

Pronominal Features in Shahlang Nongdaju, a Variety of Khasi

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Abstract

Nongdaju is a sub variety of Lyngngam, a variety of Khasi belonging to Mon- Khmer branch of Austro-Asiatic language. It is primarily spoken in West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, India. The data have been obtained from six native speakers who were above the age of 45 years. This paper examines how the nature of pronouns and the pronominal forms are reflected in the pronominal system of this variety. The analyses of data reveal that the Personal Pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju has a free form and function alone within the noun phrase and the personal pronouns exhibited in the object position are considered as strong pronouns. Gender and number are not marked by any grammatical features before the noun or head noun. The interrogative particles encode grammatical features of locative case marker /hə/. The reflexive pronouns have both mono-morphemic and poly-morphemic reduplicated form and the reciprocals are exhibited only in plural pronominal forms. In addition, data analysis reveals that personal pronouns can be formed and functioned both morphologically and syntactically.

Keywords: Khasi, Nongdaju, pronominals, personal pronouns, gender.

1. Introduction

Nongdaju is a sub variety of Lyngngam (Bareh, 1977), a variety of Khasi belonging to Mon-Khmer branch of Austro-Asiatic language family (Diffloth, 2005). Khasi has four dialects, such as: Jaintia or Pnar, War, Bhoi and Lyngngam (Grierson, 1904). Nongdaju is located in

Mawshynrut Tehsil of West Khasi Hills District in Meghalaya, India. It is situated 32km away from sub-district headquarter Mawshynrut and 75km away from District Headquarter Nongstoin. Nongdaju is represented by Nongdaju and Nongriangmaw. These two villages are located in the western parts of West Khasi Hills bordering Garo Hills. Nongdaju is the hearth of Lyngngam area. According to the Government of India Census 2011, Nongdaju has a total population of 584 people. The Nongdaju Village consists mostly of the Lyngngam community and also other inhabitants of Meghalaya either Garo, Khasis from West Khasi Hills and few Nepalese. The major objective of this study is to describe the nature of pronouns and to analyse the pronominal forms as reflected in the pronominal system of this variety of language. For this research the data have been collected from the native speakers who were above the age of 45 years. This research is descriptive in nature and Basic Linguistic Theory has been used in analysing the data. The place of research area has been encircled and shown in the following map of Meghalaya.



Map.1. Map of Meghalaya

Source: www.mapsofindia.com/maps/meghalaya. (25/08/2025, 08:30PM)

2. Literature Review

According to Huddleston & Pullum (2005), a pronoun is a small unit of grammatical features which constitute a small class of nouns where it can be distinguished syntactically from common nouns or proper nouns. Lyon (1999) states that pronoun is a grammatical unit which constitute a small functional category with different kinds of pronouns. Payne (1997) believes pronouns as clitics which can be used as an honorific term where it can be based

mostly on the relative status of the speech act of the participant. Jacobs (1995) claims that pronouns are the only elements of the noun phrase and are functional forms of nouns. The personal pronouns such as *we*, *he*, *i* are the subjective and *me*, *he*, *her* are the objective forms of pronouns. The NP internal possessive pronouns such as *your* and *my*, occur in the subject position which is inside another noun phrases which can be used as definite articles and preceding the head noun. However, independent possessive pronouns like *yours*, *hers* and *mine* can stand on its own as a noun phrase. It is intended to be indefinite articles and follows the head noun. Therefore, the personal pronouns of subjective and objective pronouns, the NP internal possessive pronouns and the independent possessive pronouns are considered as pronominals.

