Number System in Simte

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Abstract

Simte is one of the Kuki-Chin languages spoken mostly in Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts of Manipur. The Simte language falls under the Northern Kuki-Chin sub-groups of the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is one of the endangered languages among the minor tribes of Manipur. As with the other Kuki-Chin languages, this language exhibits a pronoun dropping, and possesses the SOV order as its sentential construction. This paper attempts to discuss the three divisions of numbers in Simte, namely, singular, dual and plural. Besides this, it explores how dual morpheme '-te' and plural morpheme '-gel' are suffixed to the noun or noun phrase. One significant number system found in this language is that plurality is also expressed by reduplication of nouns, interrogative pronouns and adjectives. The number system of the said language has been illustrated with suitable examples in the paper.

Keywords: Simte, number, dual, plural, reduplication

Introduction

Simte is one of the Kuki-Chin languages spoken mostly in Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts of Manipur. According to Ching (2012), most of the Simtes are confined to the Churachandpur district, which is located in the Southern Part of Manipur. To be precise, the Simte speaking community can be found in Thanlon sub-divison, Singngat sub-division and Churachandpur Town. Hangluah (2019) states the term "Sim" means "South", and 'Te" means the "People", and thus, "Simte" literally means "The people of the South". They live mainly in Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Myanmar.

Grierson (1904) asserts Simte is one of the indigenous tribe groups under the central Chin sub-group of the Kuki-chin group of the Tibeto Burman family. This language is also classified under the Northern Kuki-Chin groups along with its genetic language family such as Paite, Zou, Vaiphei, Gangte and Thadou. (Thurgood and Polla, 2003; Lewis, Simon and fennings, 2013). According to 2001 Census Reports, the total Simte population of Manipur is around 11,651. And 2011 census report shows the population of Simte falls down to 6728. (Census Report, 2011).

Chelliah (2015) agrees with Haokip (2011: 60) argument stating that Manipur hosts more than 29 languages, and bilingualism and code-switching especially within the Kuki-Chin languages resulting in convergence of languages with fewer speakers are being subsumed by structurally and similar languages. Haokip is also of the opinion that Gangte speakers are shifting to Thadou and Simte moving towards Paite. In the light of this scenario, it is pertinent to preserve the idiosyncracy of Simte language. The ubiquitous beauty of Simte language should be addressed to the academic world. By doing so, preservation and documentation of endangered language is enriched and achieved by linguists specialized in endangered languages.

Methodology

The present paper is extensively carried out by conducting field work in Churachandpur town, Pamjaal and Joutung villages of Pherzawl District, Manipur. More than 10 informants, aged between 45-55 were interviewed, and the data were also cross-examined with different age group of the same community. Journals, books and e-materials were also accessed for the secondary data.

1. **Literature Review**

In most of the world's languages, the most common manifestation of the category of number is the distinction between singular and plural (Lyons, 1968; Payne, 1997). Singular means 'one' and plural means 'more than one'. Example: Singular "boy"; Plural "boys". This distinction rests upon the recognition of persons, animals and objects which can be enumerated (as 'one' or 'more than one') and referred to individuality or collectively, by means of nouns. Lyons (1968) further states the verb must agree with its subject in number and gender. That is, the verb must have the same number and person as its subject. Subject-

verb agreement generally means that the third person singular verb form must be used with a third person subject in the simple present tense.

Croft (1990) explains number in a hierarchical form and divides the number system into singular-dual-plural system. He further claims that there is a structural evidence of the dual form. Structurally, the dual forms are frequently marked with a non-zero morpheme, just the plural is. Dual form consists of a morpheme added to the plural form, which in turn consists of a morpheme added to zero-marked singular form. One such example who uses dual-plural form is Kharia. Kharia animate nouns have plural in –ki and dual in –ki-yar.

Against the general acceptance of number system such as singular and plural, Corbett (2000) provides an alternative approached to number system. He adds the numbering system such as the dual, the trial , the paucal and the quadrals. Dual signifies two distinct real world entities. This dual concept prompts the concept of plurality a fresh definition. So, plurality connotes a three or more real world entities.

2. Number System in Simte

There are three divisions of number in Simte. They are singular, dual and plural. The singular number is unmarked in Simte. The dual form '-gel' is suffixed to the noun, and the plural form '-te' is attached to all the nouns.

2.1. Singular

Singular number is morphologically unmarked in some of the Kuki-Chin languages such as Paite, Zou and Thadou. Simte also falls under this non-marking category of singular number. Examples (1-3) show the singular form of nouns where there is no overt marking in Simte.

