A Brief Note on Phrase Structure in Sukte

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Abstract

Sukte is an undocumented language spoken by one of the tribes of Manipur. The term 'Sukte' is derived from the word *sokte* a compound word *sok* 'to go southwards' and *te* 'plural suffix indicating person' which literally means people of the southwards or lowland. Salte is the alternate name of the language. It is mainly spoken in Churachandpur District of Manipur. Linguistically, Salte belongs to Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages (Benedict, 1972). It is closely related to many other Kuki-Chin group of languages namely Paite, Chorai, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Ranglong, Rangkhol, etc.

Keywords: Sukte, Tedim-Chin, Kuki-Chin, Tibeto-Burman, Manipur, Noun phrase.

1. Introduction

Sukte is one of the unwritten, undocumented and undescribed languages of Manipur spoken by tribe in the same name. The Sukte is the name of the language and community. The term *Sukte* is derived from *Sokte* in the form of compounding such as *sok* 'to go down or southward' and *te* 'the plural suffix roughly indicating persons' literally 'people of the southward or low land'. This language is placed under the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman sub-family of languages (Grierson, 1903). It is closely related to many other languages or dialects of Kuki-Chin group of languages namely Baite, Chorai, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Guite, Kaipeng, Ranglong, Rangkhol, etc. except Manipuri and are mutually intelligible with Chothe, Gangte, Guite, Simte, etc. Sukte is primarily spoken in Moreh sub-division of Chandel district and New Lamka-G, Simbuk, Tanglon(T), Tonglon(P), Rakwal, Sum Cheavum, Tanggnuam, Pangzwl, Lanka, Singhat, Suangdai, behiang, Behiang(T), Suangphuk and Tingkangphai villages of Churachandpur district of Manipur. Officially, the same tribe is enlisted as Salhte in the Constitution of India. But they are commonly referred to as Tiddim Chin by neighbouring communities in Manipur; however, they prefer to call themselves as Sukte. The total population of Sukte (Salhte) in Manipur was 1905 according to 2001 Census report of Manipur.

Typologically, Sukte is a tonal language. Gender distinction in Sukte is determined on the natural recognition of sex i.e., gender is not grammatically marked in this language. Sukte exhibits the typical feature of the Kuki-Chin languages as subject-verb agreement is present for different persons. Sukte is a verb final language, with dominant SOV word order.

The present paper is an attempt to explore the phrase structure of Sukte language spoken in Churachandpur district of Manipur.

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Phrase Structure in Sukte

A form consisting two or more words is a phrase. "Any group of words which is grammatically equivalent to a single word and which does not have its own subject and predicate is a phrase" (Lyons, 1968). Structurally, there are three major types of phrases in Sukte, namely (i) noun phrase, (ii) verb phrase and (iii) adverb phrase.

2.1. Noun Phrase in Sukte

The construction into which nouns are most commonly enter, and of which they are the head words, are generally called noun phrase (NP) or nominal groups. The structure of a noun phrase consists minimally a noun (or noun substitute, such as pronoun. Noun phrase in Sukte consists of a head noun which may be preceded or followed by one or more modifiers. The modifiers may be demonstrative, adjectival, numeral, quantifiers etc.

2.1.1 Noun Phrase with adjectival

In Sukte, noun phrase consisting of head nouns and adjectival are found are found very commonly. As earlier mentioned that the adjectival can only follow the head noun but can't precede the head noun and the structure of such noun phrase constructions are schematized in the following ways: [NOUN + ADJECTIVAL] NP

(1) [[*puən*]N   [*sən*]ADJ]NP
     cloth   red
     'Red cloth'

(2) [[*siŋ*]N   [*saŋ*]ADJ]NP
     tree   tall
     'Tall tree'

(3) [[*laipi*]N   [*to*]ADJ]NP
     road   high
     'High road'

(4) [[*səkol*]N   [*lian*]ADJ]NP
     horse   big
     'Big horse'

(5) [[*mi*]N   [*hoih*]ADJ]NP
     man   good
     'Good man'

(6) [[*ui*]N   [*neu*]ADJ]NP
     dog   small
     'Small dog'

(7)   [[*numei*]N   [*tʰəu*]ADJ]NP
     woman   fat

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'Fat woman'

(8)   [[*seŋ*]N   [*gik*]ADJ]NP
basket   heavy
'Heavy basket'