Sinha (2013) asserts that pronominals are being categorised into different categories, such as personal pronouns, indefinite pronouns, interrogative pronouns, honorific, deitics, inclusive or exclusive pronouns and enclitic pronominals or pronominal suffixes. Brinton (2000) agrees that person is divided into three categories such as the 1st Person, 2nd Person and the 3rd Person. The 1st Person refers to the speaker, the 2nd Person refers to the hearer and the third person refers to the thing which is spoken about. He further mentions that the distribution of person is revealed by the grammatical categories or the inflectional systems of pronouns in the 3rd person singular, present tense and which is indicative of verbs by the inflection ‘s.’ However, ‘*you*’ is also considered as a generic person which is commonly used in non-formal forms. Huddleston and Pullum (2005) describe gender as a categorization of noun phrases which has numerous features in some languages. Gender shows the different forms in third person singular pronouns where it mentions that gender are of three types. They are masculine, feminine and neuter gender.

Brinton (2000) examines that numbers are of two types, such as singular and plural form. Number is indicated by the inflectional (-s) as in count nouns like *dog/dogs*. The inflectional system is expressed in demonstrative pronouns like *this/these* and the personal pronouns of the 1st person and the 3rd person, such as *me/us*, *myself/ourselves*. Furthermore, number is also expressed the different forms of singular and plural forms of pronouns, such as *every*, *each*, *someone*, *anybody*, *all*, *many*, *few*, *most*, etc. Arshad and Arshad (2020) assert that there are two types of personal pronouns, they are: subjective or nominative and accusative or objective personal pronouns. Nominative personal pronouns are used in the subject position, such as *i*, *you*, *we*, *they*, *it* whereas objective personal pronouns like *him*, *them* and *us*, are

used in the final position. Personal pronouns may have many different forms, roles and features to assign cases.

According to Morenberg (1997:84), indefinite pronouns do not refer to any specific nouns but it refers to general nouns. The most common indefinite pronouns are *somebody*, *anybody*, *everybody*, *nobody*, *something*, *anything*, *everything*, *nothing*, *someone*, *anyone*, *everyone* and *no one*. Zandvoort (1962:168) asserts that several forms of indefiniteness, such as *some*, *any*, *each*, *every*, *either*, etc. Indefinite pronouns may also know as distributive or general rather than indefinite. The indefinite pronouns of *some* can be singular and plural form as well. In singular form, *some* refers to particular things or persons of an unknown or unspecified or it can refer to a certain quantity of something. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2005), reflexive pronouns are of two forms. One can function as compliment and the other as empathetic. Compliment exhibits as a close syntactic relation to an antecedent whereas empathetic is used as reflexive forms and act as a modifier within a clause. Wardhaugh (1999) discusses that there are various forms of reciprocal pronouns. They are: *each other* and *one another*. Each other is usually used when there are two references whereas one another are usually require two or more referents.

3. Data Analyses

3.1. Personal Pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju

Personal Pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju have a free form and function alone within the noun phrase. Rynjah (2023) believes that the personal pronouns in War-Khasi and War Jaintia have significant inflectional categories of Person, Number and Gender (PNG Ag.) to facilitate agreement and concord in a sentence. Similarly, the personal pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju have significant inflectional categories of person, number and gender and there is specification for gender marker in second and third singular pronominal forms for feminine and masculine. Table 1 below shows the personal pronouns with declensions for grammatical case, number and gender

Nominative			Accusative	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
First Person	/na/ 'I'	/yaw/ 'We'	/sna/ 'me'	/siaw/ 'us'
Second Person	Ø	/p ^h aw/ 'you'	Ø	/sp ^h aw/ 'you'

Second Person Masculine	/mi/ ‘you’	/p ^h aw/ ‘you’	/smi/ ‘you’	/sp ^h aw/ ‘you’
Second Person Feminine	/p ^h ie/ ‘you’	/p ^h aw/ ‘you’	/sp ^h ie/ ‘you’	/sp ^h aw/ ‘you’
Third Person Masculine	/uju/ ‘he’	/kudu/ ‘they’	/uju/ ‘he’	/kudu/ ‘they’
Third Person Feminine	/gju/ ‘she’		/gju/ ‘she’	

