
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 13:11 November 2013
ISSN 1930-2940

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Agreements in Manipuri

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Abstract

The present paper is concerned with the Grammatical Agreements in Manipuri, a Tibeto-Burman language. This paper analyses three features such as Number, Person, Gender whether they show agreement features. Number shows relevant to certain lexemes such as nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs. Manipuri has no grammatical agreement in number. Singular is overtly unmarked while plural is marked by the suffixes, -siŋ (added to all other nouns) or -k^hoi (added to personal pronouns and proper nouns indicating humans; not state or country) and other lexical quantifiers. There is no person agreement phenomenon between the verb and its argument in Manipuri. Three pronominal prefixes are distinct in Manipuri such as, 1st person pronominal 'i', 2nd person pronominal 'nə' and

3rd person pronominal ‘mə’. Manipuri has no grammatical gender. It has ways of identifying natural genders.

1. Introduction

Agreement is a traditional term used in grammatical theory and description to refer to a formal relationship between elements, whereby a form of one word requires a corresponding form of another (Crystal, 1985). Grammatical agreement is present in many of the world’s languages today and has become an essential feature that guides linguistic processing. When two words in a sentence are said to ‘agree’, this means that they share certain features such as ‘gender’, ‘number’, ‘person’, or others. Learning a language requires mastering its means to indicate constituent structure that is how words are linked together in bigger units such as phrases. Many languages do this by relying on so-called grammatical agreement. This means that information of a single linguistic unit (source) can reappear on another unit (target), that is, grammatical information is percolated from source to target (Corbett, 2006). The information that is percolated is usually packaged in terms of agreement features. Agreement features are elements into which linguistic units, such as words, can be broken down. Commonly used features are number (e.g. singular, plural, dual), person (e.g. 1st, 2nd, 3rd), and gender (e.g. masculine, feminine, neuter). Less clear features include definiteness and case (Corbett, 2006). In Manipuri, three features such as Number, Person, Gender can be discussed whether they show agreement feature.

2. Number

Linguistically, number is a grammatical category relevant to certain lexemes such as nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs. For nouns and pronouns, number specifies the quantity of the referent (e.g. cow, for one instance; cows, for many instances). For verbs the number usually refers to the quantity of the linked noun or pronoun (usually the subject of the verb). In many languages currently spoken, number is limited to singular (of one referent) and plural (of more than one referent). In addition to this, other categories appear such as dual (of the two referents), trial (of three referents).

Manipuri has no grammatical agreement in number. Speakers of this language make use of singular and plural numbers. Singular is overtly unmarked while plural is marked by the suffixes, *-sij* (added to all other nouns) or *-k^hoi* (added to personal pronouns and proper nouns indicating humans). The lexical quantifiers such as *k^hərə* ‘some’ and *məjam* ‘many’ are used to indicate the preceding noun or pronoun to be plural. However, the numerical *əma* ‘one’ is used to indicate singular. Manipuri has no grammatical agreement in number as cited by the sentences below.

1(a). əŋaŋ kəppi

əŋaŋ kəp-i

baby cry-ASP

‘Baby cries’.

(b). əŋaŋsij kəppi

əŋaŋ-sij kəp-i

baby-PL cry-ASP

‘Babies cry’.

(c). mi əmə laki

mi əmə lak -i

person one come-ASP

‘A person comes’.

(d). mi k^hərə laki

mi k^hərə lak -i

person some come-ASP

‘Some persons come’.

(e). mi məjam laki

mi məjam lak -i
 person many come-ASP
 ‘Many persons come’.

It is noted that the verb *kəppi* ‘cry+ASP’ in 1(a) and (b) remains unchanged although the singular subject and plural subject occur respectively. Similarly, it happens in sentences 1(d) and (e) that the verb *laki* ‘come+ASP’ is not affected by the use of the plural indicative quantifiers *k^hərə* ‘some’ and *məjam* ‘many’ respectively and also the verb does not change when the numeral *əmə* ‘one’ is used along with the noun *mi* ‘person’ in 1(c).