2.1.2. Noun Phrase with Demonstrative

In Sukte, noun phrase may consist of head noun plus demonstrative in which demonstrative root always precedes the head noun and the structure of such construction are [DEMONSTRATIVE + NOUN]. It is worth mentioning here that both proximal and distal demonstratives may be used as modifiers as can be seen in the following examples:

(9)   [[*hih*]   [*laibu*]N]NP
DEM   book
'This book'

(10)   [[*huə*]   [*boŋ*]N]NP
DEM   cow
'That cow'

(11)   [[*huə*]   [*mi*]N]NP
DEM   man
'That man'

(12)   [[*hih*]   [*loi*]N]NP
DEM   buffalo
'This buffalo'

(13)   [[*huə*]   [*zusə*]N-[*te*]PL]NP
DEM   rat-PL
'Those rats'

(14)   [[*hih*]   [*lai*]N-[*te*]PL]NP
DEM   paper-PL
'These papers'

2.1.3. Noun Phrase with Demonstrative Plus Adjectival

In Sukte, the noun phrase may consist of head noun plus demonstrative and adjectival. The demonstrative always precedes the head noun and the adjectival follows the head noun and the structure of such noun phrase construction is [DEMONSTRATIVE + NOUN + ADJECTIVAL] as can be seen in the following examples:

(15)   [[*hih*]   [*səkol*]N   [*pə*]ADJ]NP
DEM   horse   thin
'This thin horse'

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(16) [[*huə*] [*zəwhŋeu*]N [*vom*]ADJ]NP
      DEM   cat   black
      'That black cat'

(17) [[*hih*] [*pak*]N   [*sən*]ADJ]NP
      DEM   flower   red
      'This red flower'

(18) [[*huə*] [*vok*]N   [*tʰəu*]ADJ]NP
      DEM   pig   fat
      'That fat pig'

(19) [[*huə*] [*sai*]N   [*lian-te*]ADJ]NP
      DEM   elephant   big-PL
      'Those big elephants'

(20) [[*hih*] [*səmsih*]N   [*neu-te*]ADJ]NP
      DEM-PL   comb   small-PL
      'These small combs'

2.1.4. Noun Phrase with Quantifier

In Sukte, the noun phrase may consist of head noun an quantifier in which the quantifier usually follows the head noun, and the structure of such construction is [NOUN + QUANTIFIER] as can be illustrated in the following examples:

(21) [[*ŋəsə*]N   [*təwm*]QUNT]NP
      fish   few
      'A few fish'

(22) [[*zusə*]N   [*təmpi*]QUNT]NP
      rat   many
      'Many rats'

(23) [[*mi*]N   [*hon*]QUNT]NP
      man   group
      'A group of people'

(24) [[*pak*]N   [*lom*]QUNT]NP
      flower   bunch
      'A bunch of flowers'

(25) [[*ip*]N [*gik*]QUNT]NP
      bag   heavy
      'Heavy bag'

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(26)   [[ən]N   [neu]QUNT]NP
       rice   little
       'Little rice'

2.1.5. Noun Phrase with Numerals

The noun phrase in Sukte may also consist of head noun plus numerals in which the numeral always follows the head noun and the structure of such construction is [NOUN+ NUMERAL], examples are given below:

(27)   [[ip]N   [tʰum]NUM]NP
       bag   three
       'Three bags'

(28)   [[humpi]N   [nih]NUM]NP
       lion   two
       'Two lions'

(29)   [[təpa]N   [[kʰətnə]NUM]NP
       son   first
       'First son'

(30)   [[tənu]N   [[nihnə]NUM]NP
       daughter   second
       'Second daughter'

(31)   [[vok]N   [[li]NUM]NP
       pig   four
       'Four pigs'

2.1.6. Noun Phrase with Adjectival and Specifier

In Sukte, noun phrase consisting of head noun plus specifier and adjectival where adjectival and specifier follow the head noun. The structure of such noun phrase construction is [NOUN+ADJECTIVAL+SPECIFIER] as can be seen in the following examples:

(32)   [[ziŋsaŋ]N   [sə]ADJ   [məhməh]SPEC]NP
       morning   hot   very
       'Very hot morning'

(33)   [[zan]N   [vot]ADJ   [məhməh]SPEC]NP
       night   cold   very
       'Very cold night'

(34)   [[tuipak]N   [etləwm]ADJ [məhməh]SPEC]NP
       lotus   beautiful   very
       'Very beautiful lotus'