Table 1 Personal pronouns Chart in Shahlang Nongdaju

3.1.1. Personal Pronouns in Subject Sentences

In Shahlang Nongdaju, the subject and object personal pronouns are overtly expressed. The subject personal pronouns are exhibited in the initial position of the sentence and are placed before the verb as cited below examples

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1. (i) <i>na</i> pule kɔt</p> <p>1SG read book</p> <p>‘I read a book.’</p> | <p>(ii) <i>yaw</i> pule kɔt</p> <p>1PL read book</p> <p>‘We read a book.’</p> |
| <p>(iii) <i>p^haw</i> pule kɔt</p> <p>2PL read book</p> <p>‘You read a book.’</p> | <p>(iv) <i>p^hie</i> pule kɔt</p> <p>2SG.F read book</p> <p>‘You read a book.’</p> |
| <p>(v) <i>mi</i> pule kɔt</p> <p>2SG.M read book</p> <p>‘You read a book.’</p> | <p>(vi) <i>ɲJu</i> pule kɔt</p> <p>3SG.F read book</p> <p>‘She reads a book.’</p> |
| <p>(vii) <i>kudu</i> di? c^ha y:u</p> <p>3PL go LOC market</p> <p>‘They go to the market.’</p> | |

3.1.2. Personal Pronouns in Object Sentences

Lyngdoh (2017) claims that Khasi pronouns are exhibited in the object position are considered as strong and pure pronominals.

In Shahlang Nongdaju, the object personal pronouns are formed by the interaction between the accusative case marker /*se*/ and the first singular personal pronouns /*na*/ in sentence 2(i), the first plural personal pronoun /*yaw*/ in sentence number 2(ii) and second personal pronouns /*p^haw*/, /*mi*/ and /*p^hie*/ in sentence number 2 (iii) to 2 (v) which brings to a sound change as /*sna*/, /*syiaw*/, /*sp^haw*/, /*smi*/ and /*sp^hie*/ as shown in sentences 2 (i) through 2 (v). However, in third pronominal form, the object personal pronouns remained identical with the subject pronouns as cited in sentences no 2 (vi) through 2 (viii) and are placed after the verb

2. (i)	uJu	pindai	<i>sna</i>	(ii)	uJu	pindai	<i>syiaw</i>
	3SG.M	love	1SG		3SG.M	love	1PL
			‘He loves me.’				‘He loves us.’
(iii)	na	pindai	<i>sp^haw</i>	(iv)	na	pindai	<i>smi</i>
	1SG	love	2PL		1SG	love	2SG.M
			‘I love you’				‘I love you’
(v)	na	pindai	<i>sp^hie</i>	(vi)	na	pindai	<i>nju</i>
	1SG	love	2SG.F		1SG	love	3SG.F
			‘I love you’				‘I love her’
(vii)	na	pindai	<i>uju</i>	(viii)	na	pindai	<i>kudu</i>
	1SG	love	3SG.M		1SG	love	3PL
			‘I love him’				‘I love them’

3.2. Number and Gender

Nagaraja (2000) asserts that in Standard Khasi ‘Number and Gender’ are marked by the same features of *u* and *ka* in singular and *ki* in plural; *u* is masculine, *ka* is feminine and *i* is

neutral, i.e. common for both genders.” However, in Shahlang Nongdaju, the number and gender markers are not marked by any inflectional features before the noun and are not following the pattern of Standard Khasi as cited below examples

- | | | | | | | | |
|--------|------------------------|-------------------------|------|------------------------|--------|-------|------------|
| 3. (i) | k ^h on-deiŋ | k ^h on-koraŋ | (ii) | k ^h on-deiŋ | rakmaw | (iii) | khondeiŋ |
| | child-small | son- boy | | child-small | girl | | children |
| | ‘Boy’ | | | ‘Girl’ | | | ‘Children’ |