Plural suffix *-siŋ* can be added to any noun as *-jum+siŋ* ‘houses’, *sa+siŋ* ‘animals’, *nupa+siŋ* ‘men’, *nupi+siŋ* ‘women’, *əŋaŋ+siŋ* ‘children’, *gari+siŋ* ‘vehicles’, etc. And also it is possible to suffix *-siŋ* to foreign singulars to form plurals in Manipuri. Examples are *iyliŋmen+siŋ* ‘Englishmen’, *p^hormula+siŋ* ‘formulae’, *medija+siŋ* ‘media’ etc.

Three personal pronouns *-əi* ‘I’, *nəŋ* ‘you’ and *ma/məhak* ‘he/she’ take this plural suffix as *-əi+k^hoi* ‘we’, *nə+k^hoi* ‘you’ and *mə+k^hoi* ‘they’. It can be noted that the first person pronoun does not change when the plural suffix is added on it. But when the suffix *-k^hoi* is added to the second and third person pronouns, *nəŋ* ‘you’ and *ma/məhak* ‘he/she’ change to *nə* and *mə* respectively. Manipuri does not allow the use of **nəŋ+k^hoi* and **ma/məhak+k^hoi* (Chelliah, 1997). In proper nouns, the suffix *-k^hoi* is marked for plurals as- *tombə+k^hoi* ‘Tomba and his group’, *rani+k^hoi* ‘Rani and her group’, etc.

The demonstrative in Manipuri, *məsi* ‘this’ and *mədu* ‘that’ does not have marked plural forms unlike the English demonstrative ‘this’ and ‘that’ used in singular, and they become ‘these’ and ‘those’ in plural (Yashawanta, 2000). The following examples can be considered.

2(a). məsigi/mədugi lairiksi(du) pabə jai

məsi-gi/mədu-gi lairik-si(du) pa -bə ja -i
 this-GEN /that-GEN book -DEM read-NZR agree-ASP
 ‘This/that book is readable (of interest)’.

(b). məsigi lairiksiṅsi pabə jai

məsi-gi lairik-siṅ-si pa -bə ja -i
 this-GEN book-PL-DEM read-NZR agree-ASP
 ‘These books are readable (of interest)’.

The quantifiers *məjam* ‘many’, and *k^hərə* ‘some’ take singular nouns. For instance,

lairik əmə ‘one book’

lairik k^hərə ‘some books’

lairik məjam ‘many books’

More examples can be considered as plurals in Manipuri do not show any agreement.

3(a). caubək^hoi cət^hre

caubə -k^hoi cət-k^hə -re

Chaoba-PL go-DEF-PERF

‘Chaoba and his group have gone’.

(b). mək^hoi cət^hre

mə -k^hoi cət-k^hə -re

3PP -PL go -DEF-PERF

‘They have gone’.

(c). əṅaṅsiṅ cət^hre

əṅaṅ -siṅ cət-k^hə -re

child -PL go -DEF-PERF

‘Children have gone’.

- (d). məni cək^hre
 məni cə-k^hə -re
 Mani go-DEF-PERF
 ‘Mani has gone’.

The above analysis reveals that in Manipuri, there is no grammatical agreement in number. Singular is overtly unmarked. While suffixes *-siŋ* or *-k^hoi* are added to form plurals. This means that plural is marked by the suffixes, *-siŋ* (added to all other nouns) or *-k^hoi* (added to personal pronouns and proper nouns indicating humans; not state or country). The numerical *əmə* ‘one’ is used to indicate singular while *məjam* ‘many’ or *k^hərə* ‘some’ is used to indicate plurals but they do not reflect any agreement to verb.

3. Person

Person is a category used in grammatical description to indicate the nature of the participants in a situation (Crystal, 1985). John Lyons (1968) states that the category of person is clearly definable with reference to the notion of participant-roles; the ‘first’ person is used by the speaker to refer to himself as a subject of discourse, the ‘second’ person is used to refer to the hearer; and the ‘third’ person is used to refer to person or things other than the speaker and hearer. But the grammatical category of person, in the case of the first and second persons, does not simply express the speaker and addressee respectively, but rather the participant or discourse roles of speaker and addressee.