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Here, interesting to note that the alternate order i.e. adjectival and specifier may precede the head noun if formative particle ə- is prefixed to the adjectival. But it is usually occurred in poem, song etc. However, the meaning is almost same. The structure of such noun phrase construction is [ADJECTIVAL+SPECIFIER+NOUN] as can be seen in the following examples:

(35)   [[*əsə*]ADJ   [*məhməh*]SPEC   [*ziŋsaŋ*]N]NP
       hot   very   morning
       'Very hot morning'

(36)   [[*vot*]ADJ   [*məhməh*]SPEC   [*zan*]N]NP
       cold   very   night
       'Very cold night'

2.1.7. Noun Phrase with Postposition

In Sukte, Noun phrase with postpositions are very commonly found as many other Kuki-Chin languages of South Asia. The structure of such construction is: [NOUN + POSPOSITION + LOCATIVE], which are shown in following examples:

(37)   [[*siŋ*]N   [*tuŋ*]POST-[*əh*]LOC]NP
       tree   on-LOC
       'On the tree'

(38)   [*siŋkuən*]N   [*suŋ*]POST-[*əh*]LOC]NP
       box   inside-LOC
       'Inside the box'

(39)   [*lo*]N   [*kim*]POST-[*əh*]LOC]NP
       field   around-LOC
       'Around the field'

(40)   [[*səbuəi*]N   [*nuai*]POST-[*əh*]LOC]NP
       table   below-LOC
       'Below the table'

2.1.8. Co-ordinate Noun Phrase

Co-ordinate noun phrases are those noun phrase which are formed by combining two or more noun phrases with the help of coordinator, which may either conjunctive *təwh* or disjunctive *əhihkeileh* as can be seen in the following examples:

2.1.8.1. Conjunctive

(41)   [[*kəpa*]NP   [*təwh*]CONJ   [*kənu*]NP]NP
       my father   and   my mother
       'My father and mother'

(42)   [[*ən*]NP   [*təwh*]CONJ   [*aktui*]NP]NP

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rice   and   egg
'Rice and egg'

(43)   [[*uipʰuk*]NP   [*təwh*]CONJ   [*guul*]NP]NP
frog   and   snake
'Frog and snake'

(44)   [[*nəŋ*]NP   [*təwh*]CONJ   [*kei*]NP]NP
you   and   I
'You and me'

(45)   [[*john*]NP   [*təwh*]CONJ   [*marry*]NP]NP
John   and   Marry
'John and Marry'

2.1.8.2. Disjunctive

(46)   [[*niaŋtui*]NP   [*əhihkeileh*]DISJ   [*boŋnoi*]NP]NP
tea   or   milk
'Tea or milk'

(47)   [[*ziŋsaŋ*]NP   [*əhihkeileh*]DISJ   [*zan*]NP]NP
morning   or   night
'Morning or night'

(48)   [[*səkol*]NP   [*əhihkeileh*]DISJ   [*boŋ*]NP]NP
horse   or   cow
'Horse or cow'

(49)   [[*zəwhŋeu*]NP [*əhihkeileh*]DISJ   [*zusə*]NP]NP
cat   or   rat
'Cat or rat'

(50)   [[*sə*]NP   [*əhihkeileh*]DISJ   [*vot*]NP]NP
hot   or   cold
'Hot or cold'

(51)   [[*vok*]NP   [*əhihkeileh*]DISJ   [*loi*]NP]NP
pig   or   buffalo
'Pig or buffalo'

2.2. Verb Phrase

Verb phrase in Sukte must consist of a verb and some other optional elements (NPs or Adverbs) which generally precede the verb. Like many other languages in the world, verb phrase in Sukte must have a verb, whereas NPs or adverbs are optionally present in the phrase. There are simple sentences in Sukte in which the VP consists of only V as exemplified in the following examples:

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(52)   *kə*   [[*lam*]V]VP   *hi*
       I   dance ASPT
       'I dance.'

(53)   *kə*   [[*tu*]V[*lai*]PROG]VP-*hi*
       I   sit   PROG ASPT
       'I am sitting.'

(54)   *john*   [[*diŋ*]V[*lai*]PROG]VP-*hi*
       John   stand PROG   ASPT
       'John is standing.'

(55)   *ui*   *ə*   [[*ham*]V]VP-*hi*
       dog   3PP   bark-ASPT
       'The dog barks.'