3.3. Indefinite Pronouns

According to Koshy (2009), indefinite pronouns in Pnar are basically based on interrogative pronouns where it derives by the syntactic process and morphological process of reduplication. Similarly, the indefinite pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju occurs by the process of syntactic and morphological process of reduplicated form and are marked by different markers such as / *yiet yiet*/, /*net net*/, /*met met*/ occurring in the initial and medial position of the sentences as given below examples

- (5) *yiet yiet* la? ban di? tə skur
 IND IND can INF go LOC school
 ‘Anybody can go to the school.’
- (6) *net net* la? ban tre se kam am bna
 IND IND can INF do ACC work GEN 1SG
 ‘Anyone can do my work.’
- (7) Jɔn baŋ *met met* bo -re tei
 john eat IND IND PL -REL healthy
 ‘John is eating something healthy’

3.4. Interrogatives

Interrogative pronouns are categorised into two types: polar (yes-no) questions and constituent (wh) questions. Polar questions in Shahlang Nongdaju differ only by intonation whereas Wh questions remain in-situ and can also move which results to wh-Movement. In sentences no (10) and (11), the interrogative particles are found to attach with the locative

case marker /hə/ as prefixed and exhibited both in the initial and final position of the sentence. However, the Interrogative Pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju are marked by different markers, such as /**yiat**/, /**katnət**/, /**bet**/, /**hənet**/as cited below examples

(8) mi dəw **yiat**?

2SG.M COP INT

‘Who are you?’

(9) **yiat** bimɔŋ am mi?

INT name GEN 2SG.M

‘What is your name?’

(10) p^haw cɔŋ **hə-net**?

2SG stay LOC- INT

‘Where do you stay?’

(11) **hə-net** p^haw cɔŋ?

LOC- INT 2SGstay

‘Where do you stay?’

3.5. Anaphors

According to Lyngdoh (2000), anaphors in Khasi has both reflexive and reciprocal. The reflexive expresses in both mono-morphemic and poly-morphemic forms while the nominal reflexive in Khasi has been used as the case marker ‘*lade*.’ The mono-morphemic anaphors in Khasi carries a lexical Case Marker (CM) to its left because Khasi has preposition. However, Lyngdoh (2000) also discusses on the reduplicated poly- morphemic in Khasi.

Shahlang Nongdaju exhibits the same as Standard Khasi that it has a mono- morphemic and reduplicated poly- morphemic forms. The mono- morphemic is the nominal reflexive that it has a case marker /*se*/ and /*bə*/ and the reduplicated poly-morphemic is indicated as /*bə hinjɔŋ se hinjɔŋ*/ and are found to occur after the verb as cited below examples

3.5.1. Nominal Reflexives

In Shahlang Nongdaju, the nominal mono-morphemic reflexive is indicated by /*se hinʃɔŋ*/ as shown in sentence no (12) and sentence no (13) is indicated by /*bə hinʃɔŋ*/ and sentences (14) through (15) are indicated by /*bə hinʃɔŋ*/ and /*se hinʃɔŋ*/ in reduplicated polymorphemic form. The nominal reflexive / *hinʃɔŋ*/ are found to occur after the grammatical case markers /*se*/ and /*bə*/ as a prefix marker. The nominal reflexive has the antecedent where it refers back to the subject within the same clause and agrees in number and gender as cited below examples

- (12) ʃɔŋ_i pindai *se hin-ʃɔŋ_i*

john love ACC NOM-self

‘John loves himself.’

- (13) bei_i re ut jhur *bə hin-ʃɔŋ_i*

mother SAM cut vegetable INST NOM-self

‘My mother cut vegetables by herself.’

- (14) uʃu_i rip *bə hin-ʃɔŋ se hin-ʃɔŋ_i*

3SG.M beat INST NOM-self ACC NOM-self

‘He beats himself.’

- (15) uʃu_i kraʔ *bə hin-ʃɔŋ se hin-ʃɔŋ_i*

3SG.M talk INST NOM.self ACC NOM-self

‘He talked to himself.’

