Nominal Morphology in Korbong Language

Biman Debbarma, Ph.D. Scholar

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| **Korbong boys** | **Bridge connecting Korbong village** |

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Abstract

Korbongs are one of the sub-tribes of Halam community which has been recognized as a scheduled tribe in the state of Tripura. Interestingly, the term 'Korbong' is also used to denote the 'language' spoken by the same tribe. Therefore the Korbong is the name of the language and the people. Korbongs are found only in two villages having only about 117 speakers in the state of Tripura, particularly in the districts of Khowai and West Tripura. Genetically, Korbong is closely related to Bongcher, Bong, Darlong, Hrangkhal, Kaipeng, Mizo, Moulsom, Pangkhua, Ranglong, etc., except Kalai and Rupini. Therefore Korbong seems to be a Kuki-Chin language

of the Tibeto-Burman family. The main objective of the proposed study is to show the nominal morphology in the areas of person, number, gender and case in Korbong.

Key words: Korbong language and people, Kuki-Chin group, nominal morphology, person, number, gender and case

1. Introduction

Korbongs are one of the sub-tribes of Halam community which has been recognized as a scheduled tribe in the state of Tripura. Interestingly, the term 'Korbong' is also used to denote the 'language' spoken by the same tribe. Therefore the Korbong is the name of the language and the people. Korbongs are found only in two villages having a population of about 117 speakers in the state of Tripura, particularly in the districts of Khowai and West Tripura. Genetically, it is closely related to Bongcher, Bong, Darlong, Hrangkhal, Kaipeng, Mizo, Moulsom, Pangkhua, Ranglong, etc., except Kalai and Rupini. Therefore, Korbong seems to be a Kuki-Chin language of the Tibeto-Burman family. Nevertheless not a single scholar has mentioned about the position of Korbong in any sub-grouping of Tibeto-Burman languages. It is also interesting to note that Korbong is one of the highly endangered languages of Northeast India having a small number of people speaking it. The total number of Korbong speakers in Tripura is estimated about 117 but the population figure of Korbong is not given in the Census of India. Similarly, Korbong is also not included in the UNESCO's list for endangered languages in Northeast India. Like many other endangered tribes, Korbongs also do not have their own script and literature.

2. Typological Profile of Korbong

1. Tonal language
2. Subject object verb (SOV) structure
3. Postpositional language
4. Classifier occurs as is common in SE Asian languages.
5. No grammatical gender, it has a natural gender.
6. Anaphora can be found in this language.
7. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, most of the basic nouns in Korbong are monomorphemic in nature.

3. Nouns

A noun in Korbong may be defined as a class of words that can be followed for the categories of gender, number and case while the pronouns inflect only for cases. In other words, the noun is the clause of words, which is capable of taking case marker also.

3.1. Classification of Nouns

Structurally, nouns can be classified into the following three types: (i) basic (ii) compound (iii) derived nouns. These are described below:

3.2. Basic Noun

Basic noun refers to those nouns which are not derived from any other word classes. These nouns can occur independently without any affixation, i.e. prefixation or suffixation. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, most of the basic nouns in Korbong are monomorphemic in nature. Some basic nouns of Korbong are given below.

/in/   'house'

/ui/   'dog'

/ŋa/   'fish'

3.3. Compound Noun

A compound noun is a noun that is made up of two or more words put together to make a word with its own meaning. Different types of compound nouns in Korbong are shown below.

(i)   **Noun + noun**
        bu + in>   */buin/* 'rice house'
        rice house

(ii)   **Noun + augmentative**
        in + əlun   >   */inlun/* 'big house'
        house   big

(iii)   **Noun + diminutive**
        in + ačin   >   */inčin/* 'small house'

house small

(iv) **Noun + adjective**

ui + *aček* > */uiček/* 'white dog'

dog   white

(v) **Noun + verb**

sum + *aze* > */sumze/* 'money earn'

money   earn

3.4. Derived Noun

Derived nouns are mainly derived from the verb by suffixing derivational morphemes *–mai* or *–aŋ* to the verbal roots. Some derived nouns in Korbong language are given below.

Verbs		**Verbal nouns**	
/in/	'drink'	*/in-**mai**/*	'drinking'
/rətui/	'run'	*/rətui-**mai**/*	'running'
/se/	'go'	*/se-**mai**/*	'going'
/lam/	'dance'	*/la-**aŋ**/*	'dancer'
/dai/	'play'	*/dai-**aŋ**/*	'player'

4. 1. Gender

Like other Tibeto-Burman languages, Korbong has a natural gender and there is no grammatical gender. Different ways of gender distinction in Korbong are shown below.

Noun

Animate   Inanimate

(Not marked)

Human   Non-Human

Masculine   Feminine   Masculine   Feminine
-pa   *-nu*   *-čal*   *-zel*

(i)   **By using {*-pa*} and {*-nu*}:**

Like many other Kuki-Chin languages, the {*-pa*} and {*-nu*} in Korbong indicates masculine and feminine gender respectively as evidenced in the case of kin nouns illustrated below:

Masculine   **Feminine**

/səpa/ 'son'   */sanu/* 'daughter'

/tupa/ 'grandson'   */tunu/* 'granddaughter'

(ii)   **By using {*-čal*} and {*-zel*}:**

In the case of non-humans, the morphemes **{-čal}** and **{-zel}** are used to indicate the male and female respectively as can be seen in the following examples:

Masculine   **Feminine**

/sratčal/   'bull'   */sratzel/*   'cow'

/uičal/   'dog'   */uizel/*   'bitch'

/arčal/   'cock'   */arzel/*   'hen'

(iii)   **By using opposite lexical items**

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In Korbong, some of the kin nouns are marked for masculine and feminine lexically as can be seen in the following examples:

Masculine   **Feminine**

/bəsal/   'boy'   */nupaŋ/*   'girl'

/pa/   'father'   */ni/*   'mother'

(iv)   By changing {-*u*} and {-*i*}

Some of the kin nouns can be found by changing **{-*u*} and {-*i*}** to indicate the masculine and feminine as shown below.

Masculine   **Feminine**
/pu/   'grandfather'   */pi/*   'grandmother'
/kə-tarpu/ 'father-in-law'   */kə-tarpi/*   'mother-in-law'

4.2. Neuter Gender

Any noun, which stands for the name of a thing without life (inanimate), is said to be of the neuter gender. All inanimate things are considered as neuter gender. Consider the following examples shown below in Korbong language.

INANIMATE

/čem/   'knife'

/paŋkai/   'hill'

/pon/   'cloth'

/lompʰi/   'broom'

/in/   'house'

4.3. Gender of Loan words

A loan word is a word borrowed from other languages. The inanimate loan words in Korbong do not show any gender distinction. They are shown below with examples.

INANIMATE

/gari/	'vehicle'
/mubel/	'mobile'
/redu/	'radio'
/opis/	'office'
/kolom/	'pen'

5. Number

Korbong has two numbers, namely, singular and plural. They are shown below with examples.

Singular		**Plural**	
/bəsal/	'man'	*/bəsal**nui**/*	'men'
/nupaŋ/	'woman'	*/nupaŋ**nui**/*	'women'
/ar/	'bird'	*/ar**nui**/*	'birds'
/tʰintak/	'tree'	*/tʰintak**nui**/*	'trees'

Plurality in Korbong is expressed in different ways as shown below with examples.

(i) **Plurality of kinship terms**

Plurality of kinship terms is expressed by suffixing **{–nui}** to the singular number.

Singular		**Plural**	
/səpa/	'son'	*/səpa**nui**/*	'sons'
/sanu/	'daughter'	*/sanu**nui**/*	'daughters'

/pu/ 'grandfather' /pu**nui**/ 'grand fathers'

(ii) **Plurality of personal pronouns**

In Korbong language, personal pronouns do not form plurality like kin nouns but are expressed plurality in the following ways:

Person	Singular		Plural	
First	/kəima/	'I'	/kaŋni/	'we'
Second	/nama/	'you'	/naŋta/	'you' (pl)
Third	/naŋma/	'he/she'	/ani/	'they'

6. Persons

Personal pronouns are those pronouns which stand for what are called the three distinctions of persons in Korbong.

FIRST PERSON		**SECOND PERSON**		**THIRD PERSON**	
/kəima/	'I'	/nama/	'you'	/naŋma/	'he/she'
/kaŋni/	'we'	/naŋta/	'yours'	/hamaraŋ/	'him/her'
/kəimaraŋ/	'me'			/ani/	'they'
/kaŋta/	'our'			/aniraŋ/	'them'
/kəta/	'my'			/ama/	'it'
/kaŋniraŋ/	'us'			/aŋta/	'theirs'
				/ata/	'his/her'

7. 1. Case

There are eight (8) cases can be found in Korbong. They are as follows.

Sl.No	Case	Case marker
1.	Nominative	$-k^ho$
2.	Accusative	$-raŋ$
3.	Instrumental	$-le$
4.	Genitive	$-ta$
5.	Locative	$-a$
6.	Ablative	$-ta$
7.	Associative	$-le$
8.	Intrusive	$-kan$

7.2. Nominative case {-$k^h o$}

It is expressed by suffixing –$k^h o$ to the nouns or pronouns. Consider the flowing examples.

nupaŋ-k^ho   *a-hota*

girl-NOM   3PP-come

'She is coming'

7.3. Accusative case {-$raŋ$}

It is expressed by suffixing –*raŋ* to the nouns or pronouns. Consider the following examples:

Wak^hiTak^hi-raŋ   *a-di*

wakhitakhi-ACC   3PP-love

'Wak^hi loves Tak^hi'

7.4. Instrumental case {-*le*}

The instrumental case is expressed by the marker *-le* as exemplified below:

Kəima   wok-raŋ   čem-le   kə-tʰak-ta

I   pig-ACC   knife-INST   1PP-kill-PST.

'I killed the pig with a knife'

7.5. Genitive case {*-ta*}

The genitive is expressed by the marker–*ta* as exemplified below:

Wahan-ta   in

Wahan-GEN   house

'Wahan's house'

7.6. Locative case {*-a*}

The locative case is expressed by the marker –*a* as can be seen in the following examples:

əma   bazar-a   a-si

he   market-LOC   3PP-go

'He went to market.'

7.7. Ablative case {-ta}

The ablative case is expressed by the marker *-ta* as exemplified below**:**

ama   bazaar   -ta   a-ho   -ta

he   market   ABLT   Pro.pre come   PST

'He came from the market'

7.8. Associative case {-le}

The associative case is expressed by the marker–*le* as exemplified below:

ama   a-pa –le   se   -ta

he   3PP-father-ASS   go   PST

'He went with his father'

7.9. Intrusive case {-kan}

The intrusive case is expressed by the marker–***kan*** as exemplified below:

ama	*kau*	*kan*	*se-ta*
he	hole	INSTR	go PST

'He went through the hole'

8. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis:

1. Morphologically, noun can be defined as a class of words to which gender, number and case morphemes may be attached.
2. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages, Karbong has a natural gender and there is no grammatical gender.
3. Like many other Sino-Tibetan Languages, number is not grammatically significant in this language, i.e., there is no subject predicate agreement as far as number is concerned.
4. All the case markers in this language are postpositions.

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Baman Debbarma, Ph.D. Scholar
Department of Linguistics
Assam University
Silchar-788001
Assam
India
bm_cbz@yahoo.com