

Reduplication in Koireng: A Morphological and Semantic Analysis

Lourembam Ludmila Chanu, M.A.

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Department of Linguistics, Manipur University

ludlou.chanu5@gmail.com

9366899299

Haobam Marak Lourembam Leikai, 795001

=====

ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of reduplication in the Koireng language, an endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken by the Koireng tribe of Manipur. Reduplication, as a significant morphological and semantic process, plays a crucial role in expressing plurality, distributiveness, intensification, simultaneity, emotional expression, and contrastive meanings in Koireng. The study investigates both complete and partial reduplication and analyses their structural and functional characteristics within different grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and wh-questions. Complete reduplication is shown to be more productive in Koireng, particularly in conveying distributive and emphatic meanings, while partial reduplication appears in limited forms such as ablaut and rhyme-motivated patterns. The research also explores different lexical manifestations of reduplication, including eco words, reduplicative compounds, child language forms, expressive reduplication, contrastive constructions, and intensive reduplication. The study further situates Koireng reduplication within broader linguistic theories proposed by scholars such as Deborah Tannen, Wang, Ghomeshi, and Rastall, thereby demonstrating the relevance of reduplication not only at the lexical level but also at the discourse and expressive levels. Through descriptive and analytical

methods, the paper highlights how reduplication functions as an important linguistic strategy that enriches communication and reflects the cultural and cognitive patterns of the Koireng community. The research contributes to the documentation of the endangered Koireng language and provides insight into the morphological processes of lesser-studied Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeast India.

Keywords: Koireng; Reduplication; Tibeto-Burman Language; Morphology; Linguistic Anthropology

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the structural patterns of complete and partial reduplication in the Koireng.
2. To analyse the semantic and grammatical functions of reduplication in different word classes of Koireng.
3. To study the various lexical forms of reduplication such as eco words, compounds, expressive forms, and intensive reduplication in Koireng.
4. To contribute to the linguistic documentation and preservation of the endangered Koireng language.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research methodology to investigate reduplication in the Koireng language. Primary linguistic data were collected from native speakers of the Koireng community through informal interviews, participant observation, and oral interactions. Secondary sources such as books, journal articles, census reports, and linguistic studies on Tibeto-Burman languages were also consulted. The collected data were classified into categories of complete and partial reduplication and analysed based on their

phonological, morphological, and semantic features. Examples from natural speech were transliterated and interpreted to understand their grammatical and communicative functions within the socio-cultural context of the Koireng community.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it documents and analyses reduplication in the Koireng language, one of the endangered languages of Manipur. It highlights the structural and semantic functions of reduplication and demonstrates its importance in expressing plurality, emphasis, intensification, and emotional meanings. The research contributes to the fields of morphology, Tibeto-Burman linguistics, and language preservation by providing valuable data on a lesser-studied tribal language. Furthermore, the study helps preserve the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Koireng community and serves as a useful resource for future researchers interested in indigenous and endangered languages.

INTRODUCTION

The Koireng are one of the recognised Scheduled Tribes of Manipur, traditionally inhabiting regions such as Saikul, Kangpokpi, Thangmeiband, and the scenic foothill areas encircling the Imphal Valley. Nestled amidst the hills and border landscapes of the state, the Koireng community represents one of the most culturally rich indigenous groups of Manipur, preserving a distinct linguistic and cultural heritage through generations. The community refers to itself as *Kolren*, where *kol* means “east” and *ren* means “people,” collectively signifying “eastern people.” The term *Koireng*, however, is believed to have been given by the Meitei community. The group is also known by several other names, including Kwoireng, Koren, Quoireng, Kolhreng, Korrengs, and Karen. T. C. Hodson (1911) referred to them as *Quoireng*, while John

Shakespear (1913) identified them as *Kolhen*. George Abraham Grierson described them as *Korrengs* or *Kolrengs*. The Thadou community addressed them as *Kolhen*, whereas the Kom community referred to them as *Karen*.

The Koireng constitute a small indigenous community with a population of approximately 2,600 according to the 2011 Census. Their language is considered one of the endangered languages of Manipur. At present, Koireng settlements are distributed across areas such as Longa Koireng, Sadu Koireng, Kamu Koireng, Awang Koireng, Utonglok, Tarung, and Koireng Colony in Thangmeiband. According to Gangmumei Kamei (1987), the original homeland of the Koireng was known as *Koram*, or the “eastern land,” which some Koirengs associate with the Karen State of eastern Burma (Myanmar).

Several tribal communities across Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, and Mizoram share linguistic and cultural affinities with the Koireng. In Manipur, these include the Aimol, Chiru, Kom, Puimei, Thikup, Purum, and Kharam communities, as well as certain Tangkhul villages such as Nambasi, Kumram, Ningchou, Kasom, Khampat Khullen, Nongman, Meiring, Khampi, Sorde, and Sorathang. Similar affinities are also observed among the Ranglong, Hrangkhoh, and Biate tribes of the North Cachar Hills in Assam; the Chir tribe and the inhabitants of Khelma village in Nagaland; the Hrangkol, Ranglong, Darlong, and Molsom communities in Tripura; and the Pawi (Poi) and Mara tribes in Mizoram. Outside India, the Koireng are believed to share close linguistic and cultural affinities with certain communities in Myanmar and Thailand (Wanbe 2015). In addition, the Koireng exhibit several cultural and civilizational similarities with the Meitei and Rongmei communities. References found in the *Chronicles of Manipur*, particularly in the royal chronicles of Moirang, portray the Koireng as a powerful tribe during the ancient period. These chronicles mention several conflicts between

the Koireng and the kings of Moirang, in which the latter were reportedly defeated on numerous occasions.

The language is commonly known as Koireng. Owing to variations in nomenclature and ethnolinguistic classification, scholars have placed the Koireng language under different linguistic subgroups. George Abraham Grierson (1909) classified the Koireng language under the Kuki–Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. John Shakespear described the Koireng as an “Old Kuki” tribe, whereas T. C. Hodson classified them as a Naga tribe. Robert Shafer (1966) placed them under the Western branch of the Kukish section within the Burmic division. Similarly, Paul K. Benedict classified them under the Western Kuki subgroup within the transitional Kuki–Naga category, while David Bradley (1994) placed Kwoireng within the Zeiliangrong group of the Southern Naga linguistic cluster.

1.1 REDUPLICATION IN KOIRENG

Reduplication is a morphological process in which a root, stem, or part of a word is repeated to create a modified linguistic form. In many languages, reduplication functions both as an inflectional and derivational process, conveying grammatical meanings as well as generating new semantic expressions. According to Deborah Tannen (1987), reduplication serves as a limitless resource for individual creativity and acts as a central strategy for linguistic meaning-making. Although the lexical aspects of reduplication have long attracted the attention of formalist linguistic theories, Wang (2005) observes that linguists have generally neglected its discourse-level functions. Similarly, Paul Rastall (2004) argues that many reduplicative forms appearing in the media are often treated as ephemeral wordplay that fail to “enter the language,” thereby highlighting the need for studies that move beyond purely lexical analyses of reduplication. This ambivalence among linguists may stem from the traditional emphasis on

formal linguistic structures associated with classical generative approaches, which often regard reduplicative forms as theoretically marginal or awkward (Ghameshi et al., 2004). Nevertheless, recent corpus-based studies have demonstrated that reduplication in English is far more widespread and productive than previously assumed. Scholars such as Wang (2005), Ghameshi et al. (2004), Biber et al. (1998), Conrad (1999), and Sinclair (1997) reveal that the use of reduplication continues to expand among North American, British, and non-native speakers of English.

Reduplication may therefore be understood as a word-formation process in which a segment, syllable, morpheme, or entire lexical item is repeated either to the left, right, or occasionally within the base word. Although reduplication occurs across a wide range of languages and language families, the degree of its linguistic productivity varies considerably. In many instances, reduplication overlaps with the concept of repetition, and the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Repetition generally refers to the recurrence of sounds, words, or concepts for the purposes of reinforcement, emphasis, or emotional expression. Ghameshi et al. (2004), for instance, associate repetition with features commonly found in child language. Repetition also functions as an important poetic and rhetorical device in which sounds, syllables, words, phrases, lines, or metrical patterns recur to create stylistic cohesion and emphasis. In discussing the rhetorical functions of repetition, Heinrich Lausberg (1998) suggests that repetition performs both informative and reinforcing functions. However, Wang (2005) maintains that repetition and reduplication are frequently conflated because of their overlapping structural and functional characteristics.

Formally, discursive reduplication may be broadly classified into two major categories: partial reduplication and full (or complete) reduplication. This classification depends on whether the repeated element constitutes the entire lexical item or only a subcomponent of it (Rubino, 2005;

Inkelas, 2014). In full reduplication, the entire word or sound sequence is repeated without modification. In the case of the Koireng language, reduplication is not grammatically productive in the sense that it does not generally function as a mechanism for creating new lexical items. Instead, reduplication in Koireng primarily serves semantic and expressive purposes, such as indicating plurality, repetition, and intensification.

1.2 COMPLETE REDUPLICATION

In Koireng, complete reduplication is found in the grammatical categories like noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective and wh-question. The process of complete reduplication is common in Koireng like other T.B languages.

1.2.1 NOUN

Reduplication occurs in noun are known to be Nominal reduplication, where the entire word or base is reduplicated. Semantically distributive nature of the noun is signalled in this type of reduplication. For instance, we have the following word phrases:

1. k^hət k^hət hapro

one one to place

‘placed one each’

2. in in lutnika kitokro

house house enter search

‘search by entering every house’

3. sənde sənde cərs cero

Sunday Sunday church go

‘go to church every sunday’

As can be seen, the above nouns of Koirang are reduplicated for distributive meanings.

1.2.2 VERBAL ADVERBS

Verbal adverbs are the adverbs derived from verbs. When the verb root is reduplicated it becomes an adverb because it is followed by the main verb of the sentence or phrase. Thus, these verbal adverbs implies simultinity of the two works.

4. ənui ənui-əh əcejei

laughing laughing-NZR gone

‘gone with a laugh’

5. kəpnə kəpnə-əh ətorjei

crying crying-NZR finished

‘done while crying’

In Koirang, the structural configuration is that any verb is reduplicated and is followed by main verb of the phrase or sentence. This example (4) employs two verbs i.e. ‘ənui’ meaning ‘laugh’ and ‘əcejei’ means ‘gone’ to show the synchronization of two events actions which get completed at the same time, like wise in second example (5) employs two verbs i.e. ‘kəpnə’ meaning ‘crying’ and ‘ətorjei’ means ‘finished’ to show the synchronization of two events actions which get completed at the same time

1.2.3 ADVERB

Reduplication of adverbs involves exact repetition of the words and modifies a verb phrase. Its implies something happening gradually and thus emphasis the base adverb. For

instance, in (6) the word ‘əlek’ means ‘little’ and ‘əlek əlek’ means ‘little little’ meaning little by little and emphasises ‘little’.

6. əlek əlek caro

little little eat

‘eat little by little’

7. ətam ətam happekro

many many put/placed

‘put/ placed by large amount ’

8. əleina əleina kidei

big big like

‘likes the big, big one ’

In example (6), (7), (8) the constructions such as ‘əlek əlek’, ‘ətam ətam’, ‘əleina əleina’ are the adverbs in reduplicated forms which emphasis the base verb of the reduplicant.

1.2.4 ADJECTIVE

Reduplication of adjective words can enhance the descriptive feeling of an adjective. It can denote plurality and degree of quality. This can be seen in the example below.

9. əsa əsa- əh rəppar t^həŋro

beautiful beautiful- NZR flower select

‘select beautiful flower ones’

10. əsaŋ əsaŋ- əh t^hiŋ əmoŋ
tall tall-NZR tree grow
'many tall trees are grown'

11. əwom əwom-əh t^həŋro
black black-NZR select
'select blacks one'

In the above constructions (9) 'əsa əsa- əh' is a complimentary distribution; (10) 'əsaŋ əsaŋ- əh' shows the magnitude of tallness and plurality, (11) 'əwom əwom-əh' shows distributiveness.

1.2.5 Wh-Question

In Koireng, the reduplication of wh-words indicate plurality as well as distributiveness. For example:

12. əŋ əŋ -mo
what what
'what else is that'

13. k^hoy k^hoy - mo
who who
'who all are that'

14. hoy hoy - mo
which which

‘which all are that’

15. hoynai hoynai ancejei

where where gone

‘where else have gone’

In Koireng, the reduplication of wh-questions implies plurality that is the answered will be plural as it is performed or done by more than one. Therefore, non-reduplicative wh-question implies singularity.

1.2.6 PARTIAL REDUPLICATION

Partial reduplication is a type of reduplication where only a part or subconstituent of the base is reduplicated. It can be further divided into two types i.e. ablaut type and rhyme-motivated.

ABLAUT TYPE

[CVC]₁

+

[CVC]₁^I

RHYME-MOTIVATED

[CVC]₁

+

[CVC]₁^I

In ablaut type, the stress vowel of the base is changed while the rest of the word is repeated. In Koireng, partial reduplication of ablaut type is not common as only few words can be found. For example:

16. rit^{hi} rit^{ha} - waste liquid and such

Whereas the rhyme-motivated types of partial reduplication is the reduplication process in which the onset consonant of the base is change and only the remaining parts of the base is reduplicated. For example:

17. ədom ət^hon – carrying in and out

2.1 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEXICAL REDUPLICATION

2.1.1 ECO WORDS

Eco words is a kind of reduplication in which the complete reduplication is done with a little change in the reduplicant syllable and others being overwritten as the base syllable. This word is mostly used as colloquial speech. For example:

18. nisam ninar – hair and such

19. nicoŋ ninar – word and such

2.1.2 COMPOUNDING

Compounds in which the second constituent partially copy the first constituent are reduplicative compound. Here, the second constituent gives emphasis to the first constituent or both the constituents can have different meaning.

20. keipek kərpek – giving and taking to and fro

21. t^heirim reirim – fruit and flower fragrance

22. potsuok keisuok – pull out and pull in

2.1.3 CHILD LANGUAGE

Normal infants go through stage of reduplication or canonical babbling (Stark 198, Oller, 1980). It is characterised by repetition of identical consonant-vowel combinations and appears as infants experiment with their vocal apparatus on the sounds used in their native language. For example:

23. ba ba ba ‘ means papa or just a random sound produce by the infant’

24. ma ma ma ‘means mama or just a random sound produce by the infant’

25. ta ta ta ‘means hi or just a random sound produce by the infant’

2.1.4 EXPRESSIVE

It is the figurative speech which is the speaker adopts the tone more expressive but not exclusively iconic in meaning.

26. ənu ənu – express pain

27. ha ha - pin point suddenly

28. əh əh – express emotions of surprise or realisation

2.1.5 CONTRASTIVE MEANING

The verb word is repeated to bring about a contrastive meaning by adding a morpheme. In Koireng, the base verb is in the form of positive past participle plus a morpheme ‘-əŋ’ followed by the same base verb in the form of negative past participle and gives the meaning of ‘ignoring something’.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| 29. t ^h ounomnum-əŋ | t ^h ounomleinum-əŋ | – not willing to do | want to |
| do | does not want to do | (negative meaning) | |
| 30. wanomnum-əŋ | wanomleinum-əŋ | – not willing to come | |
| want to come | does not want to come | (negative meaning) | |

2.1.6 INTENSIVE REDUPLICATION

In this way of reduplication, the word is used three times (triplication) to intensify its meaning or action which can be used to mean positive meaning or a reply as a dare. For example:

31. t^horo t^horo t^horo – do do do (literal meaning)

-it can be taken as an order or as a dare or a word of

encouragement (connotative meaning)

32. əca əca əca – good good good (literal meaning)

-it can be taken as a dare or a word of encouragement

(connotative meaning)

There are also some words in Koireng which is used for two times to intensify the meaning and at the same time used as a positive reply of some questions asked about one's opinion. For example:

33. sə-əte sə-əte – ok ok (intensify the approval)

34. kidei kidei – like it, like it (intensify the degree of likeness)

35. tətmək tətmək – not tired, not tired (to meant never exhausted)

CONCLUSION

Reduplication constitutes an important morphological and semantic feature of the Koireng language. Although the language is endangered and spoken by a relatively small community, it demonstrates a rich and systematic use of reduplicative forms across different grammatical

categories. The study reveals that complete reduplication is more productive than partial reduplication in Koireng and is extensively employed to express plurality, distributiveness, simultaneity, emphasis, emotional intensity, and descriptive quality. Partial reduplication, though limited, contributes to expressive and rhythmic aspects of speech through ablaut and rhyme-motivated forms.

The analysis further shows that reduplication in Koireng extends beyond grammatical usage and functions as a significant expressive and communicative device in everyday speech. Lexical forms such as eco words, child-language expressions, reduplicative compounds, and intensive reduplication demonstrate the creativity and oral richness of the language. These forms also reflect the socio-cultural identity and communicative traditions of the Koireng people.

From a broader linguistic perspective, the study supports contemporary theories that regard reduplication as more than a peripheral morphological process. Instead, it emerges as an essential strategy for meaning-making and discourse expression. The research therefore contributes not only to the understanding of Koireng morphology but also to the documentation and preservation of an endangered indigenous language of Northeast India. Further studies may explore the syntactic, phonological, and discourse-level dimensions of reduplication in Koireng in greater detail.

Bibliography

Anshen, F., & Aronoff, M. (1988). Producing morphologically complex words.

Bloomfield, L. (1935). Language. Motilal Banarsidass Publishe.

Booij, G. (2007). The Grammar of Words. Oxford University Press. University of Oxford.

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:7 July 2026

Lourembam Ludmila Chanu, M.A.

Reduplication in Koireng: A Morphological and Semantic Analysis

- Crystal, D. (1985). A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. Blackwell publishers.
- Devi. C. P (2009). The word-formation and the classification of the words in Manipuri (Meiteiron). Thesis (unpublished). Manipur University, Imphal
- Downing, L. J. (2007). *Reduplication: Doubling in Morphology*, Sharon Inkelas and Cheryl Zoll, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2005).
- Grierson, G.A. (1909). Linguistic Survey of India. Delhi: Low Price Publication.
- Koireng, R.N. Living Conditions of the Koireng Tribe in Senapati District of Manipur. IJSRP (International Journal of Scientific Research and Education.
- Konsam, M. Koireng. Sanathong.
- Koziol, H. (1937). Handbuch der englischen Wortbildungslehre. C.Winter.
- Mark, A. (1976) Word Formation in Generative Grammar. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- McCarthy, J. J., & Prince, A. (2004). Faithfulness and identity in prosodic morphology. *Optimality Theory in Phonology: A Reader*, 77–98.
- McCarthy, J. J., & Prince, A. S. (2017). Prosodic morphology. *The Handbook of Morphology*, 281–305.
- Ngalengnam, Ng. (2015). Traditional Village Polity of Koireng tribe in Manipur. IJELLH (International Journal of English, Language, Literature and Humanities.
- Nida, E. A. (1948). The identification of morphemes. *Language*, 24(4), 414–441.
- Nida, E.A. (1949). Morphology, The Descriptive analysis of words. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan.

Saperstein, A. D. (1997). *A Word-and-Paradigm Approach to Reduplication*. The Ohio State University.

Singh, C.Y. (2000). *Manipuri Grammar*. New Delhi: Rajesh Publications.

Singh, K.L. (1997). *Word formation in Kuki-Chin Group*. Thesis (unpublished) Manipur University, Imphal.

Singh, L. J. (2009). *Contrastive study of word-formation of Manipur and English*. Thesis(unpublished). Manipur University, Imphal

Stekaver, P, & Lieber, R. (2005). *Handbook of Word Formation*. Netherland: Springer.

Wanbe, K. Pr. (2015). *Koren's (Koireng) affinity with tribes inside and outside India*. Sangai Express.