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On Gender Marking in Rongmei Naga

Debajit Deb, Ph.D. Scholar



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Abstract

The gender marking in Rongmei Naga is purely lexical and suffixing phenomenon without any grammatical implication. The main of this paper is to describe the gender system of Rongmei, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the three states of North Eastern India, viz., Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. My study will be confined in the Cachar District of Assam, where more than 30 Rongmei inhabitant villages are there.

1. Introduction

The Rongmeis of Barak Valley are one of the major hill tribes community recognized by the state of Assam. British called them 'Kacha Naga' and Lushai called them 'Milong' (K. S. Singh, 1994: 173). The total population of Rongmei given in the Census of India is 61,197 (Census of India 2001). Ethnically, they are of mongoloid origin and migrated from the western part of Tibet along with the other groups of Mongoloid people to the region. Rongmei women are experts in weaving. They have a great heritage of traditional skills in weaving particularly making woolen cloths popularly known as *Naga Shwal*. Nowadays it is well-known all over India. The main occupations of Rongmei people of Cachar are piggery and cultivation but some of them are also employed in the government or non-governmental organizations. It is to be mentioned here that after migration from Manipur to the plains of Cachar and Hailakandi, they totally gave up their age-old practice of *jhum* cultivation.

According to Grierson (*Linguistic Survey of India Vol. III part II*, 1903), Rongmei in the name of Kabui falls under the Naga sub-section of the Naga-Bodo section under the Assam Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family.

2. Data and Methodology

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This paper is mainly based on my own data. Most of this data was of course collected through field work, which consisted mainly of interviews with native speakers of the Rongmei language. The fieldwork was conducted in 10 Rongmei villages of Cachar District, Assam. The persons of different age groups, professions, and sexes have been used as informants and the data have been cross-checked with other speakers of the same variety.

3. Goals of This Study

The goal of this study is to analysis the gender system in Rongmei and to cover the basics in hopes that the work will be useful to Rongmei scholars, general linguists, and to the speakers of Rongmei themselves. The present works will, of course, be a useful cornerstone for future studies on the Rongmei language spoken mainly in the Barak Valley of South Assam.

4. Gender



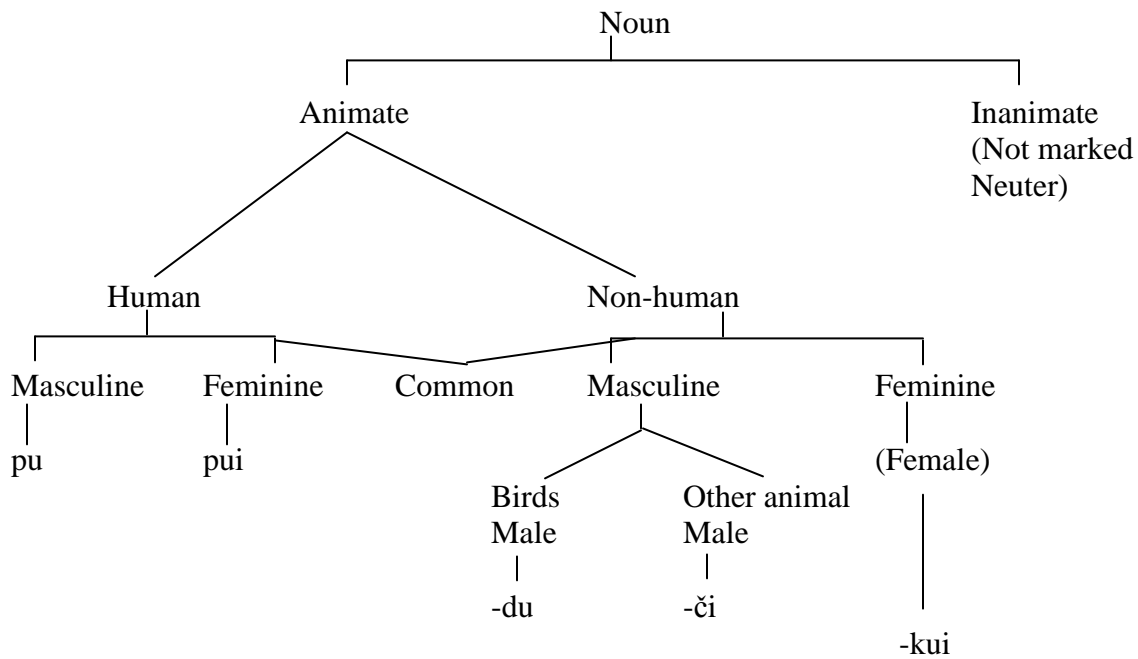
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Nouns are assigned to a gender class on a strictly semantic basis. The gender of a noun is only determined by its meaning. The basic semantic distinction between the two genders is animate and inanimate. The animate nouns in Rongmei are morphologically marked for masculine and feminine genders. There are different gender markers for the human and non-human nouns. All inanimate things fall under the neuter gender. On the basis of the morphological marking the Rongmei gender may be classified as in the following diagrams.



