) | genda ‘boar’ |

Other than the above nouns given above, most of the other nouns are marked by the free morpheme *burui* and *čila* for referring gender of female and male respectively.

| Feminine | | Masculine | |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| korai burui | ‘female horse’ | korai čila | ‘male horse’ |
| mayuŋ burui | ‘female elephant’ | mayuŋ čila | ‘bull elephant’ |
| misip burui | ‘female buffalo’ | misip čila | ‘male buffalo’ |
| goŋ burui | ‘female bear’ | goŋ čila | ‘male bear’ |

Nouns relating to birds other than hen and cock use the morpheme *čila* and *burui* for referring male and female.

| Feminine | | Masculine | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| tok-ma | ‘hen’ | tok-la | ‘cock’ |
| takhum burui | ‘female duck’ | takhum čila | ‘male duck’ |
| tokha burui | ‘female crow’ | tokha čila | ‘male crow’ |
| pharuk burui | ‘female pigeon’ | pharuk čila | ‘male pigeon’ |

Other nouns relating to trees and plants also show gender distinction. Any fruit bearing trees and plants are considered to be female in Kokborok and which do not bear fruit is male. Feminine is marked by *burui* and masculine by *čila*.

| Feminine | | Masculine | |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| koiphol burui | ‘female papaya’ | koiphol čila | ‘male papaya’ |
| thailik burui | ‘female banana’ | thailik čila | ‘male banana’ |
| kuwai burui | ‘female betel-nut’ | kuwai čila | ‘male betel-nut’ |
| phantok burui | ‘female brinjal’ | phantok čila | ‘male brinjal’ |

Attributive nouns are formed from adjectives by suffixing /-sa/ for masculine and /-juk/ and /-jukma/ for feminine as shown below. The suffix /-juk/ is used with feminine to indicate young or unmarried while the suffix /-jukma/ is used to indicate woman.

| Feminine | Feminine | Masculine |
|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| nathoŋ-juk ‘deaf girl’ | nathoŋ-jukma ‘deaf woman’ | nathoŋ-sa ‘deaf man’ |
| kana-juk ‘blind girl’ | kana-jukma ‘blind woman’ | kana-sa ‘blind man’ |
| yakheŋ-juk ‘lame girl’ | yakheŋ-jukma ‘lame woman’ | yakheŋ-sa ‘lame man’ |
| kobor-juk ‘mad girl’ | kobor-jukma ‘mad woman’ | kobor-sa ‘mad man’ |
| sele-juk ‘lazy girl’ | sele-jukma ‘lazy woman’ | sele-sa ‘lazy man’ |

Conclusion

Like other Tibeto-Burman language gender is not grammatically marked in Kokborok. Gender-marking directly follows the head noun. Thus, Kokborok being a Tibeto-Burman language do not show any gender distinction in 3rd person personal pronoun i.e., *bo* refers to both ‘he/she’.

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