(1) pasal

'Man'

(2) ke:l

'goat'

(3) meŋ

'cat'

2.2. Dual System in Simte

Simte exhibits '-gel' to express the dual form in number. The dual marker occurs along with the plural pronouns and is suffixed to it. Consider the following examples

(4)   kɔu   -gel

1PL   DUAL

'Both of us'

(5) nɔu   -gel

2PL   DUAL

'Both of you'

(6) amau   -gel

3PL   DUAL

'Both of them'

2.3. Plurality in Simte

The plural marker '-te' in Simte are marked by suffixing it to the noun. The suffix '-te' itself denotes plurality or more than one noun referent. The plural morpheme '-te' may refer to people, animals, inanimate objects etc. Examples 7 (a-l) illustrate the suffixation of plural marker '-te' to the noun.

(7)

Gloss	singular	Gloss	plural
(a) /leʔkʰabu/	'book'	/leʔkʰabu-te/	'books'
(b) /ŋa/	'fish'	/ŋa-te/	'fishes'

(c) /ui/	'dog'	/ui-te/	'dogs'
(d) /doʔkan/	'table'	/doʔkan-te/	'tables'
(e) /siŋnou/	'sapling'	/siŋnou-te/	'saplings'
(f) /houtu/	'leader'	/houtu-te/	'leaders'
(g) /va/	'bird'	/va-te/	'birds'
(h) /ni/	'aunt'	/ni-te/	'aunties'
(i) /ke:l/	'goat'	/ke:l-te/	'goats'
(j) tʰau/	'gun'	/tʰau-te/	'guns'
(k) /upa/	'elder'	/upa-te/	'elders'
(l) /saili/	'catapult'	/saili-te/	'catapults'

The plural marker '-te' also occur after numerals making the noun phrase in plural form. In its occurrence the noun comes first, followed by the numerals and the plural suffix '-te' attached to the numeral. This may be exemplified in (8) and (9) below.

(8) touna   tʰum   -te

    chair   three   PL

      'The three chairs'

(9) vatot   niʔ   -te

    duck   two   PL

      'The two ducks'

When the attributive adjective follows the noun, the plural marker is not attached to the noun but to the adjectives as shown in example (10). And if the noun comes along with attributive and numeral, the plural marker is attached to the numerals as shown in example (11)

(10) in   kaŋ   -te

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House   white   PL

'The white houses'

(11) nuŋa   melhɔi   tʰum   -te

Lady   beautiful   three   PL

'Three beautiful ladies'

2.4. Plurality Expressed by Reduplication

Siddique (2020) in his work 'Number System of Deori: An Endangered language of Assam' indicate that the plural in Deori can be expressed by reduplication of nouns, interrogative pronouns and adjectives. This notion of plurality expressed in the semantic dimensions is also quite relevant in Simte language.

Plurality in Simte may not necessarily be restricted by the presence of the plural marker '-te'. It can also be expressed by the reduplication of nouns, interrogative pronouns and adjectives. These are illustrated in the following examples.

2.4.1. Reduplication of Nouns

(12) kʰua   kʰua   a   cʰiaʔ

village village   PART   go

'All the villages are going' (Lit. 'Going by village to village')

(13) inkuan   inkuan   a   tel

Family   family   PART   participate

'Participating all families (from one families to another families)'

2.4.2 Reduplication of Interrogative Pronouns

(14) kɔi   kɔi   kap

Who   who   cry

'who all are crying'

(15) baŋ   baŋ   ka   keŋ   diŋ

What   what   1POSS carry   IRRE

'What all shall I bring?'

2.4.3 Reduplication of Adjectives

(16)   a   hau   hau   kawmaʔ   ŋen   un

3SG   rich   rich   LOC   ask   IMP: MOOD

'Ask it to all the rich peoples'

(17)   a   hɔiʔ   hɔiʔ   te:l

3SG   good   good   choose/pick

'Choose/ pick all the good ones'

3. Conclusion

Simte exhibits a non-overt or non-grammatical marking on the singular form. The dual number is expressed by suffixing the morpheme '-gel' to the head noun; while the plurality is evidenced by the presence of '-te' suffixed to the head noun. The plural marker '-te' also occur after numerals making the noun phrase in plural form. In its occurrence the noun comes first, followed by the numerals and the plural suffix '-te' attached to the numeral. When the attributive adjective follows the noun, the plural marker is not attached to the noun but to the adjectives. Significantly, the plurality is also expressed by the reduplication of noun, interrogative pronouns and adjectives.

4. Abbreviations

1. 1 POSS   First person possessive
2. 3G   Third Person Singular
3. DUAL   dual/duality
4. PART   Particle
5. PL   Plural
6. IMP:MOOD   Imperative Mood
7. IRRE   Irrealis

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