The gender representation of various distinctions is done either lexically or by suffixations.

4.1 Neuter

These are nouns representing inanimate objects. The gender is lexical.

dui	‘water’
bi	‘clay’
tiŋbaŋ	‘tree’

4.2. Common

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The gender refers to animate being, which, however, make no distinction for male and female.

4.2.1. Human nouns representing professions belong to common gender.

amu ‘priest’

4.2.2. Non-human animate beings other than birds and animals. The gender distinction is never made.

k^ha ‘fish’
čak^heŋ ‘mosquito’
ulek ‘crocodile’

4.2.3. Many human nouns not representing to professions belong to common gender.

əlau ‘child’
čampən ‘friend’
puipu ‘parents’

4.3. Masculine

Masculine gender is expressed in two ways.

4.3.1. Lexical

gan ‘boy’
pulai ‘father’s brother’

4.3.2. Suffixation

4.3.2.1. The human animate masculinity is expressed by the suffix -pu

taimai-pu ‘manipuri man’
tazuammai-pu ‘bengali man’

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4.3.2.2. In attributive noun

bəmai-pu ‘mad man’

4.3.2.3. The non-human animate masculinity of birds is expressed by the suffix -du

ruai-du ‘cock’
p^hum-du ‘duck (male)’
p^hina-du ‘pigeon’

4.3.2.4. The non-human animate masculinity of animal is expressed by the suffix -či in most of the cases.

miaunə-či ‘male cat’
guai-či ‘bull’
si-či ‘dog’

4.4. Feminine

Feminine gender is expressed in two ways.

4.4.1. Lexical Marking

tuna ‘girl’
ənai ‘father’s sister’

4.4.2. Suffixation

4.4.2.2. The human animate feminine is expressed by the suffix -pui

taimai-pui ‘manipuri woman’
tazuammai-pui ‘bengali woman’

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4.4.2.3. In attributive noun

bəmai-pui ‘mad woman’

4.4.2.4. The non-human animate feminine of birds is expressed by the suffix -kui only.

ruai-kui ‘hen’
p^hum-kui ‘duck (female)’
phina-kui ‘pigeon’ (female)

4.4.2.4. The non-human animate feminine is also expressed by the suffix -kui.

miaunə -kui ‘female cat’
guai -kui ‘cow’
si -kui ‘female dog’

4.5. Gender of Loan Words

The inanimate loan words also do not show gender distinction. For example:

gari	‘vehicle’
tebul	‘table’
mobail	‘mobile’
redio	‘radio’
teksi	‘taxi’
ophis	‘office’
kolom	‘pen’

Conclusion



Gender is not grammatically marked in the language, i.e., gender is determined on the natural recognition of sex. Hence it has only natural gender. All the gender markers are suffixed to the noun root. So, we can say that the gender distinction in Rongmei is natural. That is, all the male beings come under masculine and all the female beings come under feminine. On the basis of semantico-morphological criteria, nouns are primarily classified into two classes, viz. i) animate and ii) inanimate. All the inanimate things are considered as neuter gender. Those animate beings which are not illustrated for sex fall under the common gender. Both the human and non-human nouns are differentiated for masculine and feminine gender.

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