

The Structure of Nouns and Noun Phrases

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Abstract

A noun is the name of a person, place, animal or things. A noun can be preposed for the categories gender, number and case where as a noun phrase consists of a head noun, which may be followed by one or more modifiers. Trask (1997) “A noun phrase is an important syntactic category. The most obvious characteristic of a noun phrase is that it can perform certain functions in a sentence, such as acting as a subject, direct object or the object of a preposition” (p 154). This article is a humble attempt to describe the structure of the noun phrase in the Rongmei Naga language spoken in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

Keywords: Noun Phrase, Rongmei, Modifiers, Head

1.0. Introduction

A noun phrase generally consists of a head noun and modifiers. Givón (2001) has mentioned that numerals, adjectives, demonstratives, genitives, articles and relative clauses are noun modifiers and reveal hierarchical orderings” (p 2). Such noun modifiers may appear either after or before the head noun. The noun phrase which is composed of two or more head nouns linked by a co-ordinating connective is called co-ordinate noun phrase. A noun phrase formed by apposition or juxtaposition, called the appositive noun phrase may coordinate or attributive. This article articulates the structure of noun phrases in Rongmei language.

1.1. Who are the Rongmei Naga Tribe?

Among the inhabitants of Northeast India, the colorful Rongmei tribe of Naga captures a very special place in the part of the total population. They constitute a small linguistic community in this region (K.S.Singh, 1994). Rongmei Naga was formerly known as Kabui Naga. The British call them ‘Kacha Naga’ and Lushai called them ‘Milong’.” (p 173). They were considered as the

one of the aborigines of the Northeast. The total population of Rongmei is given in the census of India in the name of Kabui at about 94,758 (census 2001).

1.2. Fieldwork

The present paper is the outcome of the author's field visit in the month of December, 2018 in the different villages of Northeast India. However, most of the data was collected from Cachar District of Assam where a large number of Rongmei population was noticed. The secondary data on Rongmei is too scanty and taxonomic. The primary data on noun phrases were collected during fieldwork from both the sexes, i.e., male and female. The author has also concentrated on people from different age groups, i.e., younger, elder and aged people.

2.0. Noun and Noun Phrase

2.1. Noun

Semantically, noun can be defined as a name of place, a person, an idea or name of a thing. Nouns include terms referring to flora and fauna, to parts of the bodies of humans and of other animals; parts of trees, to age and sex groups, kinship terms and so on. A noun in Rongmei 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. Morphologically, the structure of nouns can be categorized into three types: (i) Basic Nouns (ii) Compound Nouns (iii) Derived Nouns.

2.1.1. Basic Noun

Nouns, which are not derived from any other word classes, are called basic nouns. Most of the basic nouns in Rongmei are monomorphemic. The following are some of the basic nouns found in Rongmei Naga spoken in Northeast India:

<i>či</i>	'lip'
<i>num</i>	'forest'
<i>bi</i>	'clay'
<i>zau</i>	'wine'

2.1.2. Compound nouns

Compound nouns in Rongmei Naga are formed by the juxtaposition of two independent morphemes. Most of the compound nouns in the language consist of Noun+ Noun and Noun+ Adjectives as shown in following examples:

Noun + Noun

kai-k^həm ‘door’
[kai ‘house’ + k^həm ‘block’]

tai-su ‘Chili’
[tai ‘saliva’ + su ‘pain’]

Noun + Verb Compound

pi-run ‘Cap’
[pi ‘head’ + run ‘wear’]

mik-run ‘Spectacle’
[mik ‘eye’ + run ‘wear’]

2.1.3. Derived nouns

Derived nouns are mainly derived from the verb by suffixing nominalizer *-mai* followed by male suffix *-pu* either female indicator suffix *-pui* to the verb root. Some of the derived nouns in Rongmei Naga are shown below:

<i>ləm</i> ‘dance’	<i>ləm- mei-pu</i> ‘ male dancer’
<i>ləm</i> ‘dance’	<i>ləm- mei-pui</i> ‘ female dancer’
<i>tali</i> ‘play’	<i>tali -mei -pu</i> ‘male player’
<i>tali</i> ‘play’	<i>tali -mei -pui</i> ‘female player’

2.2. Noun Phrase

In Rongmei noun phrase consist of the head noun, which may be followed by one or more modifiers. Generally modifier may be an adjectival, a demonstrative, a possessive, a numeral or a quantifier. Consider the following examples

2.2.1. Noun plus Adjectival

The adjectivals are the stative verbs followed by a nominalizer *-mai*. The adjectival in Rongmei Naga follows the noun generally.

tuna haugaimai

[[*tuna*] N [*haugai-mai*] ADVJ] NP

girl be beauty-NMLZ

‘beautiful girl’

si duimai

[[*si*] N [*dui-mai*] ADVJ] NP

dog be small-NMLZ

small dog’

2.2.2. Noun plus Demonstrative

In Rongmei noun phrase may consist of head noun plus demonstrative in which demonstrative root always precedes the head noun as seen in the following:

mihai si

[[*mhai*]DEM [*si*] N] NP

this dog

‘This dog’

mitai mansai

[[*mitai*]DEM [*mansai*] N]NP

that man

‘That man’

2.2.3. Noun phrase with quantifier

In Rongmei, the noun phrase may consist of head noun and quantifier in which the quantifier usually follows the head noun, and the structure of such construction is [NOUN + QUANTIFIER] as illustrated below:

kai paina

[[*kai*]N [*paina*]QUANT]NP

dog many

‘Many dogs’

kai paina

[[*inruai*]N [*katina*]QUANT]NP

bird few

‘Few birds’

2.2.4. Noun phrase with numerals

The noun phrase in Rongmei 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].

guak ək^hat

[[*guak*]N [*ək^hat*]NUM]NP

pig one

‘One pig’

kai kənai

[[*kai*]N [*kənai*]NUM]NP

house two

‘Two houses’

When the numeral is present in the noun phrase then the plural marker cannot be used. Consider the following examples.

luŋsimeɪ-guai

[[*luŋsimeɪ*]N [*guai*]PL]NP

poor man PL

‘Poor men’

luŋsimeɪ kat^hum

[[*luŋsimeɪ*]N [*kat^hum*]NUM]NP

poor man three

‘Three poor men’

2.2.5. Noun phrase with adjectival and specifier

In Rongmei, in a noun phrase consisting of head noun plus adjectival and specifier where both adjectival and specifier precede the head noun. The structure of such noun phrase construction is [SPECIFIER+ ADJECTIVAL+ NOUN].

paina daimai k^ha

[[*paina*]SPEC [*dai-mai*]ADJV [*k^ha*]N]NP

very be.big-NMLZ fish

‘Very big fish’

paina duimai duiriaŋ

[[*paina*]SPEC [*dai-mai*]ADJV [*duiriaŋ*]N]NP

very be.small-NMLZ river

‘Very small river’

2.2.6. Noun phrase with postpositions

Noun phrase with postpositions are very common in Rongmei and many other Tibeto-Burman languages of South Asia. The structure of such construction is: [NOUN-POSTPOSITION-LOCATIVE] as illustrated in the following examples:

kait^hiən deŋk^hau

[[*kaithiən*]N [*deŋ*] POST-[*k^hau*]LOC]NP

market near-LOC

‘Near the market’

gari luŋk^hau

[[*gari*]N [*luŋ*]POST-[*k^hau*]LOC]NP

car inside-LOC

‘Inside the car’

2.3. Co-ordinate Noun phrase

Co-ordinate noun phrase are formed by joining two or more noun phrase. These head nouns are linked by a co-coordinator, which may be either a connective or a disjunctive. *le* functions as a connective and *ni* as a disjunctive. When the phrase is composed of more than two nouns the co-ordinators are added after the penultimate noun.

gan le tuna

[[<i>gan</i>] NP	[<i>le</i>] CONJ	[<i>tuna</i>] NP] NP
boy	and	girl
‘Boy and girl’		

naŋ le ai

[[<i>naŋ</i>] NP	[<i>le</i>] CONJ	[<i>ai</i>] NP] NP
you	and	I
‘You and I’		

In the last example, the co-ordinate noun phrase is in attributive relationship with the head noun.

naŋ ni ai

[[<i>naŋ</i>] NP	[<i>ni</i>] DISJ	[<i>ai</i>] NP] NP
you	or	I
‘You or I’		

rui ni k^ha

[[<i>rui</i>] NP	[<i>ni</i>] DISJ	[<i>k^ha</i>] NP] NP
snake	or	fish
‘Snake or fish’		

3.0. Conclusion

The noun phrase may consist of a head noun and the optional elements that modify the head noun. When the numeral adjective and another modifier are present, the modifier follows the head noun followed by the numeral adjective. If the case marker is present it occurs at the end of the noun phrase. But the word order is not rigid in a noun phrase; the modifier can precede the head, though it is not common. The first element in a noun phrase gets more emphasis than the other elements. The noun phrase is potent in Rongmei because the noun phrase is a quintessential part of every sentence and it can include any number of other phrases within its structure.

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Abbreviations

ADVJ	Adjectival
CONJ	Conjunctive
DEM	Demonstrative
DISJ	Disjunctive
LOC	Locative marker
N	Noun
NMLZ	Nominalizer
NP	Noun Phrase
NUM	Numeral
QUANT	Quantifier
PL	Plural
POST	Postposition

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