Gender and Number in Aimol: A Case Study

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Abstract

Aimol is one of the recognized tribes of Manipur. It was recognized on 29th October, 1956 vide notification no. 2477, under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Aimol as a tribe is endogamous and possesses a common dialect, a common tradition of origin and common beliefs and ideas. The total population of Aimol according to Census-2011 is 4,640 (According to Chairman, Aimol Literature Society, Manipur). The Aimol tribe is found in Chandel, Churachandpur, and Senapati districts of Manipur. In the entire state, there are 15 Aimol villages, of which eleven in Chandel district (Khullen, Chandonpokpi, Ngairong, Khodamphai, Tampak, Chingnunghut, Khuniai, Kumbirei, Satu, Khudengthabi and Unapal), two in Churachandpur district (Kha-Aimol and Louchunbung) and another two in Senapati district (Tuikhang, Kharam-Thadoi).

Aimol has no proper written literature except some books, gospel songs, Bible and a Descriptive Grammar of Aimol written by M. Shamungou Singh, an unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Manipur University, Imphal. There is no indigenous script. They use Roman script for writing books and other journals, etc. The teaching of Aimol has not been introduced in any private and govt. schools. For communication with other communities they use Manipuri or Meiteilon which is a *lingua franca* of Manipur State. Aimol has no grammatical gender and number. Gender and number are marked by particular words or prefixes or suffixes. In the case of nouns having no generic names, male and female are distinguished by using words indicating opposite sex. The different between the singular and the plural is the number markers. Here the paper attempts to find out how the gender and number is formed in Aimol. It will be illustrated with suitable examples.

The Language

Aimol is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur. Some same language speakers are also said to live in Tripura who are known as Hrangkhawls. The language has some affinities with the other languages like Hmar, Hrangkawl, Sukte, Malsom, Darlong,

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Lushai and Thadou-Kuki, Purum, Chothe, Chiru, Kom, Koireng and Kharam. Manipuri or Meiteilon is used for communication with other tribes.

Linguistic Lineage for Aimol

Sino-Tibetan

      Tibeto-Burman

            Kuki-Chin-Naga

               Kuki-Chin

               Northern

                 Aimol

1. Gender

In Aimol there is no grammatical gender. Gender is only a lexical feature. Human and animate nouns are referred to as masculine or feminine on the basis of natural sex. For human beings, the suffix **/-pa/** indicates "male" and /**-nu**/indicates "females".

For example:

	Male	**Female**
(a)	kəpa	kənu
	"father"	"mother"
(b)	puənrasukpa	puənrasuknu
	"washer man"	"washerwoman"
(c)	lətʰopa	lətʰonu
	"male singer"	"female singer"
(d)	ətərpa	ətərnu
	"old man"	"old woman"
(e)	cuənsinpa	cuənsinnu
	"male worker"	"female worker"

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There are some nouns which do not possess any generic name but can denote either male or female. In the case of these nouns, male and female are distinguished by using words indicating opposite sex.

For example:

	Male	**Female**
(a)	pəsəlnai	numəinai
	"boy"	"girl"
(b)	pəsəl	numəi
	"man"	"woman"
(c)	retʰər	doŋmə
	"bachelor"	"maid"
(d)	əpu	əpi
	"grandfather"	"grandmother"
(e)	əpaŋak	əni
	"uncle"	"aunty"

In the case having generic names, male and female are indicated by the suffix /-pa/ "male" and /-nu/ "female" to the generic names.

	Generic name	**Male**	**Female**
(a)	suək	suəkpa	suəknu
	"slave"	"male slave"	"female slave"
(b)	lom	lompa	lomnu
	"couple"	"husband"	"wife"
(c)	micupu	micupa	micunu
	"teacher"	"male teacher"	"female teacher"
(d)	ə-ipu	ə-ipa	ə-inu
	"writer"	"male writer"	"female writer"

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Proper Names of Human Beings

Proper names ending with **-pa, -tʰəŋ, -kʰup, -boi, -ŋir, -reŋ, -lal, soŋ, -pu** etc. are considered to be the names of man.

For example:

tʰaŋpa, atʰəŋ, maŋkʰup, tʰaŋboi, cuŋŋir, kʰupreŋ, alal, asoŋ, korpu etc.

A.   Proper names endingwith **-nəi, -kim, -hui, -pi, -nu, -kip** etc. are considered to be the names of women.

For instance:

anəi, tʰəŋkim, kʰuphui, coŋpi, coŋnu and nəiɹakip etc.

In addressing respected man and woman, **/-pu/**and **/-pi/** are used as the honorific suffixes for male and female respectively.-

For example:

1.	(a)	oɹapu	"respected sir"
	(b)	oɹapi	"respected madam"
2	(a)	ləpu	"respected song teacher (male)"
	(b)	ləpi	"respected song teacher (female)"
3.	(a)	pu, atʰəŋ	"Sir Athang"
	(b)	pi, acoŋ	"Madam Achong"

Animal, Bird, Insect and Plant

In Aimol, male are indicated by /-**kʰoŋ**/ in the case bird and /-**cəl**/ in the case of animal, insects and plant but the female marker **/-pui/** is used for animal, birds, insects and plants.

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Animal

For example:

	Male	**Female**
(a)	sehrat-cəl	sehrat-pui
	"bull"	"cow"
(b)	ui-cəl	ui-pui
	"dog"	"bitch"
(c)	səkor-cəl	səkor-pui
	"stallion"	"mare"
(d)	wok-cəl	wok-pui
	"boars"	"sow"

Bird

For example:

	Male	**Female**
(a)	ar-kʰoŋ	ar-pui
	"cock"	"hen"
(b)	wəte-cəl	wəte-pui
	"male bird"	"female bird"

However there are some birds for which /cəl/ is used for male and /pui/ for female.

For example:

	Male	**Female**
(a)	uirok-cəl	uirok-pui
	"male egret"	"female egret"
(b)	ceŋcerek-cəl	ceŋcerek-pui
	"male(a kind wild bird)"	"female(a kind of wild bird)"

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Insect

For example:

	Male	Female
(a)	kʰoi-cəl	kʰoi-pui
	"male bee"	"female bee"
(b)	jaŋsa-cəl	jaŋsa-pui
	"male mosquito"	"female mosquito"
(c)	rik-cəl	rik-pui
	"male louse"	"female louse"
(d)	uicom-cəl	uicom-pui
	"male praying mantis"	"female praying mantis"

Plant

The suffix **/-cəl/** is also used as a male marker if the plant is a barren one and **/-pui/** is for indicating female.

For example:

	Male	Female
(a)	watʰəpi-cəl	watʰəpi-pui
	"male papaya"	"female papaya"
(b)	laŋpʰoŋ-cəl	laŋpʰoŋ-pui
	"male jackfruit"	female jackfruit"
(c)	ɟoŋcak-cəl	ɟoŋcak-pui
	"male parkia javanica"	"female parkia javanica"

2. Number

Number in Aimol is not grammatical. The difference between the singular and the plural is shown with the number markers.

For example:

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(a)   lairik-hi   ə-sət

             book-pdet   3pro-good

             "The book is good."

b)   lairik-ŋai-hi   ən-sət

             book-pl-pdet 3pro-good

             "The books are good."

Plural Formation of Nouns

A. Suffixation of /ŋai/

(i)The plural suffix /ŋai/ is used after the nouns to form the plural.

For example:

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
naipəŋ	"child"	naipəŋ-ŋai	"children"
ui	"dog"	ui-ŋai	"dog"
suək	"servant"	suək-ŋai	"servants"
in	"house"	in-ŋai	"houses"
pəsəl	"man"	pəsəl-ŋai	"men"
meŋ	"cat"	meŋ-ŋai	"cats"

For example:

1.   (a)   naipəŋ   ə-hoŋ

               child   3pro-come

               "The child comes."

         (b)   naipəŋ-ŋai ən-hoŋ

               child-pl   3pro-come

               "The children come."

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2. (a) ui   ə-tan

dog   3pro-run

"The dog runs."

(b) ui-ŋai   ən-tan

dog-pl   3pro-run

"The dogs run."

3. (a) suək   ə-cəp

servant   3pro-cry

"The servant cries."

(b) suək-ŋai   ən-cəp

servant-pl   3pro-cry

"The servants cry."

(ii) The plural suffix /ŋai/ can also be added to proper nouns conveying the idea of plurality.

For example:

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
coŋnu	"a name"	coŋnu-ŋai	"Chongnu and her group"
atʰəŋ	"a name"	atʰəŋ-ŋai	"Athang and his group"
kim	"a name"	kim-ŋai	"Kim and her group"
ŋaknu	"a name"	ŋaknu-ŋai	"Ngaknu and her group"

(iii) The suffix /-ŋai/ can also be added to demonstrative pronouns to form the plural.

For example:

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
hiwəhi	"this"	hiwa-ŋai-hi	"these"

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həwaha   "that"   hawa-ŋai-ha   "those"

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B. Suffixation of /-ni/

(i) The plural suffix /-ni/ is used especially to personal pronouns to form the plural.

For example:

Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
kəi	"I"	kəi-ni	"we"
nəŋ	"you"	nəŋ-ni	"you(pl)"
əma	"He/she"	ənma-ni	"they"

For example:

(a)   kəi   kə-ce

           I   1pro-go

           "I go."

(b)   kəi-ni kən-go

           I-pl   1pro-go

           "We go."

(c)   nəŋ   nə-ce

           you   2pro-go

           "You go."

(d)   nəŋ-ni   nən-ce

           you.pl   2pro-go

           "You (pl) go."

(e)   əma   ə-ce

           he/she   3pro-go

           "He/She goes."

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(f)   ənma-ni   ən-ce

he/she-pl   3pro-go

"They go."

(ii) Aimol uses six person marking prefixes which are given in the table below. These prefixes indicate number and persons and are prefixed to the verbs. They also indicate subject and verb agreement. Examples are indicated below.

Number	Singular	Plural
1st person	kə-	kən-
2nd person	nə-	nən-
3rd person	ə-	ən-

Table No.1: Person marking prefixes

For example:

1.   (a)   kəi mienpu kə-ni

I   doctor   1pro-cop

"I am a doctor."

(b)   kəi-ni   mienpu   kən-ni

we   doctor   1pro-cop

"We are the doctors."

2.   (a)   nəŋ   mienpu nə-ni

you   doctor   2pro-cop

"You are a doctor."

(b)   nəŋ-ni   mienpu   nən-ni

you-pl   doctor   2pro-cop

"You (pl) are the doctors."

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3. (a)   əma   mienpu   ə-ni

            He/she   doctor   3pro-cop

            "He/She is a doctor."

     (b)   ənma-ni   mienpu   ən-ni

            he/she-pl   doctor   3pro-cop

            "They are the doctors."

(iii) Aimol also used another six person marking suffixes which are given in the table. These suffixes indicate number and persons and are suffixed to the verbs. They also indicate subject and verb agreement. Here it is name as subject reference. These suffixes are to be used with the negative sentence only. Examples are illustrated below.

Number	Singular	Plural
1st person	-kiŋ	-siŋ
2nd person	-ce	-ceu
3rd person	-k	-u

Table No.2: Person marking suffixes

For example:

1. (a)   kəi   micupu   ni-mək-kiŋ

            I   teacher   cop-neg-sub.ref

            "I am not a teacher."

     (b)   kəi-ni   micupu   ni-mək-siŋ

            I-pl   teacher   cop-neg-sub.ref

            "We are not the teachers."

2. (a)   nəŋ   micupu   ni-mək-ce

            you   teacher   cop-neg-sub.ref

            "You are not a teacher."

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(b)   nəŋ-ni   micupu   ni-mək-ce-u

        you-pl   teacher   cop-neg-sub.ref

        "You are not the teachers."

3.   (a)   əma   micupu   ni-mək

        I   teacher   cop-neg.

        "He/she is not a teacher."

    (b)   ənma-ni   micupu   ni-mək-u

        they-pl   teacher   cop-neg-sub.ref

        "They are not the teachers."

(iv) Reduplication of /tu-/ "who" and /i-/ "what" also conveys the meaning of plurality.

For example:

1   (a)   tu-mo   ə-nui

        who-Q.mk   3pro-laugh
        "Who is laughing?"

    (b)   tu-tu-mo   ən-nui

        who-who-Q.mk   3pro-laugh
        "Who are laughing?"

2   (a)   i-mo   nə-coi

        What-Q.mk   2pro-carry
        "What (thing) are you carrying?"

    (b)   i-i-mo   nən-coi

        what-what-Q.mk   2pro-carry
        "What (things) are you carrying?"

C. Addition of Words

        In Aimol there are some words which convey the idea of plurality. They are /ətəm/

"many/much", /əbo/ "pair", /əbuk/ "pile", /əreŋŋa/ "all", /ərup/ "crowd", /alo/ "bundle",

/awer/ "some" etc. All these words can be added to nouns to convey the meaning of plurality.

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For example:

(a)	mi	"man"
	mi-təm	"many men"
(b)	sehrat	"cow"
	sehrat-təm	"many cows"
	sehrat-reŋŋa	"all cows"
(c)	lairik	"books"
	lairik-awer	"some books"
	lairik-əbuk	"A pile of books"

Abbreviations Used:

Cop : Copula

Neg : Negative

1pro : 1st person pronominal marker

2pro: 2nd person pronominal marker

3pro: 3rd person pronominal marker

Pl : Plural

Q.mk : Question marker

Sg : Singular

Sub.ref: Subiect reference

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