(56)   *kə*   [[*ihmu*]V[*ta*]PERF]VP-*hi*
       I   sleep-PAST-ASPT
       'I slept.'

When the VP takes two NPs, the first NP is the indirect object and the second NP is the direct object and the structure of such verb phrase construction is: [(NOUN PHRASE) +(NOUN PHRASE) + (VERB)]VP as can seen in the following examples:

(57)   *john-in* [[*merry*]N[*kiangəh*]]NP [[*laibu*]N[*kʰət*]NUM]NP   *ə*
       John-NOM Merry DAT   book   one   3PP
       [[*piə*]V]VP   *hi*
       give   ASPT
       'John gives Merry a book.'

(58)   *kei-in* [[*əməh*]N[*kiangəh*]]NP [[*epelgəh*]N[*nih*]NUM]NP *ə*
       I-NOM she   DAT   apple   two   3PP
       [[*piə*]V]VP   *hi*
       give   ASPT
       'I give him two apples.'

(59)   *ram-in* [[*əmao*][*kiangəh*]]NP[[*haotʰei*]N[*li*]NUM]NP ə [[*piə*]V]VP
       Ram-NOM they-DAT   mango four   3PP give
       hi
       ASPT
       'Ram gives them four mangoes.'

In Sukte, the verb phrase may consist of verb and adverb in which time, place and manner adverbs always precede the verb and the structure of such verb phrase construction is: [ADVERB + VERB] as many other SOV languages of the world do.

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Examples:

  (60) *əməh-in*   [[*oltəkin*]ADV   *ə*-[*sim*]V]VP-*hi*
       he-NOM   slowly   3PP-read-ASPT
       'He reads slowly.'

  (61) *əməh-in*   [[*kiciəntəkin*]ADV *ə*-[*gelh*]V]VP-*hi*
       he -NOM   clearly   3PP-write-ASPT
       'He writes clearly.'

  (62) *john* [[*nisim*]ADV *ə*-[*tai*]V]VP-*hi*
       John daily   3PP-run-ASPT
       'John runs daily.

  (63) [*ziŋciaŋ*]ADV [*saŋ*]NP-*əh* *kə* [[*pai*]V[*diŋ*]UNRL]VP-*hi*
       tomorrow school-LOC 1PP go UNRL-ASPT
       'Tommorow, I will go to the school.'

2.3. Adverbial Phrase

    An adverb phrase consists of an adverb. This unit is substitutable by an adverb in a clause. This adverb phrase functions as an attributive to the verb phrase. Such types of phrase are found in Sukte. Examples are given below:

  (64) *əməh-in*   [[*oltəkin*]ADV]ADVP *ə-pai-hi*
       he- NOM   slowly   3PP-go-ASPT
       'He goes slowly.'

  (65) *kei-in la* [[*ŋaihtəkin*]ADV]ADVP *kə-sək-hi*
       I-NOM song loudly   1PP-sing-ASPT
       'I sing a song loudly.'

  (66) *əmən* [[*oltəkin*]ADV[*məhməh*]SPEC]ADVP *ə-pai-hi*
       he-NOM slowly   very   3PP-go-ASPT
       'He goes very slowly.'

  (67) *ken la* [[*ŋaihtəkin*]ADV[*məhməh*]SPEC]]ADVP *kə-sək-hi*
       I-NOM   loudly   very   1PP-sing-ASPT
       'I sing a song very loudly.'

  (68) *john-in* *kei-hoŋ* [[*kinəwhtəkin*]ADV]ADVP *ə-tʰei-hi*
       John-NOM I-DIR quickly   3PP-know-ASPT
       'John knows me quickly.'

  (69) *john-in kei-hoŋ* [[*kinəwhtəkin*]ADV[*məhməh*]SPEC]ADVP
       John-NOM I-DIR quickly   very
       ə-tʰei-hi

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3PP-know-ASPT
'John knows me very quickly.'

3. Conclusion

From the above illustrations, the following conclusions may be drawn. Noun phrase in Sukte consists of a head noun which may be preceded or followed by one or more modifiers. The modifiers may be demonstrative, adjectival, numerals, quantifiers etc. The head noun in Sukte is not strictly in the right of the noun phrase. Co-ordinate noun phrase in Sukte is expressed by the coordinators, which may be either conjunctive or disjunctive. Verb phrase in Sukte must consist of a verb and some other optional elements (NPs or Adverbs) which generally precede the verb. An adverb phrase consists of an adverb with a specifier which always precedes head verb.

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