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 -kʰoi (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 ‘nɔ’ and
3rd person pronominal ‘ma’. 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, \(-si\) (added to all other nouns) or \(-k\oi\) (added to personal pronouns and proper nouns indicating humans). The lexical quantifiers such as \(k\oh\) ‘some’ and \(m\ajam\) ‘many’ are used to indicate the preceding noun or pronoun to be plural. However, the numerical \(\om\) ‘one’ is use to indicate singular. Manipuri has no grammatical agreement in number as cited by the sentences below.

1(a). \(\om\\k\app\)
\(\om\\k\\p\)
baby cry-ASP
‘Baby cries’.

(b). \(\om\\si\\k\ppi\)
\(\om\\si\k\p\i\)
baby-PL cry-ASP
‘Babies cry’.

(c). \(m\\om\\l\ak\)
\(m\\om\\l\\p\)
person one come-ASP
‘A person comes’.

(d). \(m\k\oh\l\ak\)
\(m\k\oh\l\p\)
person some come-ASP
‘Some persons come’.

(e). \(m\m\ajam\l\ak\)
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 kʰərə ‘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 -siy can be added to any noun as -jum+siy ‘houses’, sa+siy ‘animals’, nupa+siy ‘men’, nupi+siy ‘women’, əŋəl+siy ‘children’, gari+siy ‘vehicles’, etc. And also it is possible to suffix -siy to foreign singulars to form plurals in Manipuri. Examples are əŋlismen+siy ‘Englishmen’, pʰormula+siy ‘formulae’, medija+siy ‘media’ etc.

Three personal pronouns -əi ‘I’, nəy ‘you’ and ma/məhak ‘he/she’ take this plural suffix as -əi+kʰoi ‘we’, nə+kʰoi ‘you’ and mə+kʰoi ‘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 -kʰoi is added to the second and third person pronouns, nəy ‘you’ and ma/məhak ‘he/she’ change to nə and mə respectively. Manipuri does not allow the use of *nəy+kʰoi and *ma/məhak+kʰoi (Chelliah, 1997). In proper nouns, the suffix -kʰoi is marked for plurals as- tombə+kʰoi ‘Tomba and his group’, rani+kʰoi ‘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). məsɪgi/mədʊgi lairksi(du) pabə jai
məsī-qi/mədū-qi lairik-si(du) pa -bɔ ja -i
this-GEN /that-GEN book -DEM read-NZR agree-ASP
‘This/that book is readable (of interest)’.

(b). məsīgī lairikśniṣi pəbɔ jai
məsī-qi lairik-siŋ-si pa -bɔ ja -i
this-GEN book-PL-DEM read-NZR agree-ASP
‘These books are readable (of interest)’.

The quantifiers məjam ‘many’, and kəɾə ‘some’ take singular nouns. For instance,

laiɾik əmə ‘one book’
laiɾik kəɾə ‘some books’
laiɾik mojam ‘many books’

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

3(a). caubəkʰoi cətʰre
caubɔ -kʰoi cət-kʰə -re
Chaoba-PL go-DEF-PERF
‘Chaoba and his group have gone’.

(b). məkʰoi cətʰre
mə -kʰoi cət-kʰə -re
3PP-PL go -DEF-PERF
‘They have gone’.

(c). əŋaŋsiŋ cətʰre
əŋəŋ -siŋ cət-kʰə -re
child -PL go -DEF-PERF
‘Children have gone’.
The above analysis reveals that in Manipuri, there is no grammatical agreement in number. Singular is overtly unmarked. While suffixes -siŋ or -kʰoi are added to form plurals. This means that plural is marked by the suffixes, -siŋ (added to all other nouns) or -kʰoi (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 kʰərə ‘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 əiŋkʰoi ‘we’; second person singular pronoun nəŋ ‘you’ and plural, nəkʰoi ‘you’; and third person singular pronoun məhək ‘he/she’ and plural, məkʰoi ‘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 ‘ədəm’ 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 ‘nɔ’ and 3rd person pronominal ‘mɔ’. These can be affixed to kinship terms or inalienably possessed nouns. The use of second person pronominal prefix to kinship term such as, nɔma ‘your mother’ and nɔpa ‘your father’ is impolite. Instead nɔŋgi 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). ɔi cak care

ɔi cak ca -re
I  rice eat-PERF
‘I have taken rice’.

(b). ɔi-kʰoi cak care

ɔi-kʰoi 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). nŋ cak care

nŋ cak ca -re
you rice eat-PERF
‘You have taken rice’.
(b). nɔikʰɔi cak care
nɔ -kʰɔi cak ca -re
you -PL rice eat-PERF
‘You have taken rice’.

(c). nɔbani cak care
nɔbani  cak ca-re
you two rice eat-PERF
‘You two have taken rice’.

3.3 For third person

6(a). mɔhak cak care
mɔhak cak ca -re
he  rice eat-PERF
‘He has taken rice’.