3.5.2. Reciprocals

The Reciprocal forms in Shahlang Nongdaju exhibit only in plural pronominal form. Shahlang Nongdaju has four Reciprocal forms. They are

- (i) wəl se wəl

- (ii) wəl həlor wəl

(iii) mar kyllian

3.5.2.1. wəl se wəl

Shahlang Nongdaju, like Khasi (Lyngdoh 2000) show composite reciprocals in reduplication forms in which the two parts of reduplication is intervened by the accusative case marker /*se*/ to numeral one which is attached to person and number

(16) kudu re nia pindai *wəl se wəl*

3PLU SAM VC love one ACC one

‘They love one another.’

(17) yaw re nia kinnan *wəl se wəl*

3PLU SAM VC understand one ACC one

‘We understand one another.’

3.5.2.2. wəl halor wəl

Shahlang Nongdaju also exhibits /*wəl halor wəl*/ ‘one prep one’ as shown below sentences where the two parts of reduplication occur by the prepositional marker /*halor*/ in between the reduplication and it is attached only in plural pronominal form.

(18) kudu re nia kinno? *wəl halor wəl*

3PLU SAM VC blame one PREP one

‘They blame on one another.’

(19) kudu re nia pindai *wəl halor wəl*

3PLU SAM VC love one PREP one

‘They love on one another.’

3.5.2.3. Mar-Kyllian

According to Lyngdoh (2000, p 34), *mar kyllian* ‘distribution- change’ can replace the other reciprocal form in Khasi. Shahlang Nongdaju also exhibits /*mar- kyllian*/ which is also the same as Khasi reciprocals and are placed after the verb as exemplified below examples

(20) kudu re nia pindai *mar-kyllian*

3PLU SAM VC love dist.change

‘They love each other.’

(21) kudu re nia kinno? *mar- kyllian*

3PL SAM VC blame dist.change

‘They blame each other.’

4. Conclusions

The analyses of data reveal that the personal pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju are distinguished for person, number and gender. Gender is distinguished only in second and third singular pronominal forms. However, gender is not marked by any grammatical features before the noun. The personal pronouns in Shahlang Nongdaju exhibit both in subject and object position. However, the object personal pronouns are formed by the interaction between the morphemes which brings to a sound change. Interestingly, the indefinite pronouns occur by the process of syntactic and morphological process of reduplicated form. Interrogative pronouns are categorised into two types: polar (yes-no) questions and constituent (wh) questions. The interrogative particles are found to attach with the locative case marker /*hə*/ as prefixed and exhibited both in the initial and final position of the sentence. In addition, Anaphors in Shahlang Nongdaju exhibits both nominal reflexives and reciprocals. The nominal reflexives can either be mono-morphemic and poly-morphemic in morphology. The nominal mono-morphemic reflexives is indicated by /*se hinJɔŋ*/ and /*bə hinJɔŋ*/. The reflexive / *hinJɔŋ*/ are found to occur after the grammatical case markers /*se*/ and /*bə*/ as a prefix marker and the reflexive poly-morphemic reduplicated form is indicated as /*bə hinjɔŋ se hinJɔŋ*/. The reciprocal forms are realized by the repetition of numeral /*wəl*/ which is intervened by the case marker /*se*/ and /*həlor*/ and the reciprocal marker / *mar- kyllian*/ ‘distribution- change’ is also expressed and placed after the verb. The Reciprocal forms exhibited only in plural pronominal form.

Abbreviations

1SG:	First Singular
1PL:	First Plural
2SG:	Second Singular
2PL:	Second Plural
2SG.M:	Second Singular Masculine
2SG.F:	Second Singular Feminine
3SG.M:	Third Singular Masculine
3SG.F:	Third Singular Feminine
3PL:	Third Plural
SAM:	Subject Agreement Marker
VC:	Verbal Collective
ACC:	Accusative Case
INST:	Instrumental Case
INF:	Infinitive
GEN:	Genitive
IND:	Indefinite

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