Manipuri makes use of first person singular pronoun *əi* ‘I’ and plural pronoun *əik^hoi* ‘we’; second person singular pronoun *nəŋ* ‘you’ and plural, *nək^hoi* ‘you’; and third person singular pronoun *məhak* ‘he/she’ and plural, *mək^hoi* ‘they’ (Chelliah, 1997). The dual forms of these three persons are also distinct like *ibani* ‘we two’ for the first person dual form, *nəbani* ‘you two’ for second person dual form and *məbani* ‘they two’ for third person dual form. The second person has honorific singular form ‘*ədom*’ and ‘*əsom*’, or ‘*som*’ which are used in formal

relation and to strangers. Three pronominal prefixes are distinct in Manipuri such as, 1st person pronominal ‘i’, 2nd person pronominal ‘nə’ and 3rd person pronominal ‘mə’. These can be affixed to kinship terms or inalienably possessed nouns. The use of second person pronominal prefix to kinship term such as, *nəma* ‘your mother’ and *nəpa* ‘your father’ is impolite. Instead *nəŋgi ima* ‘your mother’ which literally means ‘you+GEN+my+mother’ is used.

Manipuri has no person agreement phenomenon between the verb and its argument that can be illustrated by the sentences cited below.

3.1 For first person

4(a). əi cak care

əi cak ca -re

I rice eat-PERF

‘I have taken rice’.

(b). əik^hoi cak care

əi-k^hoi cak ca -re

I -PL rice eat-PERF

‘We have taken rice’.

(c). ibani cak care

ibani cak ca -re

we two rice eat-PERF

‘We two have taken rice’.

3.2 For second person

5(a). nəŋ cak care

nəŋ cak ca -re

you rice eat-PERF

‘You have taken rice’.

(b). nəik^hoi cak care
nə -k^hoi cak ca -re
you -PL rice eat-PERF
'You have taken rice'.

(c). nəbani cak care
nəbani cak ca-re
you two rice eat-PERF
'You two have taken rice'.

3.3 For third person

6(a). məhak cak care
məhak cak ca -re
he rice eat-PERF
'He has taken rice'.

(b). mək^hoi cak care
mə-k^hoi cak ca -re
he -PL rice eat-PERF
'He has taken rice'.

(c). məbani cak care
məbani cak ca-re
they two rice eat-PERF
'They two have taken rice'.

The examples cited above reveal that all the uses of three categories of persons do not affect to their respective verbs, that is, the verb remains as it is as *care* 'eat+PERF'. This proves that there is no person agreement phenomenon in Manipuri between the verb and its argument.

3.4 Pronominal markers

Pronominal markers are all prefixes in Manipuri and they are possessed by the things viz., kinship terms, parts of body and inanimate. The nominal prefixes are identified as *i-* (first person pronominal marker), *nə-* (second person pronominal marker) and *mə-* (third person pronominal marker). Of the three pronominal prefixes the marker *i-* and *nə-* are not as productive as the third person pronominal marker *mə-*. The occurrence of these markers can be considered as in the categories of kinship terms (some not to all), body parts (some not to all) and in some inalienable objects.

Kinship terms which take pronominal prefixes are frequently used by the speakers of this language. They are illustrated as below.

i+ma > *ima* ‘my mother’

nə+ma > *nəma* ‘your mother’

mə+ma > *məma* ‘his/her mother’

i+pa > *ipa* ‘my father’

nə+pa > *nəpa* ‘your father’

mə+pa > *məpa* ‘his/her father’

i+d^həu > *id^həu* ‘my grandfather’

nə+d^həu > *nəd^həu* ‘your grandfather’

mə+d^həu > *məd^həu* ‘his/her grandfather’

Body parts which take pronominal prefixes are given below.

i+kok > *ikok* ‘my head’

nə+kok > *nəkok* ‘your head’

mə+kok > *məkok* ‘his/her head’

i+mai > *imai* ‘my face’

nə+mai > *nəmai* ‘your face’

mə+mai > məmai 'his/her face'

i+k^hut > ik^hut 'my hand'

nə+k^hut > nək^hut 'your hand'

mə+k^hut > mək^hut 'his/her hand'

Some inalienable objects which take pronominal prefix *mə-* are illustrated below.

mə+məi > məməi 'its tail'

mə+ci > məci 'its horn'

mə+ri > məri 'its lace/relative'

mə+hum > məhum 'its nest'

The root '*məi*' is a free root whereas, '*ci*', '*ri*' and '*hum*' are bound.

Corresponding to the first, second and third persons in Manipuri there are two forms viz., a free form (occurs when they are used alone e.g. *əi* 'I', *nəŋ* 'you', *ma* 'he/she') and a bound form (occurs when they are attached to some other elements like the plural markers, kinship terms, body parts, etc. *i-* '1PP', *nə-* '2PP' and *mə-* '3PP').

Examples:

7(a). əi nəŋbu k^həŋŋi

əi nəŋ-bu k^həŋ -i

I you-ACC know-ASP

'I know you'.

(b). ima ipa mitnə uba laini

i -ma i -pa mit-nə u -ba lai -ni

1PP-mother 1PP-father eye-ERG see-NZR god-COP

'Parents are like God'.

8(a). nəŋ isəi p^həjənə səki

nəŋ isəi p^həjə -nə sək -i

you song be beautiful-ADV sing-ASP

‘You sing very well’.

(b). nək^hoi nəmai nəmit tat^hokləbra

nə -k^hoi nə -mai nə -mit ta -t^hok-lə -bə -ra

2PP-PL 2PP-face 2PP-eye wash-out -PROS-NZR-INT

‘Did you wash your face?’

9(a). ma ojadi

ma oja -ni

he teacher-COP

‘He is a teacher’.

(b). mək^hoi məsək mətəu p^həjəbi nupini

mək^hoi mə -sək mə -təu p^həjəbi nupi-ni

they 3PP-face 3PP-do be beautiful girl -COP

‘They are beautiful girls’.

Free forms of pronouns occur with no elements attaching to them as in 7(a), 8(a) and 9(a). Bound form of pronouns, however, occur prefixing to the kinship terms as in 7(b), to the plural and body parts as in 8(b) and to the abstract noun in 9(b).

A suffix is distinct in this language, that is, the suffix *-hak* which is added to the second and third pronominal prefixes (for the first person, it is used as free form i.e. *əi* when the suffix *-hak* is added to it). These are nothing but the extended forms of pronouns derived by adding the suffix *-hak*. The question of meaning difference between the extended and non-extended does not arise except the plural marker can not be added to the extended form. The examples cited below support this point.

10(a). əihak risərs təuri

əihak risərs təu-ri

I research do -PROG

'I am doing research'.

(b). nəhak məhakpu k^həŋbra

nəhak məhak-pu k^həŋ -bə -ra

you he -ACC know-NZR-INT

'Do you know him?'

(c). məhak ŋəraŋ lakpra

məhak ŋəraŋ lak -pə -ra

he yesterday come-NZR-INT

'Did he come yesterday?'

(d).* nəhakk^hoi məhakk^hoibu k^həŋbra

nəhak-k^hoi məhak-k^hoi-bu k^həŋ -bə -ra

you -PL he -PL -ACC know-NZR-INT

(e).* ihak risərs təuri

ihak risərs təu-ri

I research do -PROG

Like the suffix *-hak*, the plural suffix *-k^hoi* takes the free form of first person, whereas the other two have their bound form i.e. *nə+k^hoi* > *nək^hoi* 'you', *mə+k^hoi* > *mək^hoi* 'they' and *əi+k^hoi* (**i+k^hoi*) > *əik^hoi* (**ik^hoi*) 'we'.

In Manipuri, the use of the three pronouns shows a distinct characteristic. Unlike other language, the second person *nəŋ* 'you' in singular number is limited. It is not used by the speaker to the seniors to him or to his parents. It is definitely used by the parents to their sons or daughters, by the old to young, or among the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

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close friends etc. When the use of *nəŋ* ‘you’ in singular is found wrongly or beyond the way of its usage, the speaker is automatically considered as one of the discipline. If the speaker is a small child, seniors or parents will correct the use of ‘*nəŋ*’.

4. Gender

Grammatical genders, also called noun classes, are classes of nouns reflected in the behavior of associated words; every noun must belong to one of the classes and there should be very few which belong to several classes at once. Manipuri has no grammatical gender. It has ways of identifying natural genders. Human and animate nouns are referred to as male or female on the basis of natural sex. A very distinct suffix, such as *-pə~-bə* indicating ‘male’ makes different from that of ‘female’ indicating gender suffix, *-pi~-bi* (Yashawanta, 1985). For instance, *nupa* ‘nu+pa’, meaning ‘man’ and *nupi* ‘nu+pi’ meaning ‘woman’; *əpokpə* ‘ə+pok+pə’ meaning ‘father’ and *əpokpi* ‘ə+pok+pi’ meaning ‘mother’; *jenba* ‘jen+ba’ meaning ‘cock’ and *jenbi* ‘jen+bi’ meaning ‘hen’ are distinguished. Two lexical items, such as *labə* ‘male’ and *əmom* ‘female’ are employed to indicate natural sex in the case of animal nouns as *sən labə* ‘ox’ and *sən əmom* ‘cow’; *kəi labə* ‘tiger’ and *kəi əmom* ‘tigress’. These two lexical items are also used in some plants to indicate natural sex as in *əwat^həbi labə* ‘male papaya’ and *əwat^həbi əmom* ‘female papaya’ etc. Some opposite words which are morphologically unmarked for gender such as *ima* ‘1PP+mother’, *ipa* ‘1PP+father’; *ice* ‘1PP+sister’, *ibuy* ‘1PP+brother’; and *k^hura* ‘uncle’, *indon* ‘aunt’, etc. are used to indicate natural sexes. The third person singular personal pronoun ‘*məhak*’ in Manipuri, behaves dual natures in gender as cited in the following sentences in (11) where the pronoun ‘*məhak*’ indicates both male or female sexes.

- 11(a). *məhak məharanini*
məhak məharani-ni

she queen -COP

‘She is a queen’.

(b). *məhak niŋt^həuni*

məhak niŋt^həu-ni

he king -COP

‘He is a king’.

The pronoun ‘*məhak*’ as cited in (11) above is determined the male or female by the co-referents they occur next to it. In 11(a), the pronoun *məhak* ‘she’ indicates the female sex because of its immediate co-occurrence, *məharani* ‘queen’ is a female. Similarly, in 11(b), the pronoun *məhak* ‘he’ indicates the male sex because of its co-occurrence, *niŋt^həu* ‘king’ is a male.

5. Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that Manipuri has no grammatical agreement in number. Speakers of this language make use of singular and plural numbers. Singular is overtly unmarked while plural is marked by the suffixes, *-siŋ* (added to all other nouns) or *-k^hoi* (added to personal pronouns and proper nouns). There is no person agreement phenomenon between the verb and its argument in Manipuri. Pronominal markers are all prefixes in Manipuri and they are possessed by the things viz., kinship terms, parts of body and inanimate. Corresponding to the three persons there are two forms viz., a free form (occurs when they are used alone e.g. *əi* ‘I’, *nəŋ* ‘you’, *ma* ‘he/she’) and a bound form (occurs when they are attached to some other elements like the plural markers, kinship terms, body parts, etc. *i-* ‘1PP’, *nə-* ‘2PP’ and *mə-* ‘3PP’). Unlike other language, the second person *nəŋ* ‘you’ in singular number is limited. It is not used by the speaker to the seniors to him or to his parents. It is definitely used by the parents to their sons or daughters, by the old to young, or among the close friends etc. Manipuri has ways of identifying natural genders as it has no grammatical gender. Human and animate nouns are referred to as male or female on the basis

of natural sex. A very distinct suffix, such as *-pə~-bə* indicating ‘male’ makes different from that of ‘female’ indicating gender suffix, *-pi~-bi*.

Abbreviations

1PP	first person pronoun
2PP	second person pronoun
3PP	third person pronoun
ACC	accusative
ADV	adverb
ASP	aspect
COP	copulative
DEF	definitive
DEM	demonstrative
ERG	ergative
NZR	nominalizer
PERF	perfective
PL	plural
PROG	progressive
PROS	prospective
INT	interrogative

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:11 November 2013

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