(b). mɔkʰɔi cak care
mɔ-kʰɔi cak ca -re
he -PL rice eat-PERF
‘He has taken rice’.

(c). mɔbani cak care
mɔbani  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), $n$- (second person pronominal marker) and $m$- (third person pronominal marker). Of the three pronominal prefixes the marker $i$- and $n$- are not as productive as the third person pronominal marker $m$-. 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.

\[
\begin{align*}
  i+ma & > ima & \text{‘my mother’} \\
  n+ma & > nma & \text{‘your mother’} \\
  m+ma & > mama & \text{‘his/her mother’} \\
  i+pa & > ipa & \text{‘my father’} \\
  n+pa & > npa & \text{‘your father’} \\
  m+pa & > mpa & \text{‘his/her father’} \\
  i+d^h\omega & > id^h\omega & \text{‘my grandfather’} \\
  n+d^h\omega & > ndp^h\omega & \text{‘your grandfather’} \\
  m+d^h\omega & > mpdp^h\omega & \text{‘his/her grandfather’}
\end{align*}
\]

Body parts which take pronominal prefixes are given below.

\[
\begin{align*}
  i+kok & > ikok & \text{‘my head’} \\
  n+kok & > nkok & \text{‘your head’} \\
  m+kok & > mkok & \text{‘his/her head’} \\
  i+mai & > imai & \text{‘my face’} \\
  n+mai & > nmai & \text{‘your face’}
\end{align*}
\]
Some inalienable objects which take pronominal prefix ma- are illustrated below.

\[ \text{ma+mai} \rightarrow \text{məmai} \quad \text{‘his/her face’} \]
\[ \text{i+k^hut} \rightarrow \text{i^hut} \quad \text{‘my hand’} \]
\[ \text{nə+k^hut} \rightarrow \text{nək^hut} \quad \text{‘your hand’} \]
\[ \text{mə+k^hut} \rightarrow \text{mək^hut} \quad \text{‘his/her hand’} \]

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’, nəy ‘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 ma- ‘3PP’).

Examples:

7(a). əi nəŋbu kʰəŋji
     əi nəŋ-bu kʰəŋ -i
     I you-ACC know-ASP
     ‘I know you’.

(b). ima ipa mit-nə 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). \text{nəŋ ɪsəi pʰəjənə səkɨ}
\text{nəŋ ɪsəi pʰəjə -ən sək -i}
you song be beautiful-ADV sing-ASP
‘You sing very well’.

(b). \text{nəkʰ ɨi ɨnəm ɨnəmit tətʰəkləbra}
\text{nə -kʰ ɨi ɨn -mai ɨn -mit ɨtʰək-lə -əc -ra}
2PP-PL 2PP-face 2PP-eye wash-out -PROS-NZR-INT
‘Did you wash your face?’

9(a). \text{ma əjəni}
\text{ma əjə -ni}
he teacher-COP
‘He is a teacher’.

(b). \text{məkʰ ɨi məsək mətəu pʰəjəbɨ ɲupɨni}
\text{məkʰ ɨi mə -sək mə -təu pʰəjəbɨ ɲupi-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. \text{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 kʰəbra
nəhak məhak-pu  kʰəŋ -bə -ra
you  he   -ACC know-NZR-INT
‘Do you know him?’

(c). məhak əranj lakpra
məhak əranj  lak  -pə -ra
he   yesterday come-NZR-INT
‘Did he come yesterday?’

(d).* nəhakkʰoi məhakkʰoi bu kʰəbra
nəhak-kʰoi məhak-kʰoi-bu  kʰəŋ -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 -kʰoi takes the free form of first
person, whereas the other two have their bound form i.e. nə+kʰoi > nəkʰoi ‘you’,
mə+kʰoi > makʰoi ‘they’ and əi+kʰoi (*i+kʰoi) > əikʰoi (*ikʰoi) ‘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
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, nupə ‘nu+pa’, meaning ‘man’ and nupi ‘nu+pi’ meaning ‘woman’; əpokpə ‘ə+pok+pa’ 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 əwatbəbi labə ‘male papaya’ and əwatbəbi əmom ‘female papaya’ etc. Some opposite words which are morphologically unmarked for gender such as ima ‘1PP+mother’, ipa ‘1PP+father’; ice ‘1PP+sister’, ibuŋ ‘1PP+brother’; and kʰurə ‘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 niŋtʰɑuni
məhak niŋtʰɑu-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, niŋtʰɑu ‘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 -kʰoi (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. ɐi ‘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’, ɬə- ‘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 \(-p\tilde{o}\sim-b\tilde{o}\) indicating ‘male’ makes different from that of ‘female’ indicating gender suffix, \(-pi\sim-bi\).

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1PP</td>
<td>first person pronoun</td>
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<td>interrogative</td>